

## A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH AND TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG THE SCHOOL LEVEL STUDENTS IN WADI AL SHATTI REGION

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### ABSTRACT

English is considered a link language in the globalized scenario to communicate with the rest of the world. Most of the non native countries in the world teach English as a second language ever since the children are of 3 years of age. The situation in Libya in this regard until a few years ago has been different. Students are introduced learning English alphabet at a late age consequently they are seen weak in acquiring English language skills even after completing their high school studies. However, the English language teaching and learning situation in Libya, at present, is better than before as it is being introduced from the earlier stages of studies. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to check the level of the students at the high school level to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to find out ways by following a systematic approach to improve the English speaking skills among the young learners by the time they graduate from high schools. This study is conducted at a high school in Wadi Al shatti region. This paper carries out a quantitative method of research by using a questionnaire as a data collection tool to analyze the findings and suggest effective recommendations. The results show that lack of enough vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation skills are the important factors that hamper the speaking skills of the learners. Hence, the study, in its recommendations section, suggests effective measures to address these crippling factors and the study concludes that speaking skills can be obtained by the learners with ease once the steps suggested in the recommendatios sections are kept in place .

**Keywords:** Systematic approach, Speaking skills, School level students, Wadi Al shatti

## نهج منهجي وتقنيات لتحسين مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية في منطقة وادي الشاطئ

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### المخلص

تعتبر اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أساسيةً في ظل العولمة للتواصل مع بقية العالم. تُدرّس معظم الدول غير الناطقة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية منذ سن الثالثة. كان الوضع في ليبيا مختلفاً في هذا الصدد حتى بضع سنوات مضت. يُدرّس الطلاب الأبجدية الإنجليزية في سن متأخرة، مما يُضعف قدرتهم على اكتساب مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية حتى بعد إتمام دراستهم الثانوية. ومع ذلك، فإن وضع تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في ليبيا حالياً أفضل من ذي قبل، حيث يتم تدريسها منذ المراحل الدراسية المبكرة. لذا، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الورقة البحثية هو التحقق من مستوى الطلاب في المرحلة الثانوية لفهم نقاط قوتهم وضعفهم، وإيجاد طرق منهجية لتحسين مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى المتعلمين الصغار عند تخرجهم من المدارس الثانوية. أُجريت هذه الدراسة في مدرسة ثانوية بمنطقة وادي الشاطئ. تعتمد هذه الورقة البحثية على منهج كمي للبحث باستخدام استبيان كأداة لجمع البيانات لتحليل النتائج واقتراح توصيات فعّالة. حيث أظهرت النتائج أن نقص المفردات والقواعد ومهارات النطق الكافية تُعدّ من أهم العوامل التي تُعيق مهارات التحدث لدى المتعلمين. لذا، تقترح الدراسة، في قسم التوصيات، تدابير فعّالة لمعالجة هذه العوامل المُعيقة، وتخلص إلى أنه يُمكن للمتعلمين اكتساب مهارات التحدث بسهولة بمجرد اتباع الخطوات المُقترحة في التوصيات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المنهج المنهجي، مهارات التحدث، طلاب المرحلة الثانوية، وادي الشاطئ.

## 1.0-Introduction

English is considered the International Language all over the world. It is being taught to the student as a second language at primary school level across the world where English is not their mother tongue. English is the most widely taught as a foreign language in more than 100 countries (Crystal, 1997). Most of the world's first hand literature has been produced in English. English has been the official language of communication of governments, trade and tourism besides the language of tremendous advancements in the field and science and technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Everybody can be proficient in a language by mastering the integrated skills of that particular language. Listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills are called the integrated skills. Learning English also is not an exception from this rule. Listening and reading are called the receptive skills as these two skills are used to receive and understand a message and speaking and writing are called productive skills as these two are the areas to produce what an individual wants to communicate. Speaking occupies the first and foremost place as the quickest way to communication as it takes short time to convey the message.

## 1.1 Background

Libya is one of the North African Arabic nations. It is also considered one of the richest countries in the region with its abundant natural oil resources across the country. Since the time oil explored in the country, its international relations in commerce and trade have been improved in order to deal with export and import transactions and the need of translators (Arabic to English and vice versa) emerged to communicate with the stakeholders from different countries. As a consequence, the need of English known citizens has been increased in the country.

