The Impact of Triple Ps on Developing Oral Fluency for Elementary EFL Classes

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تأثير منهجية **Presentation Practice Production** على تطوير التواصل الشفوي باللغة الإنكليزية وبطلاقة لصفوف التعليم الأساسي

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الملخص

جرى هذا البحث الكمي والنوعي في مدرسة خاصة في لبنان من أجل وضع المنهجية الملائمة التي تشجع طلاب الصف الخامس على المشاركة في برنامج التحدث بطلاقة باللغة الانكليزية على نطاق واسع، واكتشاف مدى تأثيرها. وقد تم جمع البيانات من مقابلات مع المعلمين، والاستبيانات (قبل / بعد الدراسة) وزعت على الطلاب الذين تم تقسيمهم بشكل عشوائي إلى مجموعتين (التجريبية والضابطة). وقد تم أيضا مقارنة وتحليل نتائج اختبارات التحدث باللغة الانكليزية (قبل/بعد الدراسة)، بالاضافة الى دراسة الاستبيانات الموجهة إلى أولياء أمور الطلاب تحت التجربة. وكشفت النتائج أن 63٪ من الطلاب في المجموعة التجريبية أحرزوا تقدما في مهارة التحدث باللغة الانكليزية. قد تساعد هذه النتائج المربين لتكريس الوقت الكافي لدورات المحادثة ولخلق أنشطة محفزة مثل لعب الأدوارفي المسرحيات لتطوير الكفاءة التواصلية عند الطلاب والفرص المتاحة لهم لممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية بحرية أكثر.

Abstract

This is a qualitative and quantitative action exploratory research conducted at a private school in Lebanon. The purpose of this work is to suggest activities/ methodologies, which encourage fifth graders to engage in an extensive speaking program, and to discover if such implemented methodology such as presentation practice production (PPP) positively influenced students' speaking skill. Data were collected from teachers' interviews, and pre/post study questionnaires distributed to 30 learners who were equally and randomly assigned into two groups (experimental and control). Data were, also, retrieved from pre/post speaking tests, and questionnaires addressed to students' parents under experiment. Results revealed that 63% of students in the experimental group progressed in their speaking skill and were able to freely voice their minds. These findings may help educators to dedicate sufficient time for speaking sessions and to create motivating activities such as role play/drama to develop students' communicative competence and their opportunities to practice English speaking more.

Keywords: approaches, EFL, motivation, role play, speaking

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an essential tool for communicating. People speak when they want to express their thoughts, reveal desires, and establish social relationships. There exists a wide range of literature on language learning strategies in general, and the teaching of speaking in particular. Rodney (2012) claimed that speaking should be an important skill in its own right and should occupy an essential part in ESL curricula. In Lebanon, English language infiltrated the social and educational systems. In fact, the Center for Educational Research and Development (CRDP) established the guidelines for the new curricula to develop the use of English. Its three major purposes were: interacting socially, achieving proper academics, and enriching the culture. "We

believe that the most effective way to achieve these purposes is through the adoption of thematic, integrated, and contest-base approaches to teaching and learning"(CRDP, 1997, p.6).

In the context of my teaching EFL to fifth graders, I noticed that my students were able to comprehend varied printed materials and produce creative paragraph writing.

However, when it came to oral communication, my students had limited opportunities for productive speaking. When they did, their responses were short, limited, and sometimes their mother tongue interfered. Larsen-Freeman (2000) condemned the fact of language being just mastery of forms and emphasized the process of communication. She asserted: "language functions might be emphasized over forms…students work with language at the suprasentential or discourse Level" (p.131). Since native language is acquired without attending schools or following strict rules, I realized that it is not sufficient to teach my students a language by focusing on one aspect. Many students knew linguistic structures, yet they could not express themselves using the target language.

Anecdotal evidence revealed that speaking in the school under study is not taught effectively, nor in proportion with other skills. My experience showed that this area followed traditional methodology where students were supposed to only speak when they discuss questions related to reading comprehension. If the Lebanese curriculum "moves from a system of language education based on rote learning, linguistic correctness, and cramming of information to a system that promotes autonomous learning, thinking skills, and communicative competence" (CRDP, 1997, p.6), why is it that ELT educators still follow old-fashioned methods in language teaching at "Progress School" (pseudonym)? Why is speaking overlooked in EFL curricula?

