

Reasons for Negligence of Testing Students English Language Orally at the Secondary Level

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at investing the reasons for negligence of testing students orally at the secondary level. The study is based on a descriptive analytic method. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire for teachers of English language of secondary schools in Gezira Southern locality. The participants in this study were 50 English language teachers from Gezira southern locality. The findings of the study showed that insufficient time and large classes contributed to the negligence of oral testing. In addition to, the absence of oral tests on the syllabus is considered one of the reasons for the negligence of oral tests. The recommendations of the study emphasize the importance of speaking skills testing and encourage teachers and educational circles to give particular consideration for testing oral skills. In addition, oral skills should be included in the syllabus. Moreover, teachers should devote extra time to test oral skills.

1. Introduction

Speaking skill is a critical part of foreign language learning and teaching. Despite its significance, testing speaking has been underestimated and English language instructors have proceeded to disregard oral tests. However, today's world requires skilful interpersonal communication from a dualistic perspective –speaking and writing. Hence, the goal of testing speaking is to improve students' communicative skills to communicate properly with regard to intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, basic cognitive academic skills, discourse manipulation strategies and empowering understudies to communicate and figure out how to adhere to the social and cultural rules appropriate in each informative situation. Therefore, students have to practise oral tests from the early stages of learning English as a foreign language to improve their performance. It is noticed that most secondary schools' students are not subjected to oral tests and they lack the ability to express themselves when they are asked to answer simple oral questions. They tend to write their answers rather than oral productivity. The researcher intends to investigate the reasons for negligence of oral tests and their effect on their oral production. Therefore, the researcher attempts to tackle this problem and find out the suitable solutions to it.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous studies

Many studies have been done on oral skills presenting their importance for students and show the difficulties that faced by learners. Abdelrahman (2008) conducted a study entitled, "The difficulties that face Dongoles students in speaking a meaningful, well-structured English sentence". The main objectives of his study are to specify the lack of oral practice inside the classroom and the absence of oral skills in the Sudanese syllabus exam. He encourages English language teachers to use additional sources of oral skills like cassettes and English clubs to improve students speaking skills.

Another study, carried out by Ibrahim (2012) aimed to find out factors that affect students' oral fluency. He finds out that the lack of oral fluency in particular and communication at large is attributed to nepotism; in other words, some of the teaching staff who were not qualified were recruited because of their political affiliation and not because of their credentials. Moreover, emphasis has never been given to fluency, and the only courses in the department that was intended for communications the students as a whole and fluency in particular was "topic for debate" but it was omitted in the last academic reform. He recommends that

speaking should be part of exams and particular attention should be given to speaking, because it is widely regarded as the outcome for mastering a language.

Ahmed (2012) presented a study in "Investigating Reasons Behind Low Performance in Speaking English" His main objectives are to determine the reasons which make students unable to speak in English and to investigate whether the weakness of speaking in English affects learning. The main findings are: Students' weakness in speaking English reduces their tendencies toward it. In addition, students do not have enough opportunities to practice speaking English inside classrooms in their daily lives. He recommends that language teachers should pay great attention to teaching speaking rather than teaching students to pure memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules. They have to teach speaking in the same way they teach other skills and it should be evaluated in exams, and teachers have to reduce teacher- speaking time while increasing student-speaking time and they suppose not to speak in their own native language during English lessons.

Also Mohammed (2005) conducted a study on oral skills. His main objectives are to raise students' levels of oral performance and to show how effectively oral skills are developed. The main finding is that teachers should accommodate the techniques and strategies for developing oral communication. While operating English classes, teachers should follow certain methods for correcting student's oral performance error and managing classroom interaction. His recommendations are; Audio-visuals and computers. Besides, Final oral exams are more essential.

From the above literature, we found that, the teaching and testing of oral skills in Sudan face many problems. Some of them are due to the perceived low level of oral skills among learners, syllabus, methods and techniques of teaching, unavailability of materials. In addition to teachers' lack of experience and the huge number of students in a class. What distinguishes this study is that, it dealt with the reasons for the negligence of testing oral skills at secondary level and how the negligence of oral test affected fluency among students.

