التحديات التي تواجه متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في مهارة المحادثة

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Challenges of Learners of English Language in Speaking Skill

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في مهارة المحادثة. حيث إن عددًا كبيرًا من الطلاب غير قادرين على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بوضوح ويجدون مهارة المحادثة صعبة. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في مهارة المحادثة وفهمها. ومن أجل القيام بذلك، أجرى الباحثون مقابلة واستبيانًا كأداة لكل من المعلمين والطلاب على التوالي. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب واجهوا بعض المشاكل في التحدث مثل نقص المفردات ونقص الثقة والخجل وتأثير اللغة الأم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارة المحادثة، اللغة الأم ، صعوبات التواصل، الثقة بالنفس

Abstract:

This paper investigates the difficulties that encounter students in speaking skill. The vast number of students are unable to speak English clearly and find speaking skill challenging. Therefore, this study aims to recognize and understand the difficulties encountering students in speaking skill. In order to do this, the researchers conducted an interview and a questionnaire as an instrument for both teachers and students respectively. The results of the study showed that students faced some problems in speaking such as lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence, shyness and the influence of the mother tongue.

Keywords: Speaking skill, Mother tongue, Communication difficulties, Self-confidence.

Introduction:

English language is considered as an international language. It is widely spoken by a huge number of population. It consists of four major skills, writing, listening, reading and speaking. Learning to speak in the foreign language is usually considered to be one of the hardest aspects of language learning for the teachers to assist students with (Brown & Yule, 1983).

"Speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing: and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak" (Ur, 1991, p.120). Hornby (1995) mentions that through speaking, learners of language will be assessed upon most

in real life situations. This means that speakers will be judged immediately during their speaking unlike in writing skill.

Speaking is a productive oral skill; it consists of the production of organized verbal utterance to express meaning (Bailey, 2003).

Thus, this paper will shed light on the skill of speaking, the difficulties that encounter learners of English with speaking and the reasons for it, and also solutions to such problems.

2.Research Objectives and Research Questions

This paper aims to find out the challenges that face learners in speaking skill at Elmergib University, 2nd year students in the department of English, as well as the reasons for such challenges.

This paper aims to answer the following two questions:

1- What are the difficulties that encounter learners of English with speaking skill?
2- What are the reasons for such errors?

3.Statement of the Problem

Learning to speak a foreign language clearly requires a great deal of effort and abilities. Learners who take English classes at school or university find it problematic to speak English well either with their teachers or their colleagues. They try their best to communicate with one another, but many problems arise. They are hindered either by lack of vocabulary or shyness as an example. Therefore, this study will try to find the problems and find suitable solutions.

4.Significance of the Study

Speaking skill is considered an important skill for students, so that learners can communicate with their colleagues effortlessly. Most learners have difficulties with speaking either in class or outside due to many factors. Therefore, this study is significant in the sense that it will help learners avoid their possible mistakes in their speaking. It will also allow them to recognise their weaknesses and overcome them.

5.Review of Related Studies

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the difficulties facing learners in speaking skill. For instance, Dil's study (2009) which examined Turkish EFL learners' communication difficulties in English language classrooms stated that the main challenges of communication were anxiety and unwillingness. These two factors were caused by fear of being assessed negatively when committing mistakes in front of their colleagues.

Another study conducted by Lukitasari (2008) which investigated students' strategies in dealing with speaking obstacles in a speaking class. The participants of this study were nine classes in level 1, who were registered as first semester students in the University of Muhmmadiyah Malang in Indonesia. The study's goal was to recognize the students' problems in learning speaking as well as the students' techniques in overcoming the challenges of oral performance. The researcher used 2 of the 9 sections as a sample. A questionnaire was employed to gather data. The questionnaire was handed to students and later analysed by the researcher. The results of the study showed that there were problems in speaking ability such as inhibition, lack of participation in class, and also the influence of the mother tongue.

Sayuri (2016) analysed the difficulties in the English-speaking skill of EFL learners in Mulawarman University in Indonesia. In his study, he conducted a speaking test and questionnaires from the first semester to the fourth semester. The findings revealed that those students were afraid of making conversation, or say their opinions in English. In addition to this,

the researcher noticed that they also had problems in vocabulary, grammar usage, pronunciation, and lack of self-confidence. This study agrees with the findings of Lukitasari's study (2008).

