

Problems and Difficulties of Speaking English of Students at Engineering Colleges

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ABSTRACT: The study aims at exploring the speaking difficulties encountered by English language students at Engineering Colleges. The study, more over aims at exploring the causes of such difficulties. The researcher used the experimental method so as to show and measure the speaking difficulties encountered by English language students at Engineering Colleges. The researcher designed an interview to be applied on the sample of the study. Such interview will be applied for each student to investigate speaking difficulties and the causes of such difficulties. The results showed and indicated that some difficulties in the speaking of the students due to some reasons such as fear of mistake, shyness, anxiety and lack of confidence. The researcher adopted some recommendations the most important one is to establish an environment support and encourage the students to speak English frequently, and he suggested carrying out more researches and studies regarding speaking difficulties encountered by English language students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since English is a foreign language in our country, most student's especially senior high school students are not familiar with it (Hetrakul, 1995). Kavin Hetrakul also said that they use English more frequent only inside the class and less frequent outside the class. Whereas, students' have limited time to learn English in class, and they still do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside the class in order to get familiar with English. This case brings a problem that make senior high school students have difficulties to communicate in English. This article will analyze the causes that make the students difficult to communicate in English and suggest some solutions that can overcome the difficulties. The main goal of teaching speaking is communicative efficiency. Teaching speaking means helping learners develop their ability to interact successfully in the target language. To do so, one must have communicative competence. Richards, Platt, and Weber (as cited in Nunan, 1999, p. 226) defined the characteristics of communicative competence as: Thus, to help students enhance their speaking skills, the teacher must help students improve their grammar, enrich their vocabulary, and manage interactions in terms of who says what, to whom, when, and about what.

The Problem of the Study

The researcher discusses the Speaking Difficulties Encountered by English Language

Students At Engineering Colleges. The study will answer the main question: What are the difficulties and problems that face the students of English at Engineering Colleges in speaking skills? & what are the suitable solutions? The following sub-questions arise from the main question:-

- 1- What is the most difficult type that encounter the students in speaking?
- 2- What are the errors that occur to students speaking?
- 3- What are the causes of speaking difficulty that face the students while they speak?
- 4- What are the suitable solutions for speaking difficulties?

The Importance of the Study

The researcher noticed during his career and teaching the course of Graduation Project and other courses at AlQuds Open University that the students face some difficulties and problems in speaking while they introduce and talk about their projects and during discussions in the lectures of different courses. The importance of such study lies in the following points:

1. The research formulates a list of useful techniques and procedures for students speaking skills to overcome such problems.
2. The study will upgrade the level of students speaking skills by adopting suitable techniques and procedures for proficiency and accuracy of speaking skills.
3. The research shall highlight and focus on the causes of such difficulties and problems and try to find suitable solution for the same.
4. The study will draw the attention of persons in charge and the officials to the importance of student's role in achieving and carrying out proficient and accurate speaking skills.

The Objective of the Research

The main objectives of the research of "Speaking Difficulties Encountered by English Language Students At Engineering Colleges." are:-

- Improving and developing students' skills, techniques and procedures of speaking so as to enrich and assist the students' ability of speaking skills.
- Adopting suitable speaking skills strategies.
- To enable students to learn a wider range of speaking skills, including how to speak accurately and proficiently.
- To bring and draw students to a level of practical proficiency that will enable them to be linguistically and analytically equipped to complete extended speaking skills and increasing their confidence in practicing speaking skills.

Limitations of the Study

The study has three limitations:-

1. Limitation of time: The study was carried out and applied in summer course of the academic year 2014/2015.

2. Limitation of place: The study was applied and carried out in Engineering Colleges in Gaza City Branch.
3. Limitation of Subject: The study will deal and discuss "Speaking Difficulties Encountered by English Language Students At Engineering Colleges & What are the suitable solutions?"

Definition of Terms

- Speaking: It is the action of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings.
- Speaking Difficulties: are difficulties that a speaker could have when dealing with speaking skill.
- Skill: The ability to do something well.
- Speaking skill: The ability to speak well, accurately and proficiently.
- Speaking Skill strategy: plan to solve difficulties that occur when reaching a particular speaking goal.

