

Reasons for The Neglect of Teaching of Oral Skills in Classrooms at School Level

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Abstract

Oral language is not just speaking. It is a large set of skills encompassing listening and speaking comprehension, understanding and producing complex language, vocabulary and word knowledge, grammatical knowledge, phonological skills, and so much more. To trace the reasons for neglecting to teach oral skills in English classrooms, the researcher first set a hypothesis that oral skills may be overlooked in English classrooms. The design of the research was qualitative descriptive. The population for this study was English Language Teachers and students from District Gujranwala, while 80 teachers and 40 students from Tehsil Gujranwala were taken as sampling. A questionnaire for teachers and an interview technique for students were used to collect the data. Collected data was analyzed keeping in view the remarks of different teachers and feedback from students.

Keywords: Oral skills, Communication, Neglect, reasons, English classrooms.

Introduction

First and foremost, a child's language is Oral Language (OL), which is frequently used in communication is his mother language. Through language, every individual can construct, assess, pronounce, and express his experiences. Due to media influence, in this century the English language has become part and parcel of every person's life, Pakistani students are not exceptional. It has assumed an identity of lingua franca. By acquiring English language children pinpoint themselves in the world and express themselves with it (Cregan, 1998, as cited in Archer, Cregan, McGough, Shiel, 2012).

Since oral skills, i.e., speaking and listening, play an essential role in learning any language, the importance of oral skills cannot be denied. Today, the English language is a need of the hour as it has become an international language and the language of science and technology. English has become the language of globalization today, the language of international culture, and the language of the universal economy (Graddol, 1997). So, the ability to speak English has become an acute desire for all young and older adults in every part of the world. According to the Ministry of Education in Oman (1996), the basic aim of education is to help the learner improve the required skills for life by evolving his/her communication skills, self-learning, and talent for critical thinking in dealing with science and up-to-date technology (Al Abri, 2008).

It has been observed that after spending many years learning these skills, students in Pakistan remain unable to communicate in English. Some researchers have highlighted this issue: "However, globally, there is a debate that most high school graduates cannot speak the English

language properly (Alonzo, 2014; Sarwar et al., 2014; Alharbi, 2015).” “Even the bright students who get high scores in written examinations cannot express themselves orally in English (Sarwar et al., 2014).”

Experts believe that the ability to communicate orally is equal to knowing the given language since speaking is the primary means of human communication (Lazarton, 2001). However, as some other experts in the field say, speaking has been approved to be a challenging skill for English language learners. For example, Brown (2001) believes that colloquial language, reduced forms, performance variables, redundancy clusters, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, and intonation are among the characteristics of speaking that contribute to the difficulty of this skill. Lazarton (2001) also considers spoken English difficult because it is always accomplished in collaboration with at least one speaker. Most of the students do not have any opportunity to speak English either inside or outside the classroom, and the course book is the only place where they have a chance to communicate in English (Al Zedjali, 2009). Wolvin and Coakley (1988) are of the opinion that listening consumes more time daily than other skills, both inside and outside the classroom. Listening consumes more daily communication time than other forms of oral communication. According to Coakley and Wolvin (1997), listening has a central place in students' lives during all stages of educational development.

One cannot deny the significance of listening skills when learning a foreign language because the crucial thing to acquire a language is to accept language input. Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, and Herzog (1984) assert that language acquisition occurs when students absorb intelligible input. The same claim was maintained by Rost (1994), who established that listening is essential in language classrooms because listening plays a vital role in students' language growth. Krashen (1985) claims that people can acquire language by listening to linguistic information Hasan (2000) is of the view that “listening comprehension provides the right conditions for language acquisition and development of other language skills” (p.138). Therefore, English must be taken as a receptive skill, and oral skills must be developed. Rost (2002) also points out that to develop proficiency in English, listening should be the key to achieving proficiency in speaking. Listening plays a vital role in communication as it is thought that, of the total time consumed on communication, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). According to Devine (1982), listening is the principal resource by which external ideas and information are understood. Gilbert (1988), on the contrary, says that kindergarten students throughout their school were estimated to listen 65-90 percent of the time.

Listening is mainly used in the classroom as an oral skill (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1991; Vogely, 1998). Both instructors (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings. Several studies showed that proficient listening skills were more significant than reading skills to contribute to academic success (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997).