For a certain period of time in Libya in the near past, English was not taught from the elementary level of school education though it is being taught from elementary level now. As a result, students used to graduate from schools without having proper knowledge of English language skills. The students who started studying English at a very late age at schools are now at universities. Hence, this study is conducted a high schools in Wadi Al shatti region. Besides a questionnaire, observation and interview methods are used to assess the level of the students in English speaking skills. This study is conducted at Dat Al-Nitaqayn School located in Brack town, Wadi Al shatti region.

## 1.2 Objectives

The study "A Systematic Approach and Techniques to Improve English Speaking Skills among the School Level Students in Wadi Al shatti Region" aims at assessing the level of basic language skills in English among the students of a high school located in Wadi Al shatti municipality as these skills are the foot steps to improve their speaking skills. The following are the main objectives of the study

1. To know the level of students in language areas like vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence patterns etc.

2. To know the level of students in English speaking skills
3. To know the strengths and weaknesses of students in speaking English
4. To suggest necessary techniques to learn English speaking skills in a systematic and effective way

### 1.3 Research Questions

In order to suggest some effective recommendations at the end of the study, this study proposes to address the following research questions

1. Do the students have enough basic vocabulary to speak simple English?
2. Do the students know how to pronounce the words correctly?
3. Do the students know different sentence structures and grammar rules?
4. Do the students use any Apps to improve their English speaking skills?

### 1.4 Significance of the study

1. To enable the students equip with the basic requirements of speaking language by following different techniques.
2. To enable the students to speak fluent English
3. To enable the teachers to use right techniques in teaching English speaking skills
4. To help the further research on the topic

## 2.0-Literature Review

### 2.1 - Vocabulary acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition is the first and foremost step in learning any foreign language. Every language has words that are used by the speakers of that particular language while they communicate with one another.

Lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language (Schmitt, 2000).

Once after acquiring the necessary amount of vocabulary one has to use it on a daily basis.

Thornburry (as cited in Akhyak and Indramawan, 2013) explains that speaking was a speech production that becomes a part of our daily activities. It means that speaking is daily activity that does by everybody to communication with the others in the world.

Young learners are interested to learn new vocabulary through visuals shown by the teacher and it helps them to understand the meaning of the word very easily.

Porter and Margaret (1992) assert that using visual materials not only make what you have to say more comprehensive to the young learners, they can make it more interesting as well.

Sometimes, the teachers can use even the real objects to make the learning more lively and interacting. Real objects are better than pictures whenever we have them in the classroom (Allen, 1983).

Teaching the meanings of the new words by using the context can be more helpful to the learners than translating the meaning of an English word directly into the mother tongue.

Research by Nagy and Scott (2000) showed that students use contextual analysis to infer the meaning of a word by looking closely at surrounding text.

## **2.2 - Tenses and different kinds of sentence structures**

It is known to every language aspirant that tense is the foundation to speak sentences that relate to different times (present, past and future). Tense refers to a system of relating a situation or part of a situation to a particular point in time (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 116).

Apart from having knowledge of tenses, it is also necessary to know different kinds of sentence structures. According to Ellis (2003), sentence structures serve as the building blocks of language, allowing learners to convey meaning effectively.

Usually, questions and answers in communication occur in two ways positive and negative. Hence it is necessary to know how to speak these sentences with correct structure for clarity and accuracy in communication. Research by Larsen-Freeman (2018) indicates that understanding and using sentence structures correctly contribute to grammatical accuracy, clarity and coherence in communication.

## **2.3 - Pronunciation**

Pronunciation refers to the sounds that are produced while speaking a language. Hornby (1995) states that pronunciation is the way a language is spoken. Hence, it is very important to learn how to produce English sounds while speaking it. English pronunciation skills can be improved in many ways. The first step is to learn to pronounce the individual speech sounds, words and then sentences either by imitating and repeating with the teacher or by listening, imitating and repeating with a native speakers recorded speech on tapes, CDs in the language lab while doing listening tasks. In either case, imitation and repetition technique should be adopted by the learners to learn correct pronunciation.

According to Celce-Murcia (1996), teachers can use techniques and practice materials. Listen and imitate: A technique used in Direct Method in which students listen to a teacher provided model and repeat or imitate it. This technique has been enhanced by the use of tape recorders, language labs, and video recorders.

