

Classroom Interactions in EFL Speaking Classes: Perspectives and Challenges

التفاعلات الصفية في حصص التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: الرؤى والتحديات

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• Abstract:

Speaking has been recognized as one of the most important skills in English language acquisition because the success is measured students' competence to carry out a conversation in a language. Due to this change, teachers as well as students are in great demand of effective interaction in speaking classes. The purpose of the present research paper is to investigate the students' and teachers' experiences and attitudes to speaking and interaction in the classes. It looks into how teachers provide the speaking inputs and how second year students function in foreign language speaking classes- Batna 2 University. Quantitative methods were used to research this concern, while Likert scale questionnaires were used as a tool for measuring teachers' and students attitudes. The research sample consists of 12 teachers and 80 students. The researcher found that students and teachers hold a wide range of challenges concerning speaking skill and classroom interaction. The present paper suggests guidelines that can ensure effective interaction in EFL speaking contexts.

Keywords:

Speaking, English language acquisition, competence, interaction

المخلص:

يُعدّ مهارة التحدث إحدى أهم المهارات في اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية، إذ يُقاس مدى النجاح بقدرّة الطلبة على إجراء محادثة باللغة المستهدفة. وبناءً على ذلك، أصبح كلّ من المعلمين والطلبة في حاجة ماسة إلى تحقيق تفاعل فعّال داخل حصص التحدث. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة تجارب ومواقف كلّ من الطلبة والمعلمين تجاه مهارة التحدث والتفاعل داخل الصفوف. كما تتناول الكيفية التي يقدّم بها المعلمون مدخلات التحدث، وكيفية أداء طلبة السنة الثانية في حصص التحدث باللغة الأجنبية – جامعة باتنة 2. اعتمد المنهج الكمي في معالجة هذه الإشكالية، مع استخدام استبيانات مقياس "ليكرت" أداة لقياس اتجاهات المعلمين والطلبة. وتتكوّن عينة البحث من 12 معلّمًا و80 طالبًا. وقد توصّل الباحث إلى أن المعلمين والطلبة يواجهون مجموعة واسعة من التحديات المتعلقة بمهارة التحدث والتفاعل الصفّي. وتقدّم هذه الورقة مجموعة من التوصيات التي من شأنها أن تضمن تفاعلًا فعّالًا في سياقات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحدث، اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية، الكفاءة، التفاعل.

• Introduction

Speaking is among the most essential skills that students of English as a foreign language need to learn. It is a powerful means of communication by which students learn better to express

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themselves and gain competence of communication in a speech community. As far as speaking skill is concerned, classroom interaction stands out as an essential element in the speaking process, particularly in EFL classes. Interaction between teacher and students and students and students are required in the classroom tasks. It will maintain communication to happen in the classroom. It will help the teaching and learning process run smoothly. Despite the apparent agreement on the significance of classroom interaction, many problems have been observed that may distort and weaken this significance. This attitude results in insufficient interaction, which is specifically true in English as Foreign Language (EFL) settings, like English department at Banta 2 University where all students in the classes are non-native English speakers. The current situation calls for action to search for some methods of effective interaction in speaking contexts.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Defining Speaking Skill

Speaking is the most challenging area in learning foreign language. It is based on the well use of language in the appropriate context. According to Chaney and Burk in Zainatuddar, (2015, p. 446), "Speaking is communication skill that enables a person to verbalize thought and ideas. It is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts."¹ Speaking is a form of communication that contains sets of words and sentences that symbolizes the sounds of speech. As an issue of fact, speaking is an exceptional capacity for that it enables people to convert their thoughts into spelling words for the purpose to communicate their ideas correctly and properly.

1.2 Classroom Interaction to Speaking Skill

Interaction is the communication among teacher and students, which happen continuously as responsive acts. Hadfield and Hadfield (2008, p.105) defined interaction as "The word interaction involves more than just putting a message together; it involves also responding to other people"². One of the best way through which students improve their speaking skill is by getting effective classroom interaction, which can be used in EFL classrooms as to engage students in real life situations. It is an essential aspect for providing opportunities to use and practice the language in real situations. Interaction is one of the ways that allow students to express their thoughts freely and face to face. Good language competence facilitates effective communication and interaction with others³ (Tarigan, 2019)

Classroom interaction offers English language students a way to get more practice; they can be more motivated to engage in further communication. Interaction help students to produce

¹Zainatuddar, Z. (2015). Teaching speaking in English by using picture series technique. *English Education Journal*, 6,(4), 443- 456

² Hadfield, J and C, Hadfield. (2008). Introduction to Teaching English. Oxford: Oxford University Press

³ Tarigan, H. G. (2019). *Pengajaran Kompetensi Bahasa [Teaching Language Competencies]*. Bandung. Titian Ilmu

appropriate words. This is one reason why interactive activities have become common features of contemporary classrooms.

