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**IMPACT OF TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH ONLINE VIRTUAL CLASSES ON DEVELOPING STUDENTS' FLUENCY**

**Dr. Mahdi Adam Othman Omer**

Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Jouf University, Saudi Arabia.

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of teaching English online course through virtual class (blackboard) on developing students' English language speaking fluency. To verify this hypothesis, the researcher conducted English speaking course of 7 weeks for the first common year students during first semester. The researcher conducted qualitative and quantitative study to investigate learners' levels and fluency in speaking. The participants in this study were (60) first common year students at jouf university. The researcher used the questionnaire and pre and posttests of speaking to investigate learners' levels and the progress that happen in their levels after finishing the course. Besides, many speaking activates and quizzes were applied to help learners to practice speaking. The course duration was 7 weeks. The study took place in Saudi Arabia, in March- 2021. The result of the pre and posttests was significantly different in favor of the post test. The levels of students were developed dramatically. The study recommends, the need of effective speaking program for developing students' English speaking fluency through different online learning programs or any other effective communicative learning methods.*

**KEYWORDS:** fluency, blackboard, virtual classes, quiz.

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## INTROCUCTION

Online learning is an old method of teaching and communication. It began in the mid-1990s based on the internet. It was first started and used in different institute of management and strategic studies in California for distance education programs. It involves courses offered by different institutions that are mostly virtual, excluding intensive online courses ,online learning, or virtual classes through the internet. In an online teaching, we should prepare the suitable environment for learners, use of effective methods to encourage learners to interact and participate. There are four fundamental characteristics that may assist with the success of online instruction: (1) learner should be engaged throughout the course; (2) group participation (3) frequent interaction between student-student and student-teacher. (4) the course content should relate to the real world to enhance meaning for participants. As for developing students' English speaking fluency through virtual classes, the researchers used different essential methods and techniques to achieve the objectives of the study.

Developing this program was very important for filling the gap during corona lockdown. It helped learners to communicate through blackboard using English language as a language of instruction. The most important findings of this study

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revealed that the program was effective on developing learners' fluency and communication competences. The study also concluded that there are many factors that can affect students' English fluency. In short, speaking fluency in English need more practice and understanding of different communication forms. It also depends on achieving a certain levels of language skills. Many research findings show that developing speaking fluency is important part of learning a second language because it helps learners to communicate effectively and understand how languages work. (Chaney, 2010). Distance learning is a rapidly expanding environment which allows users the flexibility of operating outside of the constraints of time and place.

According to U.S. Department of Education, (2010), the Office of Educational Technology in the U.S. Department of Education conducted the “Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students” survey in 2002-03 school year to gain insight into the prevalence of distance learning in public school districts” (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2014). The findings revealed that approximately one-third or 5,500 out of a total of 15,040 public school districts had at least one student enrolled in a distance learning course during the 2002-03 school year. Setzer & Lewis, (2005) notes that in 2009-10, the number of public school districts offering distance education courses rose to an estimated 53 percent (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2014).

According to Babson, (2014, p. 1),the expansion of online courses and enrollment in elementary, high school and higher education continues to rapidly expand with no signs of slowing. Also, Chaney, (2010) observe that online learning has the potential to create educational opportunities for individuals who may have faced unsurpassable barriers prior to the expansion of online educational programs. Advantages Online courses have been found to be conducive to students who favor self-regulated learning. Kirtman, (2009, p. 110) stressed that Self-regulated learners have a tendency to use various “cognitive and metacognitive strategies to accomplish their learning goal” while Bowen, Chingos, Lack, & Nygren, (2014, p. 1) note that One type of online environment can be referred to as “interactive learning online” (ILO). ILO refers “to highly sophisticated, interactive online courses in which machine-guided instruction can substitute for some (though not usually all) traditional, face-to-face instruction”.

Thomson, (2010) observed that communication is notably one of the most crucial elements to an effective online course. While Savenye, (2005). Stressed that interaction between the learner and the content is the most common type of interaction that occurs in online settings, through lectures and readings. Online instructors can orchestrate the class environment to increase the interaction between the learner and the instructor and the learner and other learners through both synchronous and asynchronous interactions. Davies & Pearse, (1998) noted that not all language learners after many years studying English can communicate fluently and accurately because they lack necessary speaking knowledge. Also, Brown & Yule, (1983) said that reality, many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language. Each student has their own problems.

