Research Paper

Jordanian Students' Difficulties in Speaking English Language in the Class

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Abstract
The basic element in acquiring any language is to speak that language; therefore we can consider the ability to communicate the English language orally is the most significant skill but many second language learners face constraints in mastering this skill particularly. In this study we attempt to highlight the problems face Jordanian students in speaking English language in the class, and examine the strategies used by the Jordanian teachers to motivate their students to speak the language in the classroom. The data of this study will be collected by using(open-ended) questions which will be administered to a few Jordanian teachers via E-mail. The findings will be made to help Jordanian students to overcome their difficulties in speaking English language in the class.

I.   Introduction:

Most of the methods of teaching English to non-native speakers that have appeared after the 1970s focused on one basic goal is for students to communicate in the target language (Larsen Freeman, D 2000). Based on this, we realized that the basic element in acquiring any language is to speak that language and when we know that the most of the recent teaching methods considered the target language a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study we will find ourselves forced to admit that the ability to communicate in a language is the most significant skill that the student should master but many foreign language learners face difficulties in accomplishing this task.

The major portion of this study is devoted to present the speaking problems of Jordanian students in English. This study has exposed to these problems and suggested some recommendations in order to solve them.

Problem statement:

There is no escape from admitting the fact that the majority of Jordanian students face difficulties in speaking English inside the classroom. We noticed through our personal experience in teaching English that most of the students try to avoid speaking English inside the classroom voluntarily or even if they were asked to participate in answering a given question, they will use their mother tongue or they will remain silent as if they have a fear from using the target language, therefore, the teacher in the Jordanian class room context is the dominating figure with the absence of the class interaction between him and his students or between the students with each other, also the teacher found himself forced to use code switching since the students are not willing to use English, as a result; the students mother tongue became the medium for the class interaction.

Because all of these observations do not go along with the principles of the recent developed methods of teaching English such as the principle that states the role of the teacher as a participant rather than a dominant, moreover, the class medium should be the target language and the need to encourage the students to interact more in the classroom. Missing such principles caused a big gap in the learning process which reflected negatively on the performance of both the teacher and the students. This represents a serious problem that should be investigated through examining this phenomenon in order to solve it.

Research Objectives:
The main objectives for this study are:
1.   To highlight some of the problems that the Jordanian students face in speaking English language inside the class room.
2.   To examine the effectiveness of the strategies used by their teachers to motivate them to speak the language inside the class.

Research Questions:
There are two main questions for this study:
1.   What are the problems that face the Jordanian students in speaking the English language inside the class room?
2.   What are the strategies used by the Jordanian teachers to motivate their students to speak the English language inside the class room?

Definition of the terms:
Shyness: is a psychological state that causes a person to feel discomfort in social situations in ways that interfere with enjoyment or that cause avoidance of social contacts altogether.
Audience pressure: the influence caused by encountering an audience which will decrease the individual performance level.

II.   Literature review:

Speaking is generally considered to be the active or productive skill of language usage.

Jordanian learners of English encounter problems in speaking. This fact has been clearly stated by many researchers, e.g. Abdul Haq (1982). The students in Jordan learn English in their native country, where the native language is Arabic. The only way to learn English in Jordan is through formal instruction, i.e. inside the classroom where the language teachers at school are native speakers of Arabic. There is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. This is only possible when students encounter native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists, and this rarely happen.

GhalebRaba'bah (2003) added "Another important area of difficulty that Arab learners of English have is communication. Arab learners find it difficult to communicate freely in the target language. This may be due to the methods of language teaching and the learning environment, which may be said to be unsuitable for learning a foreign language. This fact is very noticeable in Jordan because the formal language of communication is Arabic".

Many studies have been conducted to investigate lexical, syntactical and phonological errors committed by Jordanian learners of English (e.g., Abdul Haq, 1982; Zughoul and Taminian, 1984). Abdul Haq (1982: 1) states that "One of the linguistic areas in which students in the secondary cycle commit errors is in the speaking skill". He adds "There are general outcries about the continuous deterioration of the standards of English proficiency of students among school teachers and all who are concerned with English language teaching". In support of Abdul Haq's view, Zughoul (1984:4) found that "Jordanian EFL students commit serious lexical errors while communicating in English".

Students try to avoid speaking English in the classroom voluntarily, and even when asked to participate in answering a given question, they use their mother tongue or remain silent, as if they are afraid of using the target language. Missing such principles resulted in a significant gap in the learning process, which had a negative impact on both the teacher's and students' performance. All of this points to a serious problem that should be investigated by investigating this phenomenon in order to solve it. The main cause of this problem is the lack of background knowledge among Jordanian students; the curriculum's many levels of support for speaking abilities, such as a lack of natural opportunities to speak in English;

Limitations of the study:

We used a single data collection technique which is the open-ended questions consist of two questions administered via e-mail to only seven Jordanian teachers who are teaching English for the secondary level, each one of them worked in a different school in Mafraq city north of Jordan.

III.   Methodology:

The methodology we have used in collecting our data was based on (open-ended) questions administered to 4 Jordanian teachers via e-mail. Each one of them was given two questions to answer. Each one of them is working in a different school and all the schools located in the same city of Mafraq in the north of Jordan. The participants are Jordanian English teachers at secondary schools. We have contacted the participants and we asked for their help in our study. We enlightened them about the purpose of the study and how the data will be analyzed. We assured them about the confidentiality of their identities. After few days from administering the questions they sent us the feedback, we collected the data and started the analysis phase. We made several copies of the data to start the coding process for the main points. Two of us were responsible for coding the data of the first question while the other two coded the main points in the data of the second question after we had finished we switched places, the first two who were responsible for coding the first question recoded the second question and vice versa, this process called the Intercoder Reliability Test, also an expert of

English piloted the questions of our study instrument before administering them to the participantsto ensure the reliability of our data. After we had calculated the percentage of data codes accuracy which was 77% we came up with the upcoming findings.

