

EXAMINE THE STIMULUS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENTS' APPROACH IN LANGUAGE SKILL IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, English has become the most important foreign language in the world and particularly in the non-speaking English countries where there is the inter reliance of nations to create a need for a global language. The teaching of English as a compulsory subject has received a great deal of attention from the Ministry of Education as well as from the Saudi community in KS. Pompon (2017) studying English does not only mean focusing on syntactic accuracy or grammar. Instead, it means giving opportunities to learners to use English in real life contexts. Novices around the world find difficulty in learning English. Several, rationales hinder their learning process. Stimulus is one of the approaches that influence the students in the EFL speaking classroom. In order to obtain a deeper approach into students reflection on their behavioral process, Madrid and Cando(2001) defined a concept of motivation as one's internal state which is influenced by certain need or beliefs which engender constructive attitudes and interest towards a goal. These attitudes later create constant endeavor on entity because of the satisfaction experienced along with the positive results that have been obtained. This study focuses on examining the stimulus that influence students approach in the EFL classroom. A Mixed method approach which included both qualitative and quantitative method was used. A systematic random sampling technique was employed.

KEYWORDS: *Stimulus, Approach, English Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

English is being given a lot of importance all over the world. In the teaching and learning of EFL, the participation of students in the classroom plays an important role in acquiring the target language. In the last two decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of language in relation to society, which has led to a shift of focus from behaviorism and positivism to constructivism to critical theory (see Benson & Voller, 1997: 19-25). "The Ministry of Education Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has introduced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in schools since 1925" (Al-Ahaydib, 1986, P. 32). Ministry of education language strategy is to promote high quality learning, and to make students active participants in their learning activities intends to improve learners' language competence, and to provide students with knowledge of at least one foreign language, and that is, English. As for ages, the Arabian students have been lacking the stimulus towards English especially, in speaking, which is the only skill that is difficult to be efficiently acquired among the other English language skills. Saudi EFL learners have often been described as having generally low achievers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Al-Khairi, 2013a; Alrabai, 2014a; Alrahaili, 2013; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013; etc.). Speaking seems to be the most important skills of all the four skills (listening, speaking,

reading and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language (Ur, 1996). In Saudi Arabia speaking skill is perceived by most teachers as the neglected part of the materials as most teachers take it for granted and believe that it will develop naturally within the process of language learning. Al-Ma'shy (2011) affirmed that most English teachers concentrate on improving reading and writing skills and do not take into account the importance of speaking and listening skills. Therefore, it is becoming a major hindrance causing the students' lack of stimulus to learn the speaking skill. 90 percent of learners, post schooling who join colleges lack in understanding of English, it becomes difficult for them to follow even basic instructions. Limited vocabulary, grammar, organization of ideas, spelling and referencing affect their ability to communicate in writing and speaking (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). This means, that they do not have enough basic language skills in order to be able to listen, and respond to what has been said. Dornyei, (2005) stated " without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long term goals, and neither appropriate curricula and good teaching is enough to ensure students achievement. They may fail to see the relevance of learning the language skill to their real –life communication. Their importance will perhaps to pass the examination without realizing the importance of speaking and listening in real world. Hence, by stimulus for learning a second language is defined as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. (CRookes and Schmidt, 1991). It is stimulus that creates effectual second-language speakers by sowing the seeds of self-confidence.

Stimulus is a complex construct, and there are many factors that might inspire students to master a foreign language. However, motivation has been a major problem for most learners of English as a foreign language not only in high schools but also in colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia especially in learning speaking skill. Little wood (2004) revealed the factors that hinder participation in the classroom are fatigue or lack of motivation, fear of being wrong, not interested in the class, lack of knowledge in the concern area, shyness and lack of time to create ideas. Dornyei (2001, pointed out that self esteem and confidence are crucial factors influencing motivation that the self-esteem of learners is influenced by feedback from teachers. Therefore "Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behaviour, especially goal-directed behavior. Ryan and Deci (2000, 68) specify these needs as autonomy, competence and relatedness and add that "competence, autonomy and relatedness, when satisfied, yield enhanced self-motivation and mental health and, when thwarted, lead to diminished motivation and well-being". Mastering the art of teaching and learning is always dependent on the progress of students and the way students are influenced by the effectiveness of every positive attitude regarding their education. There are a lot of factors, such as, classroom's structure, lessons, various kinds of assessments, strategies, etc that play a very important role in deciding the progress and effectiveness of teacher-student learning and teaching. However, attaining mastery in the profession of teaching requires more than the traditional practices of a classroom. This allows every teacher to enhance the motivation skills in their students from the basic level (Jackson, 2011). Some researchers like Marcus (2001) as cited in Khan, raised the issue of the effect of emotional or social problems on students' performance and achievement in language learning, demonstrating that students performed better when their emotions towards language learning were strong and positive, Tella (2007) argues that the students' language level is different; their attitude towards learning English is also not similar; some of the students work hard, but some of them are just the opposite; they always feel shy and keep silent during the classroom activities. Generally, the researcher teacher, most of the times, while teaching speaking skills, examines that students' speaking performance was very low. Moges, (2006), Eshete (2004), accentuated on researching, problems students encounter in speaking in the EFL classroom, the practice of teaching speaking skill, and other more or less similar

