



Problems of English Speaking Skill that University Students Encounter from Their Perspectives

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Author's contribution

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ABSTRACT

A language is a group of skills which ultimately lead to a communication between individuals. Speaking skill is considered as the most important means of communication. For this reason the study aims at finding out the problems that the students of southern region universities in Jordan encounter in English speaking skill. The population of the study consists of the students of Mu'ta university, Al-Husein Bin Talal university, and Tafila Technical university. The sample consists of (239) male and female students. The instrument includes 27 items divided into 4 domains. The results indicated that there are statistically significant differences to the variable of university for all the domains of speaking problems. Those differences were in favor of Tafila Technical University. The results also indicated that there are statistically significant differences at level ($P = .05$) attributed to the variable of gender definitely in social domain, where females were mostly affected than males in English language speaking skill.

Keywords: Dialogue; speaking skill; problems; Universities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When we talk about English Language (EL), it seems to be that we are talking about the major window by which we get the whole view of the world since it is the first language used in most areas of life. One of the most important skill of this language that leads to effective communication between people is speaking skill. Bygate [1] argues: that "Speaking skill is the ability in using oral language to explore ideas, intentions, thoughts and feelings to other people as a way to make the message clearly delivered and well understood by the listeners.

Khamkhien [2] believed that speaking skill is the most important in a second language.

So; most people who learn English Language have in their minds that they like to master the goal of developing the proficiency in speaking skill though it is a difficult task.

Celce-Murcia and Olshtain [3] pointed out that in some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire as it requires command of speech production sub-skills like vocabulary retrieval, choice of grammatical patterns, and sociocultural competence.

The linguists tried to find an appropriate method for teaching English Language according to the importance of skills from their Perspectives.

The views of those who interested in methods of teaching a language were various. For example, in grammar translation method, the concentration was on reading and writing skills whereas, in Direct method the focus is on speaking and listening. The supporters of each method believed that the skills were vary according to their importance. Anyhow, they all agreed that any skill is developed through practice, that is (read to read, speak to speak.....etc).

Wongsuwana [4] believed that speaking skill can be trained and it does not depend on the talent.

The linguists and experts of languages wrote many articles and books pertaining the difficulties of learning foreign languages in general and speaking skill in particular. In Jordan, the students start learning the skills of English Language from the first year of school (grade 1) extending to the last year of school (grade 12).

From my experience as a teacher of English Language for thirty years in the Ministry of

Education in Jordan, I noticed that the students in general do not have the desire to study English Language and this could be clear on the days of the General Secondary Exam of English Language. This may refer to factors that students suffer from.

Mueen [5] stated that there are several factors which affect students' performance in speaking English fluently; such as, lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary, shyness, nervous, fearful to speak, and lack of confidence. Harry [6] stated that "anxiety and depression are just two effective factors that contribute to learning difficulties or are the result of learning difficulties. The impact of persistent failure can adversely affect a pupil's self-esteem, confidence, perceived self-efficacy, attitude and motivation. When confronted by certain tasks pupils may develop anxious feelings, fearing they will fail."

Biber [7] believed that some academic speaking skills such as giving an oral presentation or participating in classroom discussion require a much broader range of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical sophistication and discourse competence than is the case with typical daily life conversation.

Brown [8] listed six possible task categories for the classroom speaking performance as follows:

1. Imitative
2. Intensive
3. Responsive
4. Transactional (dialogue)
5. Interpersonal (dialogue)
6. Extensive (monologue).

Ur [9] stated the factors that affect speaking skill as follows:

1. "Inhibition. Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy.
2. Nothing to say. Students have no motive to express themselves.
3. Low or uneven participation. Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.
4. Mother-tongue use. Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue."

The study aims at investigating the problems that students encounter in speaking skill through answering the following question:

- 1- What are the problems that the students of southern region universities in Jordan encounter in English Language speaking skill from their perspectives?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences attributed to the variables of university, gender, and the academic level of the student and the interaction between the variables?

The study is limited to the students of faculties of art/ English Language specialization in the three public universities (Mu'ta, Al-Husein Bin Talal, and Tafila Technical University). The result generalization will be limited upon the subjectivity and precise of the responses of the sample and the psychometric of the instruments measurement.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

Researchers, linguists, experts, and those who interest in languages conducted many articles and wrote many books pertaining languages learning in general and speaking skill in particular and the difficulties encounter learners in a foreign language. Unfortunately; the problem is still available.

Goddard [10] indicated in his study that the environment and the personal characteristics of learners play an important role in their academic success. The school personnel, members of the families and communities provide help and support to students for the quality of their academic performance. This social assistance has a crucial role for the accomplishment of performance goals of students at school.

