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Submitted by: Messaouda Ben Abdelhadi

Ikram Ghazel

Title

The Main Factors Influencing EFL Learners' Speaking Performance

The Case of Second Year LMD Students of English at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla

Publicly defended:

On:

Before the jury:

Mrs. Samira Sayah Lambarek	MAA	President (KMUOuargla)
Mr. Madjid Doufene	MAA	Supervisor (KMU Ouargla)
Mrs. Hind Hanafi	MAA	Examiner (KMU Ouargla)

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dearest parents for the unconditional support, to my sister and my brothers,

To My cousins Amirat Maha & Amirat Messaouda

To all my friends

&

All those who care about us

Messaouda

Dedication

All praise is due to Allah, the most merciful and

grateful.

I dedicate my work to my tender and dearest mother for her

support and care.

To my father may God appease him, special thanks to my

lovely husband for his encouragement and my sweet heart

Amira, my daughter, for her patience.

To my brothers and sisters.

&

To all my relatives and friends.

Ikram

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We also thank all the teachers and staff of English Department at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla.

List of Abbreviations

CC: Communicative Competence

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FL: Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

LMD: Licence, Master, Doctorate

SL: Second Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

SPSS: Social Package for Social Sciences

TL: Target Language

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General Introduction

1. Background

Among the four skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) speaking seems to be the most important skill for EFL learners, who have a strong desire to achieve a good speaking performance (Ur. 1996). For EFL learner, speaking demands not only the acquisition of grammatical and semantic regularities, but also knowing how native speakers use the language in an appropriate context (Shumin, 2002). However, it seems not to be an easy task to master English speaking skill because it requires greater effort from both the student and teacher.

2. Statement of problem

Recent studies have showed that learners and even teachers face several difficulties during learning process. Within this context, it has been observed that many students spent long years learning English, but they still struggle to be fluent speakers. In other words, there are some obstacles that hinder learners' ability to speak. On another note, it is stated that the psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of self-esteem and the like have a negative impact on speaking performance of EFL learners.

3. Objectives of the research

The main objective of the present study is to examine the problems EFL learners encounter when they learn to speak English. Besides, it aims to state and explain the factors affecting EFL speech fluency as psychological factors (anxiety, motivation, etc). Finally yet importantly, to reflect upon the importance of giving EFL learners clear instruction and effective guidance to help them feel comfortable when speaking in class.

4. Research Questions

The current study addresses three issues:

1. What are the problems EFL learners encounter when they learn to speak English?

2. What are the factors that affect their oral performance?

3. How can EFL teachers improve learners' speaking skill?

5. Research Hypotheses

To achieve our research objectives, we formulate the following hypotheses in this study:

1. There are some speaking problems that teachers can overcome in getting students to talk in the classroom. These are inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation and mother-tongue interference.

2. Students' speaking performance can be affected by the factors that arise from performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (motivation, self-esteem and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities.

3. The teachers should help their students overcome speaking problems by having friendly, supportive and cooperative attitudes to make students feel comfortable when speaking in class, and giving them clear instruction and effective guidance.

6. Significance of the Study

Gaining the ability to speak fluently is the ultimate goal of any EFL learner. On this basis, the current study spots light on the essential problems EFL students face in speaking classes, and the factors that influence their oral proficiency. In attempting to analyze and identify the reasons why students are unable to speak in English easily and freely, it is assumed that there are many strategies teachers can apply in their teaching process so that they could help learners overcome those difficulties.

7. Methodology

In order to answer the main research questions, we will use both descriptive and qualitative methods in this study. We aim to use a questionnaire as an instrument for gathering data. The questionnaire is the most frequently used instrument for collecting the needed information. It is useful as it helps to know the accurate students' needs and lacks. Therefore, in addition to questionnaire, we use class observation to achieve much

more reliability. The two instruments will be directed to the 2^(nd) year students of English at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla.

8. Dissertation Structure

The present research consists of three chapters. Chapter one includes a theoretical background and a study of the main factors affecting learners' oral proficiency. The second chapter is devoted to the methodology and procedures applied and followed in this study. The third chapter reveals the data gathered, the analysis and the results and interpretations regarding the issue of our study.

9. Definitions of Terms

Speaking: Acorrding to Melia (2012) speaking is an "oral communication" that occurs between people in which they express their intentions and thoughts.

Performance: Brown (2000) defines performance "is the overtly observable and concrete manifestation or realization of competence" (Melia, 2012). For him, performance is acting by words (ibid).

Competence: "Chomsky (1965) states that Competence refers to linguistic system (or grammar) that an ideal native speaker of a given language has initialized"(Canal& swain, 1980, p.3).

Communicative competence: refers to knowledge or capacity relating to rules of language in real life (Canal &Swains, 1980).

Fluency: It is the ability of speaking and writing a foreign language in an easy and accurate way. Oxford Word Power Dictionary (2006).

Chapter One: Theoretical Background

Introduction

It is widely accepted that teaching speaking is a hard task for EFL teachers and learners. Learners are continuously struggling to be fluent speakers. Speaking is considered as a productive skill in which it indicates how successful the learning process within classroom (Richard). To master this skill, learners are required to do their best, as it needs much effort and special ability not only focusing on vocabulary and grammatical aspects of the language rather on how it works. In this respect, Harmer (1998) claimed that: "The ability to speak fluently presupposes not only knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and language 'on the spot'" (p.269). A plethora of researches pointed out that learners spent many years leaning English and they still cannot communicate with it, so they encounter difficulties in expressing their thoughts in the target language. Therefore, a number of studies in EFL contexts came with the conclusion that there is a variety of difficulties that hinder students' speaking performance.

In this chapter, we discuss the skill of speaking, the nature of teaching speaking and communicative competence, then, we elucidate the main factors that influence speaking performance of EFL learners, the major speaking problems, and we attempt to suggest some strategies teachers can use to overcome those difficulties and then enhance speaking skill.

1.1. Definition of Speaking Skill

Much research attention has been directed to figure out speaking skill. This led to a variety of definitions. Firstly, for Gower, Philip & Walter (1995) speaking is a 'productive skill' that consist of both accuracy and fluency. Accuracy involves the use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. While fluency is the process of speaking spontaneously with almost no pauses. Secondly, speaking is also defined as the process of making and sharing messages through using verbal and non-verbal codes in several situations (Febriyanti). Febriyanti further adds, "Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information". According to Cameron (2003) it is 'the active use of language' in which it can transmit meaningful stretches between each other as well as sharing knowledge (Melia, 2012).

In academic setting, speaking is the most important skill that has a fundamental role in making students communicate effectively in the target language. In this vein, Melia (2012) asserted that "speaking is a communication skill which enables students to verbalize thoughts and ideas". Moreover, learning to speak has a great role for learners' effective oral achievement. Here, Bygate (1987) states:

> "Speaking is the vehicle par excellence of social solidarity, of social ranking, of professional advancement and of business .It is also the medium through which much language is learnt, and which for many is particularly conductive for learning. Perhaps, then, the teaching of speaking merits more thought"(p.1)

1.2. Speaking Performance

A plethora of research examined the concept of speaking performance from different perspectives, some experts within EFL contexts such as Ellis (2003) who claims that performance involve using grammar in both processes of comprehension and production of language. In other words, his theory assumes that performance depends on the content of that performance itself in terms of the use of grammar. (Melia, 2012).

Another theory, which is ascribed to Brown; he considered performance as a 'concert manifestation' that clearly emerged. Hence, he argues that this shows an association of knowing the process of perception and speech production (ibid).

In attempting to examine performance, it is necessary to highlight Chomsky's well-known theory of competence and performance, Carlson (2004) sees that Chomsky assumes that performance is 'the specific application of this knowledge in a speech situation" (ibid).

However, EFL learners seek for developing their speaking performance through acquiring communicative competence that enables them interact fluently and successfully. That is, this competence of communication will make them fully skilled at speaking English within given conversation.

1.2.1. Communicative Competence

A number of books have been written about communicative competence, which is closely correlated with the speaking fluency. In this light, Šolcová (2011) clarifies that "the ability to speak a language involves much more than mere linguistic knowledge and skills that are necessary to acquire communicative competence" (p.46). In attempting to figure out the importance of communicative competence, Widdowson (1978) strongly confirms that the central goal in language teaching is the acquisition of communicative competence in interacting, as it helps learners in their speaking ability as well as the other language skills. Additionally, it enables them share their thoughts in natural way as he states:

> "In this case, the students feel free to communicate their ideas naturally in their speaking without hardly burdened with grammar aspect. Real life communication and social- culture interaction will highlight the existence of communicative competence in teaching speaking" (Jasno).

Canal and Swain's work (1980) that is built upon Hymes' theory proposes that communicative competence has four sub-competences, those are grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

1.2.1.1. Grammatical competence

In order to understand meaning, Learners of EFL are compelled to learn the knowledge of words and sentences. In other words, they have to interpret how words are stretched into different kind of sounds, as well as how they are stressed in specific ways. That is, grammatical competence makes the speaker be able to use and understand the structure of English language in an accurate and unhesitating way, and then this will build their fluency (Shumin, 2002).

