

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING SKILLS TO BUSINESS STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL: PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the primary English language skills that is focused in both EFL and ESL contexts. This skill is required for both English for general purposes and English for specific purposes. This study aimed to explore the practices of teaching English language speaking skills at the tertiary level in Pakistan. The challenge that paved the way for the current study was the students' lack of English proficiency. This study was conducted with 200 undergraduate students and 20 Pakistani tertiary level English language teachers. Data for this qualitative study were collected through focused group interviews, open-ended questionnaire, and observation sheets. The study employed self-validation, expert validation, and pilot validation techniques for the tool validity. Tool and participant triangulation techniques were also used to ensure the reliability of the study. The data were analyzed thematically following Savin-Baden and Major (2013) thematic analysis scheme. Findings reveal that problem-solving activities, real-life topics for classroom discussions, listening to songs and interpreting songs in speeches, debates, role plays, and pair conversations are being used to teach English language speaking skills at the tertiary level in Karachi, Pakistan.

Keywords: *Speaking skills, Teaching Speaking Skill activities, ESL, EFL, English language in Pakistan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English language learners in EFL/ ESL context have many purposes for learning the language. Some of the purposes include the learners learning the English language to communicate, improving their chances of financial prospects, and broadening their horizons literally and figuratively to be global citizens (Akhter, Haidov, et al. 2020). English is also considered a passport for global success and social mobility (Amin, 2021). Although all basic skills are

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needed to be a proficient language user, speaking is considered the essential language skill that needs to be mastered; often, learning accomplishment is evaluated on mastery of speaking skills (Chien, Hwang, et al. 2020). Several studies indicate that speaking is the most complex and challenging skill to master (Liu, Lo et al. 2020)

Pakistan has a diverse culture and a rich heritage of 72 languages (Fareed, Ashraf & Mushtaq, 2019). The Urdu language serves the purpose of the National Language, which plays the role of moderator by providing common grounds to interact with different languages and cultures (Abbas, Pervaiz, et al. 2018). English Language holds a very prestigious place in our society and relishes the position of official and second language (Abbas, Pervaiz et al. 2018).

The formal education system in Pakistan focuses more on the reading and writing skills of the English language (Asghar & Butt, 2018). Speaking and listening skills of the English language remain almost ignored in the formal Pakistani education system at the school level. English is taught as a mandatory subject up to graduation level in Pakistan. However, despite studying this language for more than 15 years, most students, especially from nonelite schools, lack the required command of basic English skills (Fareed, Khan & Akhtar, 2021).

Though speaking skill has a focal importance in English Language teaching in EFL and ESL contexts, overall, it is given less emphasis in Pakistan. However, at the university level, courses like oral communication are introduced separately to help the students improve their oral communication skills for official purposes. The majority of the students at the tertiary level still face difficulties in speaking skills; many cannot even express their point of view in the English language (Dar & Khan, 2015). According to Ali (2020), most students fail to understand the lectures at the college and university level and cannot speak about their problems.

The problem in speaking English hinders students' academic and professional lives. "English language oral communication skills are important for employment and higher studies in Pakistan" (Dar & Khan, 2014). Most of the employment interviews for graduates are in the English language. Similarly, most of the written official communication and some of the oral official communication are also in the English language.

At the tertiary level, speaking skills are of prime importance (Dar & Khan, 2014). Many universities and institutions even offer separate oral communication courses at the undergraduate level. Students at the undergraduate and graduate levels are also required to give oral presentations in the English language in most of the subjects. In response to this problem, a

need emerges to explore the current practices of teaching English language speaking skills to business students at the tertiary level.

1.1 Research Question

The study is conducted to answer the following research question:

1. What are the practices of Pakistani English language teachers to teach speaking skills to undergraduate business students at the tertiary level in Karachi?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is one of the four basic skills of the English language (Zhang, Ardasheva et al. 2020). It is required whether one wants to learn the English language for general purposes, such as social interaction, or specific purposes, like presentations, speeches, etc.

