

THE IMPACT OF DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES ON IMPROVING STUDENTS' FLUENCY IN SPEAKING SKILL

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ABSTRACT: *This study intends to examine the impact of discussion activities on improving students' fluency in speaking skill. Classroom observation was implemented as a research instrument to collect data. This study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year (2019–2020). The total sample of this study was 60 respondents, 20 English language teachers and 40 female students from the First Common Year (FCY) at Al- Jouf University. An analytical descriptive study was done. The findings of the study indicate that the different types of discussion activities were ignored especially that engage and encourage speaking skill performance. This study can be helpful for English language teachers and may contribute to the promotion and improvement of the English language teaching and learning by practising various discussion activities in the classroom to engage students, and raise their level of motivation, confidence and fluency, and thus improve their speaking skill*

KEYWORDS: speaking skill, group discussion, classroom interaction, confidence, fluency.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion activities are a great way to practice fluency and improve students' confidence in speaking skill. Teachers sometimes spend more time in the classroom talking to their students, but students need an opportunity to practice the English Language and talk too. Involve some enjoyable discussion activities into the classroom to give students a chance to participate their ideas, express their knowledge and interact with teachers and one another is enormously important for improving students' fluency in speaking skill, hence such strategies are reducing Teacher Talking Time (TTT).

Discussion activities embolden critical thinking and are consequently excellent preparation for speaking tests, which partially examine the ability to explain and rationalize ideas and opinions in English. Possibly most importantly, discussion activities can give sufficient opportunity for students to produce language and it can be a great way of fun for students. Applying discussion activities in the English speaking classroom has several benefits such as increasing students' motivation and interest, teachers who involve discussions activities in their lectures can support

maintain students' concentration, therefore speaking up in front of the class helps students to practice their public speaking skills smoothly and courageously, and it enhances confidence in speaking and improving fluency.

Teachers must encourage and help students who do not participate and be mindful to the sensibilities of shy students; integrate them into the discussion with corroboration and worried students may be highly assisted by writing down some ideas and points before participating support them to try that way. To sum up, speaking is considered as one of the important skills which students should acquire. Speaking ability helps the students to interact, communicate and discuss utilizing language English fluently, and of course, discussion activities is one of those techniques that improve speaking skill perfectly as well.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING:

Harmer (2001) asserted that discussion activities, considered as the most useful and interesting form of oral practice in the classroom since it offers chances for students to exchange their thoughts, talk about their experiences and express their opinions to Improve their communicative ability when using the English language. Meanwhile, Little Wood (1981) confirms that: “discussion provides learners with opportunities to express their personality and experience through the foreign language” (p.47). This means that “discussion” is regarded as a real language experience where the students use their abilities in order to use such speaking activity.

The purpose of applying discussion activities:

Discussion activities in the classroom may serve several purposes in developing speaking skill, for instance:

- 1- It reinforces confidence in speaking.
- 2- It supplies a deeper comprehending of the course.
- 3- It can change opinion and show the things from a Different Perspective.
- 4- It promotes the capacity to think critically.
- 5- It provides varied ways to do a problem-solving.
- 6- It assists the students in taking a decision
- 7- It enables a student to introduce her point of view.
- 8- It gives a chance to share the opinions of other students.

The characteristics of discussion activities:

Students in the class should have a mutual understanding. Students' correlation. An opportunity to verify and develop finding notions and ideas.

The types of discussion activities:

Discussion activities consist of various activities which allow students to practice their English language perfectly and properly with fluency and confidence such as:

a) Group Discussions:

Group discussions defined as an activity in which a small number of students sit together face to face and bandies and participates thoughts smoothly and freely, or trying to decide on a specific topic. Group discussions are an extremely important aspect of classroom discussion. They play a vital and creative role which motivates reflexive thinking between the classroom members. An effective group discussions engage students speaking skill.