Eka Kurniasih (2011) describes three significant types of speaking activities that can be used suitably in primary school classrooms. These activities are songs, chants, and poems, which help encourage young learners to imitate what they hear on the cassette or video. Through these activities, students recognize the sounds, rhythms, and intonation of the English language. Steiner (cited in Jaffke, 2004) suggests that poetic language must be used in the first three classes. He says that poetic language, compared to prose language, is learned quickly by young children because it is based on rhythm and rhyme. Games and pair work are the second type of speaking activities used in primary schools. Through these activities, young learners are encouraged; thus, these activities help develop student's oral skills. The third type of speaking activity is oral reports and book discussions used in primary schools. Learners often need to interact with each other about what they read and share their ideas. Zang (2009, p. 34) reports that joining these two skills, i.e.,

reading and speaking, enhances student's understanding and reveals the problems students face while reading a text. Thus, they become fluent in speaking. Most teachers spend most of their time teaching others in the classroom, writing, and, to some extent, listening to a second language. Grammar has a long written tradition. (Bueno, Madrid and McLaren, 2006: 321).

Brown (1994) considers speaking as the most inspiring skill for students because of the set of structures that characterize oral discourse, and these are:

Contractions, vowel reductions and elision;

- The use of slang and idioms
- Stress, rhythm and intonation
- There is a need to interact with at least one other speaker.

The research works mentioned above show different reasons for the neglect of oral skills. This research will highlight the factors that neglect the teaching of oral skills in the Gujranwala district. Since it is a thought-provoking issue in Pakistani schools, oral activities are less focused than other skills. In order to develop oral skills, planning, and strategies are required for this severe issue. There may be several factors behind these reasons which need to be overcome. For example, there might not be enough facilities for English classrooms, or teachers might be untrained or have less knowledge of oral skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find the reasons behind neglecting the teaching of oral skills. Why do teachers not teach these skills in the classroom, and why do students not show interest in learning oral skills, and consequently, oral skills are ignored?

Statement of Problem

Oral skills are one of the principal essentials of communication. In English classrooms, oral skills are needed special consideration and coaching. In English language learning, students may face many hurdles in learning oral skills, preventing them from communicating when expected.

Objectives of the Study

To introduce oral skills in English classrooms.

To enhance the scope of oral skills.

To encourage English language teachers to use oral skills in their classrooms.

To make the teachers how to teach oral skills in English language classrooms.

Research Questions

RQ.1. Are oral skills being neglected in English classrooms?

RQ.2. Why oral skills should be taught in English classrooms?

RQ.3. Are English language teachers qualified to teach oral skills?

RQ.4. What are the reasons of neglecting the oral skills?

Assumptions of the study

➤ Oral skills in English classrooms may be neglected.

➤ Teaching of oral skills in English classrooms may not be encouraged.

Significance and practical implications of the study

The current study is noteworthy because it aims to find the factors responsible for not teaching oral skills in classrooms or why teachers are reluctant to teach them. This study will highlight several factors influencing oral skills. Thus, by implicating or generalizing the results of this study, necessary steps may be initiated to develop oral skills among students.

Literature Review

Effective oral communication is pivotal in classrooms, facilitating active learning, critical thinking, and meaningful interactions among students and educators. The development of oral skills enables students to articulate their thoughts, negotiate meanings, and construct knowledge

collaboratively. Research emphasizes the significance of oral communication in enhancing student engagement, academic achievement, and social confidence. This literature review examines the existing body of knowledge on oral skills development in classroom settings.

The project "Move to end neglect of speaking skills" was undertaken by Henry (2002). The government, she claims, has concentrated on enhancing written English. She thinks it will soon be expected of teachers to assist pupils in developing their writing and speaking abilities. Students also need to be proficient and self-assured when speaking, she says. She says that speech abilities may be developed in phase one through group activities.

Zhang, Hong, and Nola, KortnerAiex's (1995) work indicate the criteria for oral language proficiency. They state that the basic level of oral language is communicating with others in society. Speech is essential for communication and involves thinking, knowledge, and skills. How can we help our learners promote oral skills? They believe that the natural language acquisition process for children is oral, which requires enough attention and practice.

Many studies have shown that verbal language growth has been neglected extensively in the classroom (Holbrook, 1983). Holbrook (1983) describes three norms for oral language competence: fluency, clarity, and sensitivity. "Helping children achieve these levels of development is our responsibility as educators."