Finally, each one of the participants received a copy of the findings with a letter of appreciation for their efforts in this study.

IV.   Findings:

There are two main questions for this study:

1.   What are the problems that face the Jordanian students in speaking the English language inside the class room?

2.   What are the strategies used by the Jordanian teachers to motivate their students to speak the English language inside the class room?

The findings included within the answers of the subjects came as the following:

Question 1:

•   The data revealed that one of the most influential factors that causes shyness is students do not participate communicatively because of their fear to appear foolish and the embarrassment they will face if they make mistakes and the effect of the audience pressure on the shy students which will prevent them from participating.

•   There are many pronunciation difficulties faced by the Jordanian students which is caused by the differences in some sounds and syllables between their native language i.e. Arabic and the target language i.e. English, for example, the absence of the 'p' sound in Arabic and the sequence of more than one consonant in a syllable which is a feature in the English language that does not exist in the Arabic language.

•   There is a weakness in the course curriculum in Jordan as it focuses on reading and writing skills more than speaking skill.

•   Moreover, there is a minimum use of target language in daily life.

•   There is a lack in the vocabulary competence among the Jordanian students.

Question 2:

•   The strategies used by the teachers to overcome the shyness problem consists of convincing the students that making mistakes is an evitable aspect in the learning process, moreover to motivate students to cooperate by making classroom environment more intimate.

•   Regarding the weakness in the Jordanian course curriculum, it is advisable to modify the curriculum to have more attention on the speaking skill inside the classroom besides other skills.

•   The strategies used to solve pronunciation problems faced by Jordanian students are to expose students to native like pronunciation and to use different aids (visual and audio), also to clarify and the sounds features of the target language in contrast with their native language.

•   The strategies used by the Jordanian teachers to overcome the lack of vocabulary competence among their students problem include teaching the students in a new useful way in recording vocabularies based on using a small booklet carried around with them all the time and record the new words on a separate sheet to give him the needed space to write sentences that illustrates the use of that particular word and rehearse it.

•   To enable the Jordanian students using the target language inside the classroom and in daily life, a strategy used by the Jordanian teachers to overcome this problem by encouraging their students to discuss daily issues and to interact more efficiently with each other inside the classroom.

V.   Discussion and recommendations:

To conclude and as can be seen from the analysis of the data, students in Jordan face many problems in speaking English inside the classroom. This implies that both teachers and students should have awareness and they should also see these problems as the key to understand and solve these problems. This great number of problems is an indication of how serious the problem is.

Here are some suggested recommendations for this study this study:

1.   We found that the reasons underlies the shyness problem were the students' fear to appear foolish and the embarrassment they will face if they make mistakes and the effect of the audience pressure on the shy students which will prevent them from participating in any activity that requires any encounter with students. The strategies used by the teachers to overcome this problem consists of convincing the students that making mistakes is an evitable aspect in the learning process, moreover to motivate students to cooperate by making classroom environment more intimate.

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2.   In order to overcome the weakness in the course curriculum in Jordan which focuses on reading and writing skills more than speaking skill, it is advisable to modify the curriculum to have more attention on the speaking skill inside the classroom.

3.   There is a reason behind the pronunciation difficulties faced by the Jordanian students which is the differences in some sounds and syllables between their native language and the target language, for example, the absence of the 'p' sound in Arabic and the sequence of more than one consonant in a syllable which is a feature in the English language that does not exist in the Arabic language. The strategies to solve these problems are to expose students to native like pronunciation and by using different aids (visual and audio), also to clarify and the sounds features of the target language in contrast with their native language.

4.   Regarding the lack in the vocabulary competence among the Jordanian students, the strategies used by the Jordanian teachers to solve this problem are teaching the students in a new useful way in recording vocabularies based on using a small booklet carried around with them all the time and record the new words on a separate sheet to give him the needed space to write sentences that illustrates the use of that particular word and rehearse it.

5.   Another problem that disables the students from using the target language inside the classroom is the minimum use of the TR in daily life. The strategy used to overcome this problem is to encourage them to discuss daily issues in order to enhance the communication skills.

VI.   Conclusion:

To conclude and as can be seen from the analysis of the data, students in Jordan face many problems in speaking English inside the classroom. This implies that both teachers and students should have awareness and they should also see these problems as the key to understand and solve these problems. This great number of problems figured out by this study is an indication of how serious the problem is and how important to have solutions for this problem as soon as possible.

The Significance of The Study:

This study may help the Jordanian ministry of education to notice the points of weakness in its English curriculum and in what ways it could be developed to help the students overcome their problems in English.

Also it could help the Jordanian teachers to develop new efficient strategies to motivate their students based on the findings of this study.

Implications for future research:

Our suggestions to the researchers who might conduct researches about this problem in the future are the following:

Researchers could increase the number of the participants and they can expand the scope of their research to include more schools in more than one city. We conducted this study while we are outside Jordan using open-ended questions technique which we think it is the most suitable way to collect data for this study. Researchers in the future recommended to investigate this problem in Jordan which will allow them to use a variety of techniques enabling them to examine the problem more in depth.

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