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Impact of Oral Participation on Learning English as a Second Language According to the Learners' Perception at University Level

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Abstract: The present research study aims to analyze the impact of oral participation in learning English as a second language according to the perception of learners at the university level. The theoretical framework used to substantiate the analytical grounds of the present study is based on the contribution made by Seedhouse's (2004) The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis. The study follows a quantitative mode of inquiry. A random sample of 50 students has been selected to analyze the nature of the main problem. Data has been collected through a questionnaire adapted by Ramirez (2010) & Verapornvanichkul et al. (2011). Data is analyzed through the SPSS program on a five-point Linkert scale. The analysis in the present research context can prove to be beneficial to educational psychologists, linguists, and policymakers with regard to taking initiatives in the field of learning and teaching English as a second language.

Key Words: Oral Participation, English as a Second Language, Learner's Perception, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Most people understand the English language, but they are not able to speak English. According to Brown & Yule (1983), "spoken language production is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of language learning" (p. 26). There are four skills in learning a language such as writing, reading, speaking and listening. We speak in front of others, and it requires confidence and fluency, which makes speaking different from the other three skills (listening, reading

and writing). That is why speaking is considered the more important skill in learning the English language.

In second language learning class, the major goals of teaching should be oral participation, communication and class presentation. In many cases, there is little focus on students' oral participation and class presentation. In most government schools, the students do not even know about the class presentations, that is why in higher education, they are not able to present the topic in English class. They feel hesitation and anxiety while speaking in front of others, as Endo (2008) supports the claim that "most students at the high school level are not being taught how to give presentations" (p. 654). As in further education, they are asked for oral presentations, but they feel shy in front of other class fellows. In some cases, even the students at the university level are not asked to give a presentation. Eventually, these students face difficulties in their professional life presenting orally. The students, who are not given the opportunity of oral presentations, fail to speak the language fluently and lose interest while communicating with others in a second language.

It shows the significance of oral presentation in English language class. But presentation should be interesting so that the students may take an interest in it, thereby improving their learning and the ability to present. A fluent speaker of a language can deliver the best presentations. A good presentation also keeps the class awake and also provides tips on how to present the best presentation.

In a presentation, there are some skills which should be known by the students because it is not easy to go in front of the class and deliver a presentation. If the students follow the skills of using eye contact, communicating with the audience, using body language and managing time in delivering a presentation, it may improve

their skills in presenting. The presentation would be interesting and would increase the communication skills if it is delivered in a proper way while following all the rules of presentation.

The English language is learnt as a second language throughout the world more than any other language. It has got too much importance in Pakistan as well. In Pakistan, the English language is used as an official language; that is why, too much importance is given to English in educational careers. In spite of the importance of the English language in Pakistani society, students are incapable of speaking English with fluency. They are not good while communicating skillfully even after sixteen years of educational career. Less creative work of Pakistani students in the English language indicates the poor command of students in the English language. The failure to learn English as a second language may be the result of poor teaching as the teachers teach the English language by following the grammar translation method. Students only learn the skills of learning English but are not able to speak and write a creative write-up in the English language. In government schools, teachers do not provide the opportunity for students to speak in English class and in the future, students do not try to speak English. Another reason may be the lack of advanced methodology for teaching the English language in government schools of Pakistan.

Nowadays, the English language is used as a second language of communication throughout the world. In Pakistan, the English language is used as a means of communication in offices, social gathering, in colleges and universities. In the Pakistani context, the English language is considered the emblem of success, respect and status.

Oral participation is generally considered to be a factor that brings fluency to our language, and it also increases our confidence. In language class, students should be motivated to participate in the oral

performance in the form of oral communication and class presentation.

Monsalve1 & Correal stated (2006) that there are two types of school systems in Pakistan private and government, where English is taught as a necessary subject. In Urdu-medium schools, teachers do not emphasize on learning English. Because of this reason, students do not take an interest in participating in oral communication" (p. 23). It indicates how the English language is taught or used in Pakistani government schools. Instead, the English language is also taught in Urdu medium in government schools of Pakistan. In this way, students cannot speak English with fluency.

The reason behind students' lack of participation can also be their personal fear. Learners are not participating because of scared of committing mistakes in front of other class fellows. Factors affecting learning influence the emotions, feelings, and attitudes of learners. Suppose we understand the factors of foreign language learning so we can make our learning effective.