2.2 Theoretical Part

2.2.1 Testing Oral skills

Testing oral skills may be of two benefits to assess the candidate's abilities to express their thought, feelings and how to communicate with each other (Tests of oral expression). On the other hand, there are tests to assess students' abilities of listening comprehension. The correlation between testing and teaching is very clear. Thus, testing is regarded as one of the methods and procedures of language teaching. Testing helps to find solutions to some of the problems of teaching as Heaton (1975:2) states "the main purpose of that examination is to measure the candidate's ability to use the target language. The examination is thus primarily an instrument for measuring and evaluating performance"

2.2.2 Types of Oral tests

The types of tests which can be used and constructed to measure oral production range widely from purely repetitive drills to sentence transformation and construction drills. Heaton (1975.89) classifies test as follows:

2.2.2.1 Repetition tests

The student is needed to repeat words, sentences and phrases which he heard on (tape). This kind of test is divided into many types which are:

2.2.2.2 Pronunciation tests

Students are asked to pronounce phonemes which have a similar pronunciation and also to distinguish between vowel sounds.

2.2.2.3 Stress and Intonation tests

This type of test is constructed to check students' oral production in order to test the correct use of stress and intonation. It differs from test of reading aloud because the material is spoken not written and the testee must be able to hear and produce the correct sound.

2.2.2.4 Structure tests

This type is useful in class progress tests. Structure drills are divided into two: mechanical and natural drills. Mechanical drills such as; s transform in order to form sentences (for example; positive to negative, active to passive.....). In addition to natural drills, for example, incomplete statements and combination between sentences.

2.2.2.5 Using Pictures tests

Pictures, maps and diagrams can be used for testing oral production. The student is given a picture to study for a few minutes; he /she then is required to describe the picture in a given time.

2.2.2.6 Interview

According to Heaton (1975:95), it is better to have the class teacher as the interviewer and should endeavour to put the student at his ease at the beginning of the interview, adopting a sympathetic attitude and trying to hold genuine conversation. It is possible to divide the interview into structured and unstructured interview in order to encourage candidates to speak freely.

2.2.3 Factors Affecting Fluency of Speaking a Foreign Language

Brown, G and Yule (1988:42) state many factors that affect the acquisition of the fluency of speaking a foreign language; psychological and socio-cultural factors are considered as main ones. Different theorists believe that socio-cultural factors have strong impact on language usage, especially language production. They argue that the social factors influence interpretation as well as production. In this respect Aebesold and Field (1997: p 29) have claimed that "L2 users bring a package of knowledge, feelings, attitudes and beliefs from L1." What people bring from their own language to the other languages they acquire partially or substantially depend on the values and attitudes of their cultural background. In a similar point of view, Piascka (1989:97) has suggested that "Language is the manifestation of culture." Considering this point, we can notice the influence of L1 on L2 from the side of culture, feelings and beliefs.

2.2.4 Activities to develop speaking skill

Many linguists also, ESL instructors concur that understudies ought to figure out how to communicate in the second language by "connecting". Open language instructing and cooperative learning serve best for this point. Informative language educating depends on genuine circumstances that require correspondence. By utilizing this technique in ESL classes, understudies will have the chance of speaking with one another in the objective language. To sum things up, ESL educators ought to make a study hall condition where understudies have genuine correspondence, real exercises, and significant errands that advance oral language. This can happen when understudies work together in gatherings to accomplish an objective or to finish an errand. Some of exercises must be practised inside the classroom as Harmer (2007:32) mentions the following:

2.2.4.1 Role play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. Harmer (2007:11), says in role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and..."

2.2.4.2 Simulations

Re-enactments are fundamentally the same as pretends yet what makes reproductions unique in relation to pretends is that they are more intricate. In recreations, understudies can carry things to the class to make a sensible situation. For example, if an understudy is going about as an artist, he/she carries a mouthpiece to sing, etc. Pretends and re-enactments have numerous focal points. To start with, since they are engaging, they spur the understudies. Second, as Harmer (2007:33) proposes, they increment the fearlessness of reluctant understudies, on the grounds that in pretend and reproduction exercises, they will have an alternate job and don't need to represent themselves, which implies they don't need to assume a similar liability.

2.2.4.3 Information gap

In this action, understudies should be working two by two. One understudy will have the data that other accomplice doesn't have and the accomplices will share their data. Data hole exercises fill numerous needs, for example, taking care of an issue or gathering data. Likewise, each accomplice assumes a significant job on the grounds that the undertaking can't be finished if the accomplices don't give the data the others need. These exercises are viable on the grounds that everyone has the chance to talk broadly in the objective language.