Dil [11] in his study reported that anxiety and unwillingness during the English speaking process are considered two of the biggest obstacles for EFL learners. Anxiety and unwillingness are caused by the fear of being negatively evaluated when making mistakes, particularly in front of their friends. It also revealed that students who perceive their English as "poor" feel more anxious and are more unwilling to communicate in English classes than the other students perceiving their English level as "very good, good, and OK."

Hamad [12] in the findings of her study indicated some factors that affect students' speaking skill such as, using Arabic Language in class, students fear of speaking English Language in public, instructors do not use strategies

that develop speaking as role-play and debates.

Adayleh [13] in her study indicated that: "The problem is mainly reported in issues like sound recognition, connected speech, and the relation between spelling and sounds. This is clearly noticed when examining their performance in English. For example, they fail to assign stress properly and reflect content by intonation. They may even change sound quality. Mistakes in pronunciation that hinder meaning or change it are classified as bad pronunciation".

"Teaching strategies also contribute to this problem as they are inadequate, and they do not put emphasis on speaking, which results in a meager development of this skill. Besides, vocabulary items are taught in isolation, and listening materials are not used by the majority of school teachers because of the large number of teachers compared with the number of cassettes available. Teacher-training programs were found to be not very successful in changing the teachers' methodology" [14].

Aftat [15] believes that motivation is a product of good teaching. In his further explanation, He emphasizes that to motivate students to learn well and actively communicate in English, teachers should have passion, creativity and interest in their students. In other words, students motivation is really influenced by the teachers teaching performance. Therefore, it is important that teachers also show enthusiasm in their teaching performance.

Fahad [16] indicated that: "Saudi students find it inappropriate to speak in class because of their fear to be seen as verbally challenging their teachers' views openly and publicly. Even when they do, they speak a little. This leads to frustration on the side of the teacher, in addition to the absence of any clear feedback from the students: whether they have understood the lecture or not".

Lin I. [17] conducted a study choosing (213) university students as a sample for his study. The results indicated the problems that students encounter in speaking skill. The most common problem was mental representation. Other problems were, recognizing the sounds or words they read or hear, interpreting the intended word meanings, grasping main ideas, understanding metaphor, idioms or slang, identifying sentence structure.

Mahdi [18] concluded in his qualitative study that the problems of speaking skill that students encounter are, lack of practice, lack of confidence, anxiety, and shyness. The results also indicated that most students desire to learn how to speak English well and are willing to interact with others in English Language in the classroom.

3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

For the increased need of using English Language in different areas of life, it becomes necessary for every person to be able to communicate with other persons outside his country using (EL). Through my teaching EL in Jordanian Ministry of Education for thirty years and instructor of EL in different universities, I noticed that students suffer from using English Language fluently and accurately which indicates that there are problems which hinder them from mastering English Language skills in general and speaking skill in particular.

4. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The results of the study could be beneficial for the instructors of universities, teachers at schools, students, parents, and local communities, to find solutions for the problems that the students encounter in English Language speaking skill.

5. LIMITATIONS

The results of the study could be limited by the following:

- 1- The study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016.
- 2- The sample of the study consisted of students of Mu'ta University, Al-Husein Bin Talal University, and Tafila Technical University in the southern region of Jordan.
- 3- The results are limited According to psychometric characteristics of the study tools and the study sample validity in in answering the items of the questionnaire.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Population and Sampling

The population of the study consists of the students of faculties of arts in the three state universities in southern region of Jordan as Table 1 shows:

Table 1. Population of the study

University	Male	Female	Total
Mu'ta University	115	291	406
Al-Husein Bin Talal University	106	278	384
Tafila Technical University	97	174	271
Total	318	743	1061

The sample of the study consisted of (239) students male and female which forms (22% of the population). The sample was chosen randomly from the students of Art Faculties who are specialized in English Language in the three universities. The compulsory courses of English Language and the academic levels from the first year until the fourth year were also chosen randomly as Table 2 shows:

Table 2. The sample distribution according to university and gender

University	Male	Female	Total
Mu'ta university	23	71	94
Al-Husein Bin Talal university	24	55	79
Tafila Technical university	18	48	66
Total	65	174	239

6.2 Instrument

After reviewing the related literature, the researcher developed an instrument consists of three parts. The first part includes personal information, whereas the second one includes 27 items divided into 4 domains (psychological, instructor, social, and linguistic domains). Every responder has to express the degree of his agreement for each item. The items were scaled.

