



Investigating Techniques Used in Improving EFL Learners' Aural and Oral Skills

A Case Study(Secondary Schools Teachers, Hasaheisa Locality, Gezira State, Sudan.(2022)

Manar ElTyeb Tajadeen

University of Al-Butana

Abstract

This study aims at investigating techniques used in improving EFL learners' aural and oral skills, evaluating teachers' role in improving learners' aural and oral language skills. The study adapts the descriptive analytical method. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire from fifty (50) of EFL teachers who are teaching at secondary level schools in El-hasaheisa Locality, Sudan. Then the collected data were analyzed by the SPSS program. The analysis led to the following findings: as a result of traditional teaching techniques many EFL learners find difficulties in performing aural and oral language skills, learners can develop oral aural skills mostly through audiovisual aids, creating dialogues in English language improves EFL learners oral abilities, using authentic material in EFL classroom improves oral aural language skills, questioning strategy develops learners speaking skills, classroom management helps teacher to create classroom time talking and using modern technology develops EFL learners oral aural language abilities. Based on the results the study recommended the following: EFL learners should be taught through audiovisual aids, students should be encouraged to make dialogues in English language, EFL teachers should present authentic materials in the classroom for developing EFL learners performance in speaking and listening, questioning strategy should be practiced to develop learners speaking skills, classroom management should be done in away that helps teacher to create classroom time talking and modern technology should assist EFL teaching and learning.

Key Words: performing aural and oral skills, teachers' role, creating dialogues in



تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تقصي أساليب التدريس التي تستخدم لترفع من مستوى الطلاب في ممارسة المهارات السمعية الشفهية وتقيم دور المعلم في مهمة تطوير مهارات الطلاب الشفهية السمعية. إتبعنا الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي كما إستخدمنا الباحثة نظام الاستبانة كوسيلة لجمع البيانات من (50) معلماً ومعلمة للغة الانجليزية من محلية الحصاحيصا، السودان.. إتبعنا الدراسة الطريقة الوصفية التحليلية وبرنامج SPSS لتحليل البيانات، وتوصلت الدراسة لعدة نتائج أهمها :أن الكثير من طلاب المرحلة الثانوية يعانون ضعفاً في أداء المهارات السمعية الشفهية، أن تطوير مهارات الإستماع والمخاطبة للغة الإنجليزية يكون سهلاً خلال إستخدام الوسائل السمعية البصرية في عملية التدريس ، ممارسة الحوارات تطور المهارات الشفهية لدى الدارسين ، إستخدام المواضيع الأصلية في القراءة يحفز الطلاب على القراءة الجهرية وتحسين مهارات الإستماع طلاقة القراءة ' إستخدام أسلوب الأسئلة زالأجوبة يطور مهار اللام للدارسين وأن إدارة الفصل تحسن أداء المعلم في إنشاء فرص الكلام للطلاب إستخدام التقنيات الحديثة في التدريس يساعد الطلاب على تقوية مهارات الإستماع والكلام. بناء على النتائج أوصت الدراسة بالآتي : إستخدام الوسائل السمعية البصرية في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لتقوية مهارات الطلاب في الإستماع والمخاطبة، تشجيع الطلاب على ممارسة الحوارات في مواضيع التواصل الحقيقية ، إستخدام أسلوب الأسئلة زالأجوبة يطور مهار اللام للدارسين وأن إدارة الفصل تحسن أداء المعلم في إنشاء فرص الكلام للطلاب كما يجب إستخدام التقنيات الحديثة في صفوف تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

1.0 Introduction

The two skills listening and speaking, sound exactly alike when we describe them as oral and aural skills. The aural skill according to (Khan, 2011) refers to listening and the oral skill refers to the speaking, Aural language, of course, refers to language as we hear it. Oral language is what we say. These two words are “homophones” – words spelled differently that sound alike. There is no good reason why they should be homophones, but they are. Perhaps that accident of spelling can serve as a reminder that, while these two skills cannot be separated, they need to be developed in different ways. Oral production is composed of several characteristics that people perceive from language sounds. In other words, when someone uses language sounds, individuals create meaningful and interactive communication, whether individuals are native or non-native speakers, their home region, etc. (Luoma, 2004). Hence, oral language can be structured in terms of micro and macro skills. (Brown, 2004:,p.142),states: *Micro skills refers to producing the smaller chunks of language such as phonemes, morphemes, words,*



collocations, and phrasal units whereas macro skills are associated with larger elements in oral production, such as speech stream: fluency, discourse, style, register, pitch, pronunciation, tone.