Nation & Newton (2009) believe that performance conditions can affect speaking performance. The four types of performance conditions that Nation & Newton (2009) suggestion include time pressure, planning, the standard of performance and the amount of support. Affective factors one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure is probably the affective side of the learner (Oxford, 1990).

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURE**

The research methodology in the current study is described in terms of procedure and data collection tools. It aims to achieve the purposes and the aims of the study. No doubt that there isn't an ideal method in teaching language. However, the learners' needs and their levels can decide the methods and the program needs. The researcher used different method and techniques so as to achieve the need of the learners and the program.

The researcher followed the following steps: • Designed a questionnaire to investigate respondents' needs and views towards the program and the factors that may affect speaking fluency. • Used pre and posttest in English language speaking so as to define learners' levels, and to investigate the effective ness of the program on developing students' fluency after taking the posttest of speaking. • Conducted around 28 speaking lessons and different activities during the program periods of 7 weeks, conducted in the first mid semester. • Used different drilling practices (intensive speaking practice, students were asked to record their topic and to send them to the instructor, online audios, practicing conversation and oral communication discussions about the topics in speaking and tests reviewing. • Weekly speaking tracks to be recorded by students and getting feedback from instructor and weekly intensive speaking group discussion using everyday vocabulary and different speaking topics.

### **The Participants of the study (1st year university students)**

The participants of the study were (60) first common year students at joun university. They study English as a second language. Their English level is beginners and they study English as online course through virtual classes on the blackboard. They were divided into two groups so as to ease learning and communication through blackboard.

### **Variables of the study**

As it is clear known that, defining of variables is so important for conducting of every study. In the current study, the variables were defined as independent and in dependent variables. Independent variables are represented in the English language speaking program for developing students' speaking fluency, whereas dependent variables are represented in the huge development on students' English language speaking fluency after they have finished the instructional program.

### **Teaching Materials and the Instruments of the study**

In each teaching process, using of materials and instruments is so important for facilitating teaching process and make it effective. In this study, the researcher has used the following materials and instrument:

- used the questionnaire as data gathering tools to investigate respondents' views towards the suggested speaking program.
- conducted pre-posttest of speaking to investigate levels and needs.
- developed an integrated effective English speaking program.
- used videos, audios, visual aids, pictures, and other materials.
- used students' recording and speaking practice through whatsapp.

Description of the questionnaire design and data collection

The questionnaire aimed to investigate the respondents' views toward the English language speaking program and some other factors.

The questionnaire was constructed based on the following points:

1. Based on the research questions and the need of the study.
2. Designed based on self-experiences and colleagues' advices.
3. Regarding students' level and focusing on speaking fluency development and factors that can affect speaking and fluency.
4. Focusing on online speaking activities about different topics.

As for validating of the questionnaire questions, they were submitted to the academics' experts in order to investigate their clarity and suitability to learners' level and needs. Based on their recommendations and advices, the researcher designed the questionnaire questions.

### **The Pre and posttests of English language speaking fluency**

The pre and posttest aim to define participants' speaking fluency, their English speaking levels and to find out the expected change in their speaking fluency after finishing the English speaking program.

The pre and posttests were constructed base on the following:

1. After oral communication with learners individually and in groups.
2. Reviewing many English speaking lessons for beginners' students.
3. Giving students a chance to talk about pictures and questioning each other about different topics and to introduce themselves individually using direct contact.

The pretest of speaking consisted of direct interview, describing pictures and free talk about specific topics. For test validation, the researcher submitted them to the jury of academic specialist and native speakers who teach English as second language at Jouf

university. The jury members and the teachers were requested to judge the clarity of the questions and their suitability to students' levels and the area that the test aimed to measure. Based on their recommendation and advices, the tests were designed. As for test-retest reliability, the researcher computed the reliability before administrating the test to participants. The test was given as first test (T1) to 60 students in the first mid of semester one and then 7 weeks later, the same test is given as second test (T2) to the same group of learners under the same conditions, after finishing the English language course for the first mid. The correlation coefficient between the first and the second test was calculated using the correlation coefficient analysis. The scores on two occasions were perfectly correlated. Referring back to tables (2&3) and figures (2&3) in data analysis. The reliability coefficient Was between 0,9-0,8 as shown in table (6) which was statistically highly significant, therefor the pre and posttests were considered to be reliable.

### The English language instructional program guideline

In the present English speaking program, the researcher followed the following steps to achieve the objectives of the study needs.