Participation also shows a vital part in foreign language learning classes, and it improves oral performance in language learning classes. Participation makes the students take an interest in learning, as during discussion or communication; if the students share their ideas, then automatically they will take an interest in learning. The students learning ability and teacher's teaching ability would be improved if the teacher and students participate correspondingly in the discussion, and it brings life to the class. A teacher is needed to encourage the students to participate in class so, in this way, students will overcome the fear of making mistakes during communication or asking questions. Students will take an interest in learning a language and they will try to participate orally in class.

In language class, speaking is more important than other skills such as listening, reading and writing. Through speaking, we communicate with others and can have a discussion. Speaking itself contains several elements such as pronunciation, grammar, syntax, fluency and confidence. A good speaker should have command of the above-discussed elements. Speaking needs good pronunciation and grammar rules, and the knowledge of rules and confidence make students able to speak fluently. Oral language is not only for improving communication skills, but it also increases learning.

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to analyze the perceptions of students about the impact of oral participation on learning English as a second language. It aims at analyzing students' perceptions and opinions about the development of oral skills in order to get insights into the nature of issues.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in terms of its elaboration of language skills as applied in a classroom context. It shall provide an in-depth understanding of different dimensions regarding students' oral participation in a pedagogical scenario. The findings of the study shall be beneficial to the realms of linguistics, psychology, and sociology. An understanding of oral skills and learners' perceptions in this regard shall indubitably assist the learners of English as a second language in achieving oral proficiency. In this research, the impact of oral participation in learning English will be observed. The factors which have been observed in this study will help the teachers, students, and policymakers build an in-depth understanding of second language learning with specific reference to the issue of oral participation in a classroom context. The understanding of the nature of oral participation will help the students polish their oral skills. The feedback based on

students' perceptions will help the teachers, parents and trainers to pay attention to the problems concerning the oral skills of learners in the L2 context, thereby seeking their possible solutions.

Research Objective

To investigate the impact of oral participation on learning English as a second language in the views of the students.

Literature Review

Speaking is a basic part of human nature. Speaking is a process of building meaning that involves producing and communicating information in any social setup. Hughes (2003) states that "speaking, as an innate capacity of the human being, is developed by people in the society before any other skill" (P. 7). Speaking has a significant effect on learning a second language. Communication among different countries proceeds through speaking different languages. In language class, speaking or oral activities have a very important role in learning a second language. Through speaking, we communicate with others. For speaking in the target language, learners should have confidence and a strong vocabulary for communication.

Johnson (1995) claims that "the second language students need communicative competence to participate in and learn from their classroom experience" (p. 6). In learning a second language, learners should participate in oral communication or discussion in the classroom. Communication in the target language strengthens speaking, as, through speaking, someone is considered the speaker of that language. Communication in another language needs the command of the speaker in that language. Experience of oral participation in learning a second language makes strong communication with others.

In the communicative language classroom, this implies that speaking

activities require the students' participation in order to exchange information and engage in the learning experience. Rahman (2010) defines oral communication as "the spoken interaction between two or more people" (p. 3). Oral communication is between two or more people. That's why it requires skills in speaking. Speaking skill involves what to say and how to say it so that others understand it. In this way, teachers should include oral activities in the classroom, as the learners should be given the opportunity of delivering the presentation. Oral communication can be improved by oral presentation in second language class. Learners of second language learning should be asked for presentations, and oral performance should only use the target language in language class. Through oral performance in a language class, students can improve their second language and share their opinions and experiences with others. Learners should be motivated for oral communication and class discussion, which will improve their language.

First, students should know about the skills of the presentation then they would be able to give a presentation. Otherwise, they would feel, as King (2002) said, that students "will feel that the teacher has just dumped them into the sea to struggle for survival" (p. 406). The presenters should know about the skills of presentation. First, they should know about the topic about which they have to present. Then the presenter must have command of grammar and vocabulary. They should have a strong vocabulary as it is required for a good speaker of any language. And they can communicate with others in that target language easily. For class presentations, students should have the knowledge of presentation skills. As for improving the language, speaking plays a great role in learning a language. Oral presentation in a language class is considered an important factor in speaking skills.

Furthermore, people acquiring second languages learn the components of language

through communication and contact with other people in society. The students' oral production in the classroom is also called class participation and, therefore, a key aspect of language learning. The learning ability of a student can be judged through oral production in the classroom. Speaking plays a significant role in interaction with others, and nowadays, everyone sees the ability to speak in learning a second language. Language is means of interaction with others. That is why in language teaching classes, too much importance is given to oral tasks. Oral communication, class discussion and presentations as oral tasks help in learning the second language.