Al Hosni (2014) investigated in her study speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. The population of her study consisted of grade 5 teachers and students in basic education schools in Oman. 4 English teachers and 3 classes from a school were involved in this study. The instrument involved was a lesson observation, interviews, and curriculum analysis. The results showed that there were three main speaking difficulties which are linguistic difficulties. That is to say, not sufficient vocabulary and also mother tongue influence was a factor as well as inhibition. This study shares similar findings with Lukitasari's study (2008) and also Sayuri's study (2016) in terms of lack of vocabulary.

Another important study conducted by Suliman (2024) investigated the speaking difficulties that young ESL learners encounter. It was a case study. It used a qualitative method using English lesson observations and interviews. Four teachers and four students from grade 10 were interviewed. This study was conducted in a private school that runs a Ministry of Education Curriculum in Abu Dhabi.
The results showed that learners had major speaking difficulties such as lingual difficulties, the usage of the mother tongue, and fear of making mistakes.
The study also mentioned the factors that lead to such difficulties such as teaching strategies and limited exposure to English. This study agrees with the results of Lukitasari's study (2008) in terms of mother tongue use.

Normanwati, Nugrahaeni, Manggolo, Susanto (2023) stated that in a study titled the difficulties faced by EFL learners in speaking English. The participants were first-semester non-English Department students of Universitas Tidar. A questionnaire was adopted. The results have shown three main difficulties. The difficulties were related to grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. This study shares the same findings with Sayuri's study (2016).

6. Methodology

In this section of the paper, the researchers will discuss the data collection tools and the participants of the study as well as the procedures.

6.1. Instruments

In this paper, the researchers will employ a mixed method research, quantitative and qualitative. Sandelowski and Barroso (2003) state that using mixed method research can accomplish a richer understanding of a target phenomenon. A questionnaire and an interview will be used. Brown (2001) defines questionnaires as any written tool that provides participants with a number of questions or statements which they are to be responded.
Whereas, an interview is a well- recognized interaction routine that the method works well as a useful instrument of research (Miller & Grabtree, 1999).

6.2. Participants

The participating subjects in this paper will be ten 2nd year students studying at Elmergib University, Department of English. They are both males and females selected randomly. Their ages range from 20 to 22 years old. Their first language is Arabic.
The second participants will be 10 (males and females) teachers of speaking skill at the same department. Those teachers will be interviewed about the problems that face students while speaking. Five questions will be asked about speaking.

7. Data Analysis and Discussion
7.1. Data Analysis
A- Identification of Students' answers
1- I feel afraid to speak English due to shortage of vocabulary.
Table 1.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3		√
4	√	
5		√
6		√
7		√
8	√	
9	√	
10		√
Percentage	30%	70%

As noticed in table 1.1, most subjects disagree that students have lack of vocabulary, while the others agree that they are short of vocabulary due to their lack of linguistic knowledge.
2- I often get confused in linking ideas and choosing the proper vocabulary.

Table 2.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3		√
4	√	
5		√
6	√	
7	√	
8	√	
9		√
10	√	
Percentage	60%	40%

It is obvious that half of the subjects agree that students are confused in linking ideas and have difficulty in choosing the proper vocabulary because of their lack of practice, while the others disagree.
   3- I feel embarrassed to speak English because I face problems in pronouncing words.

Table 3.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3		√
4		√
5		√
6		√
7		√
8		√
9		√
10		√
Percentage	0%	100%

Regarding Table 3.1 All subjects state that students never feel embarrassed while speaking English.

4- I am afraid that my partner will not understand me while speaking.

Table 4.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3	√	
4		√
5		√
6	√	
7	√	
8	√	
9		√
10		√
Percentage	40%	60%

As noticed in Table 4.1 Some subjects state that students are afraid of not to be understood by their partners, while the others disagree.

5- I do not understand my partners' speech.

Table 5.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3		√
4		√
5	√	
6	√	
7	√	

	Agree	Disagree
8		√
9		√
10	√	
Percentage	60%	40%

It is obvious that most students do not understand their partners' speech, while the others disagree.

6- I am afraid to make grammatical mistakes while speaking English.