Many researchers are against using L1 in teaching English language speaking skills. During an oral fluency activity, using the mother tongue changes the activity into worthless. Therefore, it is English Language Teachers' responsibility to motivate the students to use the target language most of the time in the class. Other researchers, such as (Nunan & Lamb, 1996), favor using L1 to some extent. However, they noticed that it is difficult to explain how, when, and how often to use students' first language, as using the first language to give brief details of grammar and lexis and techniques and practices can significantly facilitate learning. However, the teacher should encourage students to put in the effort to use the target language as frequently as possible (Kayi 2012). The practice of mother tongue carries both positive and negative effects concerning the students' perception constructed on their different levels of English proficiency. The students with low and intermediate English proficiency levels show a higher inclination towards the mother tongue to comprehend the instructions, describe unacquainted vocabularies, and recognize the similarities and differences in English pronunciation and idioms. On the other hand, advanced-level students have a negative perception of using their mother tongue (Hawa, Suryani et al. 2021).

Speaking skills can be taught directly or indirectly (Nazara, 2011). The direct approach to speaking skills is generated through students' active involvement in interactive activities such as discussion, role-play, information gaps, and problem-solving (Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994); this approach is used in Audio-lingual (Currie, Lew et al.) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It is considered that if the communications are meaningful, students' speaking proficiency will nurture (Brown 2001). On the other hand, (Nunan

1999) says that interactive activities are designed to produce utterances and not expressive expressions. The indirect approach to teaching speaking skills is semi-structured and more appropriate for higher-level students. Brown (2001) states that the direct approach is effective if the explicit teaching of speaking is done with practice. "This approach includes recording speaking to recognize student deficiencies in observing real speaking transcripts" (Knapp, 2021, p. 26)

Accordingly, there are multiple effective approaches to teaching speaking skills. Brown (1994) states, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is used to teach foreign languages through a communicative approach that focuses "on speaking and listening skills, on writing for specific communicative purposes, and on authentic reading texts" Through CLT approach, students ultimately use the language, effectively and receptively, in the spontaneous framework (Brown 1994). "Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) facilitates students' English learning, raises their confidence, and enhances their communicative competence" (Ho, 2020, p. 21). Moreover, the natural approach (Krashen, 1987) and integrated task-based learning (Azlan et al., 2019) increase learners' output through a comprehensive input, as speaking is not taught by drills; instead, it is developed by understanding comprehensive input of reading and listening. Similarly, learner-centered approaches also significantly developed students' speaking skills because of occasional, spontaneous, and frequent practices (Gudu, 2015).

Othman (2021) splits the roles of the teacher according to the type of interactional activities, specifically between fluency and accuracy. During fluency activities, the teacher takes up the roles of motivator, director, supervisor, and advisor, prompting that the main focus for such activities is to help students interact meaningfully. Inaccuracy activities, the teacher's fundamental task is to ensure students understand what to practice. The personality and teachers' motivational practices significantly predict language learning motivation and self-efficacy (Hennery-Leung, 2020).

Teaching speaking activities is essential to language learning, as it enables learners to communicate effectively in the target language (Azlan et al., 2019). Speaking skills can be taught by various activities, i.e., controlled or autonomous activities. In addition, role plays, presentations, interviews, debates, and discussions are the most commonly used speaking activities in language classrooms (Pratiwi & Aya, 2020). Role plays allow learners to practice specific language functions and situations, while presentations and interviews help develop fluency and accuracy in speaking. According to Mohammad and Ahmed (2021), debates and discussions encourage critical thinking and the ability to express opinions and arguments in a structured and coherent way.

Furthermore, these activities can be adapted to different levels and contexts, providing learners with opportunities to develop linguistic and social skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative, and the design of the study is descriptive. The study was conducted by taking the sample from public and private sector tertiary level EL teachers and the students of undergraduate level. The data were collected through focused group interviews with EL teachers, an open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from undergraduate students, and Classroom Observations were taken. It was a Qualitative research inquiry into the EL teachers speaking- skills instructions.

