

## Improving English Speaking Skills at Saba University

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**Abstract:** This paper is intended to find the possible solutions that may help in improving speaking skills of students at English language and translation programs, through effective strategies during teaching and learning. The paper tried to find out answers to following two questions: a. What are the most important speaking skills for students of English language and translation programs? b. What are the effective strategies and techniques that may participate in improving speaking skills for students of English language and translation programs? Through the analysis of related studies and literature the paper collected the most important strategies, activities and techniques that may help in improving speaking abilities of English language students.

**Keywords:** speaking skills, strategies, teaching, learning.

### تطوير مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب جامعة سبأ

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**المستخلص:** هدفت الورقة البحثية إلى إيجاد الحلول الممكنة التي من شأنها أن تساعد في تطوير مهارات التحدث لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية والترجمة وذلك من خلال استخدام وتوظيف الاستراتيجيات المناسبة أثناء التدريس والتعلم. حاولت الورقة الإجابة على السؤالين التاليين: ا. ما أهم مهارات التحدث لطلاب برامج اللغة الإنجليزية والترجمة؟ ب. ما الاستراتيجيات الفعالة التي يمكن أن تساعد في تطوير مهارات التحدث لطلاب برامج اللغة الإنجليزية والترجمة؟ من خلال الاطلاع على عدد من الدراسات والأدبيات السابقة جمعت الورقة البحثية أكثر وأهم الاستراتيجيات والأنشطة التي يمكن أن تساعد في تطوير قدرات ومهارات الطلاب الدراسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مهارات التحدث، الاستراتيجيات، التدريس، التعلم.

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## **Introduction.**

Nowadays, English language becomes the medium of communication in a lot of contexts. As a result, the demand for using English as a foreign language for different purposes is necessary in many countries. In Yemen, English language is very important in many aspects and considered as a foreign language, and it is used for different aims such as: study, diplomacy, academic, career, business, traveling, tourist ... etc.

The process of learning English language consists of the development of certain skills. These skills are divided into two types: productive and receptive. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing and these skills are the most important because they help learners to be active in different communicative contexts. Receptive skills on the other hand can be considered as a complementary.

Speaking skills are important because they are the first means of effective and direct communication.

## **Problem Statement:**

Studying English language should help learners to be fluent with the basic language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teaching English as a foreign language aims to help students to use the four skills in different types of contexts inside and outside the classroom. Most of English language students at Yemeni universities are not able to perform satisfied performance in respect of speaking skills as they should be. So speaking skills improvement should progressively be given greater attention through implementing effective strategies during teaching and learning.

## **Research Questions**

In the current research the following questions are intended to be addressed:

- a. What are the most important speaking skills for students of English language and translation programs?
- b. What are the effective strategies and techniques that may participate in improving speaking skills for students of English language and translation programs?

## **Research Purpose:**

The purpose of the research is to suggest the possible solutions that may help in improving speaking skills of student's performance at English language and translation programs through effective strategies during teaching and learning.

## **Research Significance**

This research tries to define speaking skills and its importance, at the same time this research will try to help English language teachers to know and to use effective strategies and methods in order to improve speaking skills of students at English language and translation departments.

**Speaking Skills:**

To speak a foreign language, means to be able to communicate in different contexts correctly. Speaking skills involve many components, such as grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics and strategy. Speaking skill is an interactive method to convey intention that involves sending and receiving information.

Oral communication contains a lot of sub-skills such as:- Giving and Eliciting Information.- Giving Oral Presentation.- Explanation.- Expressing Opinions and Attitudes.- Talking about the Future (Zuheer, 2008: 13). Speaking considered as a skill, like driving a car, swimming, or playing some types of sports. In the traditional classroom, practicing and using English has been neglected, e.g. knowledge of important vocabulary and related grammar rules, with few or no attention usually paid for practicing and using real language skills.

