

Education Department
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Deanship of Graduate Studies



Thesis Approval

Teaching Speaking & the Problems Facing Students of the 9th & 11th Grade from the Teachers' Perspectives

Prepared by: Lubna Dawoud Abu Turki

Registration No: 20912258

Supervisor: Dr. Adnan Shehadeh

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The names and signatures of examining committee members are as follow:

- 1- Head of committee: Dr Adnan Shehadeh
- 2- Internal Examiner: Dr. Omar Abu Hummos
- 3- External Examiner: Dr. Mohsen Adas

signature*Dr. Shehadeh*.....

signature*Omar Hummos*.....

signature*Mohsen Adas*.....

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Abstract:

The present study investigated teaching speaking and the problems facing students of the 9th & 11th grade from the teachers' perspectives in the scholastic year 2011-2012. The study examined the effects of the independent variables of the teacher's gender, experience, qualification and the training program towards the speaking problems. The researcher designed and used a questionnaire which included four domains to measure the speaking problems of the 9th and 11th grade from the teachers' perspectives. Data were collected and processed by using means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages, t-test and One Way ANOVA. The population of the study included all English language teachers of the 9th and 11th grade represented by (116) teachers; (61) female and (55) male teachers in (63) public schools in Hebron governorate in the first semester of the academic year 2011-2012.

Results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the teachers' beliefs towards the four different domains namely the strategies of teaching speaking, learners, textbooks, and the internal & external classroom environment attributed to the teachers' gender, experience, qualification, and training courses. The results showed that the mean was higher for female teachers in all aspects of teaching speaking. There were also differences between teachers with less than 5 years experience, 5-10 years experience and more than 10 years experience of teaching speaking, where the results showed more progress for favor of teachers of 5-10 years experience.

There were also differences between teachers who hold different university degrees or qualifications. The results showed that teachers with B.A degree or higher degrees are much more successful than those who hold Diploma. There were no significant differences between teachers who attended training courses comparing to those who didn't attend them. The results of the open general question showed the main problems which face English teachers teaching speaking skill of the 9th and 11th grade; these are mostly related to the strategies of teaching speaking. In light of the results of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

Palestinian curriculum designers are advised to increase the speaking (oral) activities in English language textbooks at all grades of education to improve the speaking skills of Palestinian EFL learners. More workshops and training courses should be held to improve speaking skills - as this skill is ignored- should be held for the Palestinian EFL teachers in order to develop their abilities to speak English well inside and outside the classrooms and to encourage learners to speak English fluently and accurately. EFL teachers must cover all English speaking activities in the students and workbooks materials to help students develop their speaking skill. More researches should be carried out to overcome the problems concerned the other skills namely, listening, reading and writing.

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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction:

English language is currently considered as the first spoken language worldwide. It is used in communication, business, politics, sport, medicine, education and travelling. According to Bayyurt (2010) it is an undeniable fact that English has become a medium of communication between the world nations. Hasman (2000) points out that over 1.4 billion people live in countries where English has an official status. Over 70% of the world's scientists read English, over 85% of the world's mail is written in English and 90% of information in the world's electronic retrieval system is stored in English. Hasman (2000) inferred that by 2010, speakers of English as a second or foreign language will exceed the number of native speakers. English has become a key factor in the development of nations as it is an official language spoken all over the world.

Speaking is an important skill necessary for everyone. It is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns and Joyce, 1997). Despite its importance, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogue. The goals of teaching speaking should be stated at schools to improve students' communicative skills. Learners should be able to express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules to speak the language appropriately (kayi, 2006).

Adhikari (2010) stated that speaking ability lies at the heart of any ELT program that aims at making students able to communicate in English accurately, fluently, appropriately and effectively. It is often the case that learning to speak English is equated with learning English as English proficiency. However, English is being taught as a tool for international understanding since there is a tendency among teachers of English to assume that English is studied chiefly as a means of becoming acquainted

with life, literature and institutions of the English speaking people (Abu Nniaj, 1992)

To be a fluent speaker is a complicated process because he/she should master several important elements of English such as pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. In that case, teachers are supposed to be creative in developing their teaching learning process. They have to create good atmosphere, improve the students' speaking skill and make the English lesson more interactive.

1.2 The importance of using English for communication:

English is considered as an international language. It is very popular and has been spoken and learnt by almost all people in the world. There are some reasons why English is important and many people attempt to learn it. Some of these reasons are: job hunting, traveling, education, interacting with others, having business, taking examination, applying research, writing in the foreign language, etc. For these reasons, English is important because it is assumed to be the only language that truly links the whole world together. Yule, 1995 mentioned that English is called the major window on the world which means that English gives us the view of the various progresses taking place in the world and provides us with up- to- date knowledge in all fields of human developments and activities.