As per the research design, the data were collected from college and university English language teachers teaching at the undergraduate level. The data were collected through Focused Group interviews designed for English Language Teachers to investigate ELT practices. Focused Group Interviews were followed by open-ended Questionnaires administered to students to collect students' perspectives about teaching English language speaking skills. Finally, classroom observations were taken to know the teaching speaking skills practices.

Twenty English language teachers were interviewed from Public and Private sector universities. Seven EL teachers were observed in public and private sector university classes. The variability was added to the sample in relation to demographic profile, age, gender, and experience, which reflected the vibrant nature of EL teachers. It maximizes the chances of approaching the information researcher was willing to know (Cheng and Dörnyei 2007). Two hundred students from both public and private universities recorded their observations through an open-ended questionnaire.

Table No. 1: Sample of the Study

	Public sector Universities	Private sector Universities	Total
Focused group Interviews Elts	10	10	20
Class Observations	03	04	07
Questionnaire Students	100	100	200

Triangulation was done to validate the data collected through focus group interviews, questionnaires and classroom observations. Triangulation uses two or more methods to study human behavior research (Cohen, Manion et al. 2013).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data from this study were analyzed thematically, as Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggested. Codes Male Teacher (MT), Female Teacher (FMT), Male Student (MS), and Female Student (FMT) have been used along with a numeral. In the following tables, the sub-themes and their frequency are presented:

Teaching Speaking Skills Practices from English Language Teachers' Perspective

Table No. 2: Teaching speaking skills, activities, methods/ approaches

Themes	Frequency
Theme 1: Teaching speaking activities	
Audio /Video Listening	20
Group discussions	18
Student Presentations /public speaking	15
Individual description speaking	9
Cultural awareness	9
Learning to learn	9
Code-switching	9
Official Meetings	8
Field speaking practice like library and bookshop visits	2
Vocabulary/ expressions development	2
Introduction of different registers	2
Online Speaking	1
Theme 2: Teaching speaking skills methods/ Approaches	
Audio-lingual method for improving pronunciation	7
Grammar Translation Method	4
Integrated approach	3

In the above illustration, the table states some interesting facts, which allows the comparison between sub-themes and their frequency of practice. The highest frequency sub-themes are cultural awareness activity, learning to learn activity, public speaking, talking about community switching, and code-switching, listing the highest with a frequency of 9. Other sub-themes are meeting skills methods for improving pronunciation, closely following the frequency of 8. Subsequently, at the frequency of 6, we have diverse common activities: TED talks/ videos, presentations, group discussions, communicative

language teaching, and describing things in their own words that FMT and MT preferred equally. In summation, activities that have the frequency of 4, 3, 2, and 1 are the introduction of different registers, vocabulary development, monologues, student opinion, Playing muted videos and students write, dialogues, Visiting places like libraries and book shops, Impromptu speaking module, skype sessions, Topics from real-life situations for discussion, debate, interview, task-based teaching, problem-solving approach, Short questioning technique, survey interview and listening.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Activities for teaching speaking skills

As EL teachers defined in their interviews, English language-speaking practices suggested stimulating activities. Reflecting on the findings of the interviews, the researcher came across a number of practices. Most EL teachers talked about using presentations, group discussions, debates, and mutual interviews as the technique they used in their classes to enhance students speaking skills. According to EL teachers, they focused on providing their students with opportunities to speak English in class. *MT 1 "...we have role-plays, presentations, topic discussions, interviewing, and meeting skills".*

To some extent, ELTs try to implement these pedagogical strategies but still: FMT 9 ".....in every situation you do not find them". Innovative ELTs introduced integrated skills programs: FMT 7 ".....it was fully integrated, I had discussion groups, my students did survey.....I sometimes play muted videos, and students add up dialogues into it there and then. Sometimes we went to book shops to read and buy books...." TED talks were shown by ELTs as samples and sources of inspiration for the learners: MT 1 ".....I try to speak English with my students and play TED Talks and audio and videos in class..... We have impromptu speaking in class.... expressions like 'supposed to, certainly' are given in class to practice". Therefore, the audio-lingual method, integrated approach, and grammar-translation methods were used in speaking activities to improve student speaking skills.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Teaching methods/approaches for speaking skills

When questioned about which teaching methodology was most effective: FMT 13 "I use CLT and ALM to help the students speak the language." FMT 16 "I usually use CLT, I start my classes with short questions to feel comfortable, and I engage them in activities..... I prefer problem-solving activities". FMT 15 "I use CLT and TBLT methods because they focus on interaction and through task-based we get more chance to assess Learners performance."