In Pakistan, two school systems work side by side. One is the private English medium schools, and the second is government Urdu-medium schools. English is learnt as a second language in both cases. In the context of Urdu medium schools, as Khan & Khattak (2011) stated, "Both students and teachers use Urdu or the regional language to communicate inside the class, and almost no exposure to English" (p.7).In Pakistan, government schools teachers play the role of director in the classroom, and the students are not given any opportunity to speak in the target language in second language learning classes. English is taught through Urdu, and students are not asked for oral performance as oral communication and presentations in the target language. That is why when the students are asked in future for oral communication and presentation in the target language, they get anxious and forget what they have to say. In government schools, second language learners are not even asked to speak in the classroom, which is why they lose confidence when communicating with others. They feel hesitation and shyness in speaking with others in the target language. So finally, they do not succeed in learning a second language.

Tannen (1992) noted that male college students are usually more active and participate more as compared to females. This may be because they have had more practice in doing so throughout their education (p. 11). It may be because in Pakistan, in uneducated families, males are more motivated to learn than females because they give too much importance to males' education than females' education.

One of the reasons for not participating in a language class is that in exams, there are not any rules for oral participation or communication in the examination. Or it may be because the learners who feel difficulty in speaking don't participate in communication to save themselves from criticism. They consider themselves to be criticized by their teachers and friends while committing mistakes in speaking.

Essberger (2007) concluded that "The person who never made a mistake never made anything" (p. 2). When the students make mistakes, the teacher should rectify them in spite of discouraging and making fun of them in the class. So in this way, they will be motivated to learn from their mistakes. Learners learn from mistakes through committing mistakes. They get an awareness of their mistakes. Learners, especially those speaking in a second language, commit mistakes, but they should not give up oral participation in class. Due to fear and anxiety, anxious learners do not participate in the oral performance in English classrooms. They should be motivated for oral participation in language learning classes.

Hall (2011), with regard to the context, once stated that students are encouraged to participate in the class activities such as group discussions and group work. There is a vital role of a teacher in the early education of student's class participation as in earlier education, the teacher should motivate a student to participate orally, and at that time a student does not feel shyness, hesitation or anxiety in front of a class. With the passage of time in high-level classes, when the

students get mature, it becomes difficult for them to participate in English language classes to speak English for the first time. The teacher at that time should make the new and easy strategies so that all students may be able to participate orally in English language class. Teachers should introduce such interesting oral activities in class that students happily participate in those oral tasks. These oral tasks also provide opportunities for learners to express their feelings and ideas to others.

According to Tornqvist (2008), "with the increased emphasis on communication in the foreign language classroom, a very challenging task for foreign language teachers is to get the pupils to take an active part in the conversation where they express themselves freely" (p. 99). It is also a difficult task for teachers to get the learners to participate in the oral performance in English classes. Because learners rarely participate in oral concerts as it makes them feel artificial to discuss the matter in a second language in spite of their first or mother tongue. It is necessary to discuss interesting topics in the English classroom for the interaction of students with one another that has some purpose.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to substantiate the analytical grounds of the present study is based on *The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis,* presented by Seedhouse (2004), exploring different dimensions of L2 classroom interaction (p. 22). The mentioned researcher states that although a second language learning classroom is fundamentally diverse in its nature, "it is nonetheless possible to state a basic sequence organization which applies to all L2 classroom interaction" (p. 24). The presented sequence organization revolves around "pedagogical focus", the "normative orientation" in terms of the number of

speakers in a classroom context and the participants' analysis of the relationship that exists between "pedagogy and interaction" (p. 24). The rationale behind the selection of the presented theoretical foundation is to have an in-depth analysis of the nature of students' interaction in terms of their oral participation in a classroom context so as to better understand their perceptions in this regard. It shall, moreover, provide a foundational framework to understand the impact of oral participation in a classroom context based on students' perceptions in this regard.

The participants of this study were 50 undergraduate (both genders) learners of learning English at BUITEMS. The type of sampling technique employed for the present research is that of *simple random sampling*. In the case of the simple random sampling technique, each individual in the population has "an equal probability of being selected" (Creswell, 2009, p. 148). The selected participant's responses were collected through the aforementioned opinnionnairess, adopted by the researcher, and were thereby processed for final analysis through SPSS.