The role of speaking as a language skill

Teaching speaking skill is necessary for learners to acquire English as a second or foreign language context. Chaney (1998) identified speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. So EFL teachers should create a classroom environment where learners have real life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that encourage oral language. So learners should feel that English must meet their needs. Consequently, they are encouraged and became willing and determined to speak English when

they feel their importance in real life situations. However, Cowan (2009) states that people learn a language by speaking or interacting. It is also important due to the large number of English language learners to be able to use English for communicative purposes. A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking (Richards & Renandya, 2004)

Speaking provides the opportunities for learners to use the target language in real situations to develop learners' confidence in using the language inside and outside the classroom. Speaking is also used to give instruction to get things, to complain about people's behavior, to make polite request and to entertain people everywhere in the target language (Richard & Renandya, 2002).

1.4 The nature of speaking

Speaking is a productive skill which requires a lot of back-up factors like knowledge, confidence, self-esteem and enthusiasm. It is an important part of human civilization and it is a means of cultural transformation. Communication using languages can be conducted in two ways: verbal and non-verbal symbols. It is believed that to communicate in writing is more difficult and more complex than speaking. However, Artini (1998) argues that, although the complexity of spoken and written forms of the languages differs, the differences don't reveal that one is easier than the other.

The nature of speaking at the workplace presents itself in various forms: discussions, presentations, negotiation, and even debates. In other words, ESL/ EFL speaking class will have to do more than pair work speaking practice in the classroom. ESL/ EFL speaking class nowadays encourage more participation from the learners in order to prepare them for functional roles in society. By doing that, learners can be more better interested to adapt the demands of the future since the emphasis is now moving from speaking as acquisition to participation (Ali, 2008)

1.5 Speaking skill in “English for Palestine”

English for Palestine is a new curriculum which was developed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to be taught in the public schools in Palestine and was first introduced in the year 2000.

English for Palestine was designed especially for schools in Palestine to realize the aims of the Palestinian Ministry of Education as described in detail in the Ministry’s English language curriculum for public schools (1999) (Curriculum Center, 2005). The Ministry of Education is attempting to improve the quality of teaching and learning by providing new curricula and textbooks across the curriculum. English is now a core and vital subject in the humanities stream; however, it is given the same weight in the scientific stream in the first Palestinian National Curriculum from the first grade (age 6) till the twelfth grade (age 17).

In English language curricula, the communicative ability is the main goal since English for Palestine is based on the communicative approach. So, it is important for learners to know about language, real success is measured by what learners can do with the language, how well they can understand meaning and convey meaning in spoken and written English (Curriculum Center, 2005). Thus, the Palestinian curriculum focuses on the learner, not on the teacher, It is a learner-centered syllabus. Learners must talk more than their teachers.

The Ministry of Education explained the status of English in the Palestinian curriculum as follow:

- English is applied to be taught from the first grade for the first time in the year 2000.
- English is allocated 3 classes, 40 minutes each per week for the lower primary stage (1- 4) and 4 classes, 40 minutes each per week for the upper primary stage (5-7) and allocated 5 classes, 40 minutes per week for the upper primary stage (8-10).

- English is allocated 5 classes, 40 minutes per week for the secondary stage (11th -12th).
- English is an obligatory subject for all students in both public and private schools.

According to the curriculum, it is designed to fit the students' needs for speaking to understand what is involved in developing oral L2 skills. (Curriculum Centre, 2005).

1.5.1 Speaking activities in the English language textbook of 9th grade

The textbook consists of 16 units, each unit has three speaking activities (vocabulary and speaking, language and speaking, listening and speaking).

These activities include: talking about travel, times and distance, important places, talking about actions, illness, describe pictures, finish the story, discuss problems from real life, comparing the life in past and present, role playing of famous persons, putting plans shopping list, relative clause and if clause, playing games, acting the story, giving direction and comparative & superlatives.

These speaking activities encourage students to use the language and vocabulary to form sentences in order to enhance the students' abilities to practice speaking.

1.5.2 Speaking activities in the English language textbook of the 11th grade

The textbook consists of 12 units, not all the units contain speaking activities except for the activities included under (listening and speaking) section. The activities include: talking about one's life, exchanging news, directions, suggesting and advising, to work out a plan for a visit to some

place and talk about it, playing interview role, problems that face and find solutions, and report actions.

These activities focus more on grammar in order to give the students the chance to build and form correct sentences by using vocabulary and enhance the students' abilities to speak.

The new curriculum is too long to be covered completely and adequately within the allocated periods of 5 classes per week with 40 minutes per class. The intensive and dense activities are obstacles in the way of the teacher to cover the material honestly and accurately in due time. Classes should be increased and the material of spoken language should be simplified to meet students' needs, abilities and interests.

