

Towards Using Slides Projector to develop Foreign Language Learners' Oral Skills: A Case Study

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Abstract

In the field of instruction, the integration of technologies is considered as a conceptual revolution and an innovative practical tool in foreign language classroom. Yet, in language classrooms, it appears piecemeal, that is, gradual and fragmentary, and sometimes even totally absent. Regarding the educational system in Algeria, different methods and techniques are already adopted to pave the way towards improving the teaching/learning process particularly assisting the EFL learners to master the target language not only in writing but also in speaking.

Towards this inevitable evolution in the Algerian higher educational system, this paper attempts to explore into the main difficulties our EFL learners encounter and thus, find out the alternative techniques to develop their oral skills using audio-visual aids such as slides projectors.

Key Words: Oral skills, difficulties, oral performance, slides projector, speaking activities.

1. Introduction

Historically speaking, the use of instructional media in the second/foreign language classroom has been a common practice for a long time, for instance, Price (1987) claimed that teachers used pictures to teach Latin in the seventeenth century. In modern times, teachers and materials developers have been paying more and more attention to the use of computer technology in classroom interaction. Therefore, the introduction of the slides projector, tape recorder, language laboratory, for example, are considered as a breakthrough in technology which can contribute to advances in learning outcomes as well.

In the Algerian context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), instructors regularly raise the query why the majority of the students are unable to speak English confidently and correctly. One among many reasons to take into consideration might be a lack of oral practice and interest, etc. So based on the question of how to increase the speaking confidence and competence, an in-depth interview was conducted with a group of EFL university students on the factors expected to enhance their speaking skills. Using computers and providing opportunities were among the key responses from the pilot study.

This study investigates whether computer (technology materials) can be adopted to enhance college EFL learners' speaking skills. Recently, many researchers view that using computer is really a significant event that can serve as a catalyst for promoting oral English in the secondary schools.

1.1 Significance of Speaking Skills

Unlike listening and reading which are receptive skills of a given language, speaking and writing skills are widely classified by many researchers as productive and active skills (Richards et al. (2002: 293). In fact, Harmer (2001: 154) recalled the important goal of language study is to improve both the productive and receptive skills. This sense drives us to conceptualise that all

language skills are integrative, and one can't teach or learn a language with a solely skill. Though, speaking is generally the most complex process and non-evaluated in the educational context, it is considered by many teaching and testing experts to be developed among our learners as advocated by Luoma (2003).

According to Burkart (1998), speaking involves three areas of knowledge, namely mechanics which refers to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. At this level, students are required to use the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation. Secondly, the transactional and interactional functions in which the learners know when clarity of message is essential for transaction or information exchange, and when precise understanding is not required for interaction and relationship building. Lastly, social and cultural norms, that is, students need to understand how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason. Apart from that, a good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

1.2 The impact of technology on language learning

Textbooks are regarded as the core of teaching materials across different levels of educational system in Algeria and serve as pivotal role to facilitate the instructors' teaching in the classroom setting (Tsai et. al., 2008). It is a principal basis for instructors to follow on a systematic manner to carry out teaching in a language course as indicated by Ur (1996). Yet in selecting a speaking course, there are various elements to consider and the textbook may not be merely effective. Evidently, nowadays, the teaching of foreign languages is essentially oriented to develop comprehension and oral skills. Thus, it is quite understandable that modern applied linguists favourate the use of computer as a mediate tool between the teacher and the learner to increase oral interaction.

Advancement in technology such as computer is used to facilitate the transfer of information among the humans and the emergence of the Internet has been considered as the latest technological innovation for sharing information. Thus language teaching professionals in secondary schools don't use such technological tools in education as opposed to the teachers of physics and Technology. The relevant question is whether the use of technological tools (e.g., computer and slides projector, audio tape recorders, etc.) has any potential pedagogical effect on foreign language instruction. Many educationalists have advocated the beneficial effects of the use of new technologies to enhance the learning environments, and allow new educational activities. Therefore, these technological innovations are supposed to be conducive to higher achievement in language learning. However, this initiation is inherently dependent on the particular theoretical or methodological approach that guides its application.

2. Research Procedure

Despite the importance often assigned to speaking skills in language classroom, it has been repeatedly reported that most students seem unable to use orally the target language in class. This study aims to document influencing factors that shape students' oral competence. Effectively, exploring oral interaction from students' perspective is important because it provides a firsthand account and insight into their feelings and perceptions. The students' perceptions are their own realities in experiencing classroom oral interaction. There have been a variety of reasons identified

in prior studies as having influences (impact) in encouraging or discouraging students' oral skills. Factors specific to students such as their interest (Brown: 1994); motivation as claimed by Ur, (1991); Gardener and Lamber,(1972). Pedagogical and educational environmental factors like class size (Howard et al., 2002), and language materials (computer, slides projector, tape recorder, etc...).