1.2.1.2. Discourse competence

In addition to grammatical competence, learners of EFL have to develop their discourse competence, which is engaged with inter-sentential relationships. In discourse, both formal and informal, cohesion and coherence rules apply, and help hold communication together in a sense that it conveys meaning. In communication, both producing and interpreting the language demands being able to perceive and process discourse elements. (Searcella & oxford, 1992, as cited in Shumin, 2002).

1.2.1.3. Sociolinguistic competence

Brown (1994, p.238) claims that in order to prepare learners to use the target language effectively and appropriately, we do not need just that knowledge of language. Students have to gain competence that embraces what users expect to know socially and culturally .In other words, the rules and norms governing the right timing and realization of speech acts must be acquired by Learners (ibid).

1.2.1.4. Strategic competence

It may be considered more important in a comparison with the other competences, that is, it is the competence that makes a speaker be able to know the appropriate time to take the turn and the suitable way for keeping a conversation going and how to open and close it. Strategic competence is the ability to compensate when there is a breakdown in communication (ibid).

On the other hand, Richards (2006) has suggested that communicative competence includes three competences:

> *"Grammatical competence refers to the ability to produce sentence which includes correct parts of speech, tenses, phrases..Then, socio-linguistic competence is the ability to understand the functional aspects of communication which includes role relationship, personal factors plus the social and cultural context. Lastly, strategic competence aims at being able to express oneself successfully in a conversation and solving any difficulties or challenges that may occur which may lead to misunderstanding"* (Yasin, Aziz, & Jannah, 2017, p.325).
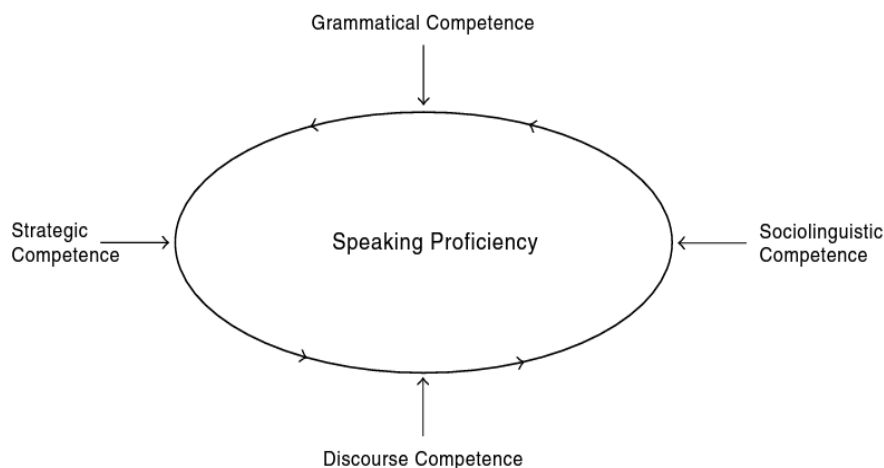
Figure 01: Communicative Competence

In order to be able to speak fluetly and effectively one has to take into consideration these components which were already elucidated in the previous competences of communication.

1.3. The Nature of Teaching Speaking

One of the most important goals of teachers is to enable learners to speak fluently and use English for communication appropriately. For many years, teaching speaking often uses the traditional ways in which it emphasizes drilling and repetition, that is, the teacher provides a dialogue then students are committed to memorize it (Febriyanti). Nowadays, communicative language teaching (CLT) is the most frequently used framework within speaking is taught. One of the reasons behind adopting this method is its nature that relies initially on communication, in which it creates more opportunities to use the target language through interactions. Richards and Rodgers (2001) confirm that:

> *"*The use of communicative language teaching (CLT) approach may help improve the ability of students in speaking. Furthermore, CLT gives the students opportunities to participate actively in activities as it's often accompanied by scenes or simulated scenarios, so that it is more close to life" (Yasin, Aziz, & Jannah, 2017, p.323).

1.4. Main Factors Influencing EFL learners' speaking performance

Enormous research into learning speaking has been devoted to investigate the major difficulties that EFL learners usually encounter when speaking. The findings showed that there are certain factors that greatly affect learners' speaking skill. Those factors are: Performance conditions, affective factors, listening ability and feedback during speaking activities.

1.4.1. Performance conditions

Newton and Nation (2009) claim that speaking can be affected by some conditions such as planning, time pressure, and amount of support as well as standard of performance.

1.4.1.1. Planning

Planning is one of the most significant elements that has a great impact on teaching speaking. That is, it takes place the time before entering the classroom. In academic setting, it is likely to take time in order to think about the topic, what to talk about, and how much time will be spent in a given activity. In this sense, it contributes oral proficiency as it represents the half of the task before a class is taught (Newton& Nation, 2009). In other words, this planning contains minimal details of every step to be adopted within classroom tasks.

1.4.1.2 Time pressure

Another performance condition has to be kept in mind is time pressure, which is fundamental in teaching process. Recent studies have discriminated between two concepts: on-line planning and pre-talk planning (Yuan & Ellis, 2003, as cited in Newton & Nation, 2009). On one hand, on-line planning is an immediate process of turning ideas while they speak. For them, accuracy can be affected positively by adopting this strategy as it offers enough time in a given chance for speaking. On the other hand, pre-talk planning, the process that serves in enhancing the quality of the speech production in terms of grammatical knowledge (Newton & Nation, 2009)

1.4.1.3. Amount of support

Support and guideness are other elements necessary for success in learning. In this vein, Newton and Nation (2009) assert, "Supported or guided tasks allow learners to operate under the most favorable condition for production". (p.119)

1.4.1.4. Standard of performance

The fourth condition which may influence speech production, is the performance standard. In EFL contexts, learners used to feel under pressure when they are asked to speak in public especially if some sorts of making decision are going to be made about their given performance (Newton& Nation, 2009).

1.4.2 Affective factors

Many experts point out that psychological factors greatly influence students' language learning process, in particular, speaking skill. Those are motivation, self-esteem and anxiety.

1.4.2.1. Motivation

It is commonly agreed that motivation has a great deal within academic contexts, particularly, in learning a foreign language (FL). "Gardner treats motivation and attitude as key variables which affect SLA" (Nitta, 2006). Similarly, Brewer & Burgess (2005) confirm that motivation is fundamental in learning process (Mahadi, 2012). However, it has been widely agreed that learners with high motivation can achieve better learning. Cook (2000) claims that learners' speaking performance is enhanced because they are well motivated (ibid). In this context, Lightbrown and Spada (2001) support the idea that the learners' needs for speaking the target language and their aim to communicate with others will make them simultaneously have a strong desire to acquire it(ibid). Nunan (1999) proposes that teachers have to take into account that motivation determines whether or not the learners' willing to speak. That is, the student's output will be better and superior when he/she is involved and interested in the task (Shaw & McDonough, 2003).

1.4.2.2. Self-esteem

Studies on self-esteem and second language acquisition field showed that it is an essential affective variable in language learning success (Park &Lee, 2005). Coopersmith (1967) defines the concept of self-esteem "self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that individuals hold towards themselves. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior" (ibid). Brown (1994 & 2000) sees that learners' oral proficiency depends on how much they feel confident (Gustaman, 2015). In this respect, Heyde (1979) investigated the influences of self-confidence on speaking production. Her study directed to the American college students learning French as a foreign language. The researcher found that self-esteem is related positively with learners' achievements in speaking performance evaluations (Park &Lee, 2005).

1.4.2.3. Anxiety

Anxiety is another affective variable that obviously hinder EFL learners to speak fluently. Lee & Park (2005) argue that "it makes language learners nervous and afraid, which may contribute to poor aural/oral performance". For them, there is correlation between anxiety, self-confidence and speaking performance of second language (SL) learners. One hundred and thirty two Korean learners participated in their study. The findings showed that the level of learners' anxiety negatively influenced their oral fluency (Park & Lee, 2005). Additionally, Philips (1992) supported that "there is relationship between language anxiety and oral performance, reporting that the more anxious the students were, the lower performance they displayed in oral

tests" (ibid). From the other side, Tanveer (2007) conducted a research in order to investigate the reasons behind learners' language anxiety. For him, there are several factors cause this phenomenon such as the lack of general linguistics knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, English word-class, etc), which are naturally contribute speech proficiency within EFL /ESL classes. In other words, the lack of sufficient input as well as the lack of the opportunity to participate (output). This is due to the lack of practice. Furthermore, the psycholinguistic aspect is another major cause encounter EFL teachers, namely students' fear of making mistakes and eventually fear of negative evaluation that will prevent the learning process improvement (Tanveer, 2007). In short, Karshen (1987) states that the three affective factors influence SLA, which are motivation, self-esteem and anxiety (Nitta, 2006).

> "Karshen's belief that a person who has high anxiety, low motivation and low self-confidence will have a high 'affective filter'. This high affective filter will limit or impede the acquisition of the L2. Conversely, someone who has low anxiety, high motivation and high self-confidence will have a low affective filter and acquire the L2 more effectively" (ibid).

