Strategies for Improving English Language Speaking Skill: A Case of District Bannu

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Abstract

This study aimed to provide some innovative strategies for improving speaking skill of English Language of secondary level students at district Bannu. Effective oral communication in English language is the problem with all the ESL students at secondary level. The improvement of the oral communication of the students has been one of the major problems faced by the Secondary level English Language teachers. The objective of the study was to help the English language teachers and students overcome this problem by showing the results of application of innovative strategies for improving English language speaking skill. Specifically, this study aimed to guide the teachers of district Bannu to bring innovation in their teaching and thus enable their students to overcome their speaking problem. For this purpose, first of all, data was collected from English Language teachers of secondary level in order to know about the steps taken for the improvement of speaking skill of their students. The data was collected through rating scale questionnaire. After that an experimental study was carried out for which a 10th grade class was selected. For the collection of data pre-post experimental designwas used. Data was analyzed through t-test. Results indicated that a visible change occurred in the speaking skill of the treatment group, after the application of innovative strategies on this group. Hence it proved that the application of innovative strategies for improving speaking skill had a very positive impact on the students.

Key Words: English Language, Innovative Strategies, Speaking Skills

Introduction

In the 1990s, the results of the research conducted showed that interaction in the second Language helps the learners in speaking fluently in L2, but in oral production the extent to which learners developed their fluency was not matched by learners' syntactic and lexical accuracy (Lightbown&Spada, 1990; Schmidt, 1993; Swain, 1991). These studies clearly indicated that these learners were in a position to speak fluently, but they committed many grammatical mistakes while speaking. Ellis (2003) is of the opinion that tasks, if carefully designed, can prove instrumental in the development of various aspects of L2 oral production. Ellis argues that narrative and descriptions can prove very effective in fluency-focused teaching

Correct pronunciation plays an important role in making things intelligible to the listeners. Tarone (2005) points out, in this connection, that the aim of teaching pronunciation has had a shift from targeting an accent like native speaker to targeting intelligibility. In the modern age, the role played by English language is that of of a primary medium, but in cross-cultures most of the time interaction takes place between nonnative speakers of the language as compared to the communication between native and nonnative speakers (Canagarajah, 2005; Jenkins, 2000). McKay (2002), also holds the same opinion and argues that in L2 the aim of pronunciation

pedagogy is to help learners get overall intelligibility rather than major modification in the accent.According to Bradley & Bryant (1983), the awareness about the Phonological aspect of the language is to understand that oral language can further be broken up into individual words. These words are then broken into syllables, and syllables in turn are then broken into individual sounds.

From the above discussion it is clear that language learning skills play a pivotal role in learning English language. Unfortunately, students at secondary level in district Bannu cannot communicate effectively in English language. It indicates that their language learning skills are not developed. The only skill which is given attention by the teachers is reading skill. No attention is given by the teachers to improve their oral communication.

Literature Review

Davis, (2008) argues that class room is a very specific context for communication. A student faces the same atmosphere daily. There are four walls of a room with a black board or a white board. Same teacher comes to teach them English and he sits among same class fellows. If a teacher really desire for real communication to take place in his/her class, s/he need to exploit:Events and changes in the class room, events in the world outside, potentially useful or amusing role-plays and simulations. According to Davis, without the use of imagination and other resources the limitations of the class room can greatly restrict the communication. Davis continues that it is extremely difficult for many people to speak in front of large groups of people. It is especially true in case when people speak a foreign language. They have their fears that they will commit many mistakes when they speak the foreign language. Secondly, they are very much conscious about their pronunciation that it will not be intelligible to the people. In order to provide help to the students a teacher must ensure to create a relaxed atmosphere in the class room and to do as many speaking activities as possible in pairs and groups. Davis contends that speaking ability, like the listening ability should partly be the natural result of using English as a main medium of communication in the class room. A teacher must simplify his/her speech in order to make the students understand with the help of gestures and mime. When the students are responding, a teacher should encourage them even if what they say is far from perfect. According to Davis, if a teacher wants his/her learners to converse in English, s/he needs to make the classroom a conversational place. If the students are not able to talk naturally in the class, it is hardly surprising when they can still hardly speak at all after hundreds of hours and several years of English classes. Davis suggests some more activities that teachers can practice for the improvement of speaking skill of his/her students. These activities include: Unscripted role- plays, Problem-solving/decision taking activities, Discussions and Debates, group projects, and Warm- ups and fillers.