Correct pronunciation is important to make the others understand the words you speak globally. This can be achieved in multiple ways. The first thing is listening to a native speaker's voice on CDs or listening to them in movies and music. Roslin, Azizul and Abdullah (2021) assert that using movies was beneficial for students mainly in terms of improving their oral skills and expanding their vocabulary. Rao (2019) also examined the effect of movie subtitles and found that it boosted language proficiency of the learners with the English language.

Another area of difficulty regarding pronunciation is reading out multisyllabic words. For easy understanding, multi syllabic words can be understood as larger words in size. Students who have less exposure to English language and who struggle to pronounce larger words are often found facing problem with the pronunciation of the multisyllabic words.

Duncan & Seymour (2003) express that poor decoders, even those who can read monosyllabic words fluently, often have difficulty to pronounce multisyllabic words.

Multisyllabic words can be pronounced with ease by following two ways. One is by repeating the word number of times until they are able to pronounce it and the other way is to pronounce it in chunks in the beginning and by joining the chunks or by moving from the part to whole word.

Cunningham & Stanovich (1991) state that one approach to teach multisyllabic word reading is to focus on providing multiple opportunities for students to read the word from isolated sounds to the connected text.

#### **2.4 - Using Apps on mobile phone to enhance English language skills**

In the modern period of technological development, mobile apps are used everywhere by the learners of English language. The term ‘mobile technologies’ is defined as the devices that are portable and personal (Rahamat et al., 2018; Hasym et al. 2017). Mobile technologies encourage the students to take control of their self-paced learning. They could use online dictionaries, interactive applications for learning, searching information through Google and reading the e-books without restricting it during the school hours. Moreover, it provides the environment for the students to enhance their writing skills (Agnes, 2016).

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is defined as the use of mobile technology in supported language learning and characterized as a tool for learning a language in the informal learning environment, accessible for material and affordable for learners (Ben-Itzhak, 2021). In using mobile language learning applications, students will have an experience exploring a variety of materials outside of formal learning to foster language skills based on their learning needs (Çakmak, 2019).

#### **2.5 – Daily conversation to improve speaking skills**

Once after getting skills in vocabulary, tenses and speaking different kinds of sentences and pronunciation, there must be regular practice to improve English speaking skills. In academic situations, the teachers can prescribe different oral activities like role plays and group discussions to improve speaking skills.

Mary Daphne mentioned in her blog post, “Speak 10 minutes in English each day. Making small talk with strangers (at a face, waiting online, at the library), chatting with a colleague from work, joining an online community, joining a book club or any type of meet up based on your interests and doing a Zoom or Skype call with someone (even regular phone call, voice only).

### **3-Methodology**

#### **3.1-Research design**

This study employs quantitative method of research to interpret and analyze the data.

#### **3.2-Data collection tool**

A questionnaire is used as a data collection tool. The questionnaire contains closed ended questions and the questions are aimed at assessing the primary information about the level of the students in vocabulary, pronunciation, understanding and speaking different kinds of sentences using different sentence structures and using modern Apps to learn English. The study was conducted at Dat Al-Nitaqayn High School located in Brack town. There are 25 respondents. There are 15 questions from all the areas mentioned above. The questionnaire was given to all the respondents with the cooperation of the class teachers and explained the questions to students in Arabic so that they can give the correct answer. All the respondents answered the questionnaire and returned the duly filled in questionnaires the same day.

#### **3.3-Data Analysis Technique**

As a questionnaire with closed ended questions is used as a data collection tool, a tabular form is used to consolidate the responses from the respondents. The table contains 15 rows representing the 15 questions on the questionnaire and two columns referring to 'yes' and 'no' respectively. Tally bars (vertical lines (I) with a diagonal line (/) for every fifth count) are used to record the responses (yes/no) for each question and to prepare a consolidated tabular form of the data collected.

#### **4.0-Results and Discussion**

From the consolidated tabular form representing all the data collected from the respondents, the following findings are revealed.