The statements' responses, as collected on the basis of these opinionnaires, were scored on a five Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". In this study, the collected data was afterwards analyzed using SPSS. First, the opinionnaire was distributed among male and female students equally, and the students were informed about the aim of the researcher. Moreover, the students were assured that their answers would not affect their grades but would help in their oral communication in learning English.

The opinionnaire adapted for the research question to show the impact of oral participation in learning English as a second language was based on the research contribution regarding students' perception

of the development of oral skills in English, presented by Ramirez (2010).

Data Analysis

The analysis presented here is quantitative in its nature. It has given an overview of the impact of oral participation on learning English as a second language at the university level. In order to analyze students' responses, the tool of research revolved around the opinionnaires adapted by Ramirez (2010). The results in the form of mean values and standard deviation have been presented in the tabular form, followed by the analysis of the presented data through the lens of a selected theoretical framework entitled *The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis,* presented by Seedhouse (2004).

The Impact of Oral Participation on Learning the English Language according to the Perceptions of Learners at the University Level

In order to analyze the impact of oral participation on learning English, according to students' perception (at the university level), the quantitative model of inquiry was pursued. The options used were displayed on the Likert scale as *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree* and *strongly agree.*

The table demonstrated the statements in the opinionnaire, adapted by Ramirez (2010), along with the mean values and the standard deviation of learners' responses as processed statistically through SPSS.

As mentioned before, the table gave an account of the mean values and the standard deviations of responses inclined towards strong agreement of the respondents with regard to the statements mentioned in the opinionnaire. A mean value of 2.10, with a standard deviation of 1.05463, reveals that few students strongly agreed with the view that vocabulary is an essential requirement in a fluent oral speech. It highlights the

generally prevalent perception that vocabulary can though adorn the oral communication of L2 speakers. However, it is not an essential requirement for an L2 learner in a classroom context.

Responses to statement number two reveal somehow the same results as that of the first statement. With a mean value of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.14802, L2 learners responded that good pronunciation and intonation patterns in L2 communication could not give us a better understanding of what we want to communicate. It highlights the learners' perception that a good pronunciation may seem appealing to the hearers, but it is not the only key to effective communication. It may, in other words, inspire the listener but cannot enhance effective communication in the L2 learning context. Communication owes a lot to all of the linguistic dimensions in order to produce appealing results.

The third statement revolved around the significance of interaction and participation in a classroom context. It demonstrated the mean value of 2.52, with a standard deviation of 1.249 with regard to the strong agreement in favour of the statement. The majority of the learners of English as L2 revealed that interaction and participation in a classroom context are of vital significance in enhancing the nature of oral communication. They strongly agreed with the perception that an L2 learner can enhance his communicative competence more and more by participating in an interactive classroom. The responses in this regard truly represent the importance of interaction in the life of L2 learners of English.

The fourth statement addressed some of the comprehensive angles of communication, including abstract ideas, opinions, and language of electronic media. The learners, with a mean of 1.66, and a standard deviation of .68839, agreed with the view that a learner who is fluent in a classroom may necessarily be able to express

his abstract ideas and opinions and comprehend the language completely, especially the vocabulary as heard on electronic media. The results signify the fact that a fluent learner in the L2 learning context may not necessarily be a completely efficient learner of English as an L2 learner. He/ she has to strive more and more in order to achieve somehow a native-like oral production of speech (i.e. English). The perception truly reveals a realization of the complex system of the second language as viewed by the students.

The fifth and the final statement, with a mean value of 3.100 and standard deviation of 1.164, produced the highest score in terms of the respondents' strong agreement. They opined that it was necessary for an L2 learner to think in the English language to ensure oral fluency. A learner of English as L2, according to them, must not translate the content from Urdu to English as both of the languages, according to them, were utterly different in their nature.

The descriptions mentioned above can be analyzed on the basis of the selected theoretical framework. Seedhouse's (2004) *The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis* regards teaching L2 to be the core institutional goal in a context where English is learnt as a second language. The rest of the goals related to interaction in a classroom context are related to the same goal. There are three attributes pertaining to the interactional goal: the first property in this regard relates to the language being the "vehicle" as well as the "object" of interaction in a classroom context (Seedhouse, 2009, p. 2). The second quality relates to the reflexive relationship between instruction of L2 and the interaction itself. Third dimension pertains to an evaluation of linguistic forms and patters by the teachers of English as L2 in classroom context. The comprehensive framework describes language to be the

process as well as the product of any instructional design.