Lyman, (1981) suggests that speaking skill of the learners can greatly be improved through the activities like information Gap Activity, Think Pair Share, and Role-Plays. Information gap activities are generally used in Second Language classrooms. These activities are designed in such a way that one student has to get information from his/her partner. Assignments are completed in this way and all the time students speak in the target language. Opportunities are provided in the

information Gap activities for the students to ask each other question (http://www2.education.). Some examples of information gap activities are: 20 Questions, Guess the Card, and Word on Back. Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a strategy in which students work in a group for the solution of a problem and more often answer a question which is assigned to them by their teacher. In this technique students are required to think about a topic individually or share ideas with his/her classmates. The sharing of the ideas with the classmates builds the oral communication skill among the students. This strategy is used before a teacher starts reading a lesson. Activity in TPS is performed in small groups. Role- play is speaking activity when you either perform someone else's role, or you find yourself in an imaginary situation. (www.teachingenglish.org.uk). In role-play students play the role of an imaginary character, say for example king, prince, a shop keeper etc. A teacher plays the role of a facilitator by giving instructions, providing suitable words when s/he thinks that students are stuck for words or phrases and correcting the mistakes of the students. Role-play can also be performed on topics included in the course book.

Hypotheses

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

H_0: Innovative strategies do not play a significant role in improving the speaking skill of English language of Secondary level students.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was experimental research design. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) defined experimental research simply as a study in which participants are placed in groups randomly. They undergo various treatments imposed on them by the researcher. In order to assess the effects of the treatments, observations are then followed (p. 108). The most commonly used experimental design is the pretest-posttest design with control group (Campbell & Stanley, 1963 as qtd in Yair Levy and Timothy J. Ellis, 2011). For the collection of data 10th grade class of a government high school was selected and its 40 students were divided into two groups randomly on the bases of pre-test. These groups were termed as Treatment group and Control group respectively. The Treatment group was taught for one month by applying the strategies suggested by Davis (2008) and Lyman(1981). The Control group, on the other hand, was taught by using the method which was traditionally used in the classrooms. After a month both the groups were re-examined with the help of posttests. In order to check the improvement in the speaking skill of treatment and Control groups, their pre and post-tests were compared and the final result was calculated using t-test.

Research Instruments

In order to get knowledge about teachers' practices inside the classroom for improving speaking skill of the students; rating scale questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was self- developed. This research tool was developed under the supervision of research and language experts. Another tool, used for the collection of

data in the study, was Pre and post- tests. These tests were developed on the bases of ideas taken from the strategies suggested by Miller Davis (2008), Lyman (1981).For the analysis of data, collected from questionnaire, percentage was used. Similarly for the analysis of pre and posttests, independent sample t-test was used.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from questionnaire shows that students are not getting appropriate practice of speaking the language. Data shows that students have no other opportunity to practice speaking in the language than the one which is provided in their English class. The only opportunity to practice and speak the language is the English class and the duration of the English class is from 30 to 40 minutes. In such a situation a huge responsibility lies on the shoulders of teachers, teaching English. English teachers should not underestimate their role. Their importance increases many fold in the atmosphere where native language is predominant. Tsui (1995) also have the same views when he argues that the language used by the teachers affects the language produced by the learners. He explains that the interaction which is available in a class room between a teacher and his/her learners is extremely important in a situation where the target language is seldom used outside the class room and the learners' only exposure to the target language is in the class room. The interaction is of great importance as the target language, in such a situation, is at once the subject of learning and the medium of communication. Harmer (2007) believes that students will get very minimum time to practice speaking if more time is taken by the teacher. According to him, it is the student who needs practice not the teacher. It is the responsibility of a good teacher to maximize student talking time and minimize his/her own talking time. For this purposeWragg& Brown (2001) suggests activities in group because in groups students are more encouraged to ask more and better questions than they work individually. According to Davis, P. 2008 if a teacher is desirous that his/her students should converse in English, s/he should make the classroom a conversational place.

The responses of the teachers in the questionnaire clearly indicated that no systematic approach was adopted by the teachers to improve the speaking skill of the students. One of the main reasons seems to be the fact that there is no compulsion on them from examination point of view to give attention to their speaking skill. In order to help the teachers improve the speaking skill of the students, an experimental study was conducted. The purpose of the study was to see what impact the innovative learning strategies will have on the speaking skill of the secondary level students.

Testing of Hypothesis

A 10th grade class of a government high school was selected and the strategies suggested by Davis, P. 2008 and Lyman, 1981 were applied on them for one month. The procedure and results of the study are discussed below

Participants

The participants involved in this study were 40 students of 10th grades in a government high school of District Bannu. All the participants were studying English as a second language.

Results and Discussion

For the collection of data the 40 students were divided into two groups randomly on the bases of pre-test. These groups were termed as Treatment group and Control group respectively. The Treatment group was taught for one month by applying the strategies suggested by Davis and Lyman. The Control group, on the other hand, was taught by using the method which was in use of the teacher in normal days. After a month both the groups were re-examined with the help of post-tests.