- a. used the communicative methods for developing speaking fluency.
- b. used appropriate materials and teaching aids for teaching speaking.
- c. defined clear learning objectives based on the program need.
- d. encouraged students to communicate through direct call, group discussion and recording their topics through WhatsApp messages.

Based on the teacher's knowledge, study needs and objectives, the researcher developed this program. Moreover, these different views have great influence on developing this program. The researcher has followed a certain plan to guide him to conduct this program. The plan includes the objectives, procedure, speaking practice and English speaking lessons and continual evaluation. As for students, they were asked to follows certain instructions. The researcher prepared a context of speaking and listening consists of 28 English lessons and about 35 different speaking activates to train learners. In addition to that, the researcher used clear instructions and strategies for planning, revising, and self-regulation during the course teaching development process.

### **Characteristic of the speaking Instructional Program**

The basic characteristic of each program, should be effective, tied to student needs and should to achieves the desired goals and objectives. According to Newman (2001, p. 299). Strong instructional program flows from the use of a “common instructional framework guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning climate. The framework combines specific expectations for student learning with specific strategies and materials to guide teaching and assessment.

The most distinguishing characteristics of the current study are follows:

1. under developing university students' English speaking fluency.

2. The use of multi teaching approaches, methods and techniques.
3. A pre-posttest were used to identify learners' needs and levels.
4. using of questionnaires as data gathering tools method.
5. Focusing on communication through topics and direct discussion.

### **Factors affecting students' speaking performance and fluency**

Speaking fluency is one of the most common problem for nonnative speakers in the context of second language speaking. And there are many factors that can affect students' English speaking fluency:

1. motivation, confidence, anxiety, listening ability and feedback during speaking activities. Nation & Newton (2009) believe that performance conditions can affect speaking performance. (all these factors were investigated during study)
2. cognitive factors, linguistic factors, and effective factors (Wang, 2014). the cognitive factors that affect speaking process include conceptualization, formulation, and articulation (Levelt,2007). Conceptualization concern with kinds of information selected to express meaning. Formulation refers to the ability of speaker chosen the using of proper words in appropriate grammatical formulation deals with speaker's ability to select proper words of grammatical structures. Articulation was speech articulatory organs that the speaker articulates.
3. self confidence among learners is one of the basic communication problem. Most learners avoiding to speak in English because they lack self-confidence and they avoid to commit mistakes while speaking.

### **The content of virtual classes**

As mentioned earlier, teaching English speaking through virtual classes during the period of corona lockdown has given the researcher the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this program on developing learners English speaking fluency. The program content in this study is based on the semester plan and consist as follows:

- 20 hours of online classes per week contacting with learners through black board focusing on speaking development (7 weeks).
- Choosing of multiple teaching methods and different speaking tasks.
- students divided into two groups of thirty students for each group.
- The focus was on online interactive lessons and individual speaking tasks.
- Using recording and direct talk for regular evaluation of students.
- Pre-posttest for identifying students' levels and the development. placement test available

### **Identifying learner's need**

The basic task for teacher is to discover, validate, and classify the learning needs. (Noessel, 2003). Each learner is unique, and brings to the learning situation his or her own different learning style, knowledge set, pool of past experiences, and motivation. In learner-centered instruction, it is important for instructors to consider the level of



knowledge and skill development attained by the learners prior to instruction (Dick, & Carey, 2004). The needs of learners should be considered within the contexts of:

- their current physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development
- the classroom and school environment
- the special nature of their communities
- a wider knowledge, needs, and physical activity patterns of learners.

The best way to get the information is by investigating learner's views. For determining the readiness of participants for learning, the teacher should decide how to collect and use data on learner needs. There is no single best way to gather information about learner's needs, but instructors can anticipate learner needs based on their prior knowledge about their skills, content they will need to achieve and the instructions that they can use. Based on what mentioned above, the researcher used the questionnaire to investigate learner's needs about the program.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