issues. Their findings were motivational and students' achievement has causal relationships. Previous studies conducted in the Arab World such as (Hamad, 2103; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Mahboob and Elyas, 2014; Alrabai, 2014 and Alrashidi1 and Phan 2015) revealed that most Arab students are not intrinsically motivated, and they lack the basic language skills that would enable them to express themselves easily in the classroom, whereas (Jdetawy, 2011; Mourtaga, 2011 and Alhaisoni and Rahman, 2013) pointed out that the Arab learners of English encounter problems in speaking due to their lack of exposure to the target language as well as their preference to use Arabic as a formal language of communication.

Hence, speaking is a challenging process the most conspicuous kind of language proficiency which is based on the cultural and social context. However, the researcher focused on the factors that influence students speaking stimulus in the EFL classroom.

- The current study focuses on two issues:
- What are students perception on the dynamics that influence students stimulus in EFL speaking classroom?
- What are the approaches used by the teachers to overcome students' speaking dilemma in EFL classroom?

METHODOLOGY

A valid method for researching the students' level of motivation and the approach that influence motivation in EFL speaking class was the Mixed method approach, both qualitative and quantitative was used.

The participants of the study were 38 English undergraduate students of Mustaqbal University who were selected through systematic random sampling technique, whereas all the available sample of 5 teachers teaching them were considered because of their involvement in teaching English language and their understanding about students' attitude towards speaking skill and what motivates the students to speak or not to speak effectively..

Classroom Observation was used as a major tool in the study. A checklist was designed to identify the dynamics that influenced student's stimulus in EFL speaking class. The major criteria of the checklist included, what is the role of the teacher in teaching speaking skill, what the learners are supposed to do during speaking lesson, do the learner contribute enthusiastically in the speaking lesson, how do the activities the learners are involved and what difficulties are observed in the classroom when speaking is practiced. To assess the level of student's motivation for practicing English speaking activity, Questionnaire was used as another tool. Both close ended and open ended questionnaire were used. The other data collection instrument that was employed was the semi-structured interview of the teachers, to find out dynamics that influence motivation in EFL speaking class and competency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Student s Perception on the Dynamics that Influence Students' Stimulus in EFL Speaking Classroom

The Learners Perception on the Most Problematic Skill in EFL Classroom

From the Figure 1, we can state that the 58% students have problem in speaking skills, the difficulty which the students faced in the other language skills is less as compared to speaking skills. 44% had problem in listening skills. This shows that the students who had major problem in understanding English is probably due to less awareness of the language coupled with problem in speaking as well. Therefore, it is clearly understood from the table that speaking skill was the skill which the EFL students in the college found more difficult. Although as a part of

language learning, it is the basic need of any English as a foreign language learner to know how to speak and communicate orally. Thus, it is essential for every classroom to spend time on individuals' speaking performance. Rahman (2013) has identified that, the prescribed textbooks with minimal level of linguistics features fail to meet the requirements of the learners.

