
Investigating Speaking Skill's Problems and Difficulties that Encounter Secondary Schools' Students in Riyadh City

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the Speaking Skill's Problems and Difficulties that Encounter Secondary Schools' Students in Saudi Arabia in Riyadh City. The scope of the study was in the area of the applied linguistics. The objectives of this study were: to investigate the difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English, to draw teachers' attention to the importance of speaking skills, to encourage speaking skill among the students, and to offer recommendations that might help teachers and students to overcome and reduce these speaking problems and difficulties. The study has adopted the descriptive analytical method. The sample of the study consisted of (20) male teachers in Riyadh city in the second semester of the academic year 1437 / 1438 H. A questionnaire was designed as a tool to collect the data. The study used a recent statistical package to analyze the data. The results indicated Saud secondary schools students face problems and difficulties in speaking skill. To conclude, the researcher gives the following recommendations: English text books should be well prepared to motivate and encourage students to speak the language and they should be given enough time to practice speaking skills, schools should be provided with language labs or at least with some educational techniques, so as to introduce classroom communication activities in good and interesting manners, and teachers should offer extra speaking skill activities in order to enable students to speak fluently.

Keywords: investigating, speaking skill, encounter, syllabuses

1. Introduction:

English is an important language in the world. It has become the international language of communication (Seidlhofer, 2005, cited in Abduh Ali Al-ma'shy, 2011). "Of the 4,000 to 5,000 living languages, English is by far the most widely used" (Broughton et al., 1978, p.1). It is considered the first language in many countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. In other countries, English is considered a second or foreign language. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, English is regarded as a foreign language and is generally treated as an academic subject in schools. In most cases, English is not the medium of teaching and learning, and is not widely used outside the classroom. Most English teachers concentrate on improving reading and writing skills and do not take into account the importance of speaking and listening skills. In other words, teaching the oral skills in Saudi schools is mostly ignored.

There are many problems and difficulties associated with teaching English as a foreign or second language. These problems are generally concerned with accuracy and fluency, and most learners are not satisfied with their speaking and listening skills.

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Definition of Speaking Skill:

Speaking is the process of how to build and share the meaning between two or more through using verbal and non-verbal symbols, and this can be used in a variety of context. So, speaking is the most important of the four language skills in second language learning and teaching because student nowadays perceive communication with others as being so important and they realize the fact that this may open more opportunities for them to get acquainted with different culture.

Tarigan (1990, pp.3-4) defines that speaking is a language skill that can be developed in a child life and he can acquire it by listening, and at that period a child can learn to speak very well.

According to Competence Based Curriculum, speaking is one of the four basic competences that students should gain well. It has an important role in communication.

Speaking is the productive skill. It could not be separated from listening.

When we speak we produce the text and it should be meaningful. In the nature of communication, we can find the speaker, the listener, the message and the feedback.

Mastering English language needs to master the entire skills. Speaking skill occupied an important place in foreign language teaching and learning, as argued by Nunan, (1989, p.39):

“To most people, mastering the art of speaking is the single most important factor of learning a second or foreign language and success is measured in terms of ability to carry out a conversation in the language.”

Speaking is an active or productive skill deserves more attention in both first and foreign language because it reflects people’s thought and personalities. In fact, we judge people according to their speaking skill.

Hedge, (2000) views that speaking is:

“Skill which they are judge while first impressions are being formed” (p.261). In addition, speaking is skill whereby others are recognized from what they are saying and how they are thinking, so it demands special care like other language skills.

2.3. The importance of Speaking:

For many people, the ability to speak in English is so important. It has often been viewed as the most demanding of other four skills. For that, we frequent ask the question “Do you speak English?” to foreign language learners rather than asking them “Do you write in English?” The question shows the importance of speaking as skill because mastering this skill means mastering other skills as Ur, (1996, p.12) states “of all four skills, speaking seems constitutively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as “speaker of the language, as if speaking included all other kind of knowing”.

Speaking skills demand from the students to be skilled in other language skills. Therefore, with speaking, students can improve their writing skill and develop their vocabulary and grammar. In addition, a good speaker needs a good listener to improve his/her oral skill. For instance, EFL learners can express themselves, argue, give opinions, ask request and do other functions of language. So far, speaking is very important inside and outside the classroom as well as speaking is a complex process whereby people sending and receiving message verbally or none verbally.

