

Full Length Research

A Probe on the Dares of Teaching Speaking Skills in EFL Classrooms: Secondary Schools in Focus, North Western Ethiopia

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The main objective of this study was to reconnoiter the challenges of teaching English language speaking skills in Etigie Tayitu Secondary School with particular reference to grade 10 students, Debre Tabor town. The study used a descriptive survey design that involves quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaire, classroom observation and interview were used to gather the necessary data for the study. Four English language teachers who were teaching grade 10 students were selected using comprehensive sampling for interview and classroom observation. And so data were collected systematically from 80 grade 10 students through questionnaire and were selected using systematic sampling technique. Hence, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were employed in analyzing the quantitative data. The overall findings of the study showed that large class size, lack of courage of students to speak, communication dread and worried about making mistakes were found to be among the dares that mired the effectiveness and adequate practice of teaching speaking skills in the English classroom; More so, English language teachers did not properly use strategies to alleviate these factors. Based on the findings, it is recommended that English language teachers should use various managing and teaching strategies such as pedagogical, management and affective related tactics in speaking lessons to mend challenges and perform the practice suitably.

Key words: Challenge, Dare, EFL, Large classroom, Probe, Speaking Skill

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INTRODUCTION

English language is a global language which is used for communication with native and non-native speakers worldwide, in the educational sector in Ethiopia, all secondary school and university students need it for their studies in order to search for information and obtain knowledge; therefore, English language is one of the required educational tools. It is often used as a medium of instruction in all educational institutions (Zaremba, 2006).

Language as a whole is the most momentous possession of human being to communicate well, conveying and sharing of ideas, feelings, emotions and information with people both in spoken and written forms. It also plays an important role in every day human interactions. Nowadays, in the era of globalization, English language is used not only as a medium of instruction but also internationally for business, political and international relationship (MOE, 2004).

In Ethiopia, even though English language learning starts at the lower grade levels, students' English

speaking skills is not found at a reasonable level of proficiency (Hailom & Woldu, 1998). Speaking seems to be the most important skills of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language (Ur, 1996; Hailom and Woldu, 1998).

According to Burns and Joyce (1997), teachers need to offer students clear reasons for speaking and how to assess their performance. In speaking, form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, their collective experiences, physical environment and the purpose for speaking. Based on this fact, the researcher tends to choose speaking skills and study its problems and possible factors that may affect the teaching and learning of English language speaking skills in Ethiopia.

Nowadays, students are progressively been enrolled in many high schools of, Ethiopia. At one fell swoop, English language is very important subject for them. Crystal (1997) reveals that English is the language that expanded breaking the barriers of color, race, belief, and has continued to spread all over the world.

Ethiopians are likely to interact with a variety of English speaking communities with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds all over the world. English is becoming an essential element playing a crucial role in the country's overall development and hence, proficiency in English provides significant advantages and opportunities to Ethiopians. However, many researches express their concern for the difficulties that the majority of Ethiopians have in spoken English. The standard of oral fluency and competence in English is low, and many Ethiopian speakers have little confidence in speaking the language (Cohen, 2007; Tsegay, 1995).

Speaking helps learners develop their vocabulary and grammar skills and aid them do better in their writing skills. Students can express their emotions, ideas, say stories, request, talk and discuss to show various functions of English language. Speaking is of vital importance outside the classroom. In like manner, Baker and Westrup (2006) state that learners who speak English very well can have greater chance for better education, finding good jobs and getting promotion. This means that speaking skills plays dominant role in the community in general and in the educational institution in particular.

The basis of this study was to explore the dares of teaching English language speaking skills in Etigie Tayitu Secondary School with particular reference to grade ten students. To this end, therefore, this study attempted to address the following basic research questions.

1. How do teachers practice teaching speaking skills in the EFL classrooms?
2. What are the challenges of teaching English language speaking skills in the EFL classrooms?
3. What strategies do teachers and students employ

to advance speaking skills?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design

This is a descriptive study, a research design which involves collection techniques used to specify, or describe naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation (Silinger and Shahomy, 1989). Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. These approaches were chosen because they could provide thorough information. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed and interpreted in the study. Quantitative data were employed through questionnaire, and qualitative data were employed through interview and classroom observation.

Research Site

This study was carried out in Etigie Tayitu Secondary School in north western Ethiopia. The school is found in Amhara region, South Gondar Zone particularly Debre Tabor town which is 666 km far from Addis Ababa. The school was opted because of its immediacy to the investigator.