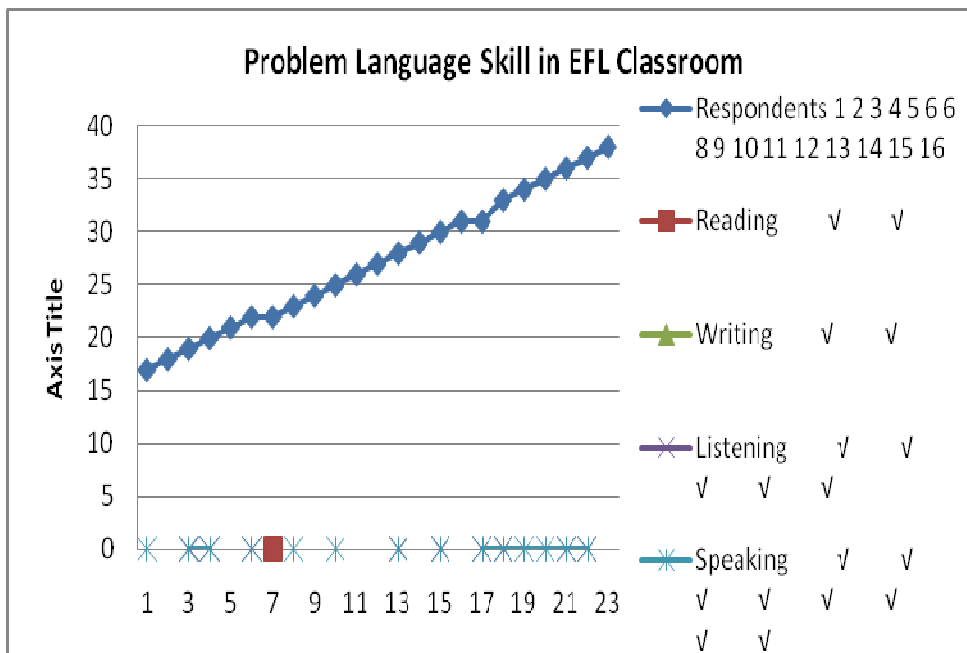


Figure 1: Problem in Language Skill.

The Learners' Awareness of the Speaking Skill EFL Classroom

Figure 2 below states that 14 (33%) and 9 (22%) strongly agree and agree to the statement that they are not comfortable in learning English speaking skills, as they do not understand the significance of speaking skill in the classroom. Whereas, during classroom observation, on an overall, students were not contributing while the instructor asked them to practice oral activities except for few outstanding students who took an initiative. According to Eckard and Kearny (1981), this passive attitude towards participating in speaking lesson results from the students lack of opportunity to express their ideas naturally and spontaneously. Further from the results of the teachers' interview on, 'What are the difficulties that de stimulate students' performance in speaking class?', it is evident that out of the Five (5) teachers interviewed, three (3) teachers responded that students' lack of awareness of English language made them less confident to participate and they were a misfit with the complexity of the speaking skill. Students come to colleges with difficulty in English Foreign Language and particularly in speaking skills. They also face problems of understanding when others speak, including their teachers, and are often seen switching to their colloquial language. Ur (1996) point out that the objective in any language classroom is to get the learners to learn the target language and use it instead of solely learning the rule of the language.

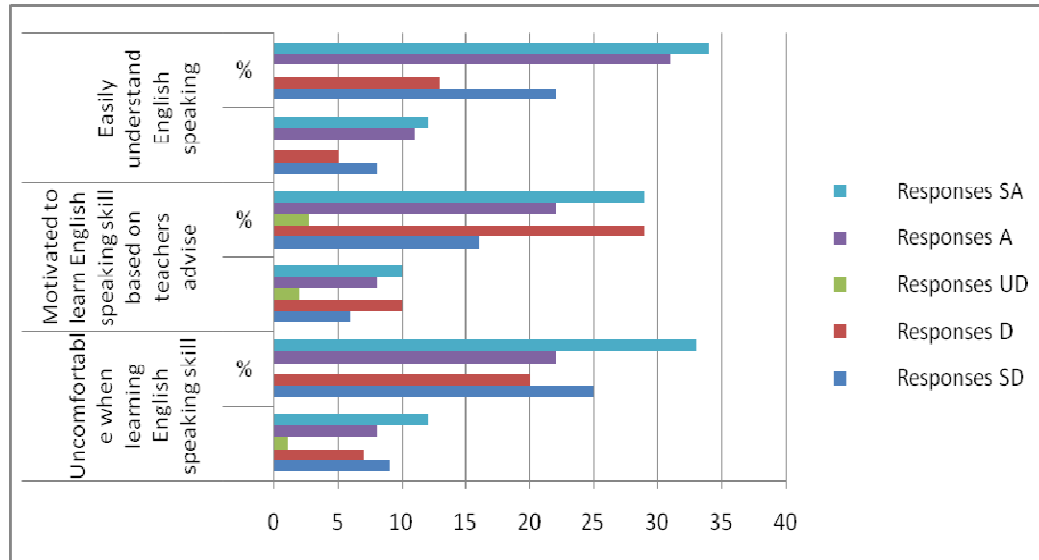


Figure 2: Awareness of Learners in English Speaking Skill.