Statement of the Problem

Many of EFL learners are weak in performing aural oral interaction in the classroom. They avoid face to face discussions. Their standard of speaking is very low. It is becomes clear that the performance of many of secondary school learners is not satisfactory. Nowadays, many of secondary level school learners find it difficult to discuss topics orally or negotiate meanings of topics or paragraphs. Most of them stay silent in the classroom and don't like interacting with the teachers or with peers.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at:

- investigating techniques used for improving EFL learners' oral aural skills.
- evaluating teachers' role in improving EFL learners' oral aural language skills.

Questions of the Study

This study will try to answer the following questions:

- What are the techniques used in improving EFL learners' oral aural skills?
- To what extent do EFL teachers able to improve EFL learners' oral aural language skills?

Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the study are :

- Many of EFL learners face difficulties in the performance of oral aural skills as a result of traditional teaching techniques.



b.EFL Teachers have great roles in improving EFL learners' oral aural language skills.

Significance of the Study

The study is signified since EFL learners can get benefits from it. Also academic expert, academic researchers, curriculum designers..etc. This study draw the teachers' attention towards the importance of improving learners aural and oral skills, The study shows the importance of improving students' performance in oral aural language through different activities as well as using authentic oral materials. The study also shows the benefits of utilizing audiovisual aids in EFL classroom to enhance learners positive attitudes towards language learning.

Methodology of Study

The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. A questionnaire was used for data collection from English language teachers at higher secondary schools, they were (50) as the sample taken from all the population at El-hasaheisa Locality, Sudan (2022). Then, the collected data were analyzed statistically by the (SPSS) program.

2. Literature Review

Classroom interaction and learners participation requires competence in oral/aural skill. According to (Ferris's,1988), speaking and listening skills block their enthusiasm and motivation to achieve their academic goals. Preparation for required speaking involvement in the classroom is much longer and complex for the EFL students. Oral participation and the contribution of ideas involve not only information to be disseminated, but diligent practice for presenting the contribution in an easily understood oral manner.

Factors that Cause Speaking difficulties to EFL Learners

Zhang (2009) argued that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. According to Ur (1996), there are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking, and they are 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

Improving Speaking through Conversations in EFL Setting

Speaking activities best occur in classrooms in which learners feel comfortable and confident, free to take risks, and have plenty of opportunities to speak, (Brown, 2010). While there are countless kinds of activities teachers use to develop speaking skills, they most commonly promote conversational speech. This, of course, requires the use of both listening and speaking skills.

Listening Proficiency and Speaking Improvement

Listening helps humans to contact one another and grow the sense of empathy between listeners and the speakers. (Buck, 2001) asserts that, listening is key when direct speaking performance is required. Prior academic arguments give the idea that training large groups of students in listening would improve their oral skills without requiring significant oral practice. By doing this, it would be possible to improve oral skills in contexts where the number of students in classrooms is excessively high. Hence, this investigation is expected to show how influential the development of aural skills is on speaking improvement. Listening means more than just a means to fulfill a certain mission. (Steinberg, 2007, p.83) asserts that:

“listening is a more complicated ability that involves, besides listening, emotions and feelings while communicating with others and that by interpreting the messages that are being conveyed whether they are verbal or nonverbal message”.

Listening has multiple functions and that proves its complexity through decoding the utterances and also through the ability to comprehend the feelings and emotions of the speaker.



Listening Comprehension through Aural Material

Listening comprehension is a highly-complex solving activities (Gilakjani and Ahmadi,2011,p.982) in which listeners can benefit from different tasks and develop their aural abilities. Listening plays an essential role in learning English language. It can help students build vocabulary, and develop both language proficiency and language usage. The aim for teaching listening comprehension is to help learners cope with listening in real-life when working with aural materials.