According to Likert five point scale as follows (strongly agree 5 points, agree 4 points, neutral 3 points, disagree 2 points, strongly disagree 1 point).The following classification was adopted to express the degree of the effect (1-2.33 low, 2.34-3.67 mid, 3.68-5 high). The third part is for the notes of the responders.

6.3 Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was showed to a jury of experts and specialists in this area. After taking their notes, the instrument was modified and adopted as a final copy.

6.4 Reliability of the Study

Reliability was checked using internal consistency, which measures the correlation between items of the instrument using Cronbach α equation. Table 3 represents the findings.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha for the reliability of the study

Domain	Cronbach's alpha	No. of items
Psychological domain	0.759	8
Instructor domain	0.702	8
Social domain	0.724	5
Linguistic domain	0.803	6
The whole instrument	0.822	27

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first question, (what are the problems that the students of southern region universities in Jordan encounter in English Language speaking skill from their perspectives?) means and standard deviations were used for the domains and items of the instrument as Table 4 shows.

The figures in Table 4 indicate that the problems relating to social aspects were with high effect on learning English speaking skill. The other problems relating to psychological, instructor, and linguistic domains were with mid effect in learning English speaking skill.

According to the items of social domain, it is clear that item (1) which states (lack of English language conversation at home) with a mean of (4.083) and item (3) which states (a criticism for who speaks English language from surrounding people) with a mean of (4.037), those two items were the most which cause problems for speaking skill in the social domain. These results agree with [10] study.

Regarding psychological domain, it was clear from the figure of item (6) which runs (I feel with anxiety when I try to speak in English language) was that most important problem with a mean of (3.677) followed by the items of lack of motivation, feeling confused, lack of interesting, and feeling shy when using English language speaking. This result meets with [11,15,12,18], studies.

For the domain of the instructor, item (6) which states (the teacher uses his native language during his speech with students) was the most effective problem in English language speaking skill. This meets with [12], study. The results of this study disagrees with [18] study regarding to the desire, or willingness of speaking English Language.

Finally, pertaining the linguistic domain, item (1) which states (I lack for vocabularies) and item (5) which runs (I feel weak in English language grammar), were the important problems in

English language speaking. The results agree with [13] and [17] studies.

For answering question number two (Are there statistically significant differences attributed to the variables of university, gender, and the academic level (MANOVA) was used as Table 5 shows.

The results indicated that there are statistically significant differences to the variable of university for all the domains of speaking problems those differences were in favor of Tafila Technical University.

The figures show that there are statistically significant differences at level ($P = .05$) attributed to the variable of gender definitely in social domain, where females were most affected than males in English language speaking.

According to the academic level, it is obvious that there are statistically significant differences at level ($P = .05$) which indicate that levels the students of third and fourth year were most affected in social domain when compared with first and second year levels.

Regarding the interaction between the variables, it is found that there is an effect for the interaction between the university and the gender of students in social domain.

There is also an effect for the interaction between the university, gender, and academic level in psychological domain for English language speaking skill.

The results of the study indicated that the students' learning speaking skill is affected by the following: social psychological, instructor, and linguistic problems arranged successively. It is clear that the social problems are the most effective ones and this could be due to the students mother language which is Arabic language and it is the means of communication between the members of the family and society as well. So; it seems to be surprising to find a person who speaks English and if that happens it will be ridicule and censure from others, so that; the goal of English speaking skill is just in learning which takes place inside the classroom for the purposes of evaluation and tests. The social problems reflected their effects on psychological problems where learning and practicing speaking motivation were descended in addition to feeling with shy, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and the fear from making errors while speaking which lead to weak learning of speaking skill.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for the domains and items of the instrument