1.4.3. Listening ability

Numerous studies carried out that there is a relationship between the two skills listening and speaking. Shumin (2002) has emphasized the role of listening in improving speaking skill. Typically, in a given interaction, one speaks, and the other listens. He sees that in case one is unable to comprehend what is said, one undoubtedly cannot act in a response. Therefore, he points out that speaking is strongly correlated with listening ability. Accordingly, Feyten (1991) in her investigation of the relationship between speaking and listening claims that the two skills are effectively interconnected, because aural comprehension affects speaking production (Astorga Cabezas, E. D, 2015). Furthermore, Shumin (2002) argues that "The fleetingness of speech, together with the features of spoken English _loosely organized syntax, incomplete forms, false starts, and the use of fillers_ undoubtedly hinders EFL learners' comprehension and affects the development of their speaking abilities" (p.205).

1.4.4. Feedback during speaking activities

The last factor is related to the feedback during speaking activities. According to Harmer (1998):

> 'Through feedback –both assessment and correction- can be very helpful during oral work teachers should not deal with all oral production in the same way. Decision about how to react to performance will depend upon the stage of the

lesson, the activity, the type of mistake made, and the particular student who is making that mistake " (p.164).

Moreover, he continues that it is not necessary to make an instant correction for every mistake made by students, for him this will de-motivate them, he sees that the teacher has to wait the appropriate moment to provide the correction needed (ibid).

1.5. Speaking problems

Ur (1996) tackles the major problems that every teacher may come across in speaking activities. For him problems such as inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low of participation, and mother-tongue use are the most common obstacles that hinder EFL learners' speaking skill.

1.5.1. Inhibition

The first problem students usually face within classroom is inhibition. It has been agreed that learners are inhibited when they have to talk in speaking courses, this is because of many reasons such as fear of making mistakes in front of others or criticism from the teacher.(Ur, 1996)

1.5.2. Lack of topical knowledge

It is assumed that there are cases in which learners may have nothing to say. Ur (1996) asserts that this problem occurs when learners have no motivation toward a given topic. That is, learners, here, are not interested, or they have not sufficient information to participate.

1. 5.3. Low or uneven participation

Another problem teachers encounter, particularly within large classes is learners' low participation. In this sense, the opportunity to talk will be little. Therefore, some learners dominate whereas the others do not talk a lot or not at all (Ur, 1996).

1.5.4. Mother-tongue use

Concerning this issue, Hardbord (1992) noticed, "Students use their L1 when performing pedagogical tasks, especially when one student is explaining something to another. This is a habit 'that in most cases will occur without encouragement from the teacher'" (Harmer, p.131). Accordingly, Harmer (1998) mentioned some reasons why students tend to use their own language. On one hand, because it is easy, natural and more comfortable for them to express their thoughts. On the other hand, in such cases, they are incapable to communicate with the target language when they are asked to participate.

Based on the problems mentioned above, Ur (1996) suggested five strategies EFL teachers can use within their classes in order to overcome the speaking problems.

a. Use group work

It is an effective way to use in speaking classes as it enables students to interact with each other in a definite period. In this sense, learners' inhibition will decrease so that they have no barrier to speak. (Ur, 1996, p.120).

b. Use easy language

Ur (1996) has proposed that the level of language used in classroom should be lower and easier for students; therefore, they can participate and speak fluently.

c. Make a careful choice of topic and task to stimulate interest

Teachers should carefully select the appropriate topic for discussion, in terms of increasing students' motivation and proving chances to participate (Ur, 1996).

d. Give some instruction or training in discussion skills

Teacher has to manage speaking activities by appointing a chairperson within each group of discussion in order to control it in which all learners are asked to participate (ibid).

e. Keep students speaking the target language

in addition to the role of the chairperson whose job is to control as mentioned above, there is another student who plays the role of the monitor, reminds his/her classmates to speak in the target language (ibid).

1.6. Some activities for improving speaking skill

EFL teachers' role in speaking classes is to enhance the oral proficiency of their students through various ways; one way is to adopt some tips and activities with taking into consideration the problems that impede their students' learning process in which those activities provide them with the chances to use their English language. Regarding the previous difficulties, experts and practitioners propose numerous speaking activities such as group work, role-plays and communication games.

1.6.1. Group Work

It is a teaching strategy in which students are divided into groups; for example, each group consists of five students. Putting them in groups will enable them do a variety of tasks such as preparing for a presentation or discussing an issue, etc. This will dramatically raise 'the amount of talking' and prompt discussion between individual learners using English (Harmer, 1998, p.117). Additionally, he states "if the task we wish our

students to be involved in necessitates oral interaction we will probably put students in groups, especially in a large class" (ibid). In other words, students in this situation can prepare to interact and listen to each other to come with a final decision. Group work opens the door for the corporation of the other language skills not only speaking.

1.6.2. Role-plays

One of the most useful activities EFL teachers may adopt within their classes is role-play. It is a kind of interaction in which students imagine themselves in a different personality and other situations and contexts (Ur, 1996, p.131). For him, the dialogue is the best way, which provides learners with the opportunity to practise the target language with no hesitation. It makes them more confident in term of decreasing their anxiety. He further adds that learning by heart will enrich students' vocabulary with well-structured statements (ibid). In the same context, Harmer (1998) supports "role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency" (p. 274). That is, they will use much wider set of language. In fact, students consider this kind of activities enjoyable and motivational to some extent.

1.6.3. Communication games

A further way to improve EFL learners' speaking performance is through communication games. This is considered among the best ways to provoke interactions between students, here, they have to talk to their partners to do the tasks that they are asked to perform (Harmer, 1991, p.272). He suggested a range of communication games in which the teacher has the choice to apply as an activity what suits for their speaking classes. These are information gap activities where the learners are asked to solve a puzzle or draw a picture, in this respect, they have to describe and exchange information. There is also 'just a minute' a comedy contest learners usually talk during this limited duration on a given topic fluently. Consequently, this kind of tasks fosters their speaking skill (ibid).

To sum up, these activities provide the opportunities for more real use of language in a range of communicative function that is likely to occur. Moreover, it reinforces students' self confidence, hence, this frequently involves them in interactions within classes, that is, their oral proficiency will be obviously improved through those tasks.

Conclusion

All in all, speaking skill is not an easy task to master so that EFL learners encounter so many obstacles in their attempts to learn English. The first chapter is devoted to an analysis of elements of the speaking such as speaking performance, communicative competence and the nature of teaching speaking. In addition, we have

discussed the main factors affecting EFL learners' speaking performance in terms of performance condition (planning, time pressure, amount of support and standard of performance), affective factors (motivation, self-confidence and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities. Moreover, the major problems that face learners in the learning process (inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low or uneven participation and mother tongue use) are also investigated and then the ways to overcome those problems respectively. In the next chapter, we will deal with methodology and data analysis. We will conduct a questionnaire for students to check whether the findings go in the same direction with our previous hypotheses.

Chapter Two:

Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

This study aims at investigating the main factors that affect speaking performance of second year students of English at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla. In order to achieve this goal, the present chapter is devoted to the methodology implemented in this research in the first place. Second, it includes a detailed description of participants, research instruments and data collecting procedures.

2.1. Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, the methodological framework that will be used in this paper are the qualitative and descriptive methods.

It is widely believed that the qualitative approach produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. Similarly, Gay, Mills & Airasian (2009) point out that qualitative

research has to do with gathering in-depth information, analysis and interpretation of (non-numerical) data through interviews and focus groups (Murry, Bagby & Sulak, 2010).

Accordingly, Cresswell (2007) states that:

> "Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a 'complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action" (p.37).

Therefore, the main reason to use this approach is its nature that is established on a naturalistic perspective, in addition to its attempting to figure out the social and human problems (Cresswell, 2007). For this reason, it is required in the current study in order to determine the main factors that affect EFL learners' speaking performance at the department of English at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla.

Together with qualitative method, it is worthy to mention that this study is conducted within a descriptive framework as well. It has been assumed that it is the most widely used method. One of its characteristics is that it attempts to give a clear description about the phenomenon. Moreover, this will serve our study to provide a clear description of the major difficulties encountered by students in their attempts to master the target language.

2.2. Population and Sample

Since the purpose of our study is to investigate the main factors that influence EFL learners' speaking performance of Second year LMD students at the English Department of Ouarlgla University, participants are selected to represent the whole population. During the academic year 2017/2018, a sample of twenty five students has been randomly selected during oral expression lessons. The reason behind this sampling lies in the nature of being EFL learners and, particularly, they might experience some speaking problems within speaking classes.

2.3. Research Instruments

In this study, both of questionnaire and class observation are chosen to be the two based data gathering tools.

2.3.1. Questionnaire

In this study, the questionnaire has been used as the main research tool for many reasons. First, it serves the purpose of our study by providing quantitative data regarding our issue. Second, because it does not take much time, and it is the best way to collect data in which the participants feel comfortable; they answer

the questions without control of anybody, and they have the opportunity to express their opinion at ease. The questionnaire was directed to students of the second year LMD at the department of English in Ouargla University.