According to students' perception of the impact of oral participation in learning English as L2, the lexis or vocabulary is a significant factor in developing oral fluency. They consider it to be an essential part of language while interacting with others. The aspect of vocabulary indubitably is a dimension of a teacher's overall core instructional goal in a classroom. The feedback and evaluation, however, are required to create an environment in a classroom context where students can express the new vocabulary learnt confidently.

Seedhouse (2004) further claims that every L2 classroom has its own interactional structure, which keeps on altering in accordance with the reflexive relationship between pedagogy and the interactional design as preferred by the teacher. The learners, while interacting, show development and progress in L2 interaction according to the interactional design opted for by the teacher. It is important to mention that feedback and valid assessment, according to him, are of central significance in the whole process (Seedhouse, 2004). The three basic features, according to Seedhouse (2004), form the foundational grounds of the interactional architecture of the L2 learning classroom.

Seedhouse (2004) claims that L2 classroom interactants, on the basis of analysis, slowly and gradually seek to come up with certain responsive turns with regard to instructional design preferred by the teacher. Participants' responses with regard to learning the pronunciation, syntactic structures, and lexis on the part of learners, along with the overall perception of fluency in the mind of L2 learners, can be understood through the lens of some of the basic arguments presented by Seedhouse (2004). The cited researcher claims that during the conversation, the role of interlocutors is very

important. He states that L2 learners learn through observing the interaction going on in the classroom. The participants' responses in the present research also accentuated the importance of interaction in acquiring fluency in a second language. It, therefore, is of vital significance that a teacher must closely monitor the conversation going on between students in a classroom, as the rest of the L2 learners observe the conversation and unconsciously evaluate their own oral fluency accordingly. The practice slowly and gradually helps inculcate in them a true potential of fluent speech with regard to a second language. Here, the role played by the reflexive relationship between the instruction and interaction must be taken into account. The instruction, if structured in accordance with the learner's aptitudes, can improve their learning styles; it can, at the same time, eradicate many of the phobias and reservations existing in their minds, thereby making them improve themselves as learners. The learners' responses reveal that they faced difficulty in coping with the instructional designs preferred by the teacher; such instructional designs hinder students' progress with regard to their oral fluency in the second language classroom.

Findings

- The participants in this study agreed with the statement that oral participation has an impact on learning the English language. It can be seen from the outcomes of the analysis of the study based on respondents' responses that are interacting and participating play an important role in the development of oral performance.
- It was found that the overall instructional design must be structured in such a way that students may improve their oral proficiency. The content introduced by the teacher must be of the kind which may

enhance their learning specific to their oral proficiency. Moreover, when the overall data was analyzed through the lens of Seedhouse's (2004) theoretical framework, it was observed that during L2 classroom interaction, the less proficient learners keenly observed the speech of more proficient learners and strived to improve their own learning. A teacher must therefore encourage the kinds of activities in a classroom that may promote second language interaction on the part of comparatively more proficient learners. Slowly and gradually, the learners consciously attempt to improve their oral proficiency and take responsive turns with regard to the interactional design preferred by the teacher.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact of oral participation in learning the English language. Most of the findings of this study confirmed that oral participation had a significant impact on learning English as a second language. The analysis in this regard was presented statistically through mean values and standard deviation. The respondents shared that the vocabulary, pronunciation, and correct grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence are required to be taken into account while speaking; the learners expert in the mentioned areas often participate in a classroom context, while the learners who are regarded as less proficient in the mentioned art, seldom express their views during classroom interaction. They stressed the importance of classroom interaction with reference to becoming a better speaker of English. Moreover, the respondents shared that it was essential for an L2 learner to think in the English language to improve his

proficiency. He, as viewed by them, must not translate the content from Urdu to English as both of the languages they shared was utterly different in their nature.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made.

- Students should be told about the importance of oral performance in the English language so that they may show their interest with regard to the skill of oral communication.
- Students should be given the opportunity to presentation so that they may improve their proficiency and competence in learning English as a second language.
- Students' talent must be explored through innovative tasks.
- A teacher should appreciate the effort of students in participating in English class and should not pinpoint their weaknesses in learning.
- A teacher should avoid the activities in English class that discourage students' motivation to develop English speaking skills.
- A teacher should use certain advanced strategies to make students improve their oral proficiency.

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