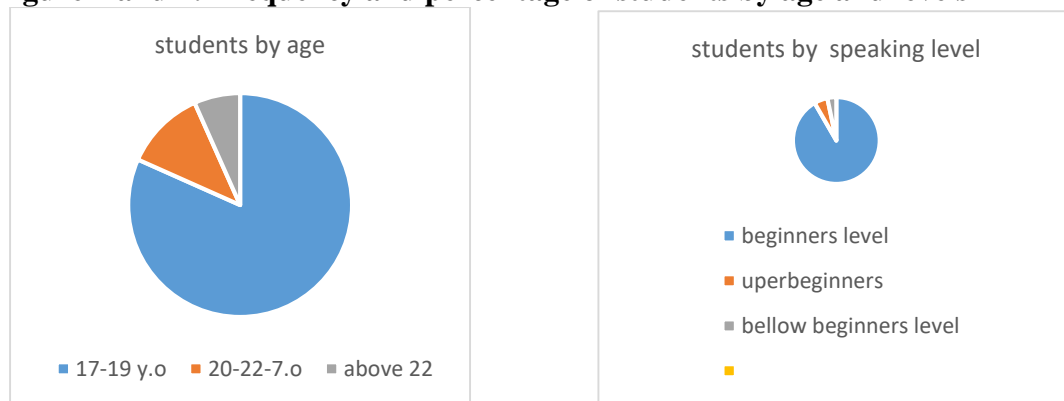
No doubt that, understanding problems and exploring the way of analyzing facts, figures, and interpretation into meaningful ways is so important for well understanding of any study. As for evaluation of this program, all data should be analyzed and interpreted. The general population of this study were 60 university students of first common year. Based on the diagnosed test result, the students' fluency level was beginners level. In this study, the data have been analyzed and interpreted through tables and figures. The researcher used graphical representation, data explanation and statistical methods. This part represents assessment of questionnaire findings with regards to the biographical data, statistical analysis of the questionnaire's questions and comparing the results of the pre and posttest of English speaking skills in order to investigate the change happen on students' fluency.

### Interpreting of students' questionnaire results and data

The students' questionnaire consists of two parts. Part one includes the biographical data of students like age and their English speaking level. Part two includes three basic questions about fluency development.

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage of students by age and level**

Subject	Students' age range			Percentage (%) and the total
	(17-19)	(20-22)	(above 22)	
frequency percent	<b>49</b> (81%)	<b>7</b> (12%)	<b>4</b> (7%)	60 100%
speaking levels	beginners	upper beginners	Bellow beginners	Percentage (%) and the total
frequency percent	55 (92%)	<b>3</b> (5%)	<b>2</b> (3%)	60 100%

**Figure 1 and 2: Frequency and percentage of students by age and levels****Interpretation of Data**

From the table 1 and figures 1 and 2 above, we notice that there are no big variables on students' ages, but it is important to classify them so as to realize the effect of ages on their level. Most learners' ages range between (17-19) years old 49(91%), 12%(7) between range between 20-22 and only 7(4%) above 22 years old. As for their English speaking level, the majority of students 55(92%) their level is beginners, three students their level is above beginners 3(5%) and only 2(3%) their level is above beginners. All students study in one stage.

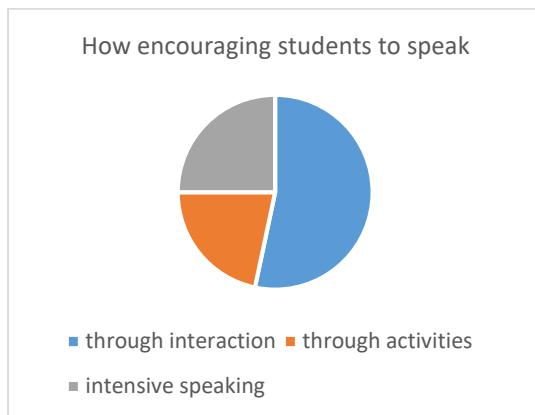


**Table 2: Identifying students' views toward the questionnaire questions**

Questions	Problem rate	speaking is difficult because of...			Percentage (%) and the total
		No practice - lack of voc. - Poor methods			
<b>1.Why students find it difficult to speak?</b>	<b>Frequency percent</b>	<b>37</b> (62%)	<b>13</b> (22%)	<b>10</b> (16%)	<b>60</b> 100%
Question	Problem rate	Bilingual method	Communicative method	other methods	Percentage (%) and the total
<b>2.What are the best methods for developing speaking?</b>	<b>Frequency percent</b>	<b>17</b> (28%)	<b>36</b> (60%)	<b>7</b> (12%)	<b>60</b> 100%
Question	Problem rate	Through interaction	Through activities	Intensive speaking	Percentage (%) and the total
<b>3.How can we encourage students to speak English?</b>	<b>Frequency percent</b>	<b>32</b> (53%)	<b>13</b> (22%)	<b>15</b> (25%)	<b>30</b> 100%