For the following question “Are they motivated to learn English speaking skill based on their teachers advice and strategies of teaching and learning speaking, the results showed that, 9 (22%) of the students replied Agree, 11 (29%) Strongly Agree, whereas 45% said Strongly Disagree and Disagree and 2 students gave no reply. This shows that it is essential for the learners to get guidance from their teachers to get support in the speaking skills. Kayi (2006) indicates that “speaking is the gap between linguistic expertise and teaching methodology.” However, when we see the response of teachers’ question, Was It discouraging for the students to get constructive guidance and motivation from their teachers?. a teacher comprehended that, T1 “We faced difficulty in motivating our students to participate in speaking; most of them came with poor background of English. In general, it is difficult to help them to speak effectively.” On the other hand, the teachers said that there are hardly any speaking materials such as recordings. Therefore, it can be assumed that because enough of attention was not paid to speaking in the past, the teachers and students are not interested in teaching and learning the speaking skill as an important aspect of the skills due to the poor students’ background in English. In addition to this, the result of the classroom observation indicated that teachers’ strategies of teaching speaking is not encouraging and motivating in the classroom. For instance, they did not use variety of teaching strategies in teaching speaking skills. As Richards (1992) noted, background knowledge plays an important role in the improvement of speaking skill. Once the lesson content and teaching techniques retrieve speakers’ background knowledge and apply them to their interest, learners are motivated to learn the language. In order to assist the students to improve their speaking skill, EFL teachers are expected to create a classroom environment in which students have real life communication, authentic activities and interactive tasks which develop students’ speaking proficiency.

The last item focused on the awareness of the English. 68% reported that they agree to the statement, ‘Understand English easily by speaking’, and for that, they indicated that the students’ background for speaking foreign language is a major hurdle to motivate speaking skill. Furthermore, the teachers’ response to the interview item number 4, ‘listening and speaking are not mutually exclusive’, the teachers as an whole responded that through the process of conversation, where there is exchange of ideas between the speaker and the listener, speaking skill as a whole necessitates active interaction between the speaker and the listener, but it fails as listeners are inactive and have anxiety problems. And also it revealed

that, the teachers themselves seemed not to be enjoying or liking the teaching on speaking skills in contrast to the teaching of other skills. The cause for this was that they usually feel perturbed because the students do not give response and majorly do not actively involved in speaking activities. Further supported by Ur (1996), EFL teachers often face some speaking problems in getting students to speak English in the classroom. Some of these problems are inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low or uneven participation and mother-tongue influence.

One of the interview questions asked to the teachers was on the factor affecting the background or the factual knowledge that the students bring to the classroom. In response to this, one of the senior teacher said that very few have the basic knowledge probably because of the development of social networking sites whereas the rest are ignorant. It is good to communicate with students who can respond and speak fluently and also wants to participate in oral activities. Bachman and Palmer (1996) stated that certain language tasks may be easier for those who possess the relevant topical knowledge, and more difficult for those who do not have the topical knowledge. Therefore, the background knowledge has an impact on their speaking performance.

In the end, it can be concluded that, according to the above findings, the learners' awareness of the English language in general was the major factor in preventing the students' speaking stimulus in the classroom. In relation to this, the lack of motivation may be caused by different variables such as background knowledge, lack of exposure, native language influence, inability to understand the speaking text, and other students' perceptions that may obstruct the stimuli of the students towards learning the speaking skill. Students who demonstrate communication anxiety do not feel comfortable communicating in the target language in front of others, due to their limited knowledge of the language, especially in relation to speaking and listening skills. Burns, and Jessome (2011), communication in a second language is a very complex process that embraces a dynamic interplay between the context of learning and the psychology of learners.