2.3.1.1. Description of the Questionnaire

This questionnaire is composed of 12 questions. The questionnaire is divided into three sections covering the variables and aspects of our study. The items require answers using the dichotomy of yes/no question, or picking up the most appropriate answer from a range of options, or open-ended questions asking the students to express their views or explain their choices.

a. Section One

Three questions were put in this section in order to collect general information about participants such as gender, age, the number of years spent in learning English, and proficiency level.

b. Section Two

Three questions are addressed to the second year LMD students at the Department of English about their level of proficiency, their attitude toward speaking English as well as the frequency of practising speaking outside classroom. The reason behind putting these questions is to know students' opinions about the process of learning speaking skill.

c. Section Three

This section includes the most difficulties encountered by learners during speaking activities, in which the six questions were put in order to explore exactly the students' problems that hinder their learning process and speaking skill in particular, and to diagnose the major factors that negatively affect their ability to speak.

2.3.2. Classroom Observation

In addition to questionnaire, this study uses class observation since the methodology adopted is qualitative. The direct observation was carried out to figure out the students' difficulties that hinder their speaking skill. It has been stated that class observation is used to measure classroom behavior and attitudes. That is, it allows the observer to record as near as possible what is happening inside class during the observation session.

We have opted for a general observation for an oral session after asking for permission from the teachers, firstly, we have designed a class observation sheet in a form of table (see Appendix B). This operation was conducted one week after the questionnaire had been administered to the study subjects. In

order to explore what kind of problems learners experience in real educational environment, we have observed two classes, namely, each class observation lasted 90 minutes.

2.4.Data Collecting Procedures

In order to test our previous hypotheses and achieve the objectives set for this study, we have adopted two survey methods, which are based on students' questionnaire and class observation for gathering the required information. It is worthy to mention that the questionnaire was conducted in April 2018, exactly at the end of the second semester. We carried out our study at the University of Kasdi Merbah in Ouargla, particularly, at the department of English where all the subjects belong to the population of Second Year degree, representing a sample of twenty-five students, selected randomly.

The questionnaire was administered in good conditions to some extent. The questions were designed clearly enough in order to help the students understand and thus provide the appropriate answers. The teacher and participants were very helpful and cooperative; this facilitated our task.

2.5.Data Analysis Procedures

After the operation of collecting data by using two instruments in terms of questionnaire and class observation, the next step to follow is analyzing and interpreting the collected data.

The data gathered will be analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 22. Concerning the qualitative data, we attempted to highlight and interpret them in terms of motivation and effect enhancing or impeding speaking skill.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the methodological procedures that are followed by the description of population and research instruments that are used in this study, focusing on both qualitative and descriptive methods, in order to get a real picture of our research issue. In an attempt to answer the research question, we have selected two tools to collect information in order to identify the main factors influencing EFL students' oral proficiency. In the next chapter, we will attempt to analyze, discuss and interpret the data collected previously.

Chapter Three:

Results and Discussion

Introduction

After having presented our research design that we have adopted in this study in the previous chapter. The third chapter that deals with the analysis of the data gathered from the sample under investigation by means of questionnaire and class observation. Moreover, this chapter will discuss and interpret the results and include some recommendations.

3.1. Students' Questionnaire Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from students' questionnaire will be provided with statistics by the means of SPSS system (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 22, and then we proceed to the interpretation of the findings.

A. SECTION ONE: PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Q1: Gender

Options	Subject	Percentage
Male	07	28.0%
Female	18	72.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (01): Learners' gender
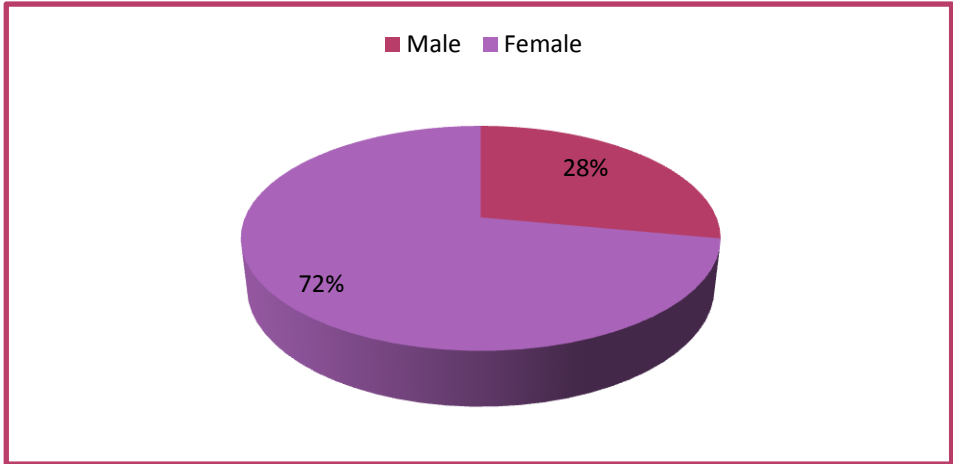
Figure (02): learners' gender

From the table (01), it is obvious that most of the population (72%) consists of female students while a small number of participants (28 %) are male students. This shows that females represent the majority of English language learners within our sample. That is, girls show more motivation and interest towards studying English.

Q2: Age

Options	Subject	Percentage
18-20	12	48.0%
20-25	13	52.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (02): Learners' Age

Figure (03): Learners' Age

It is noticeable from the table (02) that most of the learners (52%) are aged between 20 and 25 and almost the same number (48%) are between 18-20. This obviously reflects the normal age of the population of Second Year LMD students.

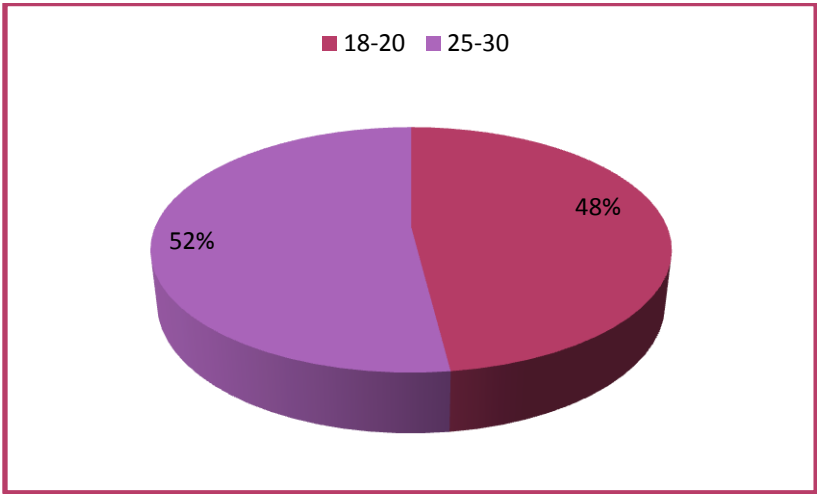**Q3: For how many years have you been studying English language?**

Options	Subject	Percentage
09	19	76.0%
10	03	12.0%
11	03	12.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (03): Years of Studying English
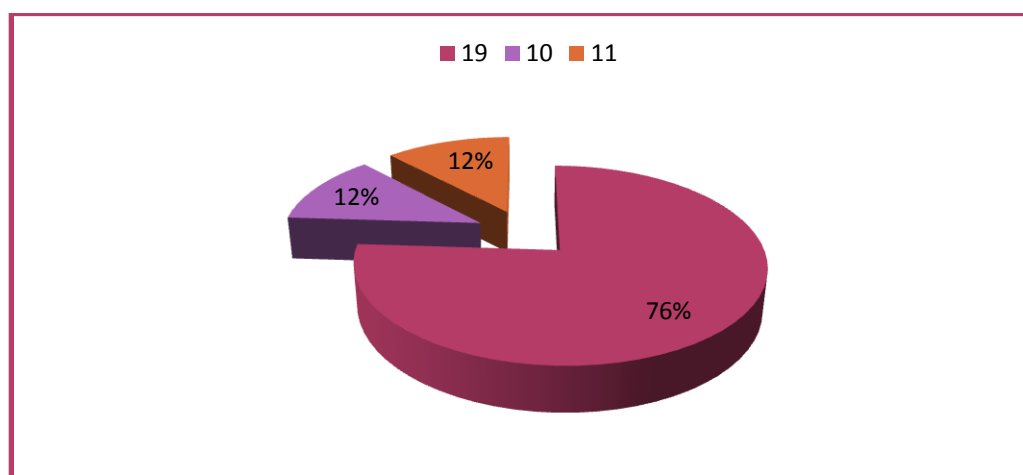
Figure (04): Years of Studying English

As the table shows, the majority of students (76%) have been learning English for nine years, they have studied four years in the middle school and they have spent three years learning English language in the secondary school, as well as, studying two years at the university as EFL learners. A percentage of (12%) participants said that they have been learning English for ten years and others eleven years (12%) due to repeating once or more times in the academic career.

b. Section Two: Speaking Skill

Q4: How do you consider speaking English?