This study hypothesized the following: the implementation of direct and indirect teaching methodologies along with role play activities, which are related to Lebanese learners' background, will offer solutions for internal/external problem that students face while learning a foreign language, and help them improve their speaking skill.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Luoma (2004) wrote: "The ability to speak in a foreign language is at the very heart of what it means to be able to use a foreign language" (p.ix). Swinney and Velasco (2012) stressed the fact that speakers' main concern with learning a new language is to be able to communicate with friends, visitors, and even strangers in a language that both speakers can understand. Yet, using a foreign language while communicating with others is not an easy task. That is why becoming competent or fluent in the target foreign language takes a long time to develop. Thus, speaking fluently requires "the mastery of the sound system of the language … instant access to appropriate vocabulary, and [the ability] to put words together intelligibly with minimal hesitation" (Luoma, 2004, p. ix).

Lightbown and Spada (2006) emphasized the importance of giving the opportunity to students to engage in interaction. They were invited to express and clarify their thoughts and opinions via the "negotiation for meaning." This can only be accomplished "through a variety of modifications that naturally arise in interaction, such as requests for clarification or confirmation, repetition with a questioning intonation" (p.150).What should the teaching of speaking prepare students to do? Asked Brown and Yule (1983). In the first place, the purpose was to enable students "to express themselves" in the target language. Second, L2 speakers should be able to overcome the problems and difficulties of basic interactive skills such as exchanging greetings, thanks and apologies. Finally, the aim of teaching is "to give the students the floor" instead of "walking by the wall" in order "to express their needs" such as "apologies, thanks, and warnings" (p.27).

Yet, in the last century, the progress of foreign language teaching underwent several changes. Literature (Blanchard, 2013; Bahous & Nabhani, 2010; Dornyei, 2003) indicated that

there were two chief approaches to the teaching of speaking- indirect and direct. Advocates of the direct approach argued that speaking skills can and should be taught explicitly via consciousness raising activities. The direct approach raised learners' awareness of systems and patterns involved in conversations via specific language input. For instance, McCarthy (1998) believed that task-based contexts where students carry out group activities were not sufficient for an ideal and natural discourse.

Still in the same stance, Goh and Burns (2012) maintained that the direct approach applied a systematic analysis to the elements of speaking competence and took students through a program of awareness-raising and practice. An awareness or knowledge of the elements of speaking still required learners to consciously control the use of the target language. Hedge (2000, p.271) indicated several simple strategies that could be explicitly taught in the early stages of learning, for instance: "ways of opening a conversation in order to get practice with other students, ways of asking for repetition, asking someone to speak more slowly, or requesting clarification, in order to get more comprehensible input. In addition to ways of keeping a conversation going, for example, with phrases like 'right', 'yes' or 'I see".

From the direct approach, evolved the Presentation Practice Production methodology (PPP). Thornbury (2005) defined it as the contrast of task based language teaching because the task to be achieved using PPP is the "culmination of an instructional sequence rather than its starting point" (p.119). It would be fair to say that if there is any one "umbrella" approach to language teaching that became the accepted norm in this field, it would be a mixture of indirect and direct approaches/ methodologies. Perhaps a balance of explicit awareness raising techniques and indirect based practiced methods provides a fairer approach to producing competent English speakers in the classroom (Yoon & Kim, 2012). This also provides a basis for designing classroom activities and materials.

Brown (2004) classified the types of speaking activities according to the genre of speaking. For the imitative, he suggested words, phrases, and repetition of sentences (drills). Harmer (2001) suggested activities of direct response such as reading aloud, sentence or dialogue completion, oral questionnaires, picture-cued activities which elicit description and map-cued activities that evoke giving directions. Such activities were designed for the practice of some phonological or grammatical aspect of language. For the responsive, Brown (2004) proposed paraphrasing, question and answer activities, giving introductions and directions. Students' task in such activities was to process the teacher's talk immediately and to fashion an appropriate reply.