**Importance of Speaking:**

When professional teachers say that some students are good in using English language, they naturally mean that they are able to speak English well. Learners of English can be evaluated in their proficiency in language learning on the aspects of how well they already improved in their ability to speak the language fluently. Someone's performance in speaking a language measures his/ her proficiency in this type of a foreign language.

English language speaking is a skill that the students can be evaluated on most real-life events. It is very important aspect in deferent types of interactions. Zuheer, (2008: 6) clarifies that learning a foreign language means to be able to communicate effectively in different contexts with ways consistent with the norms and customs of the target language users.

Fluency in speaking skills in English as foreign language is a necessary for all students. Proficiency in speaking becomes one of the four main kills that must be acquired by learners of a language which can be named as communication skill. Anjaniputra, (2013: 2) determines that teaching speaking is having high concern in many language programs and teaching strategies.

Learner of English language needs to use the language and to provide the best conditions in order to be understood. Mejilla; Calero and Salgado, (2014: 21) describe the goal of studying a language as to be able to communicate and the aim of speaking a language as to promote communicative efficiency; and in this case teachers require students to be able to use the real language as correctly as possible in so many contexts.

**Strategies for Developing Speaking Skills:**

The teacher's role can be considered as providing so many effective strategies to meet students' real needs. The teachers' responsibility also to help students speak English in different context through implementing suitable teaching strategies for speaking.

Professional teachers should design and prepare a wide range of speaking and writing activities, in order to attract learners and not to let them bored or to be just silent. Zuheer, (2008: 9) clarifies that teaching speaking skills in a foreign language context is not an easy task rather it puts heavy demands on both the teacher (to prepare and design) and students who should learn these oral skills to communicate with others in the target language (to make a lot practice).

The important role of the teacher is to provide opportunities and chances for all student to participate, interact and communicate using English. Zuheer, (2008: 57) asserts that students need a suitable environment where they can talk not only to their teacher, but also to their peers and friends. The teacher in all classroom should offer a wide range of activities to learners to practice and use the real language and those activities must be related to their abilities, previous knowledge and suitable learning styles. A teacher should prepare and provide students with a suitable environment that help learners develop the real skills, and also to be independent in improving their good achievement.

Here are some good suggestions, methodologies, and activities proposed by different authors and writers for teaching and learning English speaking skills:

**Interviews:** Students can make some types of interviews on selected and suitable topics with various imagined people. Pratama & Awaliyah (2015: 23) introduce some advice related to this point “it’s a good idea for the teacher to provide a rubric to students so that they prepare some types of questions they can ask or what methodology they may follow, and students should prepare their related interview questions. After each interview, each student may present his or her summary to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and introduce his or her partner to the other class”.

**Meaning-focused Speaking:** Attention should be concentrated on the message being communicated. Hossain, (2015: 13) suggests some activities that develops learners’ ability to speak. In this case the teacher should presents new related vocabulary or grammar and then the students are given some practice and drilling. Students start to speak when they work in groups or pairs to prepare the activity. The activity may give learners the opportunity to learn from each other easily. The students are given topics that have connected meaning and easy to be prepared to talk about, then they present what they have prepared in front of others.

**Free oral work:** in this activity learner should be given a chance to talk about any topic freely in order practice using the language. Hossain, (2015: 14) confirms that the aim of the free oral presentation phase is to create such situation and motivate all learners to be actively involved in a communicative way. The stimuli that can be involved such as: visual stimuli – some type of pictures, different maps, cartoon, videos and films or clear photographs that motivate real discussion and communication. Another example of stimulus is written words that may appeared on – magazines, newspapers (they are excellent to develop skill of reporting and delivering), books that are related to their level etc. and there are a lot of oral stimuli such as – videos from internet or CDs.

**Cooperative learning:** this strategy can be described as a successful activity in which small and homogenous teams meet to talk and discuss about a topic, each team include students of different levels and abilities, use a variety of learning activities in order to improve their understanding of a subject and to practice using the language.