Yellen, Blake, & DeVries (2004) say that speaking, like listening skills, are often ignored in the classroom, or teachers do not want to instruct or facilitate the students because this is not a required area where instructions are necessary. Through speaking, children communicate effectively and get the listeners' fluency, clarity, and attentiveness. So these skills can be learned through practice and by observing an effective speaker like a teacher.

Eltawila, Mohamed (2009) has also worked on The Neglect of Listening Activities among Egyptian Preparatory Schools EFL Teachers and found that according to the responses of his ten colleagues at La Seifer Prep School, he is going to propose that the reasons Teachers in general neglect the listening activities in given textbooks are the following:

Shortage of professional training in teacher training programs.

Insufficient support from the supervisors to the teachers.

Insufficient teaching aids and non-availability for the listening exercises.

Listening skills are excluded from the examination system.

Bashir and Marriam (2011) worked on "Factors affecting students' English speaking skills" and found that more than half of the teachers use English as a medium of instruction in the classroom. Both teachers and students use interactive techniques for the teaching-learning process. Given both the teachers and students, English is a better medium of instruction than Urdu. During the teaching-learning process, teachers use the mother language. She also recommended that:

1. Teachers should emphasize the English language as a medium of instruction.
2. Teachers ought to promote interactive techniques in the classroom.
3. Teachers should create an English-speaking environment to enhance their oral skills.
4. Students should interact in English with fellow students.
5. Refresher courses should be compulsory for better teachers' training.

"Compared to the bulk of research on anxiety associated with other skills, in particular speaking, the number of studies on FLLA is far from being satisfactory" (Elkhafaifi, 2005: 209).

Results from different studies have shown that difficulties in listening in an overseas language are distinctive to listeners from other language backgrounds. For example, Underwood (1989) and Flowerdew and Miller (1992) identified that failure to concentrate is a central problem because even the shortest attention disruption can spoil comprehension. Goh (2000) stated learners have difficulty in perception: students encounter issues recognizing acquainted words. They believe that though they were acquainted with some words, they failed to evoke their meaning immediately.

They also stated trouble understanding the intended meaning, although they were at home with the literal meaning of words.

Yuen Cheekeong, AmrAbdulatif Abdullah Yassin &TahaTalib Ali Abdulrahman (2014) have worked on Oral Communication Problems and state that to find the problems, they collected data through a questionnaire from 40 students and found that there are problems in oral communication due to three factors:

1. Teachers do not encourage the students for English speaking in the class.
2. There are not enough oral drills in the curriculum which can develop student's speaking skill.
3. Students were also confused to use English in or out the class.

Rababa'h (2005) highlighted different factors that create difficulties for learners in speaking English. Some of these factors are associated with the students, like the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For instance, many learners lack the required vocabulary to get their meaning across, and subsequently, they cannot keep the interaction in communication. Insufficient strategic competence and communication competence can also be an additional cause for the inability to keep the interaction going.

Many researchers have worked to investigate the speaking difficulties faced by EFL learners. For instance, (Dil, 2009) studied Turkish EFL learners' communication hindrances in English language classrooms, and it stated that anxiety and disinclination during the English-speaking process are considered two of the most significant complications for EFL learners.

Al-Lawati (1995) also explored the difficulties Omani students face in their oral English construction and found that the linguistic domain (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse) is the most severe area of difficulty. Teachers reported that students have not yet promoted basic abilities and a satisfactory level of the language (Ambu & Saidi, 1997) have also traced some issues in teaching English in overseas language classrooms and discovered that the massive number of students in the classroom, the inadequacy of the English teaching periods, and the syllabus that does not fulfill the learners' communicative needs are the main causes of students' speaking difficulties.

Additionally, as speaking cannot be tested, teachers and learners emphasize speaking skills less. Al-Lawati (2002) is of the view that students focus on writing, reading, and listening skills that are similar to exam items, and both teachers and students testified that they gave the slightest care to speaking tasks in the textbooks because speaking is entirely excluded from exams. Al-Abri (2008) claimed that the deficiency of oral activities in textbooks is a solid reason for students' complications in speaking. Thus, he recommends that some oral activities, such as songs, rhymes, and simple stories, should be included in books and more familiar language to empower the students and improve their speaking and listening skills.