There are many difficulties that face students in practicing the speaking skill., the first one attributed to the psychological factors which affect the learners when they are speak, and some other refer to the teachers who deal with the learners, and others refer to the learners themselves and others to the environment. The great difference between the native language and second language, affects in oral communication as the researcher has found some learners feel shy and others afraid to make mistake during speaking process.

Speaking gives learners confidence and therefore to obtain wider interest in the language, and helps learners to communicate across the boundaries of dialect and pronunciation. Many researchers have discussed the skills of language but the present study attempts to investigate the Speaking Difficulties that Encounter Secondary Schools' Students in Saudi Arabia in Riyadh City. It focuses on determining the significant factors that contribute to the inability of secondary school students to speak English. In addition, the researcher tries to present the most important speaking difficulties that face secondary school students. Finally, the study provides recommendations aimed at improving students' oral skill.

There are many sub-skills under the heading of "speaking skill" such as pronunciation and fluency. In fact, Brown (1994 as cited in cited in Abduh Ali Al-ma'shy, 2011) suggests that speaking might include the following skills:

1. Producing the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language.
2. Using grammar structures accurately.
3. Assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives.
4. Selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs.
5. Applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener comprehension.
6. Using gestures or body language.
7. Paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammatical structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement.

Furthermore, Richards and Schmidt (2002) discuss the characteristics of an effective speech act. They say that an effective speech act should involve a combination of four competencies: grammatical competence (grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and semantics), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness, pragmatics, and role relationship), discourse competence (speech events, cohesion, and coherence), and strategic competence (knowledge of strategic competence to compensate weakness).

3. Significance of the study:

This study is considered and extremely important for many factors:

- 1-The results of this study will help EFL teachers in terms of diagnosing speaking difficulties and remedying them.
- 2-The results of this study will also help curricula designers to design syllabuses that are particularly applicable for teaching speaking skills.
- 3-This study will draw the teachers' attention to the importance of speaking skill and the great role that it plays in communication between people.

4. Problem statement:

Teaching English in Saudi Arabia started in the late 1950s. Currently, Saudi students begin to study English when they reach fourth grade of the elementary level. According to (Mofarreh 2005, cited in Abduh Ali Al-ma'shy, 2011), the goal of teaching speaking is to improve the students' ability to communicate. This is necessary for the students to be able to express themselves, communicate with English speakers, and to improve their understanding and respect for the culture of other nations. Moreover, Dosari (1992) says that EFL is taught in order to enable students to communicate with other English speakers and to offer them a window on the world. However, by the time they are at secondary schools, students still face a lot of problems when speaking English, one of these problems is that the Saudi English syllabus does not encourage speaking since it mostly emphasizes reading. Not only that, but the students also lack interest in the language which leads to minimum concentration during class time. Without forgetting the fact that they also lack the opportunity to practice their speaking skills outside class since the society speaks mostly Arabic language. In addition to that, the students also lack motivation through competitions such as debates, quizzes, essay writing, radio and television talk shows, news reading competitions, etcetera so as to create interest and opportunity to practice speaking skills. And lastly, most teachers are not well versed with English pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary so as to enable smooth running of the lessons and increase both input and output.

5. Objectives of the study:

From the above mentioned problems the main objectives of this study are:

- 1-To investigate the difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English.
- 2-To draw teachers' attention to the importance of speaking skills.
- 3-To encourage speaking skill among the students.
- 4-To offer recommendations that might help teachers and students to overcome and reduce these speaking difficulties.

6. Questions of the study:

This study aims to answer the following question:

- 1-What are the main reasons behind the speaking problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi Secondary schools' students in speaking?
- 2-How can English language teachers overcome these problems and difficulties?

7. Limitations of the study:

This study will be limited to investigate the Speaking Skill's Problems and Difficulties that Encounter Secondary Schools' Students in Riyadh City. The study is also restricted to all secondary school English Language male teachers in Riyadh city and the sample is (20 teachers) in the academic year 1437 - 1438 H.

8. Methodology of the Study:

This section describes the study design, participants, and data collection procedures. The main objectives of this study are to investigate the difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English in Riyadh city. The study also seeks to draw teachers' attention to the importance of speaking skills, to encourage speaking skill among the students and to offer recommendations that might help teachers and students to overcome and reduce these speaking difficulties.

8.1. Design:

Robson (1997) stated that the design of self-completed questionnaires for researches is likely to have advantages such as low cost of collecting data and self-completion questionnaire can be cheaper regarding data processing and offer a simple descriptive information.