Participants

The target populations of this study were English language teachers, who were teaching grade 10 students, and grade 10 students of Etigie Tayitu Secondary School in Debre Tabor town in the academic year 2018/2019.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Comprehensive sampling was used to select the teacher participants in the study. This means that all grade 10 English language teachers took part in the study, i.e. 4 teachers (3 males and 1 female). In Etigie Tayitu Secondary School, there were eight grade 10 classes with 65-70 students in each class. For the purpose of this study and because of the constraints of time and budget, only 80 students were taken as a sample. Systematic sampling was used when the population is very large and of no known characteristics. For the questionnaire, 80 students were selected systematically: every seventh was selected from the population who were arranged alphabetically according to their names. This method helped the researcher to collect relevant and valid data from the respondents.

Instruments

In this study, three data gathering instruments were

used for collecting data to obtain adequate information so that questionnaire, classroom observation and semi-structured interview were used. These instruments were selected because of their suitability for gathering important data for the study; they are also important for triangulation.

In order to gather relevant data for the study, questionnaire with appropriate items were designed and administered to both teacher and student participants (Richards, 2005). The questionnaires were composed of 17 Likert-type closed-ended items with five-point Likert-scale that ranged from 5 to 1.

All grade 10 English language teachers, four, were observed during their actual lesson periods. Each teacher was observed four times using a structured observation checklist. The observation checklist incorporated items which are all concerned with speaking skills lesson presentations at different times. And so, there were semi-structured interview questions for teacher participants so that four of them were interviewed.

Data Analyses

Classroom Environments and Seats Engagements

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of responses to items related to classroom environments and seats engagements

Item	Statement	Responses					Total	Mean
		5	4	3	2	1		
1	The classroom chairs and tables are suitable for effective pair and group discussions.	F 0	4	3	14	59	80	1.40
		% 0.0	5.0	3.8	17.5	73.7	100	
2	The classroom is set in the way that facilitates learning English speaking skills.	F 2	4	0	17	57	80	1.50
		% 2.5	5.0	0.0	21.3	71.2	100	
3	The class is equipped with modern English speaking learning resources.	F 0	0	0	16	64	80	1.20
		% 0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	100	
4	The number of students in the classroom is apt for learning English speaking skills.	F 0	0	1	26	53	80	1.40
		% 0.0	0.0	1.2	32.5	66.3	100	
Grand Mean								1.40

Key: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=I am not sure, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree, F=Frequency, %=Percentage

As can be seen from the table above (see item number 1), majority of the respondents (73.7%) strongly disagreed that the classroom chairs and tables were not suitable for effective pair and group discussions in the English speaking classrooms. In reply to item number 2, widely held of the respondents (71.2%) strongly disagreed that the classroom was not set in the way that facilitates learning English speaking skills. As well 80% of the participants strongly disagreed that the class was not equipped with modern English speaking learning resources. As regards item number 4, middle-of-the-road of the participants (66.3%) strongly disagreed that the integer of students in the classroom were appropriate for learning English speaking skills. Correspondingly, the classroom observation showed that the classroom chairs

The collected data were analyzed, interpreted and discussed accordingly. Quantitative data which were collected from the respondents were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science students (SPSS 20.0) software analysis. The quantitative data collected through close-ended questions were entered into the computer and statistically described in terms of percentage and frequency. Finally, the qualitative data obtained through interview were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this leitmotif, the factors that impedes the teaching of speaking skills in EFL classrooms are presented based on the data gained from the respondents such as students' responses on the questionnaires, investigators' observation of the actual classroom instruction and teachers' responses on the semi-structured interview so that the discussion is itemized after results. Note that classroom observation and interview results are discussed in line with the questionnaire results.

and tables were not apposite for effective pair and group discussions; it was not fitting to learn/teach English speaking skills.

Hayes (1997) states the ideal size of language class is 30 at most for the reason that only under such a scale can offer enough chances for the students to communicate with each other. It was portrayed that in all of the observed classrooms, the number of students were large. As Smith (2008) explains, as the class size increases, teachers and students face many challenges that impede them not to create interactive classroom.

Therefore, classroom environments and seats engagements were the factors that hinder to teach English speaking skills. Concerning these issues, the interviewed teachers said:

The foremost challenges that we confronted when we tried to teach our students, English speaking skills, were the classroom environments and seats engagements such as number of students, nature of chairs and desks, learning resources, etc. These problems made us not to teach our students English speaking skills in the actual English classrooms fantastically.