II. METHOD OF THE STUDY

The researcher followed the analytical descriptive method in this study.

A-Population

The population of study is from English students who study English Language at Engineering Colleges in the Branch of Gaza for the academic year 2014/2015.

B-Sample of Study

The researcher chose a random sample from the population of study composed of (14) students who study English Language.

C-Instrument of the Study

The researcher will hold an interview with the student and let them talk about certain subject, then he will analyze their speech. Such analysis based on i) pronunciation ii) grammar iii) proficiency in order to show the difficulties of speaking.

Statistical Method Used in the Study

The researcher discharged and analyzed the interview by using (SPSS) program. The researcher used the percentages in the study.

Speaking is the active use of language to express meaning, and for young learners, the spoken language is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced, and learnt. Rather than oral skills being simply one aspect of learning language, the spoken form in the young learner's classroom acts as the prime source of language learning. However, speaking problems can be a major challenge to effective foreign language learning and communication. English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, no matter how much they know about the English language, still face many speaking difficulties. Many studies have indicated that oral language development has largely been neglected in the classroom, and most of the time, oral language in the classroom is used more by teachers than by students. However, oral language, even as used by the teacher, hardly ever functions as a means for students to gain knowledge and explore ideas. To develop the knowledge to deal with oral communication problems in an EFL context, researchers first need to know the real nature

of those problems and the circumstances in which 'problems' are constructed.

The thesis deals with the topic of difficulties in teaching speaking skills to adult learners. In the background chapter, the characteristics of adult learners together with differences in teaching them in comparison to the young are explained as well as the theory necessary for further research. The most important part is dedicated to the role of adult learners' experiences and language learning expectations together with the difficulties they may meet while learning English. The theoretical part deals also with the communicative approach and especially with the teachers' and learners' roles in the process of teaching and learning the English language focusing on the differences between young and adult

Comment

Upon studying the study of **Doan Linh Chi**, the researcher noticed that such study dealt with Guidance for Learners' Improvement of Speaking Skills and practicing the language. Regarding the study of **Zhengdong Gan** reports the result of a study that aimed to identify the problems with oral English skills of ESL (English as a second language) students at a tertiary teacher training institution in Hong Kong. The study, by way of semi-structured interview, addresses the gap in our understanding of the difficulties ESL students

encountered in their oral English development in the context of a Bachelor of Education (English Language) program. **Martin Matějček's** thesis deals with the topic of difficulties in teaching speaking skills to adult learners. In the background chapter, the characteristics of adult learners together with differences in teaching them in comparison to the young are explained as well as the theory necessary for further research. Concerning the study of **Magdalena Aleksandrzak** deals with the problems of teaching and learning speaking, in particular those which are most relevant in the context of developing oral skills at the advanced level of foreign language proficiency. The complex nature of spoken discourse must be taken into account reflected at each stage of the learning process. It examines the difficulties connected with choosing the appropriate framework and approach and discusses the typical patterns of interaction in the foreign language classroom. It also examines forms of control and evaluation and suggests some speaking activities which seem most suitable for advanced language learners in the light of the above theoretical considerations. The study of **Dina A. Al-Jamal & Ghadeer**

A. Al-Jamal study aimed at describing difficulties that may be encountered at an EFL setting. Regarding the study **Samira Al Hosni** study aims to find out what speaking difficulties are encountered by grade 5 students in basic education schools in Oman. It also aims to find out the main factors that contribute to the existence of these difficulties.

Regarding this paper, such paper deals with and discuss "Speaking Difficulties Encountered by English Language Students At Engineering Colleges & What are the suitable solutions?". It also shows the level of difficulty that face the students in practicing speaking skill. In addition, the study analyses the errors committed by students while they are speaking

. More over the study shows whether such difficulty based on gender variable. At the end, such study tries to adopt suitable solutions for such difficulties.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Speaking? "Speaking" is the delivery of language through the mouth. To speak, we create sounds using many parts of our body, including the lungs, vocal tract, vocal chords, tongue, teeth and lips. Speaking is the second of the four, which are: 1-Listening 2-Speaking 3-Reading 4-skill that we learn. This vocalized form of language usually requires at least one listener. When two or more people speak or talk to each other, the conversation is called a "dialogue". Speech can flow naturally from one person to another in the form of dialogue. It can also be planned and rehearsed, as in the delivery of a speech or presentation. Of course, some people talk to themselves! In fact, some English learners practice speaking standing alone in front of a mirror. Speaking can be formal or informal: i) Informal speaking is typically used with family and friends, or people you know well. ii) Formal speaking occurs in business or academic situations, or when meeting people for the first time. Speaking is probably the language skill that most language learners wish to perfect as soon as possible. It used to be the only language skill that was difficult to practice online. This is no longer the case. English learners can practice speaking online using voice or video chat. They can also record and upload their voice for other people to listen to.