In order to gather data related to students' perceptions about speaking English and their engagement in technology use for classroom interaction, an interview was employed. Research samples were Form One students from a secondary school in Ouled Mimoun, around Tlemcen, Algeria. A total of 57 students with similar education backgrounds were involved in the study and they unanimously expressed agreement to take part in the study. As the main language of converse is Arabic, the interview was translated into the language of Algerian Arabic. Besides to investigate whether computer (technology material) can be adopted to enhance college EFL learners' speaking skills, one of the speaking tasks was selected to be recorded and analyzed. The total number of participant of this task was 30.

3. Findings and Discussion

The major findings presented of this study were analysed based on qualitative and quantitative data. Discussion on each aspect was summarized:

3.1 Factors enhancing the development of EFL students' speaking skills

In this section, the findings were derived from the interview conducted with the participants. Providing more oral practice (49,12%) ; explaining difficult items in Arabic (28,07%) ; making more efforts to explain oral activities (22,81%) were mainly reported as factors that enhance speaking performance as shown in Table1.

Table1. Factors enhancing speaking skills

| Factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| Explaining difficult items in Arabic | 16 | 28,07% |
| Providing more oral practice | 28 | 49,12% |
| Making more efforts to explain oral activities | 13 | 22,81% |
| Total | 57 | 100% |

Other out-of-class factors that enhanced participants' speaking included frequent listening to English materials, such as listening to music, watching movies, listening to the radio, watching television programmes, and accessing multimedia websites. Examples of the verbatim reported factors are displayed in Table 2.

Table2. Out-of-class factors for English use

| Out-of-class factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| Speaking English outside the class | 04 | 7,02% |
| Reading books, dictionaries, handbooks | 16 | 28,07% |
| Watching TV, computer, internet, | 26 | 45,61% |
| Listening to music | 03 | 5,26% |
| Revising the lessons | 08 | 14,04% |
| No use of English | 00 | 00% |
| Total | 57 | 100% |

To sum, it is evident that our students encounter many difficulties that inhibit their oral performance, and they are aware that speaking English clearly and intelligibly is really a great challenge. And from their answers, it can be noticed that changes in language tools and methods are necessary to improve practical speaking activities.

3.2 Participants' speaking performance

The findings in this section were obtained from the recordings of one speaking task and the information was categorized in terms of content, pronunciation, and language use. The task selected was a street map from the textbook of first-year secondary level, (see Appendix "A", which was displayed in slides projector. The participants were required to ask and give directions between in pairs. Indeed, the learners interacted orally after explaining the instructions. However, some difficulties were found in the pronunciation and grammatical structure of their utterances, namely, the use of incorrect tenses, and the word order in which they made errors in formulating their questions. At this stage a revision of word order was required for further practice. Another common difficulty was in the pronunciation of word stress and diphthongs.

4. Implications for Educational Practice

Based on the findings, some suggestions are made for the improvement of the Algerian EFL students' speaking competence and considering the main factors and parameters helped to develop speaking skills.

Lindh and Holgersson (2007) emphasize the role of the teacher in stimulating students for the working groups (with limited number) and giving them positive attitudes, because the teacher has considerable influence over the way in which these tools are received by the learners. Secondary school students, in particular, seem to need relatively specific guidance on how the computers activities relate to their courses (Nugent et al., 2008). Furthermore, promoting speaking confidence, together with appropriate task design, was recommended for the English skills development of EFL/ESL learners (Nunan, 2006; Trent, 2009).

These recommendations are supported in some studies, for instance, Thomaz et al. (2009) recalled that meaningful benefits will only be obtained if the technology is used skilfully by the teachers, aligning the tools with the students' educational needs.

5. Conclusion

This study presents the role of of oral competence in foreign language classroom, with a view to identifying the potential contribution of computers as an educational tool, in the context of secondary/high schools, summarizing relevant empirical findings and indicating future research perspectives.

Language teachers should familiarize themselves with the pedagogical applications of technology in language classes. Furthermore, computers should provide input towards student educational agendas. Effectively, introducing computers expertise could bring new ways of integrating oral language skills in classroom settings. So, what can be said is that computer has much potential to assist in teaching, however, the gain in learning by students is not guaranteed just by the simple application of computer, as there are several factors that can determine the outcome and considered important for an effective use of educational computers.

7. References

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Appendix 'A': The Street Map