Listening comprehension needs certain techniques and mental processes that allow people to be good listeners, those processes are top-down processing and bottom up processing.

Top-down Processing

In order for the listeners to understand what they are listening to, they use certain techniques and cognitive processes. The top-down processing is one of them. The top-down processing is defined by (Batova, 2013) as: “Emphasizing the listener’s use of their existing knowledge of a topic and the relevant context in forming hypotheses as to the speaker’s meaning and, when appropriate, in modifying them to match new incoming information” . Meaning that the listener depends on his prior knowledge in order to comprehend what the speaker is saying, or at least have a general recognition of the topic spoken and modify his prior knowledge to fit the new input. Another similar view made by (Richards and Renandya ,2002,p.239) about the top-down processing is that:

“the listener actively reconstruct the meaning of the speaker’s utterance and use the sounds as stimuli to waken his or her prior knowledge and understand the incoming utterances”.

However, in this reconstruction process, the listener uses prior knowledge of the context and situation within which the listener takes place to make sense of what he or she hears. Therefore, the knowledge that the listener own in his memory plays a major role in understanding the speaker.



Bottom-up Processing

As opposed to the top-down process, the bottom-up is a process that works in a more analytical way “bottom-up processing would involve decoding based on the segmenting of the individual words out of the stream of speech” (Batova, 2013,p. 3). In other words, the listener tends to divide the speaker’s speech into small constituents in order to understand what is said. Richards and Renandya (ibid)explained the bottom-up processing in a more analytical way and claimed: The bottom-up processing model assumes that listening is a process of decoding the sounds that one hears in a linear fashion, from the smallest meaningful units (phonemes) to complete texts. According to this view, phonemic units are decoded and linked together to form words, words are linked together to form phrases, phrases are linked together to form utterances, and utterances are linked together to form complete meaningful texts .

According to the aforementioned explanation, it appears that the bottom-up processing functions by breaking the speech into small units and then gathering them piece by piece and move from level to another level until those small pieces form a text or a speech that is meaningful.

(Flowerdew and Miller, 2005) suggest that the learners who are beginners need to work on their bottom-up basics and develop their skills of decoding the language units, whereas the learners who have more advanced level, and are good in phonology and syntax, it is better for them to develop their top down skills because that would be more appropriate without forgetting that the bottom-up skills are required even in advanced levels like in fast speech. This means that although their differences in terms of function, they are both necessary for the learners in their process of developing their listening comprehension.

The Importance of Oral-Aural Skills in EFL Setting

Among the four language skills, speaking and listening have a major importance in the process of EFL teaching and learning. (McKenzie-Brown, ,2006) claim that, the two most basic language skills, listening and speaking, sound exactly alike when we describe them as oral and aural skills. Moreover, using



aural materials and developing activities on the basis of such materials, however, is not an easy task and requires much time, energy and creativity. However, listening is developed by employing a mixture of materials types , so that they can spark their students' interest and which will evoke more, of course, their enthusiasm about listening to authentic speech. (Nunan,2001,p.61) maintains that:

“listening compared with speaking, reading and writing is the most frequently used language skill in both the classroom and daily communication. Listening is important for speaking because it establishes the good basis for successful communicative exchanges.

Harmer (2007) explains that the main reason for exposing students to English speech, is allowing them listen to different varieties, dialects and accents rather than hearing, all the time, the voice of their teachers with its own idiosyncrasies. Through listening to some materials (songs, films...) one can be accustomed to pronunciation, rhythm, intonation and stress; which will enhance not only the oral skills, as (Dunkel, 1986,p.99) asserts *“developing proficiency in listening comprehension is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking”* but also reading and writing. Materials can take different forms: a textbook, a cassette, a CD-Rom, a video, a radio, a photocopied handout, etc. It seems that there is a connected relationship between listening and the other skills, as the use of a language is based on the four skills. A strong relationship and connection exists between listening and speaking in many EFL classrooms. Because of the lack of time, English teachers believe that the only solution is to integrate both listening and speaking practice. Such integration is said to be very useful for learners.