CLT Communicative Language Teaching was emphasized as being practiced by most EL teachers. CLT provides instances in class that help the learners groom their speaking skills. Skype sessions were practiced in class to enhance the speaking skills of students: FMT 9 "...skype sessions are used in class, I tried to connect the students with the other class students..... 80% English we use in class, but sometimes we do code-switching". FMT 13 "...speaking is limited to presentations and the focus is more on body language and topic selection". FMT 10 "I personally go for impromptu presentations to help them come out of hesitation."

EL teachers emphasized the element of self-respect, which is very important in speaking language enhancement: FMT 13 "I do not correct the students' errors on the spot as it shakes their confidence. Rather I encourage them..... ". FMT 11 "I give them rewards to help them cover up their hesitation..... my focus is on developing the environment in the class". FMT 6 "I always give room to students to speak freely as much as they want." FMT 5 "I want to expose my students to speaking as much as I can; to create such an environment is my ability."

Through class discussions and group discussions, the weaker students got more chances to practice their speaking skills with their partners more comfortably as 'teachers' presence pressure' also became less alarming. Group discussions and class discussions were mentioned by EL teachers as a tool to enhance speaking skills and to provide opportunities to slow learners to show their potential. FMT 17 "... usually I have discussion classes, I try my best to make them fluent....through class discussions they become fluent". FMT18 "... I arrange simple topics like daily routine ...students come in front of the class and share".

Teaching Speaking Skills Practices from Students' Perspective

Students' responses were collected through a questionnaire to validate the data; it helped to investigate the practices from students' point of view. The sub-themes depict the areas of concern, and their frequency shows their worth among students.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Motivation during speaking activities

Table No. 3: Motivation during speaking activities

Motivating Factor	Frequency
Watching others speaking	50
Discussion and arguments	25
Self-motivation	43
Sharing	51
Teachers' motivation	87
Class environment	55
Interesting topic	61
Extra marks	56

Visual representation of the table describes sub-themes and frequency of motivational factors for speaking during language class. The highest frequency is 87% teacher motivation; the more the motivational level of the teacher to engage students, the more student engagement became a norm in the classroom. Secondly, interesting topics, extra marks, and class environment are vital in adding motivation and ensuring class participation; these sub-themes have been followed closely with the frequency of 61%, 56%, and 55%. Eventually, the other factors contributing to speaking activities are sharing is essential (51%), watching others speak (50%), self-motivation (43%), and discussion and arguments (25%).

Encouragement and motivation played an essential role in building students' self-confidence; it helped them overcome their fears of failure or being insulted: *FMS 65 "Teacher and classmates motivate me to speak English."* *FMS 67 "Seeing other people speaking confidently fills me with confidence."*

Self-motivated students took it as an opportunity to get a chance to share their views. *MS 12 "Urge to promote my message to the public".* *MS 19 "... speaking English now becomes necessary for our future life,"* *MS 134 "Competition with colleagues or the person you are talking with."* *MS 9 "I motivate to speak more by group activities."*

4.2.2 Theme 2: Classroom Speaking Activities

Table No. 4: Classroom speaking activities

Activities	Frequency
Group	65
Pair	16
Individual	55

The inquiry was made to understand the nature of the activities during class; the majority talked about group activities as it provided space for the slow learners and allowed those who were self-motivated: *FMS 37 "I prefer doing group activities."* *FMS 70 "usually group activities."* *MS 156 "Group activities as well as individual tasks."* In Table 4.3, the highest frequency is group activities, then individual tasks, and pair activities; these frequencies elaborate the students' comfort zone and their initial preference in activities.