In cooperative learning strategy, each member of a team is responsible not only for learning but also for helping classmates to learn and to communicate, through this, it can be found a suitable atmosphere of achievement and practice (Zuheer, 2008: 13). Cooperative activities and strategies can encourage negotiation of language item (Anjaniputra, 2013: 3).

**Student Team Achievement Division (STAD) Strategy:** this strategy is one type of cooperative learning strategies that refers to the procedure or the techniques that a person aims to achieve a planned goal. Zuheer, (2008: 14) describes this strategy as a very adaptable to a wide range of levels and grades. In (STAD) strategy, learners with different academic abilities and skills are assigned to four or five members each team in order to communicate, discuss and study what has been initially taught and designed by the teacher in order to help each student reach the highest level of achievement especially in language use.

**Picture Stories:** in this activity students meet to talk about a detail of a picture to make a story. Hossain, (2015: 17) states that this technique (picture stories) can be used with all levels of learners, particularly those with limited literacy skills or at the beginning of language study. In this technique learners can make a story based on a picture sequences and orders. In this case, learners work collaboratively and communicatively to put the story in the correct order. Once they have finished, they stand in a circle or in front of the whole students to talk and tell the story.

Pratama & Awaliyah, (2015: 23) define picture description as a form of discussion in groups and each group is given a different picture. Each student starts to talk and discuss about the picture with their members in group, and then they choose a reporter or spokesperson for each group to describe the picture for the whole class. This type of activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills and this improve English language usage.

In the activity (talking about pictures), students can work either in groups or in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, such as, picture of a map or picture of boys playing football or picture of girls playing basketball. After brainstorming, students in groups or pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in these pictures (Haji and Jejo, 2020: 16).

This type of activity or technique, that is related to describing and talking about pictures based on several sequential and order, learners are required to talk a lot about a story in English language by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric before that. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use during discussion and communication.

**Controlled and guided oral work:** With controlled oral work, the speaker makes a dialogue, this dialogue can be controlled through specific type of procedures. Hossain, (2015: 14) declares that, guided talk gives students a limited freedom and to practice what they have learnt and to practice what they

already studied. In this phase, making mistakes in learning is taken as positive and a natural part. This strategy is suitable with advanced levels of students.

**Storytelling:** it's a kind of strategy that let a learner to prepare and bring a story to be discussed in details in the classroom. Pratama & Awaliyah (2015: 23) states that, in (storytelling) learners of English language can think about a story that they have read or listened and then they try to repeat the story orally. Students can summarize a tale or a story they have heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to talk and tell their classmates. Storytelling fosters creative thinking and communication. It also helps students to express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting.

To talk about a story, the teacher may prepare and design a suitable and easy story that attract students to discuss about, and after a few sentences he or she stops narrating to let students think about it and to complete the next information. Then, another student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

**Information-gap Activities:** Informational-gap activities are used to practice specific language points and they are also ideal for general fluency practice. The teacher gives assignment to gap information in the picture, gives clue or key word (Hossain, 2015: 17). In information-gap activities, learners are expected to talk and communicate in pairs. Each learner may add or complete the information that other friend does not know and each partners should discuss with others. Information-gap activities achieve many aims for example, solving problems or suggesting new ideas. All members play an important part because the task cannot be achieved if the partners do not suggest the ideas that the others may need.

**Mingle Activities:** these activities involve learners to read a lot about a topic in order to collect information to be delivered in front of students in the class on a given topic. Mingle activities help in maximizing communication, interaction and participation of different level students. Anjaniputra, (2013: 4) describes mingle activities as a method that helps in maximizing communication, interaction and participation of different level students. Mingle Activities should be performed in situations where students can show knowledge, interest, understanding, and ask or answer questions also there will be a chance to make comments, in interactivity atmosphere, and there has to be competitive element, where students work with each other to achieve certain aims.

**Problem Solving:** in this activity, teacher can prepare a problem that needs to be solved in order to communicate and discuss about it, for the purpose of English language use. In this type of activity, it's a chance for learner to study, search, talk and work together to suggest possible solutions for any problem through using only English language.