Motivation is another factor that causes neglect of oral skills. They do not show an interest in learning or speaking English. Motivation is the vital force that defines whether a learner takes on a task, how much effort he puts into it, and how long he conserves it (Littlewoods, 1984, p.53). Further, he says that expanding communicative skills can only occur if students have the motivation and chance to communicate their individuality and interact with the people nearby (Littlewoods, 1981).

Research Methodology

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to investigate the reasons behind the neglect of teaching oral skills in English classrooms.

Population

The population for the study was as follows:

- a) All teachers teaching English to classes 9th to 10th in District Gujranwala.
- b) All 9th to 10th grade students of public and private schools in District Gujranwala.

Sampling

For this study, twenty schools from Tehsil Gujranwala, consisting equally of M/F and R/U, were randomly selected. Four teachers and two students were selected randomly from each school. The division of teachers and students from each stratum is shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Stratum	Location		Gender	
	Rural	Urban	Male	Female
Teachers	20	20	20	20
Students	10	10	10	10

Framework

Marham Jupri Hadi (2014) has worked on Theories and issues in developing oral communication for a specific learner group. He is of the view that there are many parts to consider before deciding which particular theories to work on for the learner group. There are numeral aspects in which they differ. These include their current language skills, their strengths and problems, and some affective factors.

Instrument

A questionnaire (Three point Likert type scale) for teachers was developed. Questionnaire was consisting of ten statements, whereas students were interviewed through different questions. Questions which were asked by the students are shown in table 3.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted 80 English language teachers working in different schools to collect the data. Then, questionnaires were distributed among the teachers to seek the reasons for the neglect of oral skills. The collected data from different teachers is given in Tables 2 and 3. The researcher also interviewed the students from each school to validate the data. Data collected by the students is shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Data Interpretation

Data collected from 80 teachers of different schools is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Questionnaire	All Teacher's Remarks regarding Questionnaire		
	Yes	No	Occasionally
Do you think English is better as a medium of instruction in your English class?	25	55	
Do you think competency in oral skills in English is necessary?	80	0	
Do you have a TESL/TEFL degree to teach oral skills?	20	60	
Does your management appreciate teaching through interactive techniques?	10	65	5
Do your students respond in English?	15	65	
Do you neglect oral skills in English language classrooms?	70	10	
Does your management provide material for the development of students' oral	0	80	

skills?			
Do you use other materials to enhance the student's listening skills?	50	20	10
Does your school have an English-speaking environment?	0	75	5
Do the teachers teaching English classes interact with one another in English?	30	20	30

Table 2:

Table 3:

Questionnaire	All Teacher's Remarks in % regarding Questionnaire		
	Yes	No	Occasionally
Do you think English better as medium of instruction in your English class?	31	69	
Do you think competency in oral skills in English is necessary?	100	0	
Do you have TESL/TEFL degree to teach oral skills?	25	75	
Does your management appreciate to teach through interactive techniques?	13	81	6
Do your students respond in English?	19	81	
Do you neglect oral skills in English language classrooms?	88	12	
Does your management provide material for the development of oral skills of the students?	0	100	
Do you use other material for the enhancement of listening skill of the students?	63	25	12
Does your school have English speaking environment?	0	94	6
Do the teachers teaching English classes interact with one another in English?	37.5	25	37.5

Collected data from 40 students of different schools is given as under in table 4 and 5.

Questionnaire	All Student's Remarks regarding Questionnaire		
	Yes	No	Occasionally
Does your teacher use English as medium of instruction for the teaching of English in your class?	10	25	5
Do you think that Urdu is better medium of instruction than English?	25	15	
Does your teacher use Urdu language frequently in class?	30	10	

Do you answer in English?	10	10	10
Does your teacher speak fluently in English?	15	25	
Does your teacher use other cooperating techniques in teaching English?	10	25	5
Does your teacher encourage your involvement in oral communication?	10	20	10
Does your teacher speak native language while teaching English?	25	11	4
Does your school have English speaking environment?	0	40	
Does your teacher use A.V aids to teach English classes?	0	40	

Table 4:

