



EXPLORING LEARNERS' SPEAKING PROBLEM IN EFL CLASSROOM IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF SOME SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN HADIYA ZONE

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was exploring learners' speaking problem in EFL classroom for formulating problem for more precise investigation in Ethiopia particularly, in Some Selected public and private Schools in Hadiya Zone. It was attempted to explore learners' problem in verbal communication skills in English classrooms. Exploratory research design was employed in this study. To get data regarding the issue and to achieve the objectives, participant observations were used especially researcher's experience survey as a main tool. Moreover, in order to strengthen data gained through observation; interview of some selected teachers from schools was used to gather data from experienced teachers in the area. The researcher also interviewed university instructors to identify existence of communication problem of learners who join university from different preparatory schools. In the interview, five teachers participated as respondents. Data gathered through each instrument was analyzed qualitatively. Accordingly, the result of the study indicates that there were so many students who were worrying about their correctness and accuracy when they expressed their ideas, feelings and opinions excluding a few students joining higher institutions from private schools who were better in oral communication and classroom participation. In other words, they were shy and fearful of others' opinions towards their language, and they were unable to communicate automatically in-real world context. Even most of the students were not interested to ask and answer questions in the EFL classroom even though a teacher encouraged them to do so. As a result, further researches should be done in the area for better improvement of the skills.

Key words: speaking, EFL, participation, speaking problem, classroom context & speaking proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

The Role of English in Ethiopia

Before discussing about speaking skills, let me embark on with the status and role of English in

world and in level of Ethiopia in general; it is one of the most spoken and studied global languages Richards and Rogers (2001:3), McDonough and Shaw, (1993). In the world, currently, it is being used

for different purposes like as technological, business, educational and scientific language of the societies. Regarding this, Celce-Murcia and Donna (2014:63) stated English as:

English has, over the past century gradually becomes the most widely taught language in the world. It has also become the most widely used language for most purposes of communication in international diplomacy, business, science, education and entertainment. English is also more widely dispersed geographically than any other language.

Consequently, it is being taught as a foreign or second language in many countries of the world including Ethiopia. It is used in many governmental and private organizations in the context of Ethiopia; For example, FDRE Constitution and other declarations are written in English and Amharic. Moreover, some private newspapers like Reporter and Daily Government Newspapers like Ethiopian Herald are being prepared in English. Also, in different business organizations of the country like banks and insurances different brochures, newsletters and other documents are being prepared in this language.

In line with this, as to Zeleke and Alemtehay (2015:294) English is being used in different areas and situations in Ethiopia:

It has been widely used in many areas such as politics, economy, tourism, electronics, telecommunication, culture and science and technology. It is not only a means but also a key to access the latest development in science and technology. Therefore, it is becoming compulsory for many Ethiopians to have a good command of English to satisfy the growing needs of the language in the country.

English is used as the medium of teaching in different Ethiopian primary, secondary and tertiary school levels as well Ethiopian National Agency. (2001:14) as cited in Abebe. (2016).

Furthermore, English is used differently at both public and private schools in Ethiopia. For example, in the schools, it is used as a medium of instruction for all the departments like

Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Civic and Ethical Education, Geography, History, IT, sport Sciences, Economics, Business Education, drawing ...etc. Moreover, it is also given as a subject in both public and private schools. These conditions need students be active in all the skills of the language to communicate their teachers and other societies well. Accordingly, the aforementioned situations enforce giving more emphasis for improvement of English language skills particularly speaking skills in Ethiopia in general and in Hadiya Zone public and private schools in particular.

But, the main question need to be addressed is: are students who are Joining Universities from high schools are able to communicate orally in English as a foreign language classroom and out of classroom context?

Literature Review

Since English has overriding contributions in Ethiopia as well as in the world society as aforementioned, learners are expected to be proficient in speaking skills, and they are expected to have good command of it for real life situations.

In this regard, Ur. (1996) Cited in Nguyen H. and Tran Ngoc, (2015) explains Speaking as the most important skills of all the skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language.

Why verbal communications in EFL context become low?

There might be various reasons for low English proficiency of the trainees like, problems in teachers' perception about teaching speaking skills, teachers' ways or approaches of implementing speaking skills, quality of teaching materials and learners' weak performance. In this regard, Abebew. (2012) puts in plain words that due to teachers' misperceptions of effective teaching methods and procedures which teachers used in their classroom, the learners' English proficiency has been worse.

The emergency of low English speaking proficiency of learners may be emerged from teachers and students' misperception about approaches of learning and teaching speaking skills. Moreover, teachers and students' misunderstanding of their roles in speaking classroom would be the

cause for it. Furthermore, using poorly designed ELT materials for teaching bring speaking problem in EFL classroom; if the teacher uses prescribed text books, institutionally prepared materials or his or her own instructional materials, they play a vital roles in the development of communicative competence if designed and implemented in a way that promote it. In other words, Learners' verbal communication in EFL classrooms and the ways of teachers' classroom implementation of the speaking lessons might also be determined.

Research Design and Methodology

In this study, the researcher employed exploratory research design so as to explore learners' problem in verbal communication skills in English classrooms in both public and private preparatory schools. Kothari C.R (2014) explained the purpose of exploratory research as "the main purpose of exploratory study is that of formulating problem for more precise and investigation."