**Brain Storming:** in this activity, students are given a task or a topic to think about and to produce, talk, and communicate about such steps, definition, characters or specifications. Pratama & Awaliyah (2015: 23) confirm that brainstorming, depends on the context and topic, either as individual or group

brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely to be able to interact through using English language. The good characteristic of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas, so students will be free to share new ideas in English language.

**Drama and Role-play:** drama and role-play in the English classroom setting may give a useful and enjoyable method to practice a language. Students may express themselves in a variety of methods and can be transported into a world of imagination and exaggeration. Sukardi, (2019: 14) states that the use of drama in a language class is a powerful tool. All learners use a range of techniques to promote the exploration of characters, situations and historical events. This process expands the learners' imaginations, and provides them with the ideas they need to talk and communicate in English. Anjaniputra, (2013: 3) confirms that, with role play activities, students are required to pretend to be in various social contexts and various social roles. The teacher gives a good chance to the learners to choose a role or to talk as they think or feel. Thus, the student can express his/her ideas freely in English through imitating a character.

**Reporting:** students are asked to prepare or read a book, article, newspaper or magazine before coming to the class, then they report the summary of the content to their friends about what they have prepared as news or report. Students can also talk about any event or experience that may worth telling and talking to their friends about their daily lives.

**Surveys and Questionnaires:** Students can prepare surveys or questions on specific topics such as study, sleep, match or free time activities, likes and dislikes or bad and good to conduct an interview with other students to talk and interact in English. Guoqiang (2009), describes questionnaires as a simple way of giving students meaningful question and answer practice. They should prepare about a topic, e.g. satisfied and dissatisfied about food, activities, abilities, hopes .. etc. the answer required can be either yes or no, saying more explanation and details, or one of the frequency adverbs (never, ever, sometimes, quite often).

**Simulations:** In simulations, students can bring items to the class to suggest and create a real environment. For example, if a student is acting as a president, she/he brings a microphone to deliver a speech about any economic or political topic (Pratama & Awaliyah 2015: 23).

**Using minimal respond:** English language learners who lack confidence in their ability to talk or participate effectively in oral communication often just listen quietly while others talk. Important way to encourage such learners to begin participation is to help them build up a stock of minimal or short responses that they can use in different types of events and exchanges (Mejilla; Calero and Salgado, 2014: 22).

In any class or group, especially mixed-ability classes and groups, there will be some learners who do not feel confident, stand up or talk and they rather stay silent and prefer only to listen. To encourage those students to talk is to motivate them to think about and prepare a certain amount of minimal or short answers that can be used in different types of communications.

**Recognizing scripts:** in this activity students have a chance to speak English through learning how to greet, ask, answer, invite, complain, pay and other functions may follow specific patterns as they are effected by social and cultural context. Teachers can help learners to understand the content of the scripts in different types of situations, to let the learners to be able to predict and ask or how to answer and reply correctly.

Mejilla; Calero and Salgado, (2014: 22) note that some communication contexts are associated with the expected set of spoken content of a script. Greetings, replying, apologies, invitations, and other functions that are affected by social and cultural norms usually follow specific patterns or scripts. The teacher can help students to improve speaking ability or skills by making them aware of the scripts for different situations, so that they can predict what they will hear and what they will need to say in response.

Most of the teaching speaking activities are described as traditional, such as reading the content, reciting texts, making translation, and most of the contents prepared for learners are non-authentic. For these reasons students usually feel bored. In teaching speaking skills, many teachers concentrate on accuracy more than fluency, which makes students worry too much about their mistakes and errors or prefer to stay just silent and quite. Another problem in our traditional examination system that it doesn't include or evaluate skills related to oral presentations.

**Quizzes:** in teaching speaking skills there has to be a lot of quizzes to be understood and answered correctly, to improve students' knowledge. To implement these written quizzes in oral presentation activities. This will involve talking and also writing. Each pair should then ask another pair of students to answer the quiz orally in English, which involves some talking, listening and writing as well. When the quiz is passed back to the students who write it, they will get reading and talking integrated (Guoqiang, 2009).