In learning English as a foreign language, discussion group has an important impact since it gives students the opportunities to communicate with their teacher as in the lesson or with each other's when they work in groups. Cohen, Brody and Shevin (2004) stated that in the classroom situation, many teachers worry about making group work since they do not know how to organize and manage their classroom to create a good environment that will stimulate their students to fulfil collaboratively in the classroom. Learners when doing group work, the learning task need to be understandable by all students of the group to allow all students to take part in that task or discussion, they also need to know how to request assist and how to help the other members of their group working well to make their group more successful than other groups; furthermore, they need to know how to solve such problems that may arise in classroom (p. 167). Group work then, makes the learners do well in the classroom and develop their English language as all wright and Bailey (1991), confirm and also they perform a widely on communicative functions with the language.

b) Oral Presentation:

Despite the use of oral presentations is increasingly widespread in higher education but many students may not be familiar with this type of discussion activities. Oral presentations can supply a useful chance for students to practice speaking skills which are required in classroom communication. Providing opportunities to discuss and practice in a the quiet and safe the atmosphere, for instance by creating short oral presentation activities with discussion and feedback into class time might contribute to improving speaking skill and building self-confidence in communication and interacting fluently.

c) Classroom interaction:

In present years, classroom interaction has been considered as a strategy in the field of second language acquisition since it requires at least the involvement of two students who collaborate in face-to-face interaction when using a language in a real situation, we can notice that classroom interaction is one of the vital methods in which learners elicit information. Also, classroom interaction gives the students the opportunities to get feedback from the teacher or other students in the class which leads to develop their language speaking skill. For her (Hedge), speaking in the

classroom makes students able to face their lack of language knowledge; such as repeating, speaking slowly, or clarifying their opinions while talking together. It means in English language teaching, interaction and practice encourage learners to produce appropriate language when they are discussing and working in pairs or groups; because interaction makes the learners be able to test their communicative success through exchanging knowledge among the students themselves or with the teacher (as stated in Lyster, 2007). So, classroom interaction play prominent roles to manage classroom participation and stimulate student language production.

In this meaning, Nunan (1991) asserts that “learning to speak in a second or foreign language will be facilitated when students actively engaged in attempting to communicate” (p. 51). Meanwhile, Krashen (1982) claims that speaking cannot be taught directly, but rather brings out over time and on its own after the acquisition has bolstered competence through comprehending input. Also, effective improvement will only take place if the learner is afforded the interactional opportunities to modify and extend his inter-language system (Ellis, 1985).

d) Information Gap activities:

In addition to the above activities, Information Gap activity is a kind of speaking activity that is used where two speakers have different parts of information that depicts a whole image when connecting them one part to another. This activity requires the students’ capacity to fill gaps when there is a missing of information and also needs the student’s vocabulary and ideas to exchange it with another student because, in most English language classes, the teacher utilizes this type of activities aiming at sharing notion, ideas and information between students during a classroom to promote oral discussion in the course (Harmer, 1998, p.88).

e) Describing picture:

Brown (2004), states that describing the picture as a technique can be considered a powerful and important way to obtain students’ oral language performance at extensive and intensive levels. Wright (1989) argues that describing pictures can motivate students to participate in speaking activities and therefore enhance the discussion in the class. According to Byrne (1980) pictures can stimulate students’ oral discussion and explanation of the topic. Additionally, Wright also suggests that they motivate, stimulate, and provide information for speaking activities. So, from that opinion, describing pictures represent man benefits assisting both teachers and students in the learning process. Besides Wright confirms that using pictures encourages students to use their imaginations.

The effect of discussion activities on fluency and confidence in speaking skill:

Students who are shy to speak in front of their classmates as a whole might find a small group of discussion activities is less daunting. If they can practice speaking with the smaller group it may assist students to acquire the fluency and confidence to speak in front of the whole class. Think-Pair-Share is a kind of discussion strategy which joins both small group and big group discussion. When given a topic or a question students think for a while then divide into pairs or small groups. They discuss the small group and then share with the class. If a student is obsessed with talking in

front of the whole classroom, Think-Pair-Share provides them with an opportunity to practice before talking to all classroom.