In Palestine, the situation is not far from the Chinese example. Although the aim of teaching English in Palestine is to enable students communicate with English speakers of English who use oral and written skills. However, such students fail to express themselves properly in speaking, despite the fact that they have a good repertoire of vocabulary. Teachers still use traditional methods of teaching and give more emphasis to reading and writing, while listening and speaking are almost neglected. Therefore, anxiety is a real phenomenon which has always had a major negative impact on Palestinian university foreign language learners.

(Mosaddaq Yahya 2013)

Teaching of Speaking The use of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) in oral communication is, without a doubt, one of the most common but highly complex activities necessary to be considered when teaching the English language especially because we —live at a time where the ability to speak English fluently has become a must, especially who want to advance in certain fields of human endeavor (Al-Sibai, 2004, p.3).

The focus of teaching speaking, of course, is to improve the oral production of the students. Therefore, language teaching activities in the classroom should aim at maximizing individual language use (Haozhang, 1997). In the past, oral communication instruction was neglected because of the misconception that oral communication competence develops naturally over time and that the cognitive skills involved in writing automatically transfer to analogous oral communication skills (Chaney, 1998). However, Ur (1996) considered speaking as the most important skill among four skills (listening,

speaking, reading, and writing) because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because —there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can't use it! (Scrivener, 2005, p.146). **Oral Language Acquisition** Oral language acquisition is a natural process for children. It occurs almost without effort. The ability to speak grows with age, but it does not mean that such growth will automatically lead to perfection. To speak in more effective ways requires particular attention and constant practice (Zhang et al., 1995). Speaking fluency appears to develop with increased exposure to second language (L2) input (Al-Sibai, 2004). Input refers to the language data which the learner is exposed to (Zhang, 2009). Although it is widely recognised that input is very essential for language acquisition, it is not sufficient if not followed by interaction and output (the language a learner produces) because the processing of comprehension is different from the processing of production, and the ability to understand the meaning conveyed by sentences differs from the ability to use a linguistic system to express meaning. When input is negotiated and learners produce output in interaction, they selectively —take in portions of comprehensible input and choose a correct linguistic form to express themselves. This process makes it possible for the learners to internalise what they have learned and experienced (Swain, 1985, as cited in Zhang, 2009). **Oral Language Learning** For language learning to take place, there are four conditions that should exist, and they are the exposure, opportunities to use the language, motivation, and instruction.—Learners need chances to say what they think or feel and to experiment in a supportive atmosphere using language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened! (Willis, 1996, p.7). A fact that is highlighted by second language research is that progress does not occur when people make a conscious effort to learn. Progress occurs as a result of spontaneous, subconscious mechanisms, which are activated when learners are involved in communication with the second language. The subconscious element demands a new range of activities, where learners are focused not on the language itself but on the communication of meaning (Littlewood, 1984). Harmer (1982) also argued that in a communicative task, the students' attention should be focused on the content of what they are saying, rather than the form. They should use a wide variety of language. According to Ellis (2003), this can be done by involving learners in performing two types of communicative tasks: focused communicative tasks and unfocused communicative tasks. Both of these tasks seek to engage learners in using language pragmatically rather than displaying language. They seek to develop language proficiency through communication.—Through communication learners can integrate separate structures into a creative system for expressing meaning! (Littlewood, 1984, p.91). **Factors that Cause Speaking difficulties to EFL Learners** Zhang (2009) argued that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. According to Ur (1996), there are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking, and they are as follows: 1. *Inhibition*. Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy. 2. *Nothing to say*. Students have no motive to express themselves. 3. *Low or uneven participation*. Only one participant can talk at a time