Moreover, In this regard, Anol B. (2012:6) defined exploratory research as an inquiry that often conducted when the goal of carrying out research is "to scope out magnitude or extent of a particular problem, phenomenon and behavior."

The data was gathered through participant observation; researcher has six years experience of teaching English as a foreign language in different public and private schools in Hadiya zone, and he has collected data from his classrooms experience.

For strengthening the data, interview with some experienced teachers of high schools and university was done; in the interview, five teachers were participants. According to Kothari C.R (2014:92) explained interview as, "interview method of collecting data involves presentation of oral-verbal stimuli".

The data that was collected by using observation was analyzed and interpreted in descriptive way because the data collected through this instrument by nature is qualitative.

Moreover, the data that was gathered through Interview as instrument was described specifically by using words. In other words, the data that was obtained through each instrument was presented, analyzed and interpreted based on qualitative approach. Accordingly, on the basis of

the findings, conclusion was drawn; recommendations were made.

Results of the study

Result from classroom observations

As to researcher's six years experience of teaching English as a foreign language and classrooms participant observation in different public and private schools in Hadiya zone, there were so many students who were worrying about their correctness and accuracy when they expressed their ideas, feelings and opinions excluding a few students joining higher institutions from private schools who were better in oral communication and classroom activities as classroom observation of researcher revealed. Excluding a few of them, even, most of them were not interested to express their ideas in the classroom and out of classroom due to fear of inaccurate and erroneous expressions. In other words, they were shy and fearful of others' opinions towards their language, and they were unable to communicate automatically in-real world context. Even most of the students were not interested to ask and answer questions in the EFL classroom even though a teacher encouraged them to do so. In this regard, Girma. (2005) explained that using English language for the reasons of real world communication in Ethiopian high schools and higher education institutions is not as anticipated.

Learners in Hadiya Zone public and private schools also face the same challenges. Instead of communicating freely with others, they are concerned more about accuracy and correctness of their speech. Let us proceed to result from interview with teachers.

Result from Teachers' interview

The result of interview with experienced teachers in the area and with schools teachers also revealed the same result. Currently, the end outcome of interview depicts that most of the freshman students joining university from preparatory schools are unable to express their feelings, attitude... in the classrooms. The following is prescription of interview result. Accordingly,

Interviewee 1 explained:

When I come to speaking proficiency level of students, most of the students came from high school, and when I evaluate their

proficiency, they don't have any background information about how to speak in the classroom and out of the classroom.

Regarding with speaking skill, they are very poor and weak. The big challenge for us when we let them practice the courses particularly communicative English skills is their communication problem. But students who join university from different high schools are a little bit good in communication than students who join from public schools. They have some knowledge about speaking, some of them say words correctly and fluently; I gave different speaking tasks and other grammatical aspects. So I evaluated that a little bit they are better in communication than those coming from public schools. There are a lot of challenges or factors that determine their speaking proficiency level. For example, it may be their high school background; some of them come from rural areas and they don't have exposure to interact in English. The other cause may be student related factors, teachers related factors, and environment related factors. Moreover, their interest to communicate in English may be other factors because some of them hate to speak English they choose L1 to rather than target language in English classrooms.

Aman Tirkaso, Lecturer at Wachemo University

Date of interview: 12/10/2016 at 5:00pm

Data from interview session with interviewee 1 depicts that students joining university from preparatory schools are unable to express their feelings, attitude orally in English in and out of classrooms. The respondent also indicated that learners who come from high schools don't have any background information about the way to speak in the classroom and out of the classroom. During the interview, he gave emphasis on students' oral communication problem that he encountered during teaching English courses.

Interviewee 2 explained:

When we look the students ability to communicate orally, in some department majority of the students face difficulty to communicate; they couldn't express themselves freely due to different factors that may be their background knowledge. When they were high school students, they might not get enough opportunity to express their ideas adequately. All the skills might not be taught properly. As a result, they couldn't express their ideas freely. They face great challenges in verbal communication. The other problem may be due to lack of exposure to the language. Most of the teachers in high schools use L1 in English classrooms. Students lack exposure to express themselves. Actually, English speaking skills is neglected skill in our context; when teachers teach in the classroom, they focus on other skills of the language like grammar, reading and other skills. So they might not know the advantage of oral communication in English. Since the language is used as a medium of instruction, they have to practice activities in English. When they join university, almost all the courses and subjects are delivered in English.

Interview with Mr. Ermias Molito:

Lecture at Wachemo University

Date of interview: 12/10/2016 at 5:00pm

These observation and grievance may help one to conclude that students might not develop enough command of English language in secondary high school level to use it in real life situations. From these, it is possible to deduce that there is verbal communication problem of learners that determine communication in real life conditions.

Recommendations

It is concluded that preparatory level learners of both public and private schools in the zone face problems of communication in EFL classroom context; learners worry about their correctness and accuracy when they expressed their ideas, feelings and opinions excluding a few students joining higher institutions from private

schools who were better in oral communication and classroom participation. Accordingly, the following recommendation was made. Further studies should be conducted in this areas particularly, on teachers and students' perception about approaches of teaching speaking skills, strategies of teaching speaking skills to attain communicative competence, the roles of teachers and learners during verbal communication in EFL classroom, and the ways of teachers' classroom implementation of the speaking lessons and design of speaking tasks or activities in line with current CLT in public and private schools in Hadiya zone.

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