2. 2.4.4 Brainstorming

On a given subject, understudies can deliver thoughts in a restricted time. Contingent upon the specific circumstance, either individual or gathering conceptualizing is compelling and students create thoughts rapidly and unreservedly. The great attribute of conceptualizing is that the understudies are not condemned for their thoughts in this manner, they will be available to share novel thoughts.

2.2.4.4 Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristic of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas thus, they will be open to share new ideas.

2.2.4.5 Narrating

Students can quickly sum up a story or story they got with someone already, or they may make their own accounts to tell their colleagues. Narrating encourages inventive reasoning. It likewise assists understudies with communicating thoughts in the arrangement of starting, advancement, and finishing, including the characters and setting a story must have. Understudies likewise can make enigmas or wisecracks. For example, at the absolute starting point of each class meeting, the educator may call a couple of understudies to make short conundrums or wisecracks as an opening. Along these lines, not just the educator will address understudies' talking capacity, yet additionally draws the consideration of the class.

2.2.4.6 Interviews

Students can direct interviews on chose subjects with different individuals. It is a smart thought that the educator gives a rubric to understudies so they realize what kind of inquiries they can pose or what way to follow, yet understudies ought to set up their own inquiries. Directing meetings with individuals allows understudies to rehearse their talking capacity in class as well as outside and encourages them getting mingled. After meetings, every understudy can introduce their investigation to the class. Additionally, understudies can meet one another and "present" their accomplice to the class.

2.2.4.7 Story completion

This is a truly charming, entire class, free-talking action for which understudies sits all around. For this movement, an educator begins to recount to a story, yet after a couple of sentences the person quits describing. At that point, every understudy begins to describe from where the past one halted. Every understudy should add from four to ten sentences. Understudies can include new characters, occasions, portrayals, etc.

2.2. 4.8 Reporting

Before coming to class, understudies are approached to peruse a paper or magazine and, in class, they report to their companions what they find as the most fascinating news. Understudies can likewise discuss whether they have encountered anything worth telling their companions in their everyday lives before class.

2.2.4.9 Playing cards

Playing cards in this game, understudies should shape gatherings of four. Each suit will speak to a point. For example: Diamonds: Earning cash Hearts: Love and connections - Spades: A remarkable memory - Clubs: Best instructor. Every understudy in a gathering will pick a card. At that point, every understudy will compose 4-5 inquiries about that subject to pose to the others in the gathering. For instance: If the subject "Precious stones: Earning Money" is chosen, here are some potential inquiries: •Is cash significant in your life? Why? •What is the most effortless method of winning cash?

Nonetheless, the instructor should state at the absolute starting point of the action that understudies are not permitted to plan yes-no inquiries, on the grounds that by saying yes or no understudies get little practice in communicated in language creation. Or maybe, understudies ask open-finished inquiries to one another so they answer in complete sentences.

2.2. 4 .10 Picture portraying

This movement depends on a few successive pictures. Understudies are approached to recount to the story occurring in the successive pictures by focusing on the measures gave by the instructor as a rubric. Rubrics can incorporate the jargon or structures they have to utilize while describing.

2.2. 4 .11 Picture depicting

Another approach to utilize pictures in a talking action is to give understudies only one picture and having them portray what it is in the image. For this action understudies can shape gatherings and each gathering is given an alternate picture. Understudies talk about the image with their gatherings, at that point a representative for each gathering portrays the image to the entire class. This action encourages the innovativeness and creative mind of the students just as their public talking abilities.

2.2.4 .12 Find the distinction

For this action understudies can work two by two and each couple is given two unique pictures, for instance, image of young men playing football and another image of young ladies playing tennis. Understudies two by two talk about the likenesses and additionally contrasts in the photos.