The benefits of discussion activities & challenges:

There are many benefits of classroom discussion activities, for example, but not limited:

1. It develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning.
2. It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.
3. It encourages attentive, respectful listening and speaking.
4. It helps students become connected to a topic.
5. It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
6. It increases intellectual agility in using the language.
7. It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
8. It shows respect for student voices and experiences.
9. It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
10. It develops habits of collaborative learning.

The teacher role in discussion activities:

A teacher has a great and important role when intending to prepare discussion activities to his/ her student, and here are some criteria to think about when preparing them, first of all, the teacher should consider the culture of the classroom and the atmosphere in which the topic of discussion is appropriate, also involve the students by asking them to choose the topic that would like to talk about or discuss. Furthermore, decide how to divide the class and to set a time limit for the beginning and the end of discussion activities. So if the students are notably shy give them a feature to role-play helps a lot. Also, make sure that the students have some knowledge about the topic and the vocabulary they need. Give them plenty of time to prepare before they start the discussion activity. Finally, getting them to produce a mind map will help them expand their ideas and notions on the topic and then keep how discussion going.

PREVIOUS STUDIES:

Kelly O'Neal (2009). While there is an agreement that participation in online asynchronous discussions can enhance student learning, it has also been identified that there is a need to study the impact of participation in online asynchronous discussions compared to traditional discussions on student course content knowledge. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using asynchronous discussions in an online course compared to traditional classroom face-to-face discussions. The instructional program for both groups included the same required textbook, syllabus, and activities. Qualitative data were collected through transcribed course discussions and printed threaded discussions to measure the quality of discussions related to course content. Several similar themes emerged for both groups of students indicating that both groups had similar discussions related to the course content. The results of this study have direct implications for using asynchronous discussions in an online learning environment.

Yekyung Lee & Peggy A. Ertmer (2006). This study investigated the effect of group discussions and question prompts on students' vicarious learning experiences. Vicarious experiences were delivered to 65 pre-service teachers via Vision Quest, a Web site that provided examples of successful technology integration. A 2×2 factorial research design employed group discussions and question prompts as independent variables and students' perceptions of their competencies and self-efficacy for technology integration as dependent variables. While three of the four conditions showed significant increases in perceptions of knowledge and skills, ANOVA results showed no significant differences among treatments. It is speculated that additional conditions may have distracted students from the content/message of the teacher models highlighted on Vision Quest.

Hye-Yeon Lim (2003), this paper discusses ways for teachers to enhance the effectiveness of class discussions for adult Korean ESL/EFL learners. Native English speaking teachers often encounter difficulties dealing with South Korean (hereafter Korean) students who tend to be reserved and express fewer opinions in oral class discussions. Teachers lacking an understanding of Korean students may misinterpret the students' behaviours and have a hard time encouraging discussion and helping them learn and practise English in class. This paper will discuss common behaviours and perceptions embedded in the structure of Korean group dynamics and examine why Korean students tend to exhibit certain classroom behaviours. Some suggestions for tackling Korean students' group structures will be made to help teachers better facilitate group discussion.

METHODOLOGY

The main research question used to direct this study: Is there any impact of classroom discussion activities on improving students' fluency in speaking skill?

Participants:

The participants composed of university students (n= 60) and English language teachers (n= 20). The students were selected randomly from classes of the Common First Year, therefore, two classes consist of (30) students in each were selected. The students' age ranged from 18 to 19. However, all the twenty English language teachers in the college were intentionally selected. The reason that 20 teachers were chosen was that all of them taught the English course at the First Common Year (FCY) and their teaching experience over (4) years of teaching.

Instruments:

In this study, the researchers used the instruments, namely classroom observations, as an instrument so that to investigate classroom discussion activities on improving students' fluency in speaking skill which utilized by teachers beside a questionnaire which was distributed to the students in two classes they were chosen intentionally chosen by virtue of the researchers have worked in the selected classes.

