

The Effectiveness of the Methods in Use to Promote Fluency among EFL Learners at Foreign Languages Department, Taif University

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Abstract

This study outlines the effectiveness of the methods in use to promote EFL students' fluency in classroom and to what extent these methods strengthen students' ability to speak. Through a questionnaire (quantative data) was given to (54) male and female students, the study discusses their learning perception about speaking, materials and methods in practice in discourse and speech elements and evaluation of the oral skills. Depending on the statistical analysis operated by (T) test at (0.05) level, it can be concluded that teachers need to use practical and applicable strategies to develop their students' language fluency. Oral skills have not been given an exceptional distinction in the process of learning the language. The study proposes valuable suggestions to teachers to attain high levels when they plan to improve their students' oral skills. These students can obtain significant standard of proficiency with minimal means by stimulating frequent strategies of speech.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Fluent learner, EFL teachers, EFL learners, FLD

Introduction

Conventionally, English has gained a special and high status among other languages. It has become a shared language between different countries and religions. Its shininess overwhelmed other international languages. It is a fact that this globalized era obliges everyone to have basic and necessary knowledge about English in order to communicate efficiently with others. This investigation is an attempt to search intensely whether the methods that used in students' speaking classes at the department of foreign languages (FLD) are effective. On the other hand to find justifications for learners' low achievement in terms of fluency. Thus, the term fluency may seem vague regarding the objectives of this investigation; it is challenging to define it precisely (Brumfit,

1984). Foreign Learners encounter restrictions when they give-and-take information, ideas, or even feelings with others. To speak is not only to convey a message, but more importantly is to engage in longer debates with other individuals. In order to trace the effectiveness of the methods in use to promote fluency among EFL Learners at FLD, the study hopes to get invaluable responses for these questions:

- 1-Do students have their own perceptions towards speaking skills?
- 2-What methods do teachers use to evaluate their students' fluency?
- 3-How do English language learners evaluate their fluency?
- 4-Is there any statistically significant difference in terms of promoting fluency among EFL learners at FLD due to gender?
- 5-Is there any statistically significant difference in terms of promoting fluency among EFL learners at FLD due to their levels of education?

Literature Review

The ability to deliver speech in different situations with a good instruction or command of English that is 'fluency'. Fluency is paid little attention in the acquisition process of a foreign language (Fillmore, 1979). Nation & Newton (2009) also present that at the level an individual talks and performs well in different situations then he or she is a fluent learner of English. Rossiter (2009) views fluency development from another dimension that oral skills can be developed via developing listening skills since one delivers speech and other receives it then the receiver over times can convey the messages that have already got. She also mentions several factors affect one's communication which stand as a barrier for not to be fluent such hesitancy and slow pace of speech. Both of them have their impact on delaying the message of the deliberate communication. These features sometimes are necessary in governing the speed of speech in addition to what is called turn-taking. In addition, they can affect other features of speech such as the accuracy of the speaker's words and the way he or she pronounces them.

Despite of the fact that language fluency is not confined to conversation pace or such interruptions. Thus, maximizing the conversation speed and minimizing these interruptions can remarkably participate in understanding the concept of fluency. This concept closely deals with essential linguistics components such as syntax and morphology and sometimes phonology and semantics of the language. Thus, fluency interact with all these components in order to deliver long and continuous conversations (Brown, 2001). As mentioned earlier, the number of people who speak English is becoming greater in size for its multiple uses in different aspects of life. Thus, teachers should afford extensive considerations to develop this substantial skill in line with others language skills, which help in creating fluent learners and in turn increasing communication competence. Several scholars surveyed