Thornbury (2005) distinguished three types that help learners progress from imitating to achieving control over their own speaking. The first type is called awareness-raising activities. Such activities, aim at helping learners fill their knowledge gaps while speaking and responding appropriately to a difficult request. Typical activities of this type are: using live listening and noticing -the gap- activities. As for the second type, it is defined as appropriation activities or controlled practice in which the possibility of making mistakes by the learner is lessened. This type is characterized by imitation and repetition during the activity where students focus on a certain linguistic feature without being expected to produce any other pattern. The teacher's support is "always at hand".

Hall (2011) drew a distinction between student-talking time and teacher talking time. He called for a balance between these two kinds of interaction in the classroom, and asked for reducing teacher-talking time and giving more space for student-talking time. Similar to any other skill, the teaching of speaking may encounter several problems. Marzano and Pickering (2013) called attention to classroom's physical appearance. Another major problem is students' revert to mother tongue. Harmer (2001) proposed three reasons why students revert sometimes to their own language: the level of language needed in the activity, translation purposes, and

teachers themselves. Students' intrinsic/extrinsic motivation is also another influential factor. Pandey (2005, p. 83) admitted that home background is also "a complex of economic, social, cultural, and even personal factors that affect the process of learning".

METHODOLOGY

The Study Design

The major goal of this study was to improve a situation through active/direct contact with parties in concern. It, also, aimed at providing practitioner-relevant data rather than solely providing information. In this study, I act as participant observer in the field of my work to improve the rationality of my own practices and implement necessary changes to the educational context at "Progress school".

Participants

They consisted of four categories: learners, parents, English teachers and the coordinator. Participants of this study were students of grade five. They represented the second basic class in cycle II. To highlight a normal case, participants were drawn by non-probability or purposive sampling to be the focus of this study. I narrowed down my learners to include 30 students form grade five. Their age ranged between 10 and 11 years old. The majority shared same social and ethnic background, and most of their parents have little or no knowledge of the English language. Due to the relation of purposive sampling to informational considerations, the class was randomly divided (30 students) into two equal groups. Three English teachers have taught for the past three or four years, were interviewed individually. The third category was the coordinator. She is a woman in her thirties who holds a BA in English Language/ Literature and an MA in Comparative Literature. Mrs. Robinson (pseudonym) taught English for many years for Grades 10 and 11. She has been the coordinator for cycle II for two years. Additionally, this study gave the parents of the group under experiment an opportunity to be part of their children's learning English speaking.

Procedure of the Study

After getting the approval of the school administration, the study was conducted for four months. Ethical principles such as: harming the participants, lacking informed consent, invasion of privacy and involving deception, were avoided. After attaining the approval by the administration for conducting the study, participants were informed about the nature of the project, the context of the research, and the procedures adopted in order to obtain their consent. The second ethical concern was to ensure confidentiality and protect the participants. The name of the institution was not revealed, nor that of the participants in order to assure that no moral or physical harm affect them. Add to that, there was a need to protect them from being criticized and to keep the privacy of their opinions.

Instruments and Data Analysis

Data were analyzed on different scales. Analysis began with content and thematic study of the curriculum, textbooks and learning sources. Such analysis showed the themes that students dealt with during the year. It also revealed whether these subjects were motivating or related to Lebanese students' cultural background. Having collected data, results were analyzed combining both methods: qualitative and quantitative. On one hand, I explored the views of teachers and investigated if speaking was practiced/assessed in class. On the other hand, I probed the effects of the gradual implementation of PPP approach along with role play activities and drama on students' verbal communication. Such qualitative strategy dealt with real life and human experiences making the collected data rich, real, flexible and vivid.

Interviews. Collecting data was through interviews with teachers and the coordinator. A set of partially structured questions were prepared to provide rich data for the analysis of speaking

agenda, and the activities practiced in class. In addition to problems facing speaking and the way English language was assessed. The interviews were conducted in English while preserving clarity and quality. They also offered the possibility of modifying the line of inquiry and following up the interesting responses and motives of the respondents. Findings were analyzed according to different themes. These themes showed in details how speaking is taught and what the challenges of teaching speaking were. Concerning the related category, interviews were semi-structured allowing extensive follow-up of responses. Twenty three questions were structured on the basis of specific areas of interest that elicited different types of responses. Thus for example:

-Part I included information concerning the teacher's background, education, training, and workshops, in addition to questioning their awareness for English as an important language.