During the latter stage or advanced of teaching and learning, students should get acquainted with more specialized vocabulary. With respect to certain factors that may influence the final outcome of the language teaching, the following activities can be used: more complex conversation role-plays with stress on proper grammar structures and extended vocabulary register of certain topics, description of real-life topics and more serious local and global issues in a form of writing tasks, and e.g. oral summary of a recently seen film, read book or heard story (Golkovaa & Hubackovab, 2014: 4).

Finally, it can be stated that through implementing suitable, effective and attractive techniques, activities and strategies, instructor can find authentic and practical environment and this will lead English language learners to interact and participate in various communication contexts.

### **Fluency before Accuracy:**

With speaking English as a foreign language especially at the primary levels, we need to concentrate on fluency more than accuracy to be more communicatively competent. Golkovaa &



Hubackovab, (2014: 3) notify that the idea of language accuracy is very important in reading and writing because there will be a time to think but not the most vital feature in speaking activities. Also, Anjaniputra, (2013: 4) confirms that, instructors need to understand what student needs especially in speaking, from language-based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning, and in this case fluency is more important to encourage the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts.

Instructors of English speaking skills can promote more fluency by doing five things in their classrooms: Encouraging students to go ahead and make constructive or positive mistakes. Creating and finding many opportunities for students to practice using the real language use. Designing activities that help students to focus on getting a message across. Assessing and evaluating student's fluency not their accuracy in English speaking. Talking openly to the students about the importance of fluency in speaking (Zuheer, 2008: 55). Constant interruption to student speaking in front of class can cause the loss of speaking fluency (Anjaniputra, 2013: 5).

Golkovaa & Hubackovab, (2014: 4) determine that the instructor's evaluation should include criteria such as focus on fluency more than accuracy, i.e. clear to somehow, understandable, organization and delivery of the speech, confidence. A good tool to make some information of this kind is to design the evaluation sheet. An interesting idea is revealed when the teacher distributes self-evaluation sheets to his students and to evaluate their performance by themselves. The teacher will discover originally unexpected assessment from his learners when comparing his and the student's evaluations.

At the end of the evaluation period, if there are feedbacks it has be declared in a way that does not stop students' motivating, for instance after students' performance and without pointing out to individual error and mistakes (Anjaniputra, 2013: 4). Fluency is a judgment of this ease of communication and is more important aspect when assessing English speaking skills (Mejilla; Calero and Salgado, 2014: 27). If there is correction, indirect correction is effective because it allows learners to continue in speech regardless of the learning levels and linguistic errors or mistakes (Haji and Jejo, 2020: 16).

At the end, instructor should motivate students to concentrate on fluency more than accuracy in teaching and learning speaking skills. The teacher can support this idea effectively. The most important purpose of speaking classes is to motivate free talking, interaction and communication, then the instructor may play less role just as facilitator and observer to give a chance for learners to speak freely and to use English language through implementing ideas and that is fluency in learning a foreign language.

## **Conclusion.**

Through reviewing related studies and literature, the research concluded with the most effective strategies, techniques, activities and methodologies that may participate in improving speaking skills. The results of speaking courses of most students of English language and translation in Yemeni universities show that they face a lot of difficulties to be fluent especially at the end of the bachelor study. This research may participate in finding some suitable strategies and methodologies in order to improve

speaking skills of English language learners. The purpose of those strategies is to give learners of English language a chance to interact, communicate, and talk in English at least inside classes or at the university environment and this will motivate students to talk in English even outside classrooms. Those techniques and strategies give students enough time in classrooms to speak English and encourage them to communicate just in English. The role of the teacher is very important to think and to find suitable activities, methods, techniques and strategies, in order to guide, supervise, observe and help learners to try to become more fluent communicators in English. As English teachers at university level, we hope to keep thinking about how to find and create more effective methods, strategies, activities and techniques in order to improve speaking abilities of our students at least in the advanced levels.

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