In the light of what has been raised above, classroom interaction is an essential element in learning process that can raise students' language performance and improve teachers' teaching quality. Therefore, the problem object of the present study can be expressed in the following research question:

- What are EFL students and teachers' conceptions of classroom interaction in speaking classes?
- What challenges teachers and students face that potentially prevent them from getting effective interaction?
- What can be done to enhance the quality of interaction to maximize speaking learning?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

The current study used quantitative survey research method to determine the views of students and teachers in classroom interaction to improve students' speaking ability. The qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in uncovering the depth and concerns of teachers' and students perceptions and experiences. The sample of the present study is including two group of respondents, which are second year students at university level and teachers at university level selected for collecting data. Students of the study were 80 out of 300, participating on a voluntary basis, from department of English Language -Batna2 University located across the East of Algeria. The students' native language was Arabic and their mean age was 19 years.

The selection criteria focused on teachers who have had taught or/and are teaching comprehension and oral communication course within their teaching practices. Twelve teachers participated in the study, representing a mix of years of teaching experience and gender. All twelve teachers were willing to participate in the current research. Of the 12 participants, 75% are female while 25% are male. Concerning their teaching experience, it varies: 42% of them had 1-5 years of service; 50%, 6-15 years; and 8%, 16-24 years.

- **Reliability of the Instrument**

The reliability of the survey has been done using the Kuder-Richardson formula (21)⁴(Brown, 1997, p. 202). The reliability co-efficient calculated for the 12 items was 0.87, which is fairly high. The survey was preliminarily administered to five teachers and twenty students to determine its reliability, employing a test-retest method.

- **Validity of the Instrument**

⁴ Brown, J. D. (1997). Statistics Corner: Questions and answers about language testing statistics: Reliability of surveys. Shiken: JALT Testing & Evaluation SIG Newsletter, 1 (2), 17-19

In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the content validity and face validity of the survey were checked by a panel of teachers. The teachers' remarks and suggestions were integrated to develop the final version of survey.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Some of the questions are demographic questions include gender and years of teaching experience. Given that, this research was done online through the Google drive platform. After collecting the data with an online questionnaire, the results were analyzed through the SPSS program and interpreted as a percentage in tables.

Likert Scale was used as a measurement for data collection. The Likert Scale of the questions was categorized to 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree) and lastly 5 (Strongly Agree). (McLeod, 2019)⁵. There were 12 statements in total for a set of questionnaires divided into three sections. Section 1 was used to show attitudes about the importance of classroom interaction. Section 2 was used to identify the perceptions with respect to speaking activities/content of comprehension and oral communication course syllabus and Section 3 was used to analyze perceptions concerning the challenges in interaction in EFL speaking classrooms.

3. Results and Discussion

The total questionnaire items were (12). Statistical issues of the questionnaire calculated to determine the attitudes of Teachers and students towards Interaction in speaking classrooms; they are shown in the following tables

Table 1. Teachers' attitudes about the importance of classroom interaction

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
Classroom interaction develops students' involvement	0 00	0 00	2 17	10 83	0 00	46	3.83	Positive
Classroom interaction provides	0 00	0 00	2 17	7 58	3 25	49	4.08	Positive

⁵ Mcleod, S. (2019). *Likert scale*. Simply Psychology

students with a chance to test their communicative success through exchanging information, produce comprehensible output, and to get feedback from the teacher or other students								
Classroom interaction will help the teaching and learning process run smoothly	0 00	0 00	1 8	11 92	0 00	47	3.91	Positive
Interaction is needed in the classroom activities; it can increase students' communicative skills	0 00	1 8	2 17	9 75	0 00	44	3.66	Positive
Overall Mean Score							3.87	Positive

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

As shown in Table 1, most teachers (75%) agreed to the items of the survey positively, saying that it is important to depend on classroom interaction in their speaking teaching practices. While no teacher thought it was unimportant, and some of them (17%) state in doubt about the importance of classroom interaction. It is appalling that teachers expected good speaking performance from students when maintaining effective classroom interaction, and these perceptions still exist within their classes where the teaching of speaking is considered as the responsibility of them. In this sense Lyster (2007, p. 34) stated, "Interaction makes the learners able to test their communicative success through exchanging information with the teacher or among the students themselves"⁶.