-Part II probed for general information on the speaking agenda inquiring whether teachers used the English language regularly in class or whether speaking is taught separately or integrated with other skills in the students' courses. Furthermore, this part explored the amount of time devoted to speaking and the methodology adhered to teaching the course.

-Part III checked the types of speaking activities and materials used in class.

-Part IV looked into the problems that teachers face in practicing speaking.

-As for Part V, it explored the speaking evaluation system, and tried to find out how the English language was assessed, in addition to the amount of time devoted to speaking.

Emerging themes were divided into categories and exemplar quotes were selected for support. In order to avoid the problem with the sheer quantity of ephemeral data, the interviews were first recorded. Data were transcribed later on, and then typed.

Students' Questionnaires. The third source for collecting data was a pre-study questionnaire. It was made up of thirteen questions distributed to students and a post-study questionnaire including questions of the pre-study questionnaire that allowed for a comparison of data after the study. I, also, added one structured question probing for a selection of speaking activities that students liked most and providing the reason of their choice. As for the rest of questions, they were classified according to Bryman (2008, p.232) as follows:

-Personal factual questions which provided personal information such as age and sexual identity.

-Factual questions about others. An example could be about their parents; whether they work or whether they finished their education.

-Questions about attitude. This included their attitude towards speaking English on the phone or with their peers.

-Other closed questions elicited respondents' judgments about how much attention is paid to English speaking in class.

- Two open-ended questions.

Parents' Questionnaires. The fourth source of data collection was based on a questionnaire addressed to parents of students under experiment. It was analyzed thematically. Taking into consideration that some parents were not familiar with the English language, the questionnaire was typed in Arabic language, then translated into English for analysis. There were eleven questions. Nine were closed structured dealing with:

- parents' educational background

-type of spoken language used fluently along their native language

-kind of spoken language at home

-an investigation in the learners' change of their attitude at home

-impact of implemented speaking activities on students' oral fluency.

-two more open-ended questions were included.

After a detailed analysis of the following data: pre-study questionnaires, pre-speaking tests, teacher's interviews, in addition to analyzing the books of the school under study, a diagnosis for the lack of speaking was recorded. To rework this negative speaking practice, an implementation of role play and drama activities along with a change of the teaching methodology led to an action plan to rework students' negative attitude towards oral communication.

Speaking Tests. This third scale of data was computer-based analysis to facilitate comparison of different findings. Quantitative analysis followed the Cambridge ESOLFSE (Total/20) analytic rating scale. Data were quantified using a software package SPSS, 17.0. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to test the difference between scores of data collected before and after an experimental manipulation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Reflecting upon all the before mentioned data, it was clear that a fundamental change was needed.

Reducing Anxiety

Using a foreign language while communicating with others was not an easy task for fifth graders. That is why the entire integration was planned on the basis of students' needs. Concomitant with a comfortable class was a learner-centered atmosphere enhanced by the very nature of realistic and imaginative speaking activities. Activities ranged from structured interviews, to whole-class-simulations.

To begin with, students did not even have the opportunity to discuss their fears about learning the language. For this reason, being the helper I tried to follow major guidelines proposed by Wallace, Stariha, and Walberg (2005, p.12):

- help reduce unrealistic fears by pointing out how common they are among people and what to do about them.
- maintain a friendly atmosphere in class and provide opportunities for students to practice speaking alone or with another student to help reduce such fear and the affective filter as well. Thus, students can practice speaking in front of their peers who face the same situation.
- use humor as a pedagogical tool to create a positive atmosphere, relieve stress, increase mental sharpness as well as facilitate the learning process. Preparedness was enhanced by in-depth mastery of the subject matter, appropriate organization and rehearsing the presentation.

As a consequence, frequent classroom presentations and discussions enabled to diagnose and remedy problems. The practice of oral presentation lessened students' anxieties while, at the same time, helped them to learn the subject matter of the lesson.