Based on the above facts one can conclude that classroom environments and seats engagements were not fitting to teach/learn English speaking skills. The adequacy and appropriateness of the chairs and desks, seating arrangements and class size were the major challenges for effective teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms in school. The result of the computed aggregate mean value is 1.40. This indicates that classroom environments and seats engagements were the major problems.

The Ultimatums of Teaching Speaking skills in the Actual Classroom Practices

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of responses to items related to the ultimatums of teaching speaking skills in the actual classroom practice

Item	Statement		Responses					Total	Mean
			5	4	3	2	1		
5	I am vigorously involved in doing English speaking tasks in the classroom.	F	2	6	3	21	48	80	1.66
		%	2.5	7.5	3.7	26.3	60.0	100	
6	I am not shy when I am speaking in English, i.e. I am confident enough to it.	F	1	3	0	55	21	80	1.85
		%	1.2	3.7	0.0	68.8	26.3	100	
7	I am blissful to run-through speaking in pair/group in English classrooms.	F	1	4	0	27	48	80	1.54
		%	1.2	5.0	0.0	33.8	60.0	100	
8	My English teacher's instruction is flawless in the speaking lesson.	F	2	9	1	39	29	80	1.95
		%	2.5	11.3	1.2	48.7	36.3	100	
9	My English teacher guides and encourages students to express /reflect their opinion/experience in English.	F	4	5	0	28	43	80	1.74
		%	5.0	6.3	0.0	35.0	53.7	100	
10	The teacher always provides judicious responses to students.	F	3	2	0	47	28	80	1.81
		%	3.7	2.5	0.0	58.8	35.0	100	
Grand Mean								1.76	

Key: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=I am not sure, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree, F=Frequency, %=Percentage

With regard to item number 5, 60.0% of the respondents strongly disagreed that they vigorously involved in doing English speaking tasks in the classroom. 68.8% the participants disagreed that they were confident while they were speaking in English rather they were introverted. Due to this (60.0%) the students were not blissful to practice speaking in pair/group in English classrooms. 48.7% of the respondents disagreed that their English teacher's instruction was flawless in the speaking lesson. 53.7% of the respondents disagreed that their English teacher guided and encouraged students to express/reflect their opinion/experience in English; their teacher didn't always provide (58.8%) judicious responses to students.

As far as interview and classroom observation are concerned, teachers' interview revealed that most of the learners have very less confidence in English speaking. In addition, it was also observed that students have fear and anxiety of making mistakes when they are speaking in English. Therefore, based on this discussion, the confidence in learners was very low.

One can realize that teachers were not sufficiently

practicing teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms. The quality of teacher to use different strategies to teach, especially, the capacity to create good condition in large class, instruct and manage appropriately and encourage class participation and promote active learning were determinant factors to practice teaching in speaking skills classrooms.

In general, in speaking tasks students looked being shy and uninterested. Thus, teachers ought to create conducive atmosphere in the classroom and encourage students with various strategies in order that students should practice speaking skills adequately and generate the opportunity for them to interact comfortably in order to develop their speaking skills successfully. When this is explained in terms of mean, the mean value of the responses for these items is 1.76 which indicates the ultimatums of teaching speaking skills in the actual classroom were deprived. Concerning this, the affective sides of the learners is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure (Stern, 1983).

Pedagogical Stratagems

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of responses to items related to pedagogical strategies in teaching English speaking skills

Item	Statement		Responses					Total	Mean
			5	4	3	2	1		
11	How often does your English teacher use student-centered approach to teach English speaking contents?	F	2	4	3	25	46	80	1.64
		%	2.5	5.0	3.7	31.3	57.5	100	
12	How often does your teacher teach English speaking contents through pair and group work?	F	1	3	1	26	49	80	1.51
		%	1.2	3.7	1.2	32.6	61.3	100	
13	How often does your teacher elicit spot-on responses from students instead of supplying answers?	F	4	3	4	24	45	80	1.71
		%	5.0	3.7	5.0	30.0	56.3	100	
14	How often does your teacher tell stories in English in the English speaking classroom?	F	0	2	3	23	52	80	1.44
		%	0.0	2.5	3.7	28.8	65.0	100	
15	How often does your teacher conduct debating on different topics in English in the English speaking classroom?	F	0	0	1	23	56	80	1.31
		%	0.0	0.0	1.2	28.8	70.0	100	
16	How often does your teacher create different status quos that develop your English speaking skills?	F	0	1	5	27	47	80	1.50
		%	0.0	1.2	6.3	33.8	58.7	100	
17	How often does your teacher use language game modus operandi to improve your English speaking skills?	F	1	3	7	27	42	80	1.68
		%	1.2	3.7	8.8	33.8	52.5	100	
Grand Mean								1.54	