On the contrary, only one teacher had negative perceptions toward the importance of classroom interaction, which may interpret his opinions, as classroom interaction is not the only

⁶ Lyster, R. (2007). Learning and Teaching Languages through Content. John Benjamin Publishing Company: Amestterdam

key to academic success in speaking skills. Class work, students' debate, and asking question are the main activities that can best improve students' speaking skill; as such, these tasks have to be extensively included in speaking classes. As Li (2007, p. 45) states, "learning can be enhanced if students perceive teachers' intentions accurately when setting certain tasks and expectations"⁷.

The respondents had a positive attitude in the majority of the statements. Thus, the research paper concluded that teachers have a positive attitude (3.87) towards the importance of classroom interaction.

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes about the importance of classroom interaction

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
Classroom interaction makes students feel safe	0 00	10 12.5	10 12.5	60 75	0 00	290	3.62	Positive
Classroom interaction provides students with a sense of encouragement self-motivation, and self-esteem	0 00	5 6.25	5 6.25	70 87.5	0 00	305	3.81	Positive
Classroom interaction creates enthusiastic learning sphere	0 00	2 2.5	6 7.5	72 90	0 00	310	3.87	Positive
Interaction creates active participation	0 00	3 3.75	5 6.25	72 90	0 00	309	3.86	Positive
Overall Mean Score							3.79	Positive

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

⁷ Li, X. (2007). Identities and Beliefs in ESL Writing: From Product to Processes, *TESL Canada Journal*, 25 (1), pp. 41

As shown in Table 2, participants indicated that classroom interaction makes students feel safe (3.62). They also specified that classroom interaction provide students with a sense of encouragement self-motivation, and self-esteem (3.81). They further affirmed that classroom interaction creates enthusiastic learning sphere (3.87). In addition, respondents were positive (3.86) regarding the statement “Interaction creates active participation.”

Overall, students feel encouraged, self-motivated and getting their self-esteem through classroom interaction. Moreover, these features needed to create confidence since they will face both their classmates and the teacher.

Table 3. Teachers’ perceptions with respect to the content of “comprehension and oral communication course” syllabus

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
The syllabus provides authentic cultural information	1 8	9 75	0 00	2 17	0 00	27	2.25	Negative
The syllabus provides exposure to real language.	0 00	5 42	3 25	4 33	0 00	35	2.9	Neutral
The syllabus supports a more creative/active approach to teaching speaking skill	1 8	9 75	0 00	2 17	0 00	27	2.25	Negative
The use of authentic materials in language teaching is supported	1 8	9 75	0 00	2 17	0 00	27	2.25	Negative
Overall Mean Score							2.4	Positive

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

Analysis was conducted to predict teachers’ attitudes towards speaking activities/content of “comprehension and oral communication course” syllabus. By using mean score, we found

negative attitude (Table 3). According to the results, perceptions of teachers were associated with their practices and concrete perceptions were more negative on syllabus content $m=2.25$. Generally, the respondents had a negative attitude in the majority of the statements. Thus, the study stated that teachers have a negative attitude (2.4) towards the use of authentic materials in language teaching.

Table 4. Students' perceptions about speaking activities in their classes

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
Speaking class provides authentic cultural information	9 11.25	64 80	3 3.75	4 5	0 00	162	2.02	Negative
Speaking class provides exposure to real language.	9 11.25	64 80	3 3.75	4 5	0 00	162	2.02	Negative
Speaking class supports a more creative/active approach to learning	5 6.25	46 57.5	10 12.5	19 23.75	0 00	203	2.5	Neutral
The use of authentic materials in language teaching is provided	7 8.75	50 62.5	5 6.25	18 22.5	0 00	194	2.4	Negative
Overall Mean Score (OMS)							2.23	Negative

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

Sorted by the students' perspectives, Table 4 shows the percentages for each item of the questionnaire. Roughly, most of the students disagreed that speaking class provides authentic materials (items 1 and 4). In contrast with the other students, only 22.5% of students agree on the idea. The third item measured the students' perception of active learning as an approach in speaking classes. It was answered negatively by 57.5% of them. Overall, 80 % of students answered negatively.

There was no notable difference between teachers and students on the content of “comprehension and oral communication course” syllabus, on their attitude scores, (OMS) $S = 2.23$, $T = 2.4$.