##### **4.1- Findings of the Study**

1. All the respondents expressed that they lack the vocabulary to express their views in English. There are lapses in learning process of vocabulary.
2. They face difficulty in the pronunciation of some English speech sounds and especially, the multisyllabic words.
3. They lack exposure to native English pronunciation and they lack practice too
4. Very few students are able to speak little English with the absence of helping verbs in their sentences.
5. Most of them are unaware of tenses and structures of different sentences that are used in day to day communication.
6. Students are seen trying to speak English sentence in the word order of their mother tongue (Arabic)

##### **4.2- Discussion and Data Analysis**

With reference to possessing necessary vocabulary to express their views, 24 respondents out of 25 expressed that they lack it and all the 25 respondents said that they don't learn the meanings of the new words in English. It means the teachers teach the Arabic meanings of the new English words they come across.

There is no trace of students learning the meanings of the new words in English on their own. Instead, all the 25 respondents said that they write the Arabic meaning of the word above the new word in their course books. No scope for learning additional vocabulary in this practice.

Moreover, All the 25 respondents said that they never learn vocabulary in entertaining ways like playing vocabulary games and the same number of students responded by saying they were not taught vocabulary items by using flashcards by their teachers.

None of them know how many speech sounds English language has and phonemes are not taught with examples. This lead to their pronunciation issues.

All the 25 students face pronunciation problem with multisyllabic words. It cripples their flow of speaking.

13 respondents said that they know the names of tenses only, but not the exact usage of those tenses.

Almost all the respondents expressed that they don't know the structures of different sentences (statement, question, negative sentences). It causes them speak grammatically wrong sentences

10 respondents said that they know the usage of some modal auxiliaries only. The remaining 15 students don't know the modals. The above three reasons are the hurdles on their way to speak flawless English.

All the 25 respondents replied that they don't watch English programs on TV and they follow the Arabic word order though they want to speak a little English sometimes. It means communication may be served but not by using correct linguistic form.

All the respondents revealed that they are not suggested role plays to improve their English speaking skills in class.

### **4.3- Recommendations**

In order to improve English speaking skills among the school level students in Wadi Al shatti region in Libya, the following 'systematic approach and techniques' can be considered as an effective measure.

#### **4.2.1- Vocabulary building**

1- Besides the vocabulary the students come across in their course books and work books, 'categorical vocabulary' can be taught to students since the time when they start studying English as a subject.

2- While giving the meanings for the new words, teachers better give the synonyms in English instead of directly giving the meaning in Arabic. This is the best way to improve the vocabulary skills of the students

3- In addition to the above, teachers can ask the students to present a new word a day to the class preferably with its meaning and its usage in a sentence. Each student brings a new word and shares it with the class. This works in an excellent way

4- While teaching young learners, usage of flash cards may help the students learn and remember the new words better than when they are taught just the meaning of the word directly.

#### **4.2.2- Pronunciation.**

1-Teach the students all the 44 English speech sounds and the production mechanism of the sound with the audio back up recorded by the native speakers and video support with examples and let the students practice until they obtain perfection

2- Students can repeat the pronunciation with their teacher in the class as well.

3- Divide the multisyllabic words into chunks, practice the individual parts initially and try pronouncing by combining the chunks gradually

#### **4.2.3-Sentence structures**

1-Teach the students basic sentence structures with all the components in that sentence.

2- Let them get exposed to the speeches by the native speakers on regular basis by playing the CDs recorded by native speakers' voice.

3- Create situations where students have to participate and practice situational conversations with their main focus on a specific sentence structure being taught

4- Role playing and simulation activities can be entertaining and educative in improving the speaking skills

5- Let the students listen to BBC or CNN news channels to get used to English speaking and avoid mother tongue influence on English.

#### **4.2.4 - Language Apps**

1-The young generations are smart in using Apps on mobile phone. Hence, they should be advised and encouraged to keep using different English language learning apps.

2-Duolingo, ELSA, Babbel, Memrise and Fluent U are some among the many popular language learning apps recommended for students.

3- Language learning games are motivating and young learners pay more attention to these activities. Teachers have to be creative in planning suitable and required activities for their students.

### **5.0-Conclusion**

This paper tried to assess the English speaking skills among the school level students in Wadi Al shatti region in Libya and suggested effective measures to be implemented to improve the speaking skills among the young learners until they graduate from the school. The techniques suggested to improve

vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking practice using right structures and improving English language skills by using different English language learning Apps in this paper are to be followed on a regular basis throughout their school study. If all the measures suggested are observed and practiced as a routine, it can be possible to see the students as a fluent English language speakers by the time they graduate from the high school.

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