Options	Subject	Percentage
Very difficult	00	0%
Difficult	05	20.0%
Very easy	04	16.0%
Easy	16	64.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (04): Attitude towards Speaking English
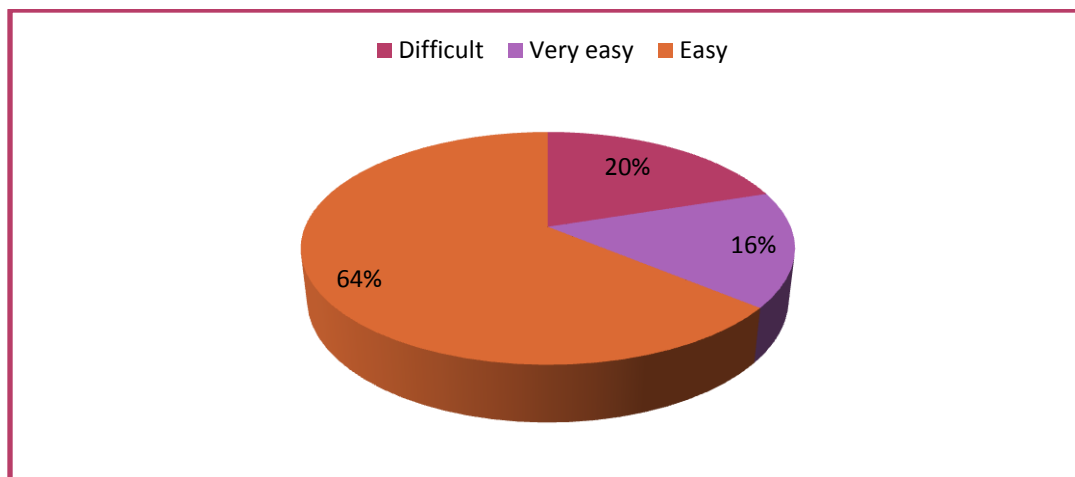
Figure (05): Attitude towards Speaking English

The participants are asked to say whether they find speaking very difficult, difficult, very easy or easy. Most of them (16 students) 64% believe that speaking in English is easy, and about (16%) said it is very easy; on the other hand (20%) find it difficult. According to them speaking is easy, but this does not necessarily mean that they are all good speakers.

For those who consider speaking is difficult, they represent the proportion of learners which is low at class participation and most of them encounter speaking problems.

Q5: How often do you practise speaking English outside classroom?

Options	Subject	Percentage
Always	02	8.0%
Usually	06	24.0%
Sometimes	16	64.0%
Rarely	01	4.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (05): Frequency of Practicing English outside the Class
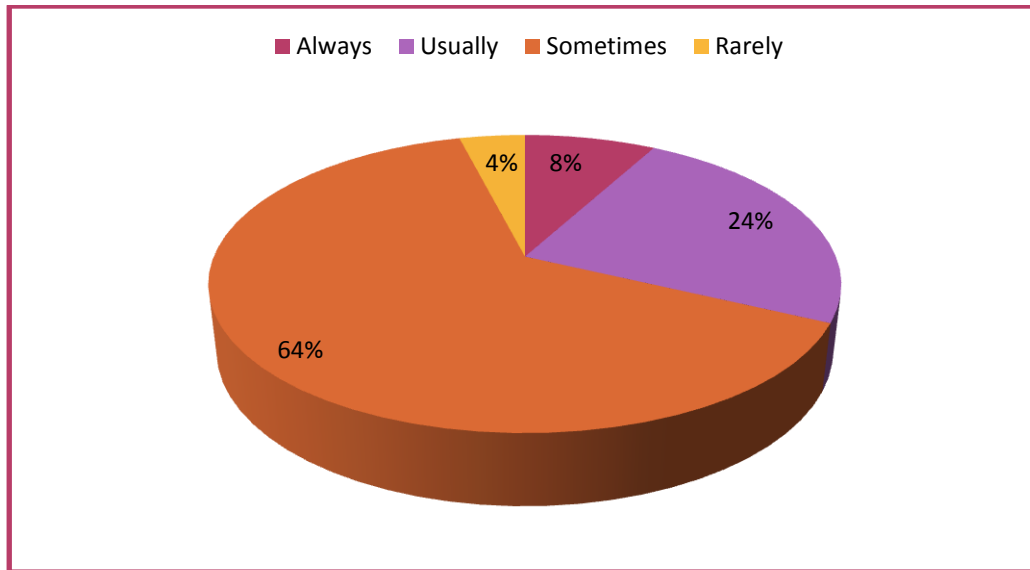
Figure (06): Frequency of Practicing English outside the Class

When students were asked about their frequency of practicing English outside class, their answers varied. About (64%) said that they use it sometimes. By contrast, a percentage (24%) uses it usually, whereas (8%) crossed the <u>always</u> option and only one has crossed <u>rarely</u>. This indicates that they do not use English as much as possible in the way that makes them fluent speakers. In technical terms, the lack of practice is the main cause for most students.

Q6: How would you evaluate your speaking performance?

Options	Subject	Percentage
Good	17	68.0%
Average	04	16.0%
Poor	04	16.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (06): Evaluation of Students' Speaking Performance
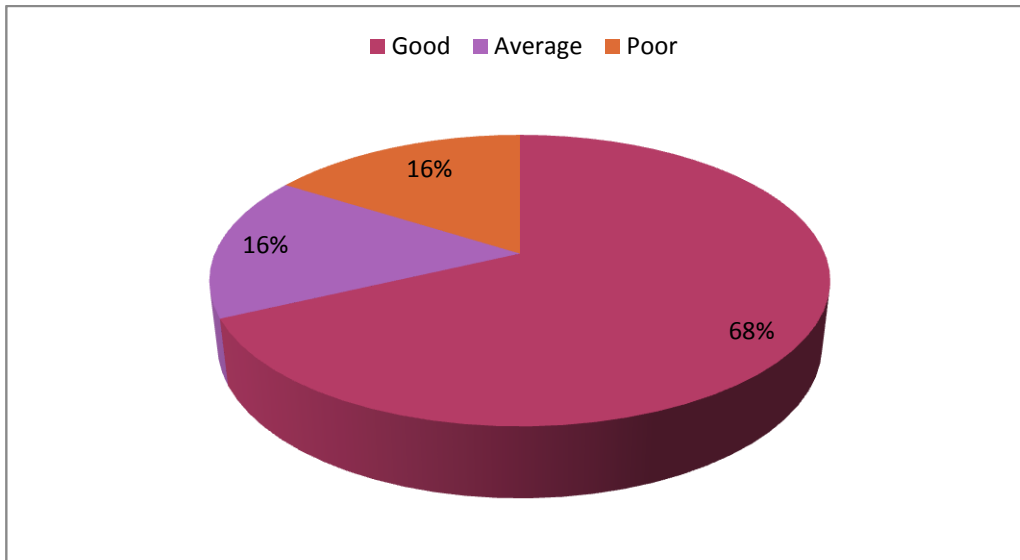
Figure (07): Evaluation of Students' Speaking Performance

Subjects, here, are asked to evaluate their speaking skill in the classroom. They are asked to rank themselves very good, good, average and poor.

No one said that he/she is very good at speaking English. The majority of participants (68%) admitted that they have a good level. About (16%) said that their level is average. On contrast (16%) of participants answered that their level in English is poor. Then, the proportion which has a poor level was asked to give us the reasons of this failure. They answered that it is due to the lack of practice, that is why they are unable to speak fluently and appropriately. While the others said that the lack of motivation is the real cause.

c. Section Three: Factors Influencing Students' Speaking performance

Q7: How much do you like speaking English in classroom?

Options	Subject	Percentage
Very much	04	16.0%
Normal	15	60.0%
Little	06	24.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (07): Speaking within Classroom
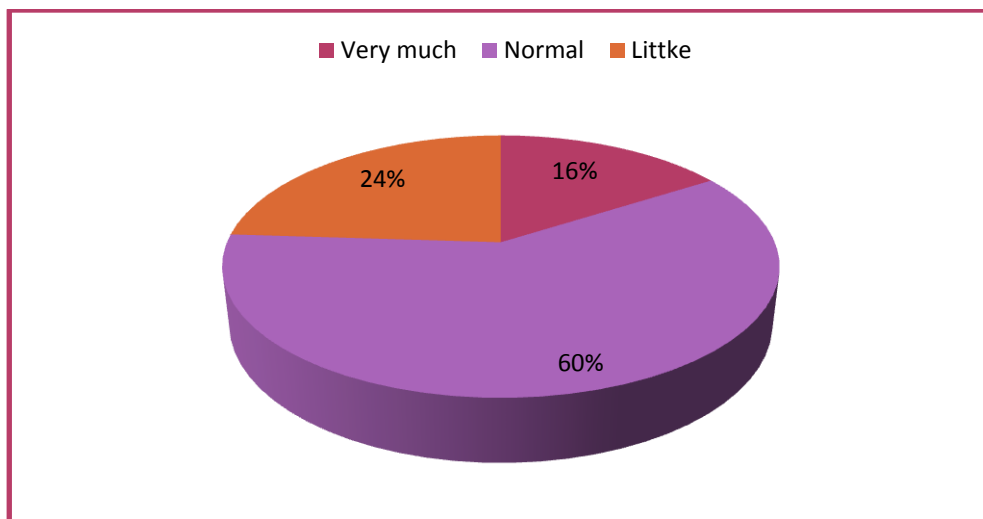
Figure (08): Speaking within Classroom

This question aims at investigating the students' acceptability to speak English during oral class sessions; that is, the extent to which they feel the desire to participate. The majority of students shares the same answer, they are about (60%) who answered normal, very much (16%) and little (24%).