2.2. 4.13 Conversations/Debates

After a substance-based exercise, a conversation can be held for different reasons. The understudies may mean to come to an end result, share thoughts regarding an occasion, or discover arrangements in their conversation gatherings. Prior to the conversation, it is basic that the reason for the conversation action is set by the educator. Thusly, the conversation focuses are applicable to this reason, so understudies don't invest their energy visiting with one another about unimportant things. For instance, understudies can get engaged with concur/differ conversations. In this kind of conversations, the educator can frame gatherings of understudies, ideally 4 or 5 in each gathering, and give questionable sentences like "individuals learn best when they read versus individuals learn best when they travel". At that point each gathering deals with their subject for a given timeframe, and presents their assessments to the class. It is fundamental that the talking ought to be similarly partitioned among bunch individuals. Toward the end, the class settles on the triumphant gathering who guarded the thought in the most ideal manner. This action cultivates basic reasoning and speedy dynamic, and understudies figure out how to communicate and legitimize themselves in gracious manners while contradicting the others. For productive gathering conversations, it is in every case better not to shape huge gatherings, since calm understudies may abstain from contributing in huge gatherings. The gathering individuals can be either doled out by the instructor or the understudies may decide it without anyone else, yet gatherings ought to be adjusted in each conversation movement so understudies can work with different individuals and figure out how to be available to various thoughts. In conclusion, in class or gathering conversations, whatever the point is, the understudies ought to consistently be urged to pose inquiries, reword thoughts, express help, check for explanation, etc. Informative yield exercises permit understudies to work on utilizing the entirety of the language they know in circumstances that take after genuine settings. In these exercises, understudies must cooperate to build up an arrangement, resolve an issue, or complete an assignment.

2.2.5 Learners' problems with speaking activities

Speaking exercises can flop wretchedly because of some genuine issues in the ESL study hall. As per Ur (1996: 121), there are a few issues looked by the students of ESL in talking exercises.

2.2.5.1 Mother tongue

This issue is valid especially for classes where the majority of learners are speakers of the same native language. During speaking activities learners tend to "switch" to their mother tongue because, as they report, they feel less exposed. If they lack appropriate words or structures, it is easier for them to convey their message in the mother tongue. Furthermore, it feels "unnatural" for them to communicate among themselves in a foreign language.

2.2.5.2 Inhibition

Speaking activities often engage learners in expressing themselves in front of their classmates. Some learners may feel uneasy in such situations. They may feel anxious about making mistakes, or not finding right expressions. They may be afraid of humiliation and derision.

2.2.5.3 No ideas to share

Students frequently can't consider what to state on a specific subject. Their reason is that they don't have any pertinent information on the point; they are not intrigued or have no plans to contribute.

2.2.5.4 Problems of participation

In speaking activities only one learner may speak at a time. This fact is further complicated by a high number of learners in classes. Speaking time allotted to a learner is limited. In addition, some learners may tend to dominate the discussion, whereas others participate very little or not at all. Considering the aforementioned issues, the present study seeks answers to the following research questions:

- 1- What are the problems caused by the negligence of oral tests?
- 2- To what extent do most teachers neglect using oral tests in class?
- 3- What are the appropriate suggestions to encourage teacher to make oral tests?
- 4- To what extent does the SPINE syllabus include enough oral practice?

3. Methodology

The study followed the analytical descriptive method. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 25) was used to analyze the data collected by the reflection of the frequency and percentage, whereas tables were used to present the results.

3.1 Reliability

Cornbrash's Alpha and Spearman-Brown were used to compute the reliability of the questionnaire. Both show high reliability (Table 1).

Table 1. The reliability of the Questionnaire

Equation	Reliability coefficient
Cornbrash's Alpha	0.901
Spearman-Brown	0.904

3.2 Validity

In order to show the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the tool used for data collection in the present study, some experts were asked to check to what extent the items of the questionnaire were suitable in terms of instructions, the types of items and their suitability for the subjects, the style and the language used in the tools, the illegibility of the items and any other comments. The questionnaire was checked and examined by experts from the Department of English, Faculty of Education – Hantoub, University of Gezira, before it was distributed for teachers to fill.

3.2 Participant

The selection of the sample was done randomly by taking 50 secondary school teachers from the target population. They were chosen from Gezira Southern locality to participate in this study. Their experiences ranged between (1/35) years. They were 24 males and 26 females. The selected tool for this study is a questionnaire for 50 secondary school teachers. The questionnaire was prepared and distributed to ELT teachers in Gezira Southern locality; it was made up of 16 multiple choice items. The items were arranged in the logical progression depending on the hypotheses of the study; the data were calculated manually, and then analysed by the computer, with the program (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

4. Results and Discussion

With reference to Table 2, teacher responses presented the problems caused by the negligence of oral tests.

