

Investigating EFL Students' Poor Speaking skills at Kandahar University

Abdullah Rahimi

English Language and Literature Department,
Kandahar University,
Kandahar, Afghanistan
E-mail: abdullahhaidari365615@gmail.com

Parveen Quraishi

English Language and Literature Department
Kandahar University
Kandahar, Afghanistan
E-mail: parveen.quraishi100@gmail.com

Abstract

This study reveals the causes that make the EFL students poor in speaking skills. The problem was EFL students' poor speaking skills at Kandahar University. The study used quantitative approach by developing a questionnaire consisting 15 items based on five likert scales. Two faculties were the target population of the study, and data was collected from 100 students as a random sampling which 81 were male and 19 female students. The data was analyzed and interpreted based on mean and standard deviation through SPSS software (24) version. It was revealed by the present study that different causes like, feeling shyness during presentation, nervousness when speaking with strangers even with family members, weakness of speaking when whole class pay attention, no motivation from peers and feeling fearful when speaking with lectures affect EFL students' speaking skills.

Keywords: EFL Students, Poor speaking skills, Kandahar.

1. Introduction

English today is considered as the international language and, according to some estimates, it is spoken (at various levels of competence) by more than 2000 million people around the globe, including native speakers (over 380 million) and those who learn it as a second/foreign language (Munat, 2005). One of the most important English language skills that must be mastered by any foreign language learner is the ability to speak. The common question that arises from anybody who wants to know one's ability in foreign language is whether he or she can speak English or not. According to Nunan (1991) who stated that for most people, mastering speaking is the most important aspect of learning as a second language and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in a language.

Speaking is required by people to interact among them. In speaking activity, many things that should be paid attention, not only related to what is being spoken, what the language is used, but also who is our interlocutor. In addition, a good speaker should pay attention what the topic is being spoken by him/her, what the language that he/she uses in order to be understood easily by his listener, and to whom he/she speaks. Hence speaking is a tool to communicate ideas that are arranged and developed accordance with listeners need (Tarigan, 1987 cited in Musaddat, 2008). The researcher also stated that the speaker must strive to communicate his/her ideas clearly so that those ideas can be comprehended well with what is wanted by the listeners. Burnkart (1998) explained that language learners need to have three areas of knowledge involved with speaking namely (1) mechanics of language elements (pronunciation, Grammar, vocabulary) which emphasize on use of right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation, (2) the functions of the language that deals with speaking performance in the form of transaction and interaction, (3) the sociocultural norms (such as turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants, understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what

circumstance, about what, and for what reason). Furthermore, language learners must also acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange owing to the fact that effective oral communication is called for the speakers to use the language in various social interactions.

With regards to speaking skills, Nazara (2011) stated that Non-linguistic elements such as gestures and body languages, facial expressions and so on, may accompany speech to convey messages directly. According to Al Zedjali (2009) who stated that it is necessary to develop communication skills, English oral communication skills are part of this skill set, and thus, students should be supported to gain these skills. The researcher also mentioned that learners of English in Oman often do not have opportunities to speak English outside the classroom, and for many of them, the course book is the only place where they meet English. Speaking is the prime means of communication and the structure of society itself would be substantially different if we had failed to develop communication through speech (Laver, 1994). Also, Venkateswaren (1995) explained that if you want to develop your oral communication, information gap activities are suggested. The researcher further described that, information gap activities have the scope of integrating all the speaking skills. The international use of English between non-native speakers of different nationalities, in situations where no native English speakers are present has become an important feature of business, diplomacy, education and personal relationships around the world Wattereson (2008). In ESL/EFL contexts, speaking is the most important of four language skills such as listening, reading, speaking and writing (Carter and Nunan, 2001). If all the language production of the student is controlled from outside, he will hardly be able to transfer his knowledge from a language learning situation to a language using situation (Bygate, 2003).