Using Authentic Materials in Developing EFL Aural-Oral Skills

According to (Gebhard,1996), explains that authentic listening texts refer to materials that are created for native speakers, including for instance: audio, video, CD, or other digital medium. In addition, it is considered as recordings of people speaking naturally and without the purpose of language learning in mind (Field, 2008). On the basis of this, one may say that authentic aural material reflects a kind



of genuine, natural and spontaneous unscripted spoken language that contain hesitations, repetitions and so on; which can take different forms (interviews, lectures, discussions etc).

3. Material and Method

The participants of this study were the EFL teachers of secondary schools at Al-hasaheisa Locality, Sudan, (2022). A questionnaire was distributed to fifty (50) of them for data collection. Then, it were analyzed by the SPSS program.

Material: The participants were given the following questionnaire statements to respond to them.

Statement (1) Negotiation of meanings develops EFL learners' oral and oral skills.

Statement (2) Practicing real life interaction improve learners' speaking skills.

Statement (3) Some EFL learners find it difficult to interact orally in the classroom.

Statement (4) Using authentic materials in the classroom develops EFL learners performance in speaking and listening.

Statement (5) Using modern technology develops EFL learners oral aural language abilities.

Statement (6) Practicing dialogues develops learners' oral aural skills.

Statement (7) Speaking skills cannot be developed unless speakers develop listening skills.

Statement (8) Turn taking activities increase classroom interaction.

Statement (9) Questioning strategy develops learners' interaction.

Statement (10) Teaching environment influences learners' participation.

Statement (11) Motivation helps in increasing EFL learners' interaction.



Statement (12) Crowded classes confuses EFL learners' interaction.

Statement (13) Classroom management helps teachers to create class time talking.

Statement (14) Practicing conversations between learners develops their speaking skills.

Statement (15) Teaching supplementary reading material improves EFL learners' language skills.

4. Data Analyses and Discussions

The study used the SPSS Program for analyzing the questionnaire statements as it is appear below in the following tables

Tables	agree	percent	neutral	disagree	Total
Table (1)	45	90	3	2	50
Table (2)	41	82	4	5	50
Table (3)	42	84	6	2	50
Table (4)	46	92	2	2	50
Table (5)	43	86	4	3	50
Table (6)	42	84	6	2	50
Table (7)	38	76	9	3	50
Table (8)	44	88	4	4	50
Table (9)	45	90	4	1	50
Table (10)	39	78	8	3	50
Table (11)	44	88	5	1	50
Table (12)	36	72	9	5	50
Table (13)	40	80	5	5	50
Table (14)	46	92	3	1	50
Table (15)	44	88	5	1	50



Statement (1) Negotiation of meanings develops EFL learners' oral and oral skills

The data in table (1) shows that, most of the sample (90%) agree, (6%) are neutral and (4%) of the sample disagree that negotiation of meanings develops EFL learners' oral and oral skills. This statement is accepted.

Statement (2) Practicing real life interaction improve learners' speaking skills.

Table and diagram (2) shows that, (82%) of the sample agree with the that practicing real life interaction improve learners' speaking skills while (8%) are neutral and (10%) of the sample disagree. According to the statistical analysis of statement, it is accepted.

Statement (3) Some EFL learners find it difficult to interact in orally

Table and diagram (3) shows that, some EFL learners find it difficult to interact in orally in the classroom. (84%) agree with the statement, (12) of the sample are neutral and (4%) disagree with it. So, the statement is accepted.

Statement(4) Using authentic materials in the classroom develops EFL learners performance in speaking and listening

Table (4) shows that, (92%) of the sample agree, (4%) are neutral and (4%) of the sample disagree that, using authentic materials in the classroom develops EFL learners performance in speaking and listening, thus this statement is accepted.

Statement(5) Using modern technology develops EFL learners oral aural language abilities

Table (5) shows that, using modern technology develops EFL learners oral aural language abilities (86%) of the sample agree,(8%) are neutral and (6%) to agree to some extent that, to be giving task encourage participation and interaction, thus this statement is accepted.