the causes of weak performance of EFL speakers and they concluded that one of them is little exposure to the language, moreover shyness causes frightening and lack of confidence about making errors in front of their classmates and teachers (Trent, 2009). There are some other factors which can encourage effective communication include individual differences, that is, the distinctive features exist between two persons. Moreover, motivation, aptitude, strategies of learning and stressful barriers have a remarkable input upon successful communication (Dörnyei, 2005). Gardner-Chloros (2009) also supports this view and emphasizes the usefulness of these components in generating adequate and real communication. Not long ago, MacIntyre (2007) paid more considerations to when a learner will be in a good position to speak naturally, as a native speaker does. This occurs only promptly when the learner masters the basic skills of that language. The uprising areas of interactive mediums in education and training facilitate of one being fluent in such a language. Based on the above mentioned, several scholars notice by referring to some students' views that their teachers rarely give them activities concern speaking in their classrooms. Therefore, communicative activities such as role games, group debates are productive in improving speaking. Teachers need to encourage and promote fluency among their students. Teachers can devote at least thirty to forty minutes of teaching speaking two times a week which can help improve their student' speaking skills. The type of vocabulary whether passive or active or in the form of idiomatic expression have its influence upon effective communication and reshaping its flow. Equipping students with multiple contexts and different speaking assignments can have efficient roles in developing students' fluency (Tam, 1997). Other aspects can affect one's communication are confidence and competence which normally strengthen a learner' oral skills. Patil (2008) states that competence and confidence can be reinforced or promoted by reducing one's stress in particular when he or she feels embarrassed of making mistakes in front of his or her teacher or classmates. Accordingly, it is the teacher's job to create a suitable and unstressed environment for language practice. Songsiri (2007) mentions that proficiency, competence and confidence can be generated from rightful course outlines, teaching techniques, variation of tasks and text subject matters. Shumin (1997) underlines that in speech efficiency numeral aspects are implicated such as listening as a receptive skill, socio-linguistic and socio-cultural influences, which involve other subfields, for instance, grammar, dialogue and discussion. They enable speakers to practice using the language effectively, in addition to build one's confidence when exchanges and shares information with others in a form of conversation and discussion. One of the most essential duties of a teacher is to guide students to reflect upon their academic practice and help students integrate themselves into a new class environment throughout the learning process. It is important to make them

acquainted with department policies and plans and ascertain the social integration in the classroom. Nanan et al., (2001: 207) mentions that "Regular meetings and conferencing are of great help for students and a relationship of trust and respect will help them feel confident and relaxed." It is the time when the learner and the teacher make interactive activities inside the classroom, which help the students to speak the language fluently. There are different activities which can stimulate students' fluency such as a teacher discusses with his or her students different topics, and encourages them to speak and he/she listens to them patiently, the teacher then tries to value and understand, the students discuss issues which are relevant to them, the teacher provides them with different options to overcome a problem and makes them reflect and plan for improving the situation. It is always important that teachers help students to identify and understand the source of the problems in order to solve them.

Fluent learners have great ability to convey the message more fast and clearly and they have positive attitudes towards knowledge. Lee (1999) presents that some EFL learners by nature discourage themselves to take a communicative part in conversation. Thus, teachers need to encourage their students to take part whenever opportunities are obtainable for them. Lennon (1990) emphasizes that fluency has its absolute influence upon listening skills progress. It is known that fluency development is indispensable in learning any language. First, learners widen their lexicon and their knowledge about the rules of that language. Second, they put these aspects into practice, and then it is expected to have high levels of performance (Nation & Newton, 2009). The researcher will check to what extent these activities and other authentic ones promote EFL students' language fluency in the classroom.

Methodology

The representative sample of this research was taken randomly from the students of the 3rd and the 4th years at the Foreign Languages Department (FLD). The researcher has designed a 25- item questionnaire which was administered to 28 (male students) and 26 female students (table 3.1) in order to obtain quantitative input that checks the effectiveness of the methods in use which promote fluency among EFL learners at the Foreign languages Department in Taif University. The overall participants are (54) and they are unintentionally chosen from the 3rd and the 4th years. The reason for limiting the sample only to the final two years that since they had passed all the courses of the Speaking classes they can simply answer the questionnaire statements.

The questionnaire responses will be analyzed statistically by using the descriptive methods. Furthermore, T-Test was used to prove whether there is any statistical variation among the participants of this study regarding gender and levels of education.

Table (3.1): Descriptive statistics of the study sample

Group	N	percentage
Male	28	51.9%
Female	26	48.1%
Total	54	100%
Third Year	13	24.1%
Fourth Year	41	75.9%
Total	54	100%

Table (3.2): Questionnaire Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Statements
.870	25

Before using the questionnaire for data collection, Cronbach's Alpha was employed for the questionnaire statements and the numerical value is (.870) which indicates that the wording of the statements is clear and is highly reliable (Table 3.2).

Results

The twenty-five statements of the questionnaire have been grouped into three parts. Part (1) includes six items that cover students' learning perception about speaking. The next section integrates six items, which center on EFL learners' evaluation of methods in practice. The last section involves thirteen items, which focus on evaluation of the learners' fluency.