Approach of the Students Towards the Speaking Skill

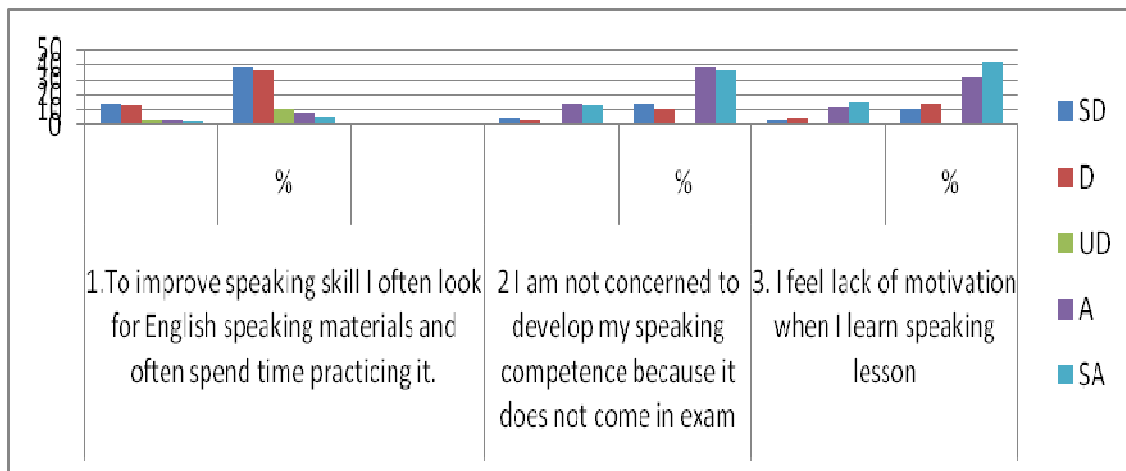


Figure.3: Approach of Students Towards Speaking Skill.

In the above Figure 3, it shows that, 39 % students reported that they strongly disagree, and said that they did not look for or study English speaking materials. They also mentioned that they did not spend their time practicing English speaking skills as they did for other skills such as grammar and reading, whereas other 35 responded that they disagree, 16.% strongly agree and the rest 14% responded undecided. For Item 2, 75 % strongly agreed that they are not concerned

to develop their speaking competence because it does not appear in exam. As can be understood, 88% of the students showed that they never attempted speaking tasks in English class. Only 5% of the respondents indicated that speaking tasks were attempted sometimes. The teacher's responses in the interview were that students hardly focused much on speaking skill, as they are not an integral part of exam. Rahman (2013) has identified that, the prescribed textbooks with minimal level of linguistics features fail to meet the requirements of the learners. Similarly the classroom observation too showed the lack of stimulus by teachers to teach this skill and rather they focused more on other skills. Although Students have speaking and listening course, they focused more on oral practice of the students and on listening and writing. In addition to this, most students have said that speaking materials in the textbook were not interesting to motivate them. So, they hardly paid attention to the speaking skills. In relation, the majority of the interviewed teachers reported that to appraise the students' attitude in learning the speaking skill in the classroom told that the students often did not pay attention in practicing the speaking skill in the classroom,. This in turn indicates that the students' extrinsic motivation, that is, looking for speaking materials which were relevant to the development of speaking skill seemed difficult to find. According to the data, among the respondents, 12% indicated that their speaking skill was affected by fear of making mistakes they felt nervous when they spoke in front of the class. Sometimes, they did not know what to say and kept silent and hence developed lack of stimulus in the EFL speaking classroom. In brief, the findings from the questionnaires showed that when the students learn speaking, they encountered many problems. Al-Housni (2014) states, "Many studies have indicated that oral language development has largely been neglected in the classroom, and most of the time, oral language in the classroom is used more by teachers than by students. However, oral language, even as used by the teacher, hardly ever functions as a means for students to gain knowledge and explore ideas." That is, the teacher should recently be a facilitator and the one who guides the lesson and not the one who gives that lesson. Apparently, oral expression has not much significance in learning. Hence, learners would find difficulty in speaking English even if they were university students

The Approaches Used by the Teachers to Overcome Students' Speaking Stimulus Problems in EFL Classroom

The teachers said that "*The bilingual and translation methods were the teaching approaches they used for Foreign Language Teaching*" Although A number of teachers believe that teaching speaking skill in EFL classroom is important as a part of language learning, they do not give the sufficient time to do that, and say the time is not available and they said they have other skills to focus which are more important. If a chance or a time is obtainable to allow students to speak, teachers prefer just moving on to accomplish other tasks like reading and writing (Bani-abdelrahman, 2013, p.81). The development of speaking skills was neglected further depriving students from listening and speaking English, lastly they hardly could produce the language with such minimal listening input. Arab students have little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction. (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014 and Alrabai, 2014) also concluded that one of the major factors that led to the students' low level of English is the lack of the target language exposure.