Table 6.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3		√
4	√	
5	√	
6		√
7		√
8	√	
9	√	
10	√	
Percentage	70%	30%

With reference to table 6.1 Most subjects agree that they are not competent enough in grammar and they are afraid to make mistakes while speaking, while the others disagree.

7- I often use my first language when I speak in class to make my speech understood.

Table 7.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3		√
4	√	
5		√
6	√	
7	√	
8		√
9		√
10		√
Percentage	30%	70%

As noticed in table 7.1 Some subjects use Arabic words when they speak English to bridge their linguistic gap, while the others disagree.

8- I have difficulty in speaking English due to overuse of Arabic language in class.

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Table 8.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3	√	
4		√
5		√
6	√	
7	√	
8		√
9		√
10		√
Percentage	30%	70%

It is clear that some subjects state that they overuse Arabic language in class, whereas the others disagree.

9- I am not confident enough to speak English language well.

Table 9.1

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2		√
3	√	
4		√
5		√
6	√	
7		√
8	√	
9		√
10	√	
Percentage	40%	60%

Regarding Table 9.1 Some subjects illustrate that they are not confident enough to speak English in front of their classmates, whereas the others disagree.

B- Identification of teachers' answers: -

1- Students lack enough vocabulary to speak fluently.

Table 1.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	100%	0%

As noticed in table 1.2, all teachers agree that students have shortage in vocabulary, that is why they make several mistakes while speaking and they produce incomplete sentences and incoherent sentences.

2- Students are embarrassed of speaking; they are afraid of making mistakes in front of their classmates.

Table 2.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	100%	0%

It is clear that all teachers state that students are embarrassed when they speak because they are afraid to make mistakes.

3- Students are not competent in producing coherent ideas.

Table 3.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4		√
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	85%	15%

It is obvious that most teachers illustrate that students are not competent enough to produce coherent ideas.

4- Students have problems in linking sentences.

Table 4.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5		√
6	√	
Percentage	58%	15%

As noticed in table 4.2, the majority of teachers agree that students have problems in linking ideas, they produce ungrammatical sentences.

5- Most students produce meaningless sentences while speaking.

Table 5.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2		√
3		√
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	70%	30%

It is clear that most teachers state that students produce unmeaningful sentences while speaking because of lack of practice.

6- Students are not competent enough in English language.

Table 6.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1		√
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	85%	15%

It is obvious that the majority of teachers illustrate that most students are not competent enough in English language in grammar and style.

7- Students have grammatical mistakes.

Table 7.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	100%	0%

It is clear that all teachers agree that most students make grammatical mistakes in terms of tenses and word order.

8- Students have pronunciation problems.

Table 8.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4		√
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	85%	15%

As noticed in table 8.2, most teachers state that most students pronounce words incorrectly and this is because they are not competent enough in linguistics in terms of phonology.

9- Students find problems in producing a complete meaningful sentence.

Table 9.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	100%	0%

As noticed in table 9.2, all teachers agree that most students do not produce complete meaningful sentences because they are not competent enough in linguistics in terms of semantics and grammar.

10- Native language or mother tongue affect students while speaking in English language.

Table 10.2

Students No.	Agree	Disagree
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	
Percentage	100%	0%

It is clear that all teachers agree that students' English language is affected by their mother tongue while speaking due to lack of competence in phonology and grammar.

7.2. Discussion

Having compared between the questionnaire of teachers and the questionnaire of students, the researchers find out that students suffer from shortage of vocabulary. This makes students produce unclear and incomplete words/ or sentences. In addition, they show problems in coherence and cohesion. They produce unlinked sentences because of their lack of cohesive devices. They also suffer from difficulties in forming logical sentences (sequence of ideas). In general, most students lack competence in English language in terms of grammar and style. That is why they produce incomplete and unclear sentences while speaking.

Similarly, most students feel embarrassed while speaking in front of their classmates and they use Arabic language while speaking English to fill their shortage of vocabulary and likewise they feel embarrassed to speak English because of their mispronunciation, so most students are not confident enough to speak English.

Conclusion

The current study was conducted in order to shed light on the speaking skill difficulties that encounter Libyan students studying English language. The findings of the study revealed that students were not able to speak English confidently and this is due to a number of factors such as pronunciation problems, lack of vocabulary and interference of the mother tongue.

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