Table 2. Problems caused by negligence of oral test

No	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	There is a considerable link between the time allotted to oral tests and the students' results.	41	82%	9	18%
2.	The reason for students' inappropriate response in oral testing is shyness.	42	84%	8	16%
3.	The reason for students' inappropriate response in oral testing is fear of making mistakes.	44	88%	6	12%

From the above table, it is noticed that fear is the main problem that affect students in oral testing 88%, 84% for shyness and 82% because of time allotted for oral test. Teachers think that it is not sufficient.

Table 3 Suggestions for conducting oral tests

No	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Speaking should not be neglected in testing	44	88%	6	12%

2.	Oral testing is easier if given to students in small groups	44	88%	6	12%
3.	Given enough time for testing oral ability is of great help for teachers and students in learning process.	48	96%	2	4%
4.	Oral production is an essential component of learning a foreign language.	47	94%	3	6%
5.	Oral testing should be an integral part of the syllabus.	45	90%	5	10%
6.	English tests should be comprehensive and cover all four skills	46	92%	4	8%

It can be seen from table 3, 96% of the participants suggest that more time should be devoted to testing oral skills. Moreover, 92% agree with the importance of oral production in learning English as foreign language. In addition, 92% of the teachers encourage the inclusion of the whole four skills in oral test and 90% of them call for syllabus integration.

Table 4. Neglecting of oral test in class

No	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Testing my students` oral skills is not very important.	5	10%	45	90%
2.	I seldom test my students` oral skills	50	100%	0	0
3.	No tests are given to evaluate listening and speaking skills	50	100%	0	0

Table 4 shows that testing of oral skill is completely ignored by teachers although 90%% of the teachers are convinced of the importance of testing oral skills.

Table 5. Oral practice in Spine syllabus

No	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	The reason for students` inappropriate oral communication is lack of practice.	42	84%	8	16%
2.	The reason for students` inappropriate oral communication is ignorance of rules.	45	90%	5	10%
3.	SPINE series does not include enough materials for oral practice.	50	100%	0	0

As shown in table 5, the Spine syllabus (Sudan Practical Integrated National English) does not contain any component for oral practice according to the whole teachers' responses. So, that leads to the ignorance of rules of oral communication among students and to lack of practice as well.

4. Conclusions

From the above results, it is noticed that social factors - fear and shyness- play a dominant role in affecting the learners' performance in oral communication. The researcher thinks that the lack of practice goes with Abdelrahman (2008) finding. Although teachers complain about insufficient time, they guess may be due to the fact that they do not experience teaching and testing of oral skills according to their responses. It is also noticed that the majority of teachers encourage the implementation of teaching and testing oral skills. This result indicates that the problem is very clear for the teachers, researchers and syllabus designers but it appears that the implementation of oral communication is so expensive for a country suffering from economical situations, electricity in rural areas, labs and listening materials all are unaffordable.

To sum up, the researcher asks for urgent and possible alternatives to narrow the gap. So, straight forward recommendations are stated as follow;

1. Teachers should rely on communicative output activities, tasks and drills, as mentioned above.
2. Using mobile phones becomes easier nowadays, so teachers and students can use them for listening and recording for rehearsing, recap and corrective feedback.
3. More time can be devoted to students by using different techniques and strategies _ pair work, groupwork, games and etc.
4. Encouraging English clubs and societies.
5. Selecting suitable authentic materials -content and language level from different TV channels.
6. Using social media – Facebook, What Sapp etc., - to form communication groups among the students and teachers.

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Appendix A

1- Speaking should not be neglected in testing.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

2- Testing my students' oral skills is not very important.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

3- I seldom test my students' oral skills.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

4- No tests are given to evaluate listening and speaking skills.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

5. Oral testing is easier if given to students in small groups.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

6- Given enough time for testing oral ability is of great help for teachers and students in learning process.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

7- There is a considerable link between the time allotted to oral tests and the students' results.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

8- The reason for students' inappropriate response in oral testing is shyness.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

9- The reason for students' inappropriate response in oral testing is fear of making mistakes.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

10- The reason for student's inappropriate oral communication is lack of practice.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

11- The reason for students' inappropriate oral communication is ignorance of rules.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

12- Oral production is an essential component of learning a foreign language.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

13- Oral testing should be an integral part of the syllabus.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

14- English tests should be comprehensive and cover all four skills.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree

15-SPINE series does not include enough materials for oral practice.

a. strongly agree b. agree c. disagree d. strongly disagree