Q8: **What are the problems that you often face when speaking in class?**

Options	Subject	Percentage
You are worried of making mistakes	09	36.0%
You are shy	08	32.0%
You have no motivation to express yourself	07	28.0%
You speak very little or not at all	01	4.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (08): Speaking Problems

Figure (09): Speaking Problem

When asked about the main problems that hinder their speaking performance, about (36%) of learners agree that they are worried of making mistakes. By contrast, some of them admit that they are shy (32%). While the rest of participants has no motivation to express themselves (28%). Only one student (4%) states that she usually speaks very little or not at all.

Q9: Do you feel fear to speak in class?

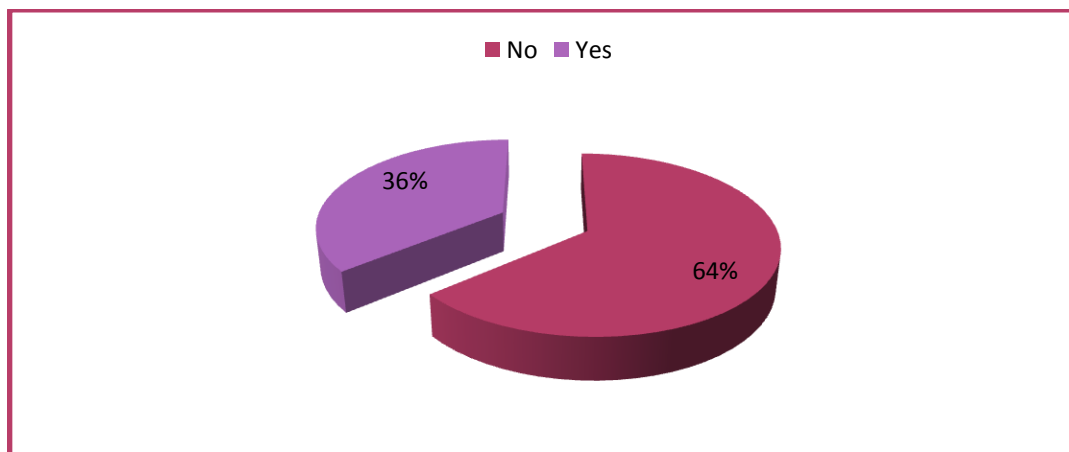| Options	Subject	Percentage
No	16	64.0%
Yes	09	36.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (09): Students' Anxiety

Figure (10): Students' Anxiety

This question aims at determining the extent to which subjects feel scary to talk. The results show that participants (36%) do not feel at ease to speak. While (64%) think that they can speak without feeling fear.

The next question gives us a clear idea of some possible factors that may prevent students from speaking the target language in the classroom.

Q10: If your answer is "yes", is it because:

Options	Subject	Percentage
Fear of making mistakes	05	20.0%
Having deficient vocabulary	03	12.0%
Lack of self -confidence	01	4.0%
Total	09	36.0%

Table (10): Anxiety Causes
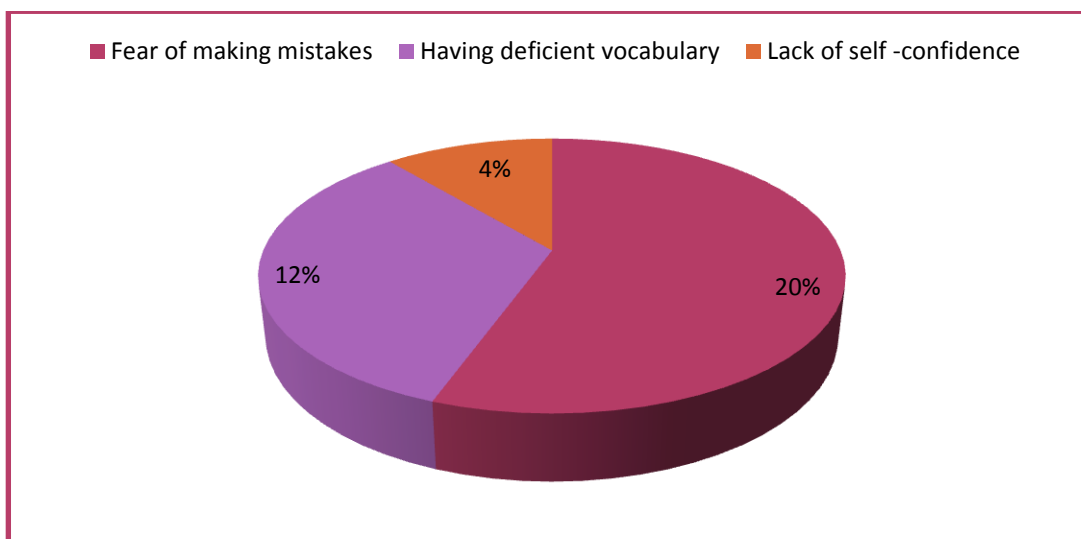
Figure (11): Anxiety Causes

As mentioned above, we have discussed the fear of students to talk. The present question concerns the proportion which put "yes"; it seems appropriate to check what makes students unable to speak the language they are learning. The participants are, therefore, asked to select one choice, which represents their state. 05 subjects of this proportion (20%) state that fear of making mistakes is one of the most obstacles that prevents them from speaking. In fact, this problem may prevent communication and slow down learning. Three (03) participants (12%) consider that their vocabulary deficiency is the reason that makes them unwilling to participate in class. Only one student sees that the lack of self-confidence is the cause.

Q11: What are other factors that prevent you from speaking freely and easily?

For the purpose of identifying the other factors that may influence their speaking skill, this question was addressed to the students. The results will be shown in details in the following tables:

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	12	48.0%
Yes	13	52.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (11): Time Preparation
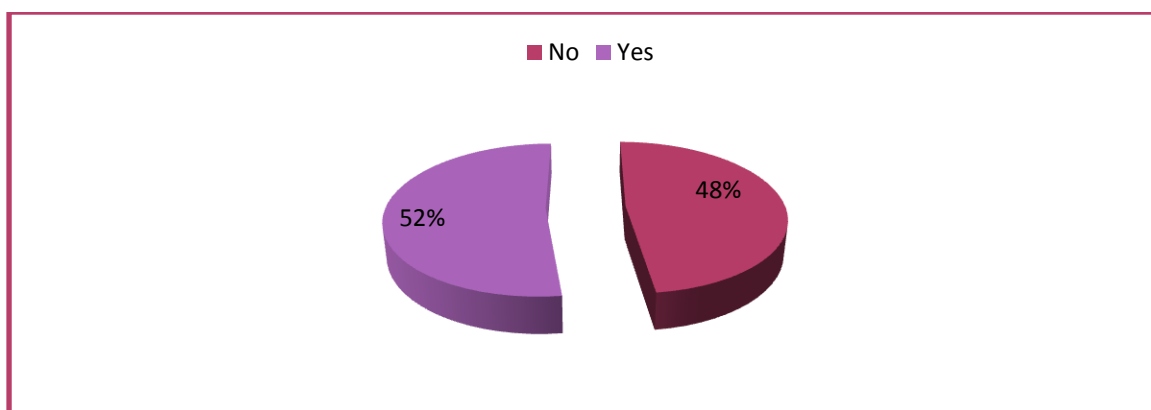
Figure (12): Time Preparation

The table shows that time preparation has an influence on students' oral performance during the speaking session. Thus, 13 participants (52%) said that time preparation affect their presentation; that is, their performance would be effective if they are provided with the needed time to prepare. The remained number (48%) state that it does not affect them, hence they can speak whenever they are asked or want to.

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	11	44.0%
Yes	14	56.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (12): Listening Ability

31
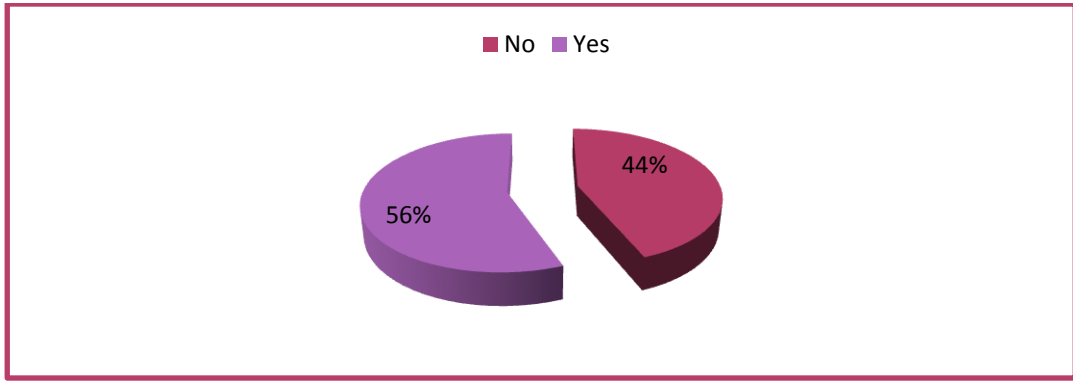
Figure (13): Listening Ability

Many students find difficulty in listening comprehension; this consequently breaks down communication between the students and the teacher. As it is shown in the findings of the previous question, it demonstrates that (56%) of participants agree that listening ability has a an influence on their speech performance. While, (44%) were not.