Statement (6) Practicing dialogues develops learners' oral aural skills

According to the statistical analysis of table (6), (86%) of the sample agree, (10%) are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. Thus, this statement is accepted.

Statement (7) Speaking skills cannot be developed unless speakers develop listening skills.

According to the statistical analysis of table (7) most respondents (76%) agree that speaking skills cannot be developed unless speakers develop listening skills. Only (18%) disagree and (6%)neutral.

Statement (8) Turn taking activities increase classroom interaction.

The data in table (8) shows that,(88 %) of the respondents agree , (8 %) of the sample choose the answer neutral and (4%) disagree that, turn taking activities increase classroom interaction. The statement is accepted.

Statement (9) Questioning strategy develops learners' interaction.

Table (9) shows that,(90 %) of the respondents agree , (8 %) of the sample choose the answer neutral and (2%) disagree that, teachers questioning in the classroom develops students' interaction. The statement is accepted.

Statement (10) Teaching environment influences learners' participation.

. According to the statistical analysis of table (10) most respondents (78%) agree that teaching environment influences learners' participation while (16%) are neutral and (6%) disagree.

Statement (11) Motivation helps in increasing EFL learners' interaction.

According to the statistical analysis of table (11) most respondents (88%) agree,(10%) neutral while(2%) disagree that, motivating EFL learners helps in increasing their interaction. There, this statement is accepted.

Statement (12) Crowded classes confuses EFL learners' interaction.



The data in table (4-12) shows that most respondents (72%) agree while (18%) are neutral and (10%) disagree that, crowded classes confuses EFL learners' interaction.

Statement (13) Classroom management helps teachers to create class time talking.

The data in the above table shows that,(80 %) of the respondents agree that, classroom management helps teachers to create class time talking, (10 %) of the sample disagree and (10%) are neutral.

Statement (14) Practicing conversations between learners develops their speaking skills.

The data in table (14)shows that,(92 %) of the respondents agree that, practicing conversations between learners develops their speaking skills., (6 %) of the sample are neutral and (2%) disagree.

Statement (15) Teaching supplementary reading material improves EFL learners' language skills.

The data in table (14)shows that,(88 %) of the respondents agree that, practicing conversations between learners develops their speaking skills., (10 %) of the sample disagree and (2%) are neutral with the statement.

5.0 Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

Conclusion:

Oral skill is the first output of any language and the only skill which one needs a partner to practice, one can listen to audio resource alone, read a book alone and can write a letter alone, but one can't speak alone as he/she needs someone to speak to. Learning speaking EFL skill highly depends on classroom lesson and language labs. Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols of context. EFL learners expressed their inhibition in class participation due to a general lack of confidence in their speaking skills. Academic listening and speaking skills represent a complex and problematic task for EFL learners. The aim of this study is to investigate learners' performance in oral aural skill. Accordingly speaking and listening skills are



developed through different teaching techniques. The researcher used a questionnaires for data collection from Sudanese English language teachers. Then the data was analyzed with the SPSS program , the following are the results:

Findings

After analyzing the data, the study has found the following results:

1. Many EFL learners find difficulties in aural oral performance
- 2.EFL learners mostly develop oral aural skills through teaching with audiovisual aids.
- 3.Creating dialogues and conversations between learners improves their aural oral abilities..
- 4.Using authentic material in EFL classroom improves oral aural skills.
5. Teachers have great roles in guiding learners to improve oral aural skills.
6. Using real-life interaction improves EFL learners oral aural skills.
- 7.Using modern technology develops EFL learners oral aural abilities.
- 8.Questioning strategy develops learners' interaction.
- 9.Crowded classes confuses EFL learners' interaction.
- 10.Classroom management helps teachers to create class time talking.

Recommendations

Based on the results the study recommended following:

- 1.Audiovidual aids should be used in teaching English language.
2. EFL learners should be presented with real life interaction.
- 3.Students should be encouraged to practice dialogues in English language.
- 4.EFL teachers should present authentic materials in the classroom.



5.Modern technology should be used in EFL teaching and learning.

6.Classroom should be managed in away that helps teachers to create class time talking.

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