Key: 5 =Always, 4=Usually, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never, F=Frequency, %=Percentage

As disclosed in the above table (see item number 11), 57.5% of the participants replied that their teacher never used student-centered approach to teach English speaking contents; and 61.3% of the students said that their teacher never taught English speaking contents through pair and group work. Majority of the respondents (65.0%) replied that the English teacher didn't use stories in English in the English speaking classrooms. Besides, 70.0% of the defendants replied that the teacher never conducted debating on different topics in English in the English speaking classroom due to the large size of the class.

As far as interview is concerned, almost all teachers responded that they never let students to form pairs and groups in speaking lessons appropriately. The interviewed teacher said:

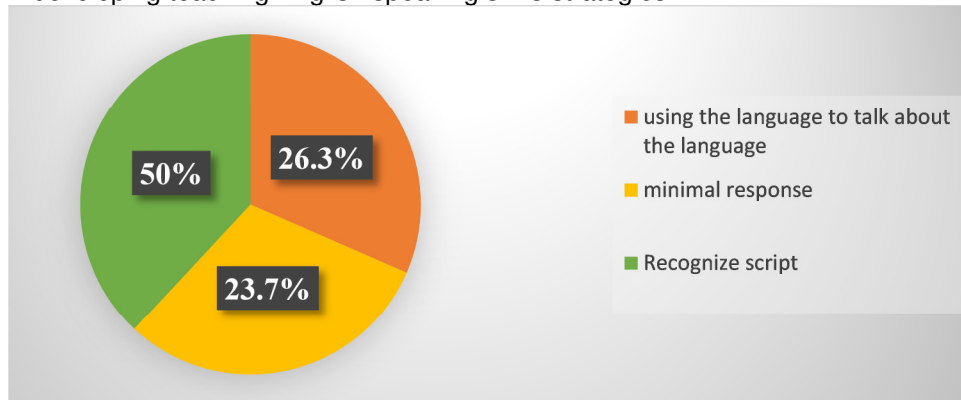
Most of the time, I do not give attention for speaking lessons because of many factors.

Therefore, instead of focusing on speaking lessons, mostly I give attention for grammar part of the text book. So, I do not arrange my students either in pairs or groups and let them practice speaking lessons because of their large number. In the class what I usually do is simply teach the grammar part using lecture methods.

From the above data one can conclude, the majority of the students never participated actively in speaking activities. For instance, they did not involve in asking and answering questions, talking to their partner, conducting debate, telling story. In the main, they did not practice speaking when teachers provide some opportunities. Majority of the students didn't have motivation, willingness and initiation to practice English speaking while the lesson is delivered. The result of the computed aggregate mean value is 1.54. This indicates that pedagogical stratagems were not castoff in the actual classroom teaching and learning.

Strategies to Developing Teaching Speaking Skills

Pie chart 1: Frequency and percentage of responses to items related to developing teaching English speaking skills strategies