Indirectness in Discourse Management

At the start, speakers were given the opportunity to engage in interaction, they were invited to express and clarify their thoughts and opinions using the target language along with their mother language so to avoid being mocked. Learners needed strategies of indirectness in discourse. To save their own face, they were taught how to gain time while talking (as I was saying before…), how to hedge (well, it is hard to say...), how to acknowledge their limitations and ask for help (I am sorry, I don't know how to say…, how do you say…), and to participate in a group conversation even if they had nothing to say, by commenting, paraphrasing or expanding on what others say (Kramsch, 1985).

Interactional and Transactional Use of Language

Two types of language were used in the classroom: (1) the lesson content that was taught and learned, for example grammar, vocabulary, cultural facts; and (2) the interactional language that was used by teacher and student to deal with the lesson content, for example: "Please speak louder, what do you mean, now let's turn to… ." So, the second type of language was

characterized by short responses. As a result, clarity of information exchanged was not of primary importance since the listener was probably only half-listening anyway.

However, when transactional spoken language was concerned, longer terms were used to convey a message and clarify the theme of conversation. In other words, students adjusted their utterances according to listeners' reply during the interactional language. So, taking Brown and Yule's advice into consideration, the transactional task was used as the basis for interactional conversation.

In the first phase of presentation, the scene was set for the dialogue, and then presented in conjunction with essential visual aids. In the next stage, students were given the opportunity to practice new items in meaningful contexts for themselves. This stage was teacher-centered. I often resorted to the use of choral group in which the target form had a high likelihood of occurrence. Each learner was given a chance to practice while monitoring their performance. The last stage of this method was production. There was room and need for some degree of self-expression granted for learners. It is through this attempt to express themselves that students became aware of how to accommodate the little they know the language, to the situations in which they know of the language, to the situation in which they have to use it, rather than be led to believe that they will be able to do this at some remote date.

Motivating and Innovative speaking Activities

In school and in life, students face a diversity of circumstances that require language skills. For this reason, a variety of speaking activities in class, mainly, role play and drama helped learners shift from accuracy to fluency.

I made sure that the themes dealt with were realistic, informative and motivating. In order to fulfill this aim, (1) a textbook different from mine and from that of my students was used. 2) The content of the activities was relevant to students' lives and concerns. Students, for example, simulated a restaurant scene given the necessary clues. This activity was complicated by few difficulties for some. Realistic activities had the advantage that they were easy to formulate and can more or less replicate true-to-life experiences that students encounter in the target culture (shopping, asking for directions…). These activities were promoted first, written out before hand and then ad-libbed. They had to be achievable in order to build students' self-esteem and amusing to motivate them to speak. (3) These activities varied in order to keep learners busy and not get bored. Often, the difficulty of an activity was adjusted by changing vocabulary or by adding or subtracting complications to cite an example, the task of describing a picture given to a group at an emerging level became spotting the discrepancies at a somewhat higher-level and telling the story of this picture at a higher level: advanced.

Role play was also a technique adapted to make students use the target language and thereby develop spoken skills. (4) Students imagined and assumed roles by attempting to think, act, and speak. They created situations, and pretended to be some different persons. Once they assumed a role, students produced words and sentences appropriate to the situation as well as to the roles they have assumed.

Roles were selected beforehand so that they were familiar and within the linguistic competence attained until then by students. Role play was the liveliest form to get the class involved in speaking- except for those students under control who were passive learners. It brought situations form real life into the classroom. (5) Sometimes discussions revolved around students' personal experience. Other times they talked about anything they own such as a doll, a pet, ect. Worthy to be mentioned was a balance between teacher control and students' choice in all activities that involved students in sharing responsibilities and decision making.

The choice of speaking activities was based on students' level. Therefore, (6) students were given enough time to practice simple utterances through drilling exercises. Often disapproved for

its association with an audio-lingual style of teaching, drilling was fun and motivating, memorable and built confidence as students learnt to say interesting sequences of language which were available to them for later analysis and experiment.