2. Statement of the problem

In general it seems that foreign language is not easy to speak fluently, and there are more problems that prevent our speaking skills, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical problems. Thus, there are some difficulties of EFL students' poor speaking skills at Kandahar University. Although the students have been trained for twelve years at school term, then they have got four years university training, and still they are poor speakers. A similar concern was revealed by Kasim (2003) that the English language ability of students, including university students was still unsatisfactory. At the university level, few students can communicate English and give responses to their lecturer's questions but most of the others seem to keep quiet. There are very few studies conducted regarding EFL students' poor speaking skills, therefore I want to fill this gap.

3. Significance of the study

This study may help the relevant organizations and students to bring positive changes in this part (poor speaking skills in EFL students at Kandahar University).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the challenges that prevent EFL students to speak fluently at Kandahar University.

5. Research Objective

- To identify the causes that make the EFL students poor in speaking skills at Kandahar University.

6. Research Question

- What are the causes that make EFL students poor in speaking skills at Kandahar University?

7. Literature review

Speaking is probably the language skill that language learners wish to improve as soon as possible. There is a large volume of previous studies available such as (Yingji, 2013; Wood, 2004; Savasci, 2014; Tanveer, 2007; Shukla, 2017; Holland, 2018; Hadijah, 2014; and Imene, 2012) describing the issue of poor speaking skills of EFL students. In a long term, the speaking fluency achievement to practice in class will be beneficial for the real life conversation that requires the similar languages and contents (Yingji, 2013). Of all the four macro English skills, speaking seem to be the most important skills required for communication (Zaremba, 2006 cited in boonkit, 2010). Wood (2004),

Savasci (2014) and Tanveer (2007) mentioned several factors regarding EFL learners' poor speaking skills that include: 1) Anxiety, 2) Shyness, 3) Lack of interest in the class, and 4) fear of being wrong.

7.1 Anxiety

The first factor, according to Holland (2018), is anxiety that is our body's natural response to stress. Furthermore, it's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what is to come. In addition, giving a speech may cause most people to feel fearful and nervous. A considerable number of students at each level felt anxious when they are speaking English in the class, learners responded to the teacher felt the most anxious, and the students during pair work felt least anxious (Liu, 2006). Anxiety about speaking a certain language can affect students' performance. The researcher further stated that anxiety can influence the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are (Horwitz, 1991). Most importantly, the level of perceive teacher's support have the strongest relationship with students feelings of anxiety. The researcher also stated, that teacher support is defined as the help and friendship the teacher shows toward students; how much the teacher talks openly with students, trusts them, and is interested in their ideas, may be possible to reduce the anxiety of language learners (Trickett & Moos, 1995).

7.2 Shyness

Researchers such as Butt, Moosa, Ajmal and Rahman (2011) explored the effects of shyness on the self-esteem of 9th grade female students, and stated that some students suffered from occasional shyness while other experienced acute shyness, which obstructed the development of students. Teachers are more likely to encourage shy children by providing learning opportunities for them (Lao, 2013). Shy learners experience difficulties in their peer relationships through peer exclusion and peer rejection, as well as, close teacher student relationships may serve a protective role for shy children and adults in terms of improving school adjustment outcomes. Furthermore, the absence of parents and teachers are the authority figures for children and adults to help (Saima, 2017).

7.3 Lack of interest in the class

Teachers good attitude, in particular plays an integral part in the effort to improve students' interest to participant in the class (Lee, Chao and Chen, 2011). Shukla (2017) asserted some reasons regarding students losing interest: Most students do not have the power of self-control. They switch their focus from important things to some unimportant things. There are many students who do not know what actually their goal is. ((They lose interest in the related subjects. There are some students who are highly confused about studies and it becomes headache for the students)). According to Salim and Mustafa (2012) who identified some factors with regards to students lack of interest, which indicate that there are two major factors affecting students interest, situational factors and individual factors. The situational factors are: (1) the parents' influence, (2) the teachers influence and, (3) the education curriculum, whereas the individual factors are: (1) initial interest that resides within each individual and, (2) learner diversity in learning. In addition, about student's lack of interest, Thomas (2013) has found that students felt more academic support from significant of others and more practical class activities could have increased their interest in the academic subjects. Another study has revealed that the goals that individual adopt in achievement situations, as well as the value students perceive in activities, promote the development of subsequent interest in topics and activities (Harackiewicz and Hulleman, 2009).