8.2. Study population and Sampling:

The population of this study is all English Language male teachers in Riyadh city. The sample used in this study consists of twenty English language male teachers, chosen randomly from the Saudi English

language teachers who have long experience and teach English as a second or foreign language in The Saudi secondary Schools especially in Riyadh city.

8.3. Data collection

8.3.1. The instruments:

The instrument which was used in this research as a tool to collect data was a questionnaire for the English language male teachers the subjective questionnaire is used. The questionnaire is consisted of ten items so as to achieve the objectives of the study (SEE APENDIX 1). In addition to the personal information of the participants which consists of age, gender, academic qualification and teaching experience. The researcher thinks that the questionnaire is the most valuable and suitable data collecting method, so it is distributed to teachers in different schools in Riyadh. The study will help to obtain reliable data that will lead to reasonable results and findings by the end of the study.

8.3.2. Validity of the questionnaire:

The questionnaire was shown to a panel of three university professors and two English Language supervisors to ensure the validity and their comments and recommendations were taken into consideration before editing the final version.

8.3.3. Reliability of the questionnaire:

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. Colin Phelan *et al*, (2005-06). Reliability study was carried out to assess the internal consistency of the tool. The study participants consisted of 20 male teachers. The internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of items within tool construct was good with alpha ranging from 0.79 to alpha = 0.82. The reliability of the tool was high (0.82). (SEE APPENDIX 2)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.816	10

8.3.4. The Procedure:

The questionnaire was distributed to twenty male teachers who teach English language as a foreign or second language. They answered the questionnaire's questions according to their point of view by choosing from; strongly agree, agree, uncertain, strongly disagree, and disagree. The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed the data of the questionnaire.

9. Results and discussion:

Participants:

The participants of this study were twenty English language male teachers chosen randomly from the Saudi English language teachers who have long experience and teach English as a second or foreign

language in the Saudi secondary Schools especially in Riyadh city. As shown in the below table that the majority of the teachers aged 40 to 49 years old (40%) and 30% aged 50 to 60 years , while the younger ones represent 20% out of the total of teachers (aged 20 to 29 years) but 10% of the teachers aged 30 to 39 years. Half of the study sample (50%) have a BA as an academic qualification, while 30% have more than two academic qualifications (BA, Higher Diploma and MA), as well as there are 20% of the participants have more than one academic qualification (BA, Higher Diploma). Regarding teaching experience of the study participants, the results of this study revealed that half of them have many years of teaching experience (more than ten years) in addition to that there are 20% with ten years of teaching experience, similarly there are 20% of the participants with two years of teaching experience. However, 10% of the study participants have one year of teaching experience.

Table 1. The distribution of sample according to their personal information

Independent variables		Frequency	Percent
Age	20-29 yrs	4	20.0
	30-39 yrs	2	10.0
	40-49 yrs	8	40.0
	50-60 yrs	6	30.0
	Total	20	100.0
Academic qualification	BA	10	50.0
	23	4	20.0
	234	6	30.0
	Total	20	100.0
Teaching Experience	One year	2	10.0
	Two years	4	20.0
	Ten years	4	20.0
	More than ten years	10	50.0
	Total	20	100.0

Research question (1):

1) What are the main reasons behind the speaking problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi Secondary schools' students in speaking?

All data were examined in order to answer the research questions about difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English in Riyadh city. The current study underline the reasons behind the speaking problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi Secondary schools' students in speaking. So the first question of the current study was answered in light of the results in table (2):

Table 2. Difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English

Statements	SA		A		U		D		SD		Mean	SD
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
The English textbook does not include enough speaking activities so as to encourage students to speak.	15	75.0	5	25.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.75	3 SA 0.44
Most teachers don't pay attention with English pronunciation, grammar, and Vocabulary.	10	50.0	7	35.0	3	15.0	-	-	-	-	4.35	6 SA 0.75
One of the main causes of these problems and difficulties is that the students lack the opportunity to practice their speaking skills outside class.	14	70.0	6	30.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.70	4 SA 0.47
The speaking skill activities enable students to speak fluently.	17	85.0	3	15.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.85	2 SA 0.37
Students can improve their speaking skill through involvement in real communication activities	17	85.0	3	15.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.85	2 SA 0.37
Lack of language laboratories affect negatively in speaking skill	14	70.0	6	30.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.70	4 SA 0.47
Lack of adequate vocabulary makes speaking English difficult for the students.	19	95.0	1	5.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.95	1 SA 0.22