Treatment group

Hypothesis;

$$H_0 : \mu_d = 0$$

$$H_1 : \mu_d \neq 0$$

In order to check the improvement in the speaking skill of the treatment group, both its pre and post-tests were compared and the result was calculated using t-test. The scores of students, belonging to Treatment group, are shown in the table No 1

Table 1
Students' scores in pre and posttests

Pre (x_1)	Post (x_2)	$x_d = x_2 - x_1$	x_d^2
10	12	2	4
9	13	4	16
5	8	3	9
11	13	2	4
9	12	3	9
6	9	3	9
5	8	3	9
9	12	3	9
4	8	4	16
12	15	3	9
11	14	3	9
5	7	2	4
8	10	2	4
13	14	1	1
5	7	2	4
6	10	4	16
11	16	5	25

10	15	5	25
6	10	4	16
8	12	4	16
		Sum= 62	Sum=214

From table 1 Arithmetic Mean was calculated in order to know about the average improvement of students belonging to Treatment group using the following formula

$$\overline{d} = \frac{\sum d_i}{n} = 62/20 = 3.1$$

After that the values of Test Statistics t and critical region were calculated using the following procedure

The Standard deviation is

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1}\left[\sum d_i^2 - \frac{(\sum d_i)^2}{n}\right]}$$

Putting values we get,

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{20-1}\left[214 - \frac{(62)^2}{20}\right]} = 1.0711$$

Now the standard error is

$$s_{\overline{d}} = \frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{1.0711}{\sqrt{20}} = 0.23950$$

$$t = \frac{\overline{d}}{\frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}}} = \frac{3.1}{0.23950} = 12.94363$$

Test Statistics

(v) Critical region

$$t_{\frac{r}{2}}(v) = t_{\frac{0.05}{2}}(20-1) = 2.093$$
((Searched from table)

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Control Group

In order to check the improvement in the speaking skill of the Control group, both its pre and post-tests were compared and the result was calculated using t-test. The scores of students, belonging to Control group, are shown in the table No 2

Table No 2

Pre (x_1)	Post (x_2)	$d_i = x_2 - x_1$	d_i^2
10	9	-1	1
7	6	-1	1
6	4	-2	4
10	8	-2	4
7	5	-2	4
5	5	0	0
6	5	-1	1
8	6	-2	4
5	5	0	0
13	10	-3	9
10	9	-1	1
7	5	-2	4
6	5	-1	1
14	11	-3	9
7	7	0	0
3	3	0	0
9	7	-2	4
11	9	-2	4
4	3	-1	1
6	5	-1	1
		Sum= -27	Sum=53

From table No 2 Arithmetic Mean was calculated in order to know about the average improvement of students belonging to Control group using the following formula

$$\overline{d} = \frac{\sum d_i}{n} = -27/20 = -1.35$$

After that the values of Test Statistics t and critical region were calculated using the following procedure

The Standard deviation is

$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1}\left[\sum d_i^2 - \frac{\left(\sum d_i\right)^2}{n}\right]}$$

Putting values we get,

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$$s_d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{20-1}\left[53 - \frac{(-27)^2}{20}\right]} = 0.93330$$

Now the standard error is

$$s_{\bar{d}} = \frac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{0.93330}{\sqrt{20}} = 0.20869$$

Test Statistics $\qquad t = \dfrac{\bar{d}}{\dfrac{s_d}{\sqrt{n}}} = \dfrac{-1.35}{0.20869} = -6.46892$

(v) Critical region

$$t_{\frac{r}{2}}(v) = t_{\frac{0.05}{2}}(20-1) = -2.093 \qquad \text{(Searched from table)}$$

Conclusion

The value of Arithmetic Mean of Treatment group (3.1) shows that there is significant average improvement in the speaking skill of the students belonging to Treatment group. Overall improvement in the speaking skill of the Treatment group students is also indicated by the difference in the values of Test Statistic t and Critical region (12.94363>2.093). The difference between the two values shows that the value of Test Statistic is significant. As the calculated value of $t = 12.94363$ is greater than the tabulated value of $t = 2.093$, so H$_0$ is rejected and it is concluded that the pre and post data set have different averages, and the application of innovative strategies play a significant role in improving the speaking skill of the students. Thus it is proved that the application of strategies has positive results. Similarly the values of Test statistical and Critical region for the Control group were calculated and were noted as -6.46892 and -2.093 respectively. (The scores of pre and posttests of students of Control group are given in Table No 2).The difference of values of Test Statistics and Critical region shows that the value of Test Statistics t is insignificant (-2.093 > -6.46892). This shows that no improvement occurred in the speaking skill of the students of Control group.

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