7.4 Fear of being wrong

Another contributing factor that causes poor speaking is fear of being wrong. In this regard, Florescu and Pacurar (2016) discovered that the main barrier causing poor or lack of communication between students and teachers in higher education remains the fear of making mistakes. The researchers also stated that professors should manifest students that the wrong answer does not imply something negative, thus believe that questions are an important aid in the teaching of the human experience. DeBrincat (2015) have conducted research with benefits that can come being wrong in front of their teachers and peers. According to the author, teachers should work with students to reframe their fear of ultimately a painless experience. Furthermore, teachers want them to see error as a simple component of the human experience. Metcalfe (2016) asserted cause of students' fear of being wrong, that errorful learning followed by corrective feedback is beneficial to learning. Zua (2008) provided several suggestions. First,

emotional bonds between students and teachers should be build. This way, the students are expected to feel comfort with their teacher and believe that the teacher will help them if they make mistakes. Second, the teacher should improve the students' concentration when learning English. Finally, the teacher creates a harmonious atmosphere that can reduce students 'nervousness.

8. Previous studies

Hamad (2013) conducted study and asserted some factors in Saudi colleges for girls in the south, which negatively affected English language speaking skills in terms of: a) instructors b) students c) curriculum and text book d) English language teaching methods and exercises e) teaching and learning environment. Banu (2017) found difficulties faced by college students in speaking English. The study revealed that students use English more frequent only inside the class and less frequent outside the class. As well as students have limited time to learn English in the class, and they still do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside the class in order to get familiar with English.

Hadijah (2014) identified the problems of English speaking of the students of Islamic Boarding school program. The quantitative data gathered from the speaking test result by involving 130 students and the qualitative data gathered through questionnaire and interview. The findings showed that the students' ability categorized low majority of students have problems in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency and students have problems in comprehension. In addition, minority of students have own personal reasons, such as shy to perform speaking, lack of self-confidence, lack of speaking practice, limited time given for preparation on English speaking test, difficulties in speaking materials found in the English text book and lack of support from teacher side. An investigation in Srinagar city by Mullick, and Riyaz (2016) focused on speaking difficulties encountered by learners at higher secondary level. The authors stated that, there is no significant difference in speaking skills from their initial level to final levels. The study also showed that EFL learners did not have that much exposure to English language use inside and outside the classroom.

9. Material and Method

9.1 Research Design

This research was quantitatively conducted to investigate the EFL students' poor speaking skills factors at Kandahar University. According to Fraenke, Wallen and Hyun (2016), in a survey method, the researchers collect information from a large group of participants through their responses to the questionnaire items. The researchers added that quantitative study essentially tries to explain the problem using numbers and attempts to generalize the study from a larger population.

9.2 Research site

Kandahar University is selected as the data collection source because it is one of the biggest universities of Afghanistan and also many students from different provinces come here for getting their higher education.

9.3 Sampling and population

The total Population of the study was two faculties 1- Education faculty 2- Language and literature faculty. Then the researchers select a sample of 100 students, among which 81 are males and 19 are females and from each faculty 50 students were selected. Participants were all aged between 20 to 30 years old. Participants were selected through random sampling in this study.

9.4 Instrument

The main instrument used in this survey research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire had two parts Part: A demographic information and Part: B consisted 15 statements that participants were putting the tick mark in the given boxes through the five likert scales 1- Strongly Agree 2- Agree 3- Undecided 4-Disagree 5-strongly disagree. The researchers created the items of the questionnaire based on the literature review.