because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

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

In addition, Rababa'h (2005) pointed out that there are many factors that cause difficulties in speaking English among EFL learners. Some of these factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For example, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going. Inadequate strategic competence and communication competence can be another reason as well for not being able to keep the interaction going. Some learners also lack the motivation to speak English. They do not see a real need to learn or speak English. Actually —motivation is the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks in a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he perseveres (Littlewood, 1984, p.53). The development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have the motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and relate with the people around them (Littlewood, 1981). Teaching strategies also contribute to this problem as they are inadequate, and they do not put emphasis on speaking, which results in a meagre development of this skill. Besides, vocabulary items are taught in isolation, and listening materials are not used by the majority of schoolteachers because of the large number of teachers compared with the number of cassettes available. Teacher-training programs were found to be not very successful in changing the teachers' methodology (Rababa'h, 2005). Furthermore, all the other subjects are in Arabic, and English is seen as an academic subject only, which means exposure to the English language is insufficient. The lack of a target language environment can be considered another problem, which of course results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. Not allowing learners to participate in discourse can be another reason for speaking difficulties. —Children need both to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills for participation in order to learn discourse skills (Cameron, 2001, p.36). Furthermore, —language is best learned when the learners' attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.27). It is worth mentioning that researchers recognize that learners can improve their speaking ability by developing learning strategies that enable them to become independent learners (Nakatani, 2010). Littlewood (1981) argued that some teachers use L1 for class management. Nevertheless, this can be another factor that contributes to the problem of speaking difficulties. This is because using L1 means sacrificing valuable opportunities for well-motivated foreign use. In addition, it tends to devalue the foreign language as a vehicle for communication. Learners see it as allocated to communicatively nonessential domains such as drills or dialogue practice, while the mother tongue remains the appropriate medium for discussing matters of immediate importance. Another main reason for other teachers to use L1 is vocabulary and grammar. Although their attitudes are of disagreement with L1, this is not reflected in their practice (Al-Busaidi, 1998).

The Nature of Speaking Skill

It is mentioned in the literature that, naturally, to speak means to produce some words representing one's ideas. It is a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998 in Kayi, 2006).

In line with this issue, there have been some relevant researches conducted. Burns and Joyce in Nunan (1999); Schwartz (2005); and Thornbury (2005) argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the factors commonly that hinder students from speaking.

Another study conducted by Koichi Sato (2003) finds that students of English are not highly competent in speaking because of their fear of making mistakes. The same finding is also shared by another research conducted by Ballard (1996, in JIN Yan-hua, 2007) who finds that students fail to join in the English discussion because of their vocabulary problems and fear of making mistakes resulting in their inability to speak English well. In addition, she says that students find speaking English a stressful activity especially if they have to perform something using English. The finding above confirms the results of this study as will be explained in part of the result findings.

Psychological Factors That Hinder Students from Speaking

It has been mentioned earlier that there are some psychological factors that hinder students from practicing their speaking in English class. Each of them is explained below.

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.

Causes of Fear of Mistake

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 others 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 a mistake in speaking English. Students' fear of making mistakes in speaking English has been a common issue especially in an EFL context like in Indonesia. As argued by Middleton (2009), most EFL students are afraid to try and to speak in a foreign language they learn. In this context, as

heads, students do not want to look foolish in front of the class. In some other cases, they also worry about how they will sound, and are scared of sounding silly and so on.

2.2.1.2 Possible Solutions to Overcome Fear of Mistake

In terms of possible solution to overcome students' fear of mistakes, Zua (2008) gives several suggestions. First, she suggests that emotional bonds between students and teachers should be built. This way, the students are expected to feel comfort with their teacher and believe that the teacher will help them if they make a mistake.

Second, Zua further states that the teacher should improve the students' concentration when learning English. This can be done, as she suggests, by creating a supporting learning atmosphere. Finally, the last suggestion is that the teacher creates a harmonious atmosphere that can reduce students' nervousness. In this context, how to deal with errors in conversational English of students is worth discussing and emphasizes that mistakes in communication are keys to carry out a communication.