Table (4.1): Pearson Correlation of the three sections

Section	Correlation	TOTAL
A	Pearson Correlation	.775**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30
B	Pearson Correlation	.856**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30
C	Pearson Correlation	.883**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30
TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	30

Table (4.1) presents the output of the correlations of the three sections that the questionnaire has. The correlations are (0.775), (0.856) and (0.883) respectively. The Pearson's r for the correlation between the statements of section one (Students' learning perception about speaking) and the statements of section two (Learners' evaluation of methods in practice) is ranged between

(0.775) and (0.856). The Pearson’s r for the correlation between the statements of section two (Learners' evaluation of methods in practice) and the statements of section three (Evaluation of learners' fluency) is between (0.856) and (0.883). These estimations signify that there are close connections within these three variabilities, and fluctuations in one variability are connected with fluctuations in the second variability and in turns in the third one. The Pearson’s r are (0.775), (0.856) and (0.883). They are very close to (1). Accordingly, one can decide that there is a relevancy within these three sections. The Sig. (2-Tailed) value in the three sections is (0.000) for each one and it is less than (.05.) On account of this, it can also be concluded that there is a notably variation within the statements of the three sections.

The outputs corresponded to the participants' perception about speaking are illustrated in table (4.2) with a very high mean (4.76). The participants emphasize the importance of English nowadays. They also like learning English (mean 4.57). Based on the statement three, that has a very high mean (4.22), students, have possibility to speak English. This contrasts with statement four with a reasonable mean of (3.72) that students see learning of English is a difficult task. Positively, students do different activities in their speaking classes with a mean of (3.52). Moreover, students like the topics that their teachers have presented as speaking activities. This reflects the effectiveness of the teaching methods used by teachers to promote their students' fluency.

Table (4.2): Students’ learning perception about speaking

No.	Items	N	M	Std. Deviation	Degree	Rank
1	I like learning English.	54	4.7593	.58067	Very high	1
2	I am able to speak English.	54	4.5741	.66167	Very high	2
3	It is difficult for me to learn English.	54	4.2222	.88310	Very high	3
4	I like doing different activities in my speaking class.	54	3.7222	.95989	high	4
5	I like the topics of the speaking activities.	54	3.5185	1.02314	high	5
6	English is important nowadays.	54	3.4444	1.09315	high	6
	Grand Mean	54	4.0401	.47796	high	-

The second section opens the floor for the students to assess the method in use for improving speaking. This section as mentioned earlier covers six items. The item, which gained a very high mean (4.30), is statement eleven, which emphasizes that communicative activities such as role games, group debates are productive in improving speaking. The other statements with high means express the importance of activity variation, motivation, the

use of simple language, but statement ten has moderate mean (3.22) which explains teachers rarely ask their students to say things in longer range of contexts and this method is recommended in order to have effective communication.

Table (4.3): Learners' evaluation of methods in practice

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree	Rank
7	The teacher gives us a variety of activities to improve our speaking skills .	54	3.6111	1.08882	high	4
8	The lectures are interesting and motivate us to speak.	54	3.4630	1.25462	high	5
9	Using simple English helps me to speak better.	54	4.2037	.85516	Very high	3
10	Teachers ask to say things in longer range of contexts.	54	3.2222	.81650	moderate	6
11	Communicative activities such as role games, group debates are productive in improving speaking.	54	4.2963	.90344	Very high	1
12	Having 35 to 40 minutes of teaching speaking two times a week improves my speaking skills.	54	4.2222	.92485	Very high	2
	Grand Mean	54	3.8364	.59036	high	-

The third section evaluates learners' fluency inside and outside their classrooms. Items (13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25) got high means (table 4.4). Meaning that students are imaginative, creative when speaking English. They also try to develop their communicative proficiency in the language. Moreover, they use body language when communicating verbally with others. Items (15 and 19) got moderate means (table 4.4). This reflects that some students are so hesitant and unable to produce continuous speech when communicating with others. The finding recorded in table (4.4) below undoubtedly suggests that the differences in means are statistically significant, and they are not due to chance or sampling error. These results prove that effective teaching methods can have their noticeable outcomes in improving students oral skills.