Domain	No.	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree of effect
Psychological domain	1	I lack for interesting in English speaking skill	3.313	1.252	mid
	2	I lack for wish in English speaking skill	2.979	1.227	mid
	3	I feel shy when I speak in English language	3.054	1.328	mid
	4	I feel confused when I speak in English language	3.489	1.215	mid
	5	I lack for motivation to speak in English language	3.497	1.184	mid
	6	I feel with anxiety when I try to speak in English language	3.677	1.199	mid
	7	I hesitate when I try to speak English language to avoid making errors	3.050	1.235	mid
	8	I lack for confidence when I try to speak English language	3.251	1.248	mid
	Average		3.489	0.665	mid
Instructor domain	1	The teacher listens carefully to the students speech to understand their errors	3.636	1.176	mid
	2	The teacher understands the language skills well	3.205	1.245	mid
	3	The teachers' speech is appropriate to the level of students	3.698	1.100	high
	4	The teacher tolerates the students' errors	3.497	1.208	mid
	5	The teacher reinforce the students when they speak in English language	3.313	1.102	mid
	6	The teacher uses his native language during his speech with students	3.171	1.155	mid
	7	The teacher applies the way of pairs and groups for his students in speaking English language	3.343	1.166	mid
	8	The teacher varies his methods in teaching English speaking skill	4.050	1.183	High
	Average		3.489	0.665	mid
Social domain	1	Lack of English language conversation at home	4.083	1.093	high
	2	Lack of English language conversation at home	3.661	1.222	mid
	3	A criticism for who speaks English language from surrounding people	4.037	1.127	high
	4	Lack of opportunities in meeting native speakers of English language	3.899	1.155	Mid
	5	Lack of holding course from local society associations in English language speaking skill	3.581	1.141	mid
	Average		3.852	0.708	high
Linguistic domain	1	I lack for vocabularies	3.468	1.169	mid
	2	I feel weak in constructing sentences	3.280	1.202	mid
	3	I feel weak in correct pronunciation	3.276	1.276	mid
	4	It is difficult for me to comprehend the accent of the native speaker of English language	3.259	1.334	mid
	5	I feel weak in English language grammar	3.359	1.275	mid
	6	I feel weak in understanding the expressions and concepts of English language	2.552	1.266	mid
	Average		3.199	0.891	mid

Table 5. Tests of between- subjects effects

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Means square	F	Sig.
University	Psychological domain	5.020	2	2.510	6.106	.003
	Instructor domain	5.020	2	2.510	6.106	.003
	Social domain	4.149	2	3.574	8.020	.000
	Linguistic domain	5.169	2	2.584	3.405	.035
	average total	5.408	2	2.704	11.980	.000
gender	Psychological domain	.199	1	.199	.484	.487
	Instructor domain	.199	1	.199	.484	.487
	Social domain	2.303	1	2.303	5.167	.024
	Linguistic domain	.039	1	.038	.049	.824
	average total	1.030	1	1.030	4.564	.034
Level	Psychological domain	.300	1	.300	.731	.394
	Instructor domain	.300	1	.300	.731	.394
	Social domain	3.311	1	3.311	7.428	.007
	Linguistic domain	.557	1	.557	.733	.393
	average total	.357	1	.357	1.580	.210
University * gender	Psychological domain	1.106	2	.553	1.345	.263
	Instructor domain	1.106	2	.553	1.345	.263
	Social domain	2.878	2	1.439	3.229	.041
	Linguistic domain	.038	2	.019	.025	.975
	average total	.484	2	.242	1.071	.344
University * level	Psychological domain	.113	2	.057	.137	.872
	Instructor domain	.113	2	.057	.137	.872
	Social domain	.774	2	.387	.869	.421
	Linguistic domain	3.738	2	1.869	2.462	.088
	average total	.404	2	.202	.896	.410
gender* level	Psychological domain	.085	1	.085	.206	.650
	Instructor domain	.085	1	.085	.206	.650
	Social domain	1.033	1	.1033	2.317	.129
	Linguistic domain	.178	1	.178	.235	.628
	average total	.445	1	.445	1.970	.162
University * gender * level	Psychological domain	3.030	2	1.515	3.686	.027
	Instructor domain	3.030	2	1.515	3.686	.027
	Social domain	.196	2	.098	.220	.802
	Linguistic domain	.536	2	.268	.353	.703
	average total	.027	2	.014	.060	.942

Regarding to the instructor, it is clear that most of them concentrate on teaching grammar, reading, writing more than teaching speaking. They also use the native language (Arabic language) which impedes learning speaking skill. In addition to what Mentioned, the difficulty that teacher encounter in evaluating speaking skill. Learning speaking skill is affected with linguistic skills, so the lack of vocabularies that the students possess and the weakness of mastering language grammar cause a defect in learning speaking skill .The reason for that is, teachers of English Language teach vocabulary in isolation not in situations

8. CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that the students of the three universities were suffering from many problems in possessing English Language speaking skill, definitely those relating to social, psychological, and the instructor domains, in addition to linguistic domain.

It also concluded that the student, teacher and instructor, parents, and community are responsible for the weakness of students in English speaking skill , and they have to work together in order to solve the problems that students encounter. However attention should be given for female students since they face many obstacles in possessing speaking skill by encouraging and motivating them to participate in learning English speaking skill.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Instructors should cocentrate on speaking skillas well as other skills.
- 1- Students should practice speaking skill regardless the critisizm, shy, unwillingness, and anxiety they may face.
2. The decision makers in Ministry of Education should give additional care in speaking skill at schools.
3. Courses in English speaking skill should be held for students at schools and even at universities.
4. Teachers should not use Arabic language for a long time in the classroom.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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