Table(1) Means, standard deviation, relative weight and ranks for the sample of the students scores on each domain and total degree of speaking skills test

Skills	Mean	Standard deviation	Relative weight	Rank
Fluency	7.25	1.81	72.50	1
Grammar	7.18	0.95	71.79	2
Pronunciation	7.00	1.02	70.00	3
Total degree	21.43	3.21	71.43	

Table (1) shows that the study sample participants have the highest relative weight in fluency skills (72.50) which was medium relative weight; then in grammar skills they had relative weight (71.79) and the lowest relative weight they have got is the relative weight of pronunciation and the total relative weight was a medium weight (71.43) which means that the levels of students of English at Engineering Colleges in speaking skills is medium and the skills which has got the first rank was the fluency, 2nd rank grammar and the last rank was pronunciation. It means that the most difficult type is "pronunciation", its percentage is 71.43% , then "grammar" its percentage is 71.79%, the last one is "fluency" its percentage is

72.50%. **Answering the Second Question Results related to the second question** The second question stated "What are the levels of errors that occur among students of English at Engineering Colleges speaking skills?" To answer such question the researcher computed means, standard deviation and relative weight of the scores of the study sample on each domain and total degree of speaking English language skill test as shown in table(2)

Table(2): Means, standard deviation, relative weight and ranks for the sample of the study errors occur on each domain and total degree of speaking skills test

Skills	Mean	Standard deviation	Relative weight	Rank
Fluency	2.75	1.81	27.50	3
Grammar	2.82	0.95	28.21	2
Pronunciation	3.00	1.02	30.00	1
Total degree	8.57	3.21	28.57	

Table (2) showed that the study sample errors in pronunciation got the highest relative weight (30.00), their errors occurred in grammar has got the second rank with relative weight (28.50) and the fluency has got lowest relative weight (27.50). This results means that the highest errors of speaking skills among study sample participants occurs in pronunciation, then in grammar and the lowest errors occur in fluency and the level of errors of speaking English skills occur among Engineering Colleges are medium level of errors.

Answering the Third question Answering the third question "What are the causes of speaking difficulty that face the students while they speak ?" On observing the interview the researcher noticed that there are some factors that cause speaking difficulties, the students are still incompetent in communicating orally in English., the factors that cause difficulty in speaking areas follows: 1- Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy. 2- Students have no motive to express themselves. 4- Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue. 5- Many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going. Inadequate strategic competence and communication competence can be another reason as well for not being able to keep the interaction going. 6- Some learners also lack the motivation to speak English. 7- The lack of a target language environment can be considered another problem, which of course results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. 8- Not allowing learners to participate in discourse can be another reason for speaking difficulties.

Answering the Fourth question

Answering the fourth question " What are the suitable solutions for speaking difficulties?" On observing the interview the researcher noticed that there are some factors that cause speaking difficulties , consequently the researcher suggests and adopts the following solutions which may help in overcoming such difficulties : 1-Making the students more competent in communicating orally in English by practicing English speaking . 2- Students should avoid anxiety by encouraging them to speak fluently even if they make errors or mistakes in their speaking and not to criticize them cruelly , more over we should let students avoid the fearful of criticism, or simply shy by making them familiar with the person whom are talking with. 3- Students must have motive to express themselves. 4-Encouraging Learners not to use their mother tongue. 5-Encouraging learners to read more and more to get high quantity of vocabulary .6-Raising the motivation of English speaking. 7-Providing the environment which may help the students in English speaking . 8-Allowing learnersto participate in discourse which may help the students English speaking .9-Raising the element of self confidence in the students.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The first cause that makes the students difficult in speaking English is that the environment does not support the students to speak English frequently.
2. The second solution is for the students themselves. They can have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. They can share and talk about anything in English during that time. In this club, they can learn together. Students can correct each other without feeling embarrassed.
3. Lecturers should create a comfortable environment by strengthening the confidence of English language learners.
4. Lecturers should not try to correct the local errors of students when they struggle to get their meanings across. Instructors can also speak to the students privately to eliminate any embarrassment.
5. Lecturers should not insist on the errors of the student while they are speaking.
6. Lecturers should create a suitable and friendly environment while they are speaking.
7. The lecturers should encourage all students to speak with them in English.

Suggestions The researcher suggested carrying out more studies and researches about speaking difficulties encountered by English language students .

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