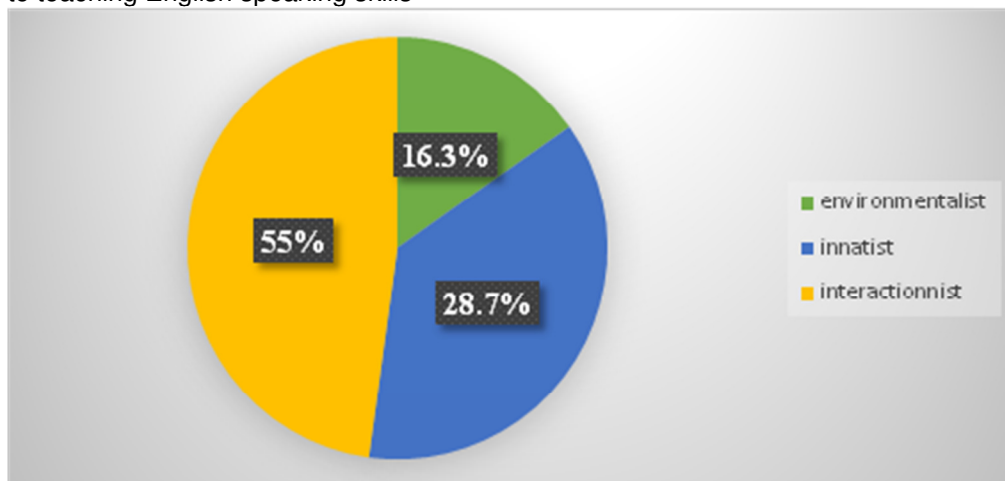


As demonstrated from the above pie chart, respondents were asked; which stratagems the teachers mostly employ for developing English speaking skills; 40 (50%) of respondents frequently opted recognize scripts strategies of teaching speaking skills, it indicates that the teacher mostly employed it as strategies of teaching speaking skills and the remaining 21 (26.3%) using the language to talk about the language and 19 (23.7%) using minimal response were the second and the third choices of the respondents that the teacher mostly applied in the classroom. It indicated that using the language to talk about the language and using minimal response were the teachers less frequently applied strategies of teaching English speaking skills.

As it is noted in the pie chart above, the investigator concluded that strategies of teaching speaking skills were factors of the learners' English language speaking skill limitation. Hence, all these methods/strategies were very crucial to develop speaking skills. Thus, teachers should use each of the above strategies interchangeably based on the learners' situation, interest and learning preference. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language which help themselves to expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it so that the students can use speaking to learn (McKay, 2003).

Approaches to Teaching English Speaking Skills

Pie chart 2: Frequency and percentage of responses to items related to approaches to teaching English speaking skills



The respondents were asked, which approaches English teachers mostly use for developing speaking skills? 44 (55%) of the respondents responded 'interactionist approach', 23 (28.7%) of the respondents said 'innatist approach', and 13 (16.3%) of them said 'environmentalist approach'. The result revealed that teachers mostly used interactionist approach and sometimes environmentalist approach in the classroom so as to develop the students speaking skills, but teachers should also use innatist teaching approach in the classroom.

According to Bygate (1991), since advances in language learning over the past decades have influenced how speaking has been learned and taught, a review the role that this skill has played within three approaches to language learning, namely: environmentalist, innatist and interactionist approach. One can understand that teachers can use the above list of approaches depending on the students' ability, attitude, needs, learning preferences and knowledge of the language.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion made in the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- ✚ Classes were large in size or overcrowded, due to that, the classrooms were not arranged or organized in the way that could develop students speaking skills. Moreover, classrooms were not equipped with modern learning resources. No teaching aids or other supplementary materials were seen being used to facilitate the teaching English speaking skills. Thus, these were also the factors affecting teaching English speaking skills related to the classroom environments and seats engagements.
- ✚ English teachers were required to develop speaking activities that pave the way or open the path for students to use the language for real-life communication. However, the study showed that teachers were rarely let students to practice English speaking.
- ✚ Most students need little encouragement to use English outside the classroom. They just need to be reminded of the opportunities that are out there. Teachers need to harness the amazing power of learning outside the classroom. However, the finding showed that students speak little English only inside the classroom. And as a result, the use of English only inside the classroom is another factor that hinders the successful of the students' learning English speaking skills.
- ✚ The findings of the study showed that the

interactionist teaching speaking approach was dominantly employed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

- ✚ Teachers should create a favorable learning condition and opportunities for students' learning English speaking skills. They should let students to practice English speaking through dialogues, role play, picture description, debating, storytelling, peers interview, and listening to the records on the radio or video and present the report back to the class. The fact that well planned speaking lesson always motivates the learners, teachers must plan and design speaking lesson in the way that should motivate students.
- ✚ Teachers should also use learners-centered approach in order to let students do the talking when practicing English speaking skills. They should provide some pronunciation points in the lesson to help building students' English fluency.
- ✚ The way students sit in the classroom affects the way they interact with each other. So, the chairs should be convenient for pair work, small group or large group discussions.
- ✚ Therefore, it is generally recommended that capacity building trainings need to be provided to the English teachers focusing on the planning and designing of the speaking activities, techniques, and strategies that could let teachers to easily provide students with meaningful and functioning English speaking lesson so that students can develop their English speaking skills so easily and quickly.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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