4.2.3 Boring Activities in speaking class

Table No. 5: Activities in speaking class that English language learners considered boring

Sub- Themes	Frequency
Debates	60
Group discussions that end with no conclusion	16
Incident sharing	2
Individual tasks	51
Interviews	43
Presentations	25
Read aloud	2
Roleplays	11
To discuss a topic you do not know	24
When one girl is continuously speaking	17
The whole class gave presentations on the same topic	5

It was probed which class activities did not appeal to students as learning was discouraged because of boring activities: *MS 22 "Discussing each other's activities in life, in groups."* *FMS 106 "Group discussions always end with no conclusion ... an incomplete task".* *FMS 41 "Speech when the topic is boring".* *MS 7 "Pronunciation is the most boring."*

Findings of Practices through Observation

Observations were carried out to record actual teaching speaking skills practices.

Table No. 6: Observation Findings

Sub-Themes	Frequency
Presentations	3
Discussion	3
Group Work	2

Whole class teaching	5
Code-switching	2
Lack of encouragement from ELT	1

Seven classes were observed to develop an understanding of what in-class practices were. The frequency stated that out of seven, three EL teachers used presentations as a technique to teach English speaking skills; it was a part of the class, not the whole class was based on it. The majority of the teachers were involved in whole-class teaching. Code-switching was also observed in two classes, whereas group work and discussions were partial activities in two and three classes.

The cold response of EL teachers was considered a 'lack of encouragement' and was one of the reasons for demotivation.

4.3.1 Sharing Views/Presentations

Table No. 7: Sharing views/ presentations

Sub- Themes	Frequency
Sharing views	98
Not much often	72
Never	2

When it was asked how often the students were getting opportunities in class to present their point of view, the majority replied "occasionally," which reflected that students were provided chances, but there were not ample likelihoods that could help in polishing their speaking skills. MS 46 "Occasionally, I share my views." MS 27 "very less" MS 06 "...During a presentation for every subject we share our views + opinions approximately ten classes in the whole semester". MS 118 "Almost every semester, we get a chance to come on stage and share our views". MS 167 "Probably once in each semester". In table 4.2.3, the frequency shows opportunities where students were able to share their views: 98% of students avail this chance and share their views, next 72% of students were not able to share views much often, and finally, 2% of students never really opt for any opportunity in sharing their view.

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Presentations	25
Individual tasks	51
Interviews	43
The whole class giving presentations on the same topic	5
Role plays	11
Incident sharing	2
Pronunciation	12

4.3.3 Boring Activities in speaking class

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5. DISCUSSION

The English Language teachers used role plays, presentations, discussions, debates, interviews, reading aloud, and oral description to develop students' speaking skills Zare and Othman (2015) had similar findings. Every teacher did not use all of these activities. The teachers could use two to three of the above activities in a semester because the large classroom size and lengthy syllabus neither allowed a variety of activities nor more frequency. This point was also noted by Long and Crookes (1992). The findings from observations suggest the strategies would be more effective if they had been organized better; further, the focus of the activities should also shift from pronunciation to fluency. Students had mixed feelings about group activities. Some students preferred group activities because they helped them learn from each other.

On the other hand, some students considered group activities boring. CLT and ALM were used as teaching methodologies, as Martin and Bolliger (2018) concluded. Teachers allowed students to speak and discuss in class. Teachers' favorable responses made students confident to speak and respond. CLT encouraged students to share their point of view in class. Even reluctant students also started participating in class who were quiet in class earlier.

6. CONCLUSION

There should be a guided syllabus for teaching speaking skills. Various speaking activities are advised to be used in speaking classes, and more time should be given to develop speaking skills. The functions of speaking skills such as turn-taking, responding and initiating, following the correct and relevant length of the talk, repair, and repetition, coherence in real-time fluency should be practiced by devising activities on them so that students would get enough practice of all the functions individually.

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