The differences between Arabic and English sound systems make speaking English difficult for the students.	5	25.0	12	60.0	3	15.0	-	-	-	-	3.80	7 A	1.28
Students do not want to speak English in the classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes.	7	35.0	13	65.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.35	5 SA	0.49
Students do not speak English in the classroom because their classmates will laugh at them if they make mistakes.	4	20.0	9	45.0	5	25.0	0	0.0	2	10.0	3.65	8 A	1.14
Overall average											4.50SA		0.42

NB: SA= strongly agree, A=Agree, U=uncertain, D= Disagree, SD=strongly disagree

As shown in table (2) that almost all the responses of the study participants towards difficulties and the problems that face secondary school students in speaking English ranged between Strongly Agree and Agree. And the highest mean of teachers' responses was that of 4.95 (SD=.22). The analysis of the data illustrate that all of the study participants (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that lack of adequate vocabulary makes speaking English difficult for the students.

Furthermore, all the study participants (100%) agreed or strongly agreed to the following statements as a main reasons behind the speaking problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi Secondary schools' students in speaking:

- 1-The English textbook does not include enough speaking activities so as to encourage students to speak
- 2-Lack of language laboratories affect negatively in speaking skill
- 3-Students lack the opportunity to practice their speaking skills outside class.
- 4-Students do not want to speak English in the classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes.
- 5-Most teachers don't pay attention with English pronunciation, grammar, and Vocabulary

However, the study participants where only agreed (not strongly) that (*The differences between Arabic and English sound systems make speaking English difficult for the students*) and (*Students do not speak English in the classroom because their classmates will laugh at them if they make mistakes*)

Research question (2):

2) *How can English language teachers overcome these problems and difficulties?*

Regarding this question, the results of the current study revealed that 85% of the teachers agreed and strongly agree that to overcoming the problems and difficulties behind the speaking problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi Secondary schools' students in speaking teachers must pay more attention with English pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

10. Conclusion

This study dealt with the speaking skill problems and difficulties that encounter Saudi secondary school students and suggests how these problems and difficulties can be solved.

10.1. Findings

The results of this study approximately accept all the hypotheses of the study. Testing hypotheses of the current study revealed that the Saudi students encounter problems and difficulties in speaking skills because students don't involve in real communication activities so as to improve their speaking skill. Moreover, the English textbook does not include enough speaking activities so as to encourage students to speak. Add to that lack of language laboratories, and finally the students lack the opportunity to practice their speaking skills outside class.

10.2. Recommendations:

- 1-English text books should be well prepared to motivate and encourage students to speak the language and they should be given enough time to practice speaking skills.
- 2-Schools should be provided with language labs or at least with some educational techniques, so as to introduce classroom communication activities in good and interesting manners.
3. Teachers should offer extra speaking skill activities in order to enable students to speak fluently.

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الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي المشاكل والصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب المدارس الثانوية في مهارة التحدث في المملكة العربية السعودية في مدينة الرياض. وقد انحصر نطاق هذه الدراسة في مجال اللغويات التطبيقية. وكانت أهداف هذه الدراسة هي: تقصي الصعوبات والمشاكل التي تواجه طلاب المدارس الثانوية في مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية، ولفت انتباه المعلمين إلى أهمية مهارات التحدث، وتشجيع مهارة التحدث لدى الطلاب، وتقديم التوصيات التي قد تساعد المعلمين والطلاب في التغلب على مشاكل وصعوبات التحدث والحد منها. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. تكونت عينة الدراسة من (20) معلماً في مدينة الرياض في الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الدراسي 1437/1438. وقد تم تصميم استبانة كأداة لجمع البيانات. استخدمت الدراسة الحزم الإحصائية الحديثة لتحليل البيانات. أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن طلاب المدارس الثانوية يواجهون مشاكل وصعوبات في مهارة التحدث وفي الختام أوصى الباحث بالاتي: علي مصممي المناهج اعداد الكتب الدراسية بشكل جيد لتحفيز وتشجيع الطلاب على تحدث اللغة، وينبغي أن يمنحوا الوقت الكافي لممارسة مهارات التحدث ، ينبغي تزويد المدارس بمختبرات لغوية أعلى الأقل ببعض التقنيات لتعليمية، وذلك لإدخال أنشطة التواصل في الفصول الدراسية بطريقة جيدة ومثيرة للاهتمام ، واخير ينبغي على المعلمين تقديم نشاطات اضافية في مهارات التحدث لتمكين الطلاب من التحدث بطلاقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقصي، مهارة التحدث، تواجه، المناهج