Language is a way that the teacher uses to present different activities during lessons. In a balanced activities approach, the teacher uses a variety of activities which benefit learners of different level, motivating them to produce effective language learning in speech context. The capacity to speak a language is a critical part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies; using minimal responses, recognizing script, and using language to talk about language, and then the students would develop their knowledge of the language and their confidence to use it. Febriyanti (2011) believes that speaking is one of the most substantial and essential skills that must be practiced at regular intervals to communicate orally.

The Role of the Teachers in the EFL Classroom

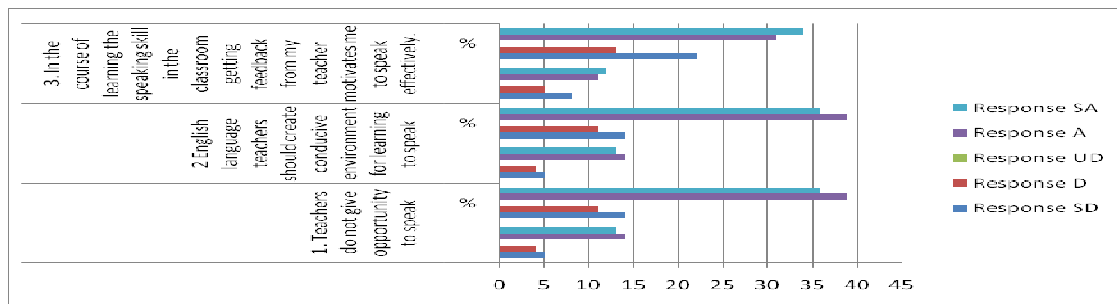


Figure 4: Role of Teachers.

According to Cotter (2007), “learning speaking skills which let students communicate and interact in a meaningful and fruitful form (for example exchanging information, negotiating meaning, supporting ideas, facing oral defenses) is a means of encouraging students to use English Language as a tool for social interaction.” Teachers today confront educating a continually expanding number of linguistically diverse students. Students were asked if their teacher gave them opportunity to speak in English during speaking lesson classes. The results in above Fig. No. 4 shows that, that 14 (37%) of them responded strongly agree that their teachers do not give them opportunity to speak in English so as to enhance their speaking capacity and motivation. 13 (38%) of them responded agree. 10 students 15% reported strongly disagree and disagree respectively. This consequence shows that English language teachers do not persuade their students to take part in the speaking activity during English speaking class. This usually causes students to be passive participants during the speaking lesson class. During classroom observation, it was noticed that the teacher focused mainly to cover the lesson in the given time hardly focusing on these speaking activities. During teachers interview also, one of the teachers said we have limited time to complete the syllabus usually we focus on exam related skills.

Item 2, there the reflection is on the nonexistence of conducive environment. 37% of students strongly agreed that their teacher should create conducive environment in speaking classes to help them be motivated to speak. 36% gave affirmative agreement. The rest 25% have reported strongly disagree and disagree respectively. During the classroom observation the teachers spent most of their teaching time by explaining grammatical structure and only focusing on activities related to exam.

According to Item 3, 13 (4%) of the students have strongly agreed that in their course of learning the speaking skills, getting feedback from their teachers motivates them; while significant number of students 11 (31%) have responded agree. On the other hand, 6 (13%) and 8 (22%) have reported that they disagree and strongly disagree of getting feedback from their teachers which encourage them to speak effectively. Results drawn from the statements number 3, and 9, unbiased, encouraging and motivating while correcting students’ English speaking mistakes.” From this, we can infer that the students need to get feedback from their teachers for motivating themselves towards effective speaking. According to the classroom observation, the teachers lacked the tendency of providing feedback to Students. Motivation and confidence are important factors which accelerate the students’ language progress. Accordingly, there is a strong relationship between motivation, confidence and students’ performance and achievement (Al Samadani and Ibnian, 2015). From this, we can infer that the teachers’ role significantly affects the students’ motivation towards the speaking skill.

Strategy Used by Teachers to Overcome Stimulus Hindering Dynamics

The role of teachers is to assist the students overcome that problem by stimulating them that misunderstanding can occur in any communication; Instructors can also provide students with the needed strategies to use for comprehension (Bashir, 2011). Consequently, teachers can be successful in constructing authentic practice environment within the classroom via sustaining students to use clarification phrases in classroom in the case of misunderstanding to respond positively. After enhancing a range of clarification strategies, students will be confident to deal with a variety of communication situations that they may occur outside the classroom. Secondly, effective instructors teach students speaking strategies; using minimal responses, recognizing script, and using language to talk about language, and then the students would develop their knowledge of the language and their confidence to use it.