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	12	48.0%
Yes	13	52.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (13): Motivation to Speak
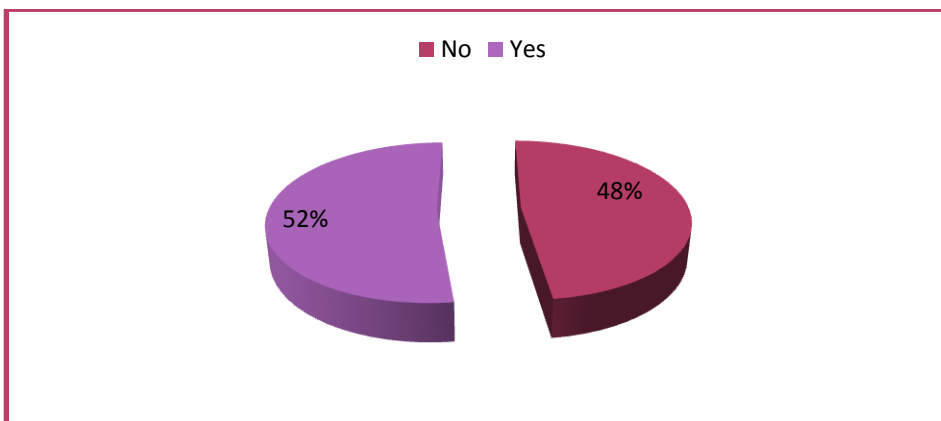
Figure (14): Motivation to Speak

It has been agreed that motivation is a key to an effective learning, (52%) were influenced by the extent to which their performance depends on the amount of motivation either high or low. Whereas, (48%) are not.

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	19	76.0%
Yes	06	24.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (14): Lack of self-confidence
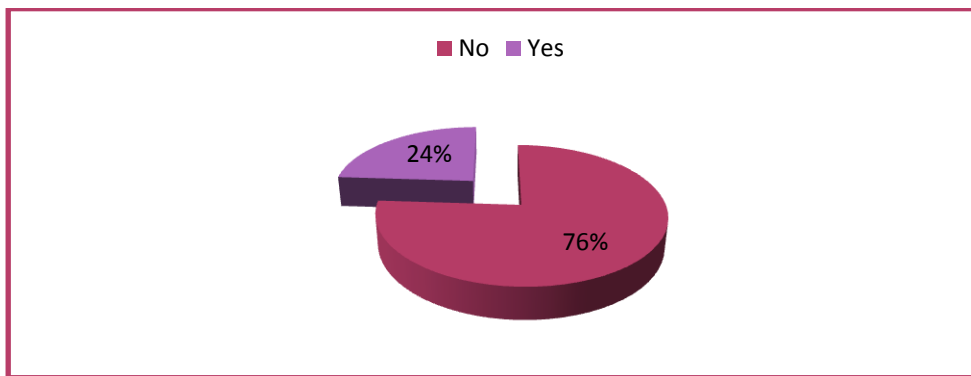
Figure (15): Lack of self-confidence

Among the factors that hinder students' performance is self-confidence. Seventy-six per cent of participants feel confident when they are asked to speak; however, twenty-four per cent argue that their speech fluency is influenced by the lack of self-confidence.

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	19	76.0%
Yes	06	24.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (15): Anxiety
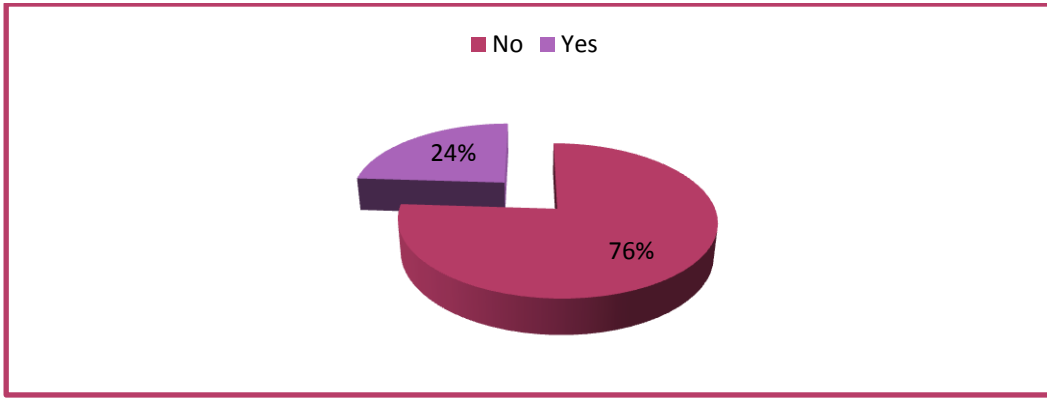
Figure (16): Anxiety

When we asked students to choose the main factors influencing their speech, nearly about (24%) of respondents claim that anxiety affect their ability to speak freely and easily. whereas about (76%) view that it is not an essential obstacle that hinder their oral production.

Options	Subject	Percentage
No	07	28.0%
Yes	18	72.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Table (16): Topical Knowledge
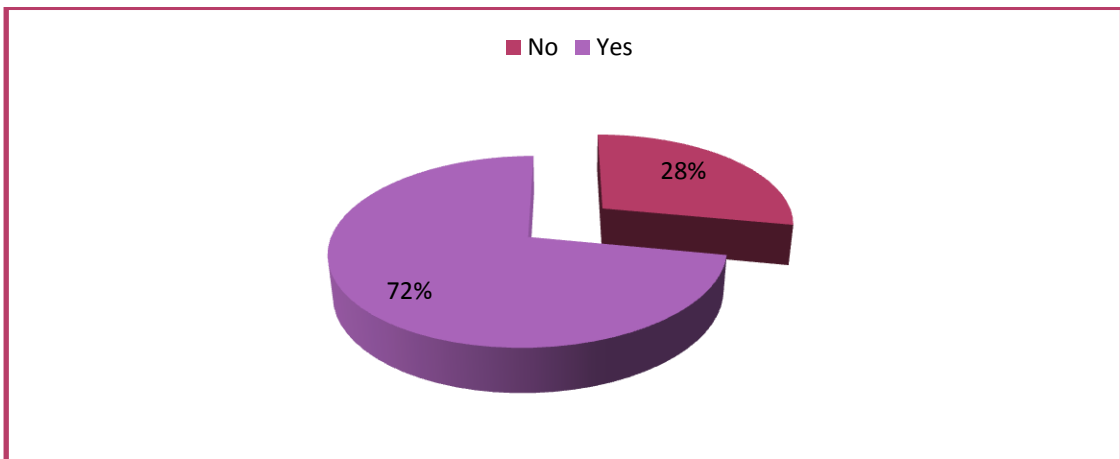
Figure (17): Topical Knowledge

Only a small number of subjects (28%) thought that topical knowledge is not an obstacle for speaking in an easy and free way. By contrast, most of respondents (72%) claim that lack of topical knowledge is one of the central problems that affects their feedback during speaking task.

Q12: What would you suggest to improve the students' oral proficiency?

The purpose of this question is to know what are the techniques that are used to improve students' speaking performance from students' perspective. In other words, what kind of tasks that attract the students' attention, so that teachers could be familiar with the most motivational activities that make learners have a desire to speak English in the classroom. After reading the learners' answers, we have noticed that the majority said that they need a large amount of discussion between themselves in a speaking class in terms of using the target language as much as possible. That is, regarding the results obtained from the last question, it can be noticed that the majority of learners claims the necessity of practice. The others agree that listening to English speakers, namely, native speakers can help them improve their speaking ability. In the same direction, some suggested that listening to songs and watching movies might also work. A proportion of them sees that building students' self-confidence and motivating them by providing interesting topics in class. In addition, trying to decrease learners' anxiety with special activities is another option to improve students' oral proficiency.

3.2. Class Observation Analysis

The results from student questionnaire were quite similar to those of class observation. The latter was designed to see the real performance of students in the classroom and observe influences on their performances. We have investigated the following problems, which are commonly observed in speaking classes.

It is worthy to mention that all students were committed to perform their presentations in a session of one hour and half, they were hurried because of the limited time given. This obviously reflects their performance. Some students hesitated to speak because they seem to feel scary and worried of making mistakes. While the others find it difficult to speak in a foreign language for that they tend to use their mother tongue. That is, they are incapable to say the word in English, they use Arabic, instead; it seems to be difficult for them to say everything in the target language. Moreover, we noticed that some students tend to be silent when they are required to answer teachers' questions due to the lack of topical knowledge. It has been also noticed that anxiety was observed among students, they are nervous and scary at the speaking task, which then cause their poor performance. Motivation was varied among the sample under investigation as we have observed it within the classroom, a number of students were motivated and confidents, and conversely, the others were unmotivated because the topics were not interesting enough for them.

In short, the data obtained from class observation revealed that the speaking performance of students was affected by time pressure, self-confidence, anxiety, topical knowledge and the amount of motivation.