**Figure 3, 4 & 5: Identifying students' views toward the questionnaire questions 1,2 and 3**



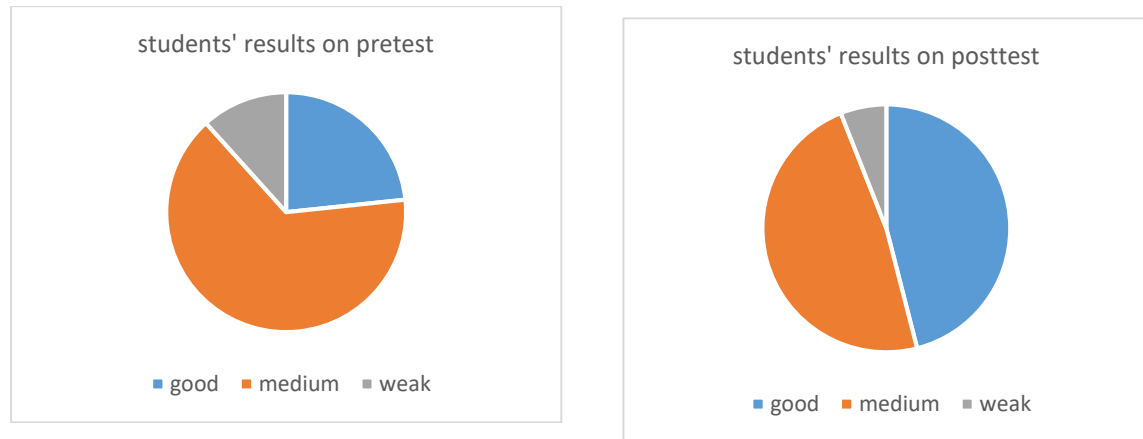


### Interpretation of Data

The table 2 and figures 3, 4 and 5 above, show Frequency and percentage of students toward the questionnaire questions. In question one, most learners 37(62%) believe that the lack of practice is the basic reason for speaking difficulties, while others 13(22%) believe that poor vocabulary and methods are the basic reason for speaking difficulties. As for question two, we notice that most students 36 (60%), believe communicative method is the best for developing their speaking fluency. Around 17(28%) believe that the bilingual method is the best while 7(12%) believe other methods. As for question three, the majority of students 32(53%) believe speaking can be developed through interaction method, 15(25%) believe through listening and the least 13(22%) believe it can be developed through speaking activities.

**Table:3 Comparing the results of pre and posttest of speaking**

subject	Level &percent	good	medium	weak	total
<b>Pretest</b>	Frequency percent	14(23)	39(65%)	7(12%)	60(100%)
subject	Level &percent	good	medium	weak	total
<b>Posttest</b>	Frequency percent	23(38%)	24(40%)	3(5%)	60(100%)

**Figur 6 and 7 comparing the results of pre and posttests of speaking****Interpretation of Data**

Referring to the table 3 & figures 6 and 7 above, we notice that there is a great progress on students' levels after taking the English speaking course. As for the pretest of speaking, around 14(23%) students scored good, 39(65%) students scored medium and only 7(12%) scored weak. As for the posttest, we can see a great development on students' levels. Most students scored good (23%) and medium (24%) and only 3(5%). The dramatic development on students' levels reflect the effectiveness of the English speaking program and the methods used.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion of the questionnaire and per-posttests findings above, we can conclude that there is a strong relation between the instructional program and the development on students' levels in speaking skill. In comparison with the results of the pre and posttests of speaking, it is obvious that most students' levels before taking the program were weak, and the score that they got was low. Therefore, we can strongly believe that, the program can develop students' English speaking skills. This result congruence with many research results conducted by many researchers. For example, Brown (1983) also states that "speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information." Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. Nunan believes that the speaker needs communicative competence which includes not only linguistic competence but also a range of other sociolinguistic and conversational skills which help him/ her know how to say what to whom and when. To conclude, developing of speaking fluency need more conversational practice, intensive listening, high vocabulary knowledge and it also affects by other factors like methods, style, technique etc... Further, if learners and teachers match their teaching methods to the student' learning style, students will be more successful and more interested in language. As a result of this study, it

recommends that similar further researches are needed and should be conducted to different group of learners regarding other factors.

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