1.6 Speaking within the Teaching Methods:

To have a clear idea about the development of teaching speaking, the Audio-Lingual Method began to gain favor in teaching English as a foreign language and English as a second language in the 1940- 1960s. The language was taught by a systematic attention to pronunciation and by an intensive oral drilling of its basic sentence patterns. Pattern practice is the basic classroom techniques.(Richards & Rodgers,1998).

In the Direct Method, no use of learner's mother tongue is permitted, teachers, therefore must be native speakers or have native-like proficiency in the target language. Since the spoken language is primary in this method, learners hear the language first before seeing it in a written form. So learners can speak English but can't write it because they have not learnt the structures yet. Grammar rules are taught after learners have practiced the grammar points in context (Richards & Rogers, 1998). The relating of learning to the real-life situation of the students is accomplished by giving the main priority to the local culture and environment especially in the early stages. Material is presented orally with actions or pictures. All the language activities are related to the classroom and not connected with real life situations. (Al-Quds Open University, 2006).

Stephan Krashen and Tracy Terrell developed the Natural Approach that gives a part for students to listen to the teacher using the target language communicatively that will allow speaking, reading and writing over time. It has certain similarities with the Direct Methods, with the important exception that students are allowed to use their native language alongside the language as part of the language learning process.

The most important and popular teaching approach over 35 years since 1970s is named the “communicative approach” which emphasized learning the language for practical purposes. Widdowson (1984) pointed out that communicative approach is more difficult in an EFL environment because the learners' use of English is unnatural. Language is used in real context and learners should be given the opportunities to express their ideas and opinions even they make mistakes. Fluency is much more important than accuracy. Errors are natural outcome of the development of communication skills.

Teachers usually create real life situations in classes and students play roles, simulations, true- to- life interaction and other communicative activities in order to learn to use language appropriately in different types of situations, to use language to perform different kinds of tasks, and to use language for social interaction with other people (Liao, 1996). However, Roberts (2004) assured that the most important characteristics of the communicative approach is that the course contents are based on students' needs, and teaching is more learner-centered and the teacher is just a facilitator or guide. Classroom activities guided by the communicative approach are characterized by producing meaningful and real communication at all levels.

- Students can't pronounce the words correctly. The teachers' responses formed (08 %) of the total responses.
- Teachers focus on grammar more than speaking. The teachers' responses formed (08 %) of the total responses.

5.4 Recommendations

In the light of the results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1-The Palestinian curriculum designers are advised to increase the speaking (oral) activities in English language textbooks at all grades of education to improve the speaking skills of the Palestinian EFL learners.
- 2- More workshops and training courses should be held to improve speaking skills - as this skill is ignored- should be held for the Palestinian EFL teachers in order to develop their abilities to speak English well inside and outside such as reading stories, listening English songs, watching films and cartoons in English) the classrooms and encourage learners to speak English fluently and accuracy.
- 3- Teachers should use simple English in order to improve learner's hearing and speaking abilities and to encourage them to communicate in English.
- 4- There should be at least one session a week for speaking skill. Learners should get the opportunity to express themselves in English, to discuss different points of view, to express feelings, to get information and give directions, etc.
- 5- More researches should be carried out to overcome the problems concerned the other skills namely, listening, reading and writing.

- 6- EFL teachers must cover all English speaking activities in the students and workbooks materials to help students develop their speaking skill.
- 7- Encourage English Teachers to use different kinds of speaking activities in teaching by training them how to implement these activities effectively in teaching.

5.5 Conclusion

Results showed that the mean score of the teachers beliefs of strategies of teaching English was (3.30) which indicated that teachers use different methods and strategies to improve the learners speaking skills. While the means score of the teachers beliefs of learners was (3.68) which indicated that teachers encourage learners to speak English. Then the means score of the teachers beliefs of textbooks was (3.40) which indicated that textbooks are over the learners levels and don't meet the learners' needs and interests. Results also showed that the mean score of the teachers' beliefs of the internal and external classroom environment was (3.26) which indicated that the internal and external classroom environment don't help or encourage learners to speak English since it is a frustrating environment.

There were no statistically significant differences of the teachers' beliefs of the four different domains discussed in this study, namely, strategies of teaching speaking, learners, textbooks, and the internal & external classroom environment due to the teachers' gender, experience, qualification, and the training courses. The results showed that the means were higher for females teachers in all aspects of teaching speaking. There were also differences between teachers less than 5 years experience, 5-10 years experience and more than 10 years experience of teaching speaking due to the 5-10 years experience .

There were also differences between teachers who hold Diploma, B.A, MA and more in terms of teaching speaking due to the B.A holders qualification. There are no significant differences between teachers who attended training courses comparing to those who didn't. The results of the