Table (4.4): Evaluation of learners' fluency

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree	Rank
13	I am so imaginative when speaking English.	54	3.7778	.94503	high	8
14	I am so creative when speaking English.	54	3.8519	.85578	high	5
15	I speak English naturally without hesitation.	54	3.3519	.93481	moderate	12
16	I speak English with a perfect command of intonation.	54	3.4074	.83595	high	11
17	I speak English with a perfect command of vocabulary.	54	3.6667	.80094	high	9
18	I speak English with a perfect command of grammar.	54	3.5000	.86330	high	10
19	I produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties.	54	3.2037	.76182	moderate	13
20	I can communicate ideas in English effectively.	54	3.8519	.85578	high	6
21	I use facial expressions when communicating with others.	54	3.9074	.97649	high	4
22	I use hand gestures when communicating with others.	54	4.1667	.90596	high	1
23	I use head movements when communicating with others.	54	3.8333	1.11169	high	7
24	I use eye movements when communicating with others.	54	3.9259	1.16314	high	3
25	I am able to speak about issues related to my life as a Saudi.	54	4.0926	.89587	high	2
	Grand Mean	54	3.7336	.51865	high	-

Table (4.5) explains that there is no notable variation in terms of gender due to the education levels regard the oral skills. The standard deviation level shows no great variation on this factor.

Table (4.5): Level of education

Variable	Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
learning Perceptions	Third	13	4.167	.44	1.098	52	.277
	Fourth	41	4.000	.48			
Learner's methods	Third	13	3.795	.78	0.289	52	.774
	Fourth	41	3.850	.52			
Learners' fluency	Third	13	3.834	.50	0.801	52	.427
	Fourth	41	3.702	.52			

Furthermore, table (4.6) stresses that there is no notable variation due to gender in the context of speaking improvement. The differences in means are statistically significant, and they are not due to chance or sampling error.

Table (4.6): Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
learning Perceptions	Male	28	3.988	.55	0.828	52	.412
	Female	26	4.096	.38			
Learner's methods	Male	28	3.786	.66	0.651	52	.518
	Female	26	3.891	.50			
Learners' fluency	Male	28	3.618	.52	1.730	52	.090
	Female	26	3.858	.49			

Measuring the level of education and gender factors in this study it seems that students of the 3rd and 4th levels are in a good position. They had passed all the courses of the Speaking classes and they could simply answer the questionnaire statements. Thus, they got high means. For gender, it is noticed that female students responded more actively than the male one. Female students recorded such a high measurement, reflecting their priority in the fluency.

Conclusion

This study confined itself to a particular area; therefore, its sample does not have a valid representativity. The study could have generalized results if it involved more participants from varied educational institutions. Teachers need to focus more clearly on both the speaker's and the listener's needs. This means not just to trace the language produced by the actions of interaction made by them, but also to consider the adequacy of both the speaker and the listener. This will obviously expand the range to involve sociopragmatic features. Some areas suffer from lacking of learning and learning sources. Teachers can easily design their own educational environment and provide students with simple means of teaching. With the knowledge of this, teachers can promote fluency among their students and stimulate them to have interactive roles. As one of the fundamental aspects of interacting with people, oral skills need special and sustainable primacy in an EFL setting.

Teachers need to make their students feel more comfortable engaging in conversation in informal contexts with peers. Well preparation from the teacher will satisfy the students in learning the basics of how to communicate meaningfully. Through teachers' guidance, he or she needs to identify clear conversation subject matters and assignments related to them in addition to create a suitable environment for speech practices with reference to the extensive use of the target language. Thus, students' confidence should be developed and this in turns will improve students' competence in communication and linguistics. Development of oral proficiency in English should be directed towards developing speakers' competencies. This necessarily involves components such as speaking effectiveness, barriers influencing, successful oral communication, and methods of improving speaking abilities. According

to Zhang (2009), some learners rarely chance upon sufficient contexts to practice the language professionally whether with their classmates or with others out the class. Students should be provided with the essentials of how to produce long and continuous conversations. Thus, students should focus on improving their speaking skills through practice, good preparation and the use of the speaking activities. Fluency should be encouraged by teachers, and should be strictly promoted in the initial stages of the courses. In order to make the students more fluent in English, they should be able to understand virtually everything heard or read. Moreover, expressing themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, and be able to differentiate meanings in highly complex situations.

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