9.5 Questionnaire validity and reliability

When the researchers designed the questionnaire then researchers shared it with the supervisor and have taken his ideas and feedback about the questionnaire as well. Thus, the consistency of the questionnaire and item's scales was (0.79) Cronbach's Alpha, which means that the scales and items were reliable. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) stated that "The criterion of the reliability provides information on whether the data collection procedure is consistent and accurate".

9.6 Data Collection Procedure

The researchers collected the data through questionnaire in two weeks and participants were invited to participate and find out the relevant factors. The researchers have selected their target population from two faculties Education faculty and Languages and Literatures faculty. As the participants were from English Departments classes it was not necessary to design the questionnaire by Pashto. First the researchers took the permission from the dean of faculty to collect the data. Then researchers went to the classes introduced themselves, explained the questionnaire to the participants and described their aim for conducting this research. And all the participants (Male and Female) were satisfied to participate in this study.

10. Data Analysis

After collecting the data from participants the data was analyzed in order to know the result of the research. The analysis process was held with the help of (SPSS) software 24 version. Data was analyzed from different aspects regarding the poor speaking skills factors based on mean standard deviation.

10.1 Result and Findings

Characteristics of the respondents

Table 1.1 shows the demographic information of the respondents in categories of gender, level of education, age, and faculty.

	Characteristics	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Gender:	Male	81	81
	Female	19	19
Level of Education:	Freshmen	30	30
	Sophomore	19	19
	Junior	26	26
	Senior	25	25
Age:	18-25	89	89
	25-28	8	8
	28-35	3	3
Faculty:	Education Faculty	50	50
	Language and Literature Faculty	50	50

Table 1.1 Shows that there were hundred participants. Out of hundred, 81 were male and 19 female students. Depending on their level of education, freshmen were 30, sophomore 19, junior 26, and 25 senior students. With regards to age, 18-25 years old were 89, 25-28 years old 8, and 28-35 years old were 3 students. Regarding faculty division, 50 were from Education faculty and 50 students were from Language and Literature faculty.

Research question: What are the causes that make EFL students poor in speaking skills at Kandahar University?

Factors that affect EFL students' speaking skills	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have no interest with speaking.	3.80	1.31
Speaking is hard skill than other skills for me.	3.09	1.41
I have problem with the teacher speaking strategy.	3.06	1.40
I can't speak in class because my lecturer is serious, so I feel fearful.	3.05	1.55
I felt nervousness when my lecturer interrupting to correct my speaking.	2.92	1.41
I feel anxious during speaking in a meeting.	2.86	1.49
I become under pressure during presentation.	2.84	1.47
I have faced problems with my peers in speaking.	2.79	1.43
Do you agree with the saying "To learn a language you must speak it?"	2.77	1.44
I feel fearful and my hearth beating very fast in time of speaking with lecturer.	2.66*	1.39
I have no motivation from my peers when I speak about something.	2.59*	1.30
I can't speak when whole class pay attention to me.	2.49*	1.40
I am nervous when I speak with strangers.	2.32*	1.42
I feel shyness during the presentation in the class.	2.28*	1.22
I speak nervously with other people even my family members.	2.12*	1.05

Table 1.2 Indicates the factors affecting EFL students' speaking skills at KDR University.

Likert scales: 1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3=Undecided, 4=Disagree, and 5= Strongly disagree.