Creating Conducive Classroom Environment

The role of teachers is to make the class environment appropriate for speaking, and encouraging the students to talk by using different ways. Generally, two factors are affecting students' speaking English. Either they do not find the words to express their thoughts, or they are afraid of making mistakes. Consequently, students sometimes make mistakes in speaking because of their shyness and nervousness. Making a proper atmosphere where the students will not feel shy is very important, so they will volunteer to ask a question, give an answer, and give an opinion.

According to the teachers' responses for the interview questions, how she creates a conducive speaking skill classroom environment. T4 said "One of the strategies I commonly use to encourage my students towards the speaking skill is building an interesting and a conducive classroom environment, because I believe that learners motivation will increase in a fear free classroom environment in which students can express their opinion and ideas freely". T5 stated that building a positive environment holds a great importance in students' motivation. When students feel relaxed, their level of interest is improved. She also noted that appealing to students' needs and interest renders them more motivated to learn. The teacher furthered that teachers' being interested in current issues and giving current examples make students more involved in the lesson. This way, they can build relationships and understand the lesson better.

Whereas from the questionnaires', response it was explored that, the teachers were controlling to keep the students silent and listen attentively. In relation to this, a student responded for the open ended question Item saying, "That their teachers help them in motivating towards the speaking skill in the classroom firstly, they tell us to be silent and listen to the speaking lesson attentively at the beginning of the class." From this it is possible that to conclude that teachers believed this strategy was particularly important in speaking class.

According to the classroom observation results The effectiveness of this strategy, was not encouraging most of the students did not show active participation during the presentation of speaking lesson, and most of them seem absent minded. This shows that the teachers' strategy that was used in the classroom to create suitable environment to the speaking skill seemed to be not effective to motivate the students.

From Teacher to the Student-Centered Strategy

To motivate students based on the teachers' interview responses, Students were always participating in practicing the speaking skill in the classroom. The teachers response was, "*To make my students highly motivated towards the speaking skill, I mainly occupy the strategy of student-centered, I try to encourage students to be active participant in all process of*

learning the speaking skill, I simply act as a facilitator.” The classroom observation showed that, Students were not so active and responsive to the teachers’ assigned strategies of teaching. Very few hardly took the floor. It seemed that they were accustomed to listening to the teacher passively. It was more teacher-centered strategy of teaching speaking. However, the greatest challenge with this strategy of teaching was integrating the speaking experiences of the students in to classroom instructions and keeping up students’ interest and motivation. Hereby the students were not intrinsically motivated in speaking classes because they did participate actively in class activities. They need everything to be explained by the teacher. The teachers follow teacher-centered strategy of teaching in the class, which was not effective to motivate the students.

Use of Modern Technology

The interview question asked about the techniques that increase students’ level of participation. The teacher pointed out that *usage of modern technology promotes students’ learning; thus, improve students’ attention and interest.* Similarly, using body language makes lesson more understandable, which increases students’ motivation. When lesson gets clear and comprehensible, they feel more willing. Therefore, the advent of technology is important in the classrooms as it motivate students easily to practice their speaking skill. Ellis (1994) clarifies that effective language teachers should be energetic and creative because of the risk of losing motivation easily. The classroom observation showed a positive sign that the students very enthusiastic using these technology. Brown (2007) indicates that the quality of language learning is improved because of internet and distance education. Web-learning offers well-selected activities and interactive learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching speaking means helping learners develop their ability to interact successfully in the target language. To do so, one must have communicative competence. According to Richard (2008), speaking is the most important skill in communication, yet students have difficulties in speaking. Improving Saudi learners’ competence will require a systematic, extensive treatment of the underlying problems and contributing factors. Students’ motivation towards the speaking skill was influenced by different variables such as understanding of the English language, especially inability to speak before people due to low vocabulary knowledge, lack of awareness, shyness, being afraid, lack of practicing the speaking skill in relation to other skills and giving less attention to the speaking skill in the classroom. The challenges that teachers come across in using effective strategies were students’ poor background knowledge of the English language and difficulties in applying specific strategies by students. The focus of teaching speaking, of course, is to improve the oral production of the students. Therefore, speaking activities in the classroom should aim at maximizing individual language use.

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