Questionnaire	All Student's Remarks in % regarding Questionnaire		
	Yes	No	Occasionally
Does your teacher use English as medium of instruction for the teaching of English in your class?	25	62	13
Do you think that Urdu is better medium of instruction than English?	62	38	
Does your teacher use Urdu language frequently in class?	75	25	
Do you answer in English?	25	50	25
Does your teacher speak fluently in English?	38	62	
Does your teacher use other cooperating techniques in teaching English?	25	62	13
Does your teacher encourage your involvement in oral communication?	25	50	25
Does your teacher speak native language while teaching English?	62	28	10
Does your school have English speaking environment?	0	100	
Does your teacher use A.V aids to teach English classes?	0	100	

Table 5

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed after collecting questionnaires from teachers and student interviews, and remarks from teachers and students were observed. As can be seen in Table 2, the questionnaire is placed in 1st column, and the remarks from the teachers are shown in the following columns. These columns show that different teachers have commented differently on each statement. Thus, it indicates that there are specific reasons for the neglect of oral skills in English classrooms. Data is shown more specifically in Table 3. Table 3 shows the number of teachers displayed in front of

each statement. This way, the researcher learned how many teachers remarked on each reason. For question one, 25 teachers agreed, and 55 disagreed. In question number two 80, teachers agreed. In the same way, teachers' remarks can be shown in the rest of the questions.

Discussion

It has been mentioned above that the researcher contacted 80 English language teachers to know the reasons for the neglect of oral skills in English classrooms. For this, the researcher developed a questionnaire and distributed it among 80 teachers. After receiving their remarks, the researcher learned the reasons for the neglect of oral skills. This researcher reviewed Marriam Bashir's work on factors affecting students' speaking skills. In her work, she has analyzed that about (43%) of teachers agreed that they use other materials for the enhancement of the speaking skills of students. About (53%) of teachers, they were stated that the school has an English-speaking environment. About (55%) of teachers it was said that they teach through interactive techniques. On the other hand, the researcher's work was based on tracing the reasons for neglecting oral skills in English classrooms, and he found different reasons for this.

Results

After completing the whole research process, the researcher learned that the hypothesis he set at the beginning of the study was approved accurately, i.e., oral skills in English classrooms are being neglected. As per the remarks of different teachers, the reasons for the neglect of oral skills in English classrooms are as follows: 69 % of teachers think English is better as a classroom instruction medium. 100% of teachers agree that competency in oral skills is necessary. 75 % of teachers agreed that they do not have a TESL/TEFL degree to teach oral skills. 81 % of teachers agreed that their management does not appreciate teaching through interactive techniques. 81 % of teachers agreed that students do not respond in English. 88 % of teacher's neglect oral skills in English language classrooms. 100 % of teachers agree that their management does not provide material for developing oral skills. 63 % of teachers do not use other materials to develop students' oral skills. 94 % of teachers agreed that their schools do not have English-speaking environments. 37 % of teachers do not or occasionally communicate in English with one another.

As per data collected from the students, the reasons for the neglect of oral skills in English classrooms are as follows: 62 % of students reported that their teachers do not use English as a medium of instruction for teaching English. 62 % of students think that Urdu is a better medium of instruction than English. 75 % of teachers use the Urdu language frequently in class. 50 % of students do not answer in English. 62 % of teachers do not speak English fluently. 25 % of teachers use other cooperating techniques in teaching English. 50 % of teachers do not encourage student's involvement in oral communication. 62 % of teachers speak their native language while teaching English. 100 % of students agreed that their schools have English-speaking environments. 100 % of students agreed that teachers do not use AV aids to teach English classes.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the responses from teachers and students, it has become known that more than half of teachers recommend English as a medium of instruction. In contrast, students think Urdu is a better medium of instruction. More than half of teachers agree they are not trained to teach English classes. Students do not respond in English. Most teachers believe their management does not provide the necessary material for developing oral skills. Almost one hundred percent of teachers reported no English-speaking environment in their schools, and students stated the same. Most of the teacher's neglect to teach oral skills. Seventy percent of students believe that teachers use Urdu frequently in class. A hundred percent agree that teachers should not use AV aids while teaching English.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should avoid Urdu while teaching the English language.

2. Management should provide the necessary equipment to develop oral skills.
3. To develop oral skills in school, management should create an English-speaking environment within schools.
4. Students and teachers should communicate in English besides classrooms.
5. To teach the oral skills, teachers should be trained.
6. There must be English labs for developing oral skills in English classrooms.

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