Data Collection:

The classroom observation data were analyzed manually in the form of thematic and interpretative analyses. The written data first were organized, and then they were divided into relevant themes, categories, and patterns. The questionnaire included (15) closed-ended statements. It was made of a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD=1), disagree (d=2), unsure (U=3), agree (A=4), and strongly agree (A=5). Finally, the data collected through the two instruments were compared and contrasted to make decisions and report them.

Validity & Reliability

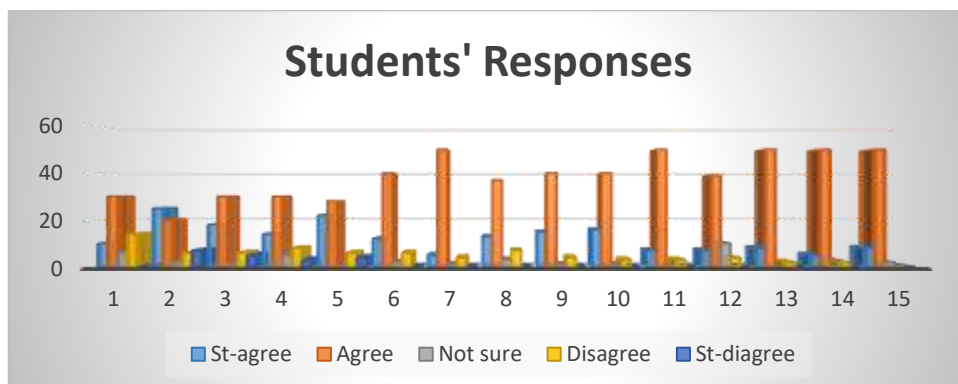
It can be argued that the instruments are valid since it have been developed and used by specialists in this field. However, six EFL specialists were kindly requested to check if the instruments were appropriate and relevant to the domains and context. Also, they have suggested some valuable remarks about the instruments, and the researchers responded to that.

The Procedure:

The researchers observed two classes from the First Common Year (FCY) at Jouf University. The aim was to investigate the impact of discussion activities on improving EFL Students' Fluency in Speaking Skill and the interaction of the students with their teachers and materials used, beside the classroom size and its organization using a checklist. However, the researchers observed all activities that run in the classroom and the process of teaching speaking using discussion activities. On the other hand, to elicit what is happening inside the classroom, the researchers have chosen two classrooms randomly and observed each of them during their classes. The classroom observation data were captured via different sorts of notes.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

5.1 : Students' questionnaire:



The brief results in the above chart indicate that most of the students are satisfied with the use of the discussion activities techniques in the classroom. The degree of agreement was high, between strongly agree and agree as the percentage reached 65% for agreeing and 20.1% for strongly agree, while the non-sure students were about 4.1%, and 8.3% for disagreeing and 2.1% for the strongly disagree option, which means that the degree of satisfaction and agreement is very high.

Check list of the classroom observation:

Items	Always	Sometimes	A few	Never
1.The use of group discussions	✓			
1.1 Oral Presentation		✓		
1.2 Classroom interaction	✓			
1.3 Information gap activities	✓			
1.4 Describing picture		✓		
2. Language items	✓			
2.1 grammar	✓			
2.2 listening	✓			
3.pronunciation	✓			
3.1 Sounds	✓			
3.2 words		✓		
4. Fluency	✓			
4.1. pauses	✓			
4.2 hesitation	✓			
5.Classroom organization		✓		
5.1.pair work	✓			
5.2.seating arrangements	✓			

CONCLOSSION

This study attempted to find out whether the classroom discussion activities impact on improving students' fluency in speaking skill or not. Thus discussion activities can be considered as a key factor that leads students to a successful classroom interaction among students themselves and also

with their teachers too, they can bring fundamental aspects and important benefits and advantages of language learning in the classroom.

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