Table 1.2 Shows the mean scores for the EFL students' poor speaking skills at KDR University. All of the items had the mean scores between the ranges of two to three. The average level of the EFL students' poor speaking skills was in the range of "Agree" and "Undecided". Items which gained higher mean scores in this dimension were identified as "I have no interest with speaking" (M= 3.80, SD= 1.31), "Speaking is hard skill than other skills for me" (M= 3.09, SD= 1.41) and "I have problem with the teacher speaking strategy" (M= 3.06, SD= 1.40). Meanwhile, the three items with comparative lower mean scores were "I am nervous when I speak with strangers." (M= 2.32, SD= 1.42), "I feel shyness during the presentation in the class." (M= 2.28, SD= 1.22) and "I speak nervously with other people even my family members." (M= 2.12, SD= 1.05). The result reveals that minority of the participants were (Undecided) but, majority of the participants were (Agree) with the questionnaire items. Thus, the researchers emerged the major factors that affect EFL students' poor speaking skills. Those risky factors are called: 1) EFL

Students speak nervously with other people even with their family members. 2) Students feel shyness during presentation in the class. 3) Students are nervous when they speak with strangers. 4) Students cannot speak when whole class pay attention to them. 5) Students do not have motivation from their peers when they speak about something. 6) Students feel fearful and their hearth beating very fast in time of speaking with lecturer.

11. Discussion

The findings of this study identified that there is lack of confidence in terms of speaking English. Students responded that they could not even speak with their parent liberally. This finding is in line with Tinkler (2002) who concluded that sometimes students feel less confident when speaking English in front of their parents, thus it caused them discouraging from attending school functions. Meanwhile, the findings also suggested that students feel nervousness when speaking to the people who are stranger or unfamiliar and met for the first time which they never saw before. As well as, fearful and their hearts beat while talking to the teacher or when teacher correct their mistakes during presentation and speech. Accordingly, Ohata (2005) and Woodrow (2006) stated that giving oral presentations and performing in front of teachers was reported to be one of the most anxiety provoking situations, as well as, giving feedback to the students' during speaking failed their purpose.

Furthermore, the research findings also points towards students shyness which the students feel themselves shy in front of teacher and audience when giving presentation and reading the lesson. Therefore, this factor can cause poor speaking skill in students. Moreover, another study concluded by Crozier (2002) investigated that shy children and adults are more quite than their peers in social circumstances. They are slower to start conversations with unfamiliar people, take longer to break silence, give shorter utterances and avoid elaborating. The author further explained, that they make less eye contact and touch their faces and bodies more frequently with their hands. As revealed in this research that there is insufficient motivation from peers when speaking about something or when offering presentation and they are afraid of getting things wrong that caused peers amusing and making fun. This was also found by Zarina and Shamsa (2011) who demonstrated that peer pressure negatively impact on academic achievement of students. Moreover, peers aggrieving can deprivate students from academic obtain.

11.1 Suggestion

Students are recommended for future study to collect data from teachers teaching methods in order to know how teachers teach EFL learners and which methods and techniques they are using.

11.2 Implications

EFL learners at Kandahar University have speaking difficulties that can be overcome by putting more emphasis on this skill. Many issues related to teachers, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulation should be considered. Teachers need to be trained on how to integrate speaking to other skills and how to teach it communicatively. Moreover, teachers need to be enlightened on the different teaching strategies that may reduce their use of L1 in their classes. Curriculum should be designed to provide students with frequent opportunities of speaking and communicative tasks should be included. This can help students acquire the language better as many researchers declared involving students in extracurricular activities can provide them with more chances to use the language, and the classroom will not be the only place where they are exposed to the English language.

12. Conclusion

The current study was designed to identify the causes that make the EFL students poor in speaking skills. The problem was EFL students' poor speaking skills. Accordingly with the previous literature, the researchers stated that there were some causes that affected EFL students' speaking skills. Such as, anxiety, shyness, lack of interest in the class and fear of being wrong. Moreover, the study was conducted quantitatively by providing questionnaire through random sampling. Likewise, the data was analyzed through SPSS software (24) version in terms of mean and standard deviation. Finally, the present study found that there were six major causes that affected EFL students' speaking skills. Like, speaking nervously with other people, feeling shyness during presentation, nervousness when speaking with strangers even with family members, weakness of speaking when whole class pay attention, no motivation from peers and feeling fearful in time of speaking with lectures.

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