3.3. Discussion of the Findings

In the light of the analysis of the students' questionnaire and class observation, we have noticed that students encounter some speaking problems and they usually find it difficult to speak the language fluently within

classroom. Initially, the results revealed that anxiety is the most influential factor that prevents students from expressing themselves; this issue is due to several reasons, mainly, fear of making mistakes and fear of the teacher's negative feedback as well as shyness to speak in front of others. Secondly, lack of self-confidence is another barrier that makes students feel frightened to participate in speaking tasks and be unable to interact easily. Thirdly, motivation has a great role to play in learning to speak. That is, students usually have nothing to say and this may be due to the topic interest. Additionally, the time for preparation given to students makes them perform the activity in a hurry. We have also deduced that the use of mother tongue is another obstacle that decreases their progress of acquiring speaking skill in an EFL class.

To sum it up, after analyzing the findings, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents meet some of problems that impede their speaking development, in addition to a number of other factors which contribute in their success and failure in developing their speaking performance. In fact, the current teaching of oral expression at KMU of Ouargla needs to be improved. EFL teachers have to look for solutions to get rid of students' difficulties. This implies that various activities are suggested to create an environment in which EFL learners can practise the language they are learning.

Conclusion

The practical part is carried out to confirm our hypotheses. The findings showed that there are significant factors that affect EFL learners' speaking performance, which, in fact, hinder their speaking performance. Anxiety, motivation and self-confidence are the most influential and the predominating factors within our target population. In addition to lack of topical knowledge that significantly prevent them from participating, and also the fear of making mistakes that consequently reinforce students' inhibition.

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Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this work, a set of recommendations are strongly presented to be kept in mind for both teachers and students. First of all, as for EFL teachers, they have to take into consideration the first step in which it should be based on improving the performance condition, that is, providing students with needed time for preparation before the speaking task.

Second, teacher has to create opportunities for students to speak English as much as possible, this would help in increasing students' motivation, and more importantly, s/he has to prevent students from using the mother tongue in order to make the real use of target language because classroom is the most appropriate place where students can practise their speaking skill.

Third, EFL practitioner are required to select carefully the appropriate time and way for correcting students' mistakes so that learners would not be afraid of making mistakes and this consequently build their self-confidence.

Forth, learners seem to have different difficulties so that teachers are required to apply the techniques that they see as motivating to their students and make them feel at ease and comfortable atmosphere where they can participate whenever they asked to do so.

Finally, we suggest that teachers could provide students with the tasks that they have to learn by heart, namely, dialogues in order to present it in front of their classmates, in this way they will overcome the problem of anxiety among EFL learners.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, particularly, students' suggestion about how to improve the speaking skill. Most of the students are interested in practicing this can be interpreted that activities such as discussion and role-play are the most effective ones in the teaching speaking skill process. In other words, the teachers' role is to implement the suitable activities that encourages and motivates students' participation and reinforce their speaking performance.

General Conclusion

To conclude, our study shed light on the main factors influencing EFL learners' speaking performance. Within this context, we have conducted our study with the Second Year LMD students of English at KMU in Ouargla. We have used a students' questionnaire in order to test our hypothesis and figure out those factors and students' speaking problems that hinder their ability to speak fluently. Class observation was the second tool used in the present study. It was carried out at the end of April, 2018, through which we have observed students' activities in real situations.

This research work was divided into three chapters. First chapter was devoted to the review of related literature, in which we have presented the speaking performance and the main factors influencing learners' oral proficiency and we have suggested some activities EFL teachers can implement to improve students' speaking skill. In the second chapter, we have explained the research methodology that we have adopted in this study, in addition to the description of the sample that the study and the instruments used to collect data. Data analysis and results were discussed in the third chapter.

The findings reveal that Second Year LMD students of English encounter some problems (inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation and the use of mother tongue), those are the major difficulties that prevent them from speaking fluently. It was revealed that most of the respondents (36%) were worried of making mistakes, this reflects their inhibition. Whereas, the others (28%) have no motivation to participate within speaking tasks due to the topic interest. Students' deficient vocabulary and lack of topical knowledge (72%) are also observed within the performance of our sample. Furthermore, a number of factors (motivation, self-esteem and anxiety) contribute in students' success or failure in acquiring speaking performance. That is, it has been noticed that those factors have an impact on the learners' speaking performance.

Some recommendations and strategies are indicated to overcome students' speaking problems. Modestly, this study will relatively help both EFL learners and teachers improve speaking performance at the department of English at KMU in Ouargla.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

This questionnaire is designed for investigating the factors influencing speaking performance of Second Year students of English at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla. Your answers are very important for the validity of this study. We would be very grateful if you devote some of your time to answer this questionnaire.

You are requested to fill in this questionnaire either by putting a cross (x) in the appropriate box, or by answering the questions given.

Section One

Personal background

1. Gender:

    a. Male   ☐   b. Female   ☐

2. Age:

18 -20 ☐   20-25 ☐   25-30 ☐

3. For How many years have you been studying English language?

…………………………………………………………………..

Section Two

Speaking Skill

4. How you consider speaking English?

a.Very difficult ☐

b. Difficult ☐

c.Very easy ☐

d. Easy ☐

5. How often do you practise speaking English outside classroom?

a. Always ☐

b. Usually ☐

c. Sometimes ☐

d. Rarely ☐

6. How would you evaluate your speaking performance?

a.Very good ☐

b. Good ☐

c. Average ☐

a. Poor ☐

If you see your performance poor, what are the causes?

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.... **Section Three**

Factors Influencing Students' Speaking performance

7. How much do you like speaking English in classroom?

a.Very much ☐

b. Normal ☐

c. Little ☐

d. Not at all ☐

8. **What are the problems that you often face when speaking in class?**

   a. you are worried of making mistakes ☐

   b. you are shy ☐

   c. you have no motivation to express yourself ☐

   d. You speak very little or not at all ☐

9. **Do you feel fear to speak in class?**

   a. Yes ☐

   b. No ☐

10. **If your answer is "yes", is it because**:

    a. Fear of making mistakes ☐

    b. Having deficient vocabulary ☐

    d. Fear of teacher's negative feedback ☐

    e. Lack of self -confidence ☐

11. **What are other factors that prevent you from speaking freely and easily?**

Factors	Yes	No
a. Time for preparation		
b. Listening ability		
c. Motivation to speak		
d. Lack of self-Confidence		
e.Anxiety		
f.Topical knowledge		

12. What would you suggest to improve the students' oral proficiency?

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Thank you for your collaboration

Appendix B

Class Observation Table

Time	Content	Teacher's activities	Students' activities
	1. Warm up		
	2. Pre-speaking		
	3. While-speaking		
	4. Post- speaking		

Abstract

Speaking is considered as one of the four fundamental language skills that an EFL learner is required to acquire and perform, but it is not an easy task for most learners to overcome the difficulties they meet while practising this skill in the classroom or in real life situations. Thus, the aim of the present study is to investigate the main factors influencing EFL learners' speaking performance. By adopting both qualitative and descriptive methods, a questionnaire and class observation instruments have been designed and administered to Second Year LMD students of English at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla in order to collect data necessary for testing and validating our hypotheses. The results reveal that most of students encounter several obstacles that impede their speaking performance.

Key Terms: Speaking skill, Performance, Communicative competence, Difficulties, Fluency.

الملخص

تعتبر مهارة التكلم من إحدى المهارات اللغوية التي ينبغي لأي متعلم للغة الانجليزية أن يتقنها. في الحقيقة هي ليست بالمهارة السهلة لاسيما و أن العديد من الطلبة يجدون صعوبة في تكلمها. هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى اكتشاف العوامل التي تؤثر على مهارة التكلم الخاصة بطلبة الانجليزية السنة الثانية (أل أم دي) في جامعة قاصدي مرباح ورقلة .وهدا باتباع منهج الوصفي النوعي فقد تم توزيع استبيان في إطار هادا المجال بالإضافة إلى الملاحظة عن قرب. النتائج المتحصل عليها في هدا البحث العلمي تدل على أن اغلب الطلبة يواجهون صعوبات تمنعهم من التكلم بفصاحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : مهارة التكلم, الأداء, المقدرة على التواصل،الصعوبات، الفصاحة.

Résumé

L'objectif principal de cette recherche est de déterminer les facteurs qui affectent la production oral des 2eme années LMD étudiants d'Anglais à l'universite Kasdi Merbah de Ouargla. En utilisant les méthodes qualitative et descriptive nous avons conçu et puis distribué un questionnaire à un échantillon de 25 participants. En plus du questionnaire nous avons organisé une observation du groupe afin d'examiner et explorer les attitudes et comportements manifestés durant la séance de l'expression orale. Ces deux outils nous ont permis de collecter des informations nécessaires pour la vérification et validation des hypothèses de cette étude. Notre ultime but est l'indentification de la source des difficultés rencontrées par les étudiants qui les démotivent à acquérir la capacité de parler suffisamment la langue ciblée. Les résultats obtenus dans cette travaille ont largement confirmé la persistance de ces difficultés.

Les mots clé : Compétence orale, Performance, Compétence de communication, Difficultés, Aisance.