Table 5. Teachers’ perceptions regarding the challenges in interaction in EFL speaking classrooms

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
Speaking class provides authentic cultural information	0 00	0 00	0 00	10 83	2 17	50	4	Positive
Speaking class provides exposure to real language.	0 00	1 8	1 8	10 84	0 00	45	3.75	Positive
Speaking class supports a more creative/active approach to learning	0 00	4 33	1 8	7 58	0 00	39	3.25	Neutral
The use of authentic materials in language teaching is provided	0 00	0 00	0 00	9 75	3 25	51	4.25	Positive
Overall Mean Score							3.81	Positive

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

In table (5) above, teachers perceived the following factors as difficulties to achieve successful classroom interaction: lack of enough vocabulary (4), shyness and lack of confidence (3.75), lack of interest (3.25), and fear of teachers’ negative feedback (4.25). Most teachers agree that the difficulties mentioned in the table are behind students’ reluctance to interact.

Broadly, the teachers had a positive attitude in the majority of the statements. Thus, the study concluded that teachers have a positive attitude (3.81) towards the difficulties listed in the table.

Table 6. Students' perceptions regarding the challenges in interaction in EFL speaking classrooms

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total Score	Mean Score	Attitude
	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %			
The teacher is the who does most of the talk in the classroom	0 00	9 11.25	5 6.25	59 73.75	7 8.75	304	3.8	Positive
Students do not have confidence and they are shy.	2 2.5	14 17.5	7 8.75	32 40	25 31.25	304	3.8	Positive
Students are not interested	23 28.75	25 31.25	2 2.5	30 37.5	0 00	199	2.5	Neutral
The fear of teachers' negative feedback	0 00	0 00	0 00	70 87.5	10 12.	330	4	Positive
Overall Mean Score							3.52	Positive

1-2.4(Negative attitude), 2.5-3.4(Neutral attitude), and 3.5-5(Positive attitude)

Source: (Prepared by the researcher)

The previous table shows that students revealed positive attitudes towards the obstacles mentioned in the table regarding their speaking interaction and participation. The highest score was for the last statement (The fear of teachers' negative feedback) which representing (m=4) (87.5+12.5%), followed by the first and second item which representing (m=3.8), and finally by third item (Students are not interested), representing the lowest score (m=2.5).

These results indicated, firstly the positive attitudes towards the effectuality of interaction in boosting the students' speaking performance, encouragement, self-motivation, self-esteem, and enriching the learning/teaching process with enthusiastic sphere. Secondly, the result indicated that teachers need more commitment in effective using of classroom interaction to develop their teaching practices and the students learning.

Thirdly, the students' viewpoint towards classroom interaction in speaking classes was dependent to teachers' practices, which indicates that, the students will have a positive attitude if the teachers apply communicative approach in the classroom. Finally, the result indicated the need to rethink the classroom pedagogy to support enthusiastic and innovation in teaching and learning the speaking skill.

• Conclusion

The study concludes with recommendations to improve the conditions of teaching and learning the speaking skill:

- Teacher are invited to encourage their students to speak regularly in class to get rid of shyness and stimulate them to take risks. Student-centered classroom interaction could be used by teacher to develop their perspectives towards speaking learning and thereby become excited students in oral classes. Tuan & Nhu (2010, p. 67) suggests that “student-student interaction make learners receive a comprehensible input, opportunities to negotiate meaning and receive other’s feedback”⁸. In other words, a learner-centered pedagogy in EFL where students’ attitudes and perceptions are recognized. This is very essential and the current research paper incorporates students’ views in recommending better ways of teaching speaking skills.
- Teaching speaking skill adopting classroom interaction strategy could be done in different steps; teachers can create a supportive, friendly, and relaxed atmosphere for their students. They should encourage interaction among students by asking relevant questions.
- Teachers are asked to avoid using negative feedback and provide students with the chance to select the topics that motivate them.
- Students need to practice their speaking skill outside the class; students need to use their abilities in real life situations (discussion). This might eliminate a number of errors and might also help EFL students to develop their spelling in the process. Littlewood (1981) states that: “discussion provides learners with opportunities to express their own personality and experience through the foreign language”⁹ (p.47)
- Students should be more confident about their abilities and skills. They have to use the language naturally rather than memorizing conversations

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⁸ Tuan, L.T. & Nhu, N.T.K. (2010). Studies in Literature and Language: Theoretical Review on Oral Interaction in EFL Classrooms

⁹ Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative Language Teaching*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press

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