Taking into consideration that my students were not yet ready for playing drama, I decided to have (7) small talk and evaluate it. In fact, many English students were more interested in making effective small talk than knowing correct grammar structures. Small talk was a pleasant conversation about common interests. I admit that it was difficult for some learners because "making small talk means talking about almost anything- and that means having a wide vocabulary that can cover most topics" (Beare, 2014, par.1). This lack of vocabulary led to some students "blocking". They slowed down or stopped speaking completely. That is why I tried to interfere whenever learners were running out of ideas. Candidates were asked to speak without preparation. Their speech or "small talk" was recorded using an MP3 Digital Player for a set time (i.e.1-2 minutes) on one specified general topic. I even asked them to bring items to class to create a realistic environment.

Later on, students moved to practice (8) simple dialogues and conversations which gave them opportunities for practicing their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar and for learning chunks of language they can analyze and experiment with later on. Sometimes students had difficulty composing their thoughts in English or expressing them coherently, using appropriate grammatical structures and words. In this case, they were given prompts wherever necessary, which encouraged them to guess and produce utterances appropriately.

There can be no doubt those literary activities among which (9) drama added variety and richness to the language class. The purpose of including drama lied in the fact that it helped students develop their: means of communication, opportunities for becoming skillful, verbal expression of both emotional and intellectual perspectives. In performance, students developed and portrayed characters and remained in role in a given situation using voice, body and gesture. I have also (10) downloaded part of a play: The Wizard of Oz (last two months) from youtube.com, and my students were finally able to watch, then perform it in front of their classmates and the director.

So, the plan started with the setting of the environment first, the preparation of students second, and then activities were introduced and numbered (1-10) from what is simple to what is more complex. The aim in introducing such activities was to break the ice that stood among themselves, gain self-esteem, motivation and step away from anxiety, and most important of all encourage responsibility and independence for fluent English speaking. This variety of activities gave students a more personal space to express themselves and create a sense of autonomy.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data from convergent sources; interviews with teachers and coordinator, pre/post study questionnaires, pre/post speaking tests, in addition to parents' questionnaires were analyzed according to different themes in separate sections. Before analyzing the data, I analyzed the books used by this school under study. This justified my use of different materials to implement my study.

Textbooks Analysis

Two books were analyzed: students' textbook and teacher's book. Three different topics were the major sources behind this analysis: the title, the preface, and the content of the textbooks. The rationale behind choosing these three parts is that they reveal what subjects the books dealt with. The title presented the book; the preface clarified the aim behind using this book. As for the content, it detailed in depth the place of the speaking skill compared to the rest of English skills. In short, *Reading Street* is the publication of Scott Foresman. It is a book designed by American practitioners and researchers. In other words, the themes and topics dealt

with are American, which our students in Arab schools find difficult to understand and feel demotivated to discuss. To mention just a few: exploring the Midwest, a Japanese man making his home in California, a girl strikes a bargain on the Texas prairie, and a traveler to Yosemite National park who recalls her trip. Most important of all, speaking as a separate skill was not given that importance as compared to the rest of other skills. In fact, students practiced reading, writing and grammar every week, but speaking was not given enough attention. Students worked on speaking activities two or three times each five weeks whereas reading comprehension was acquired weekly. This shows again that speaking was not given enough time so that foreign learners benefit from this time given and be able to speak English fluently without losing face.

As for the daily plan, it aided teachers to divide their 90 minutes every day for English Language learning as follows:

-Oral language: speaking, listening, viewing (10 minutes)

-Word work: spelling (15 minutes)

-Reading: comprehension, vocabulary, fluency (45 minutes)

-Language Arts: writing, grammar usage and mechanics (20 minutes).

Further analysis of textbooks revealed that quite a little importance is accorded to speaking in English with respect to all other possible skills such as reading, listening and writing.

Interviews

The majority of teachers, I interviewed, admitted the importance of teaching speaking in the teaching context. Answering the question on whether teachers think that speaking should be taught as a separate skill or integrated with other skills such as listening, reading or writing, the majority of teachers acknowledged that knowing a language means being able to speak it, write it, read it and understand it when spoken. Some teachers admitted that "it is the practice in listening along with speaking that paves the way for the learner to achieve oral fluency or accuracy." Others revealed that reading is strongly related to speaking. In fact students are encouraged to read widely on subjects which interest them personally and prepare presentations in which they share what they have enjoyed with their fellow students.

As for another category of teachers, they assumed that writing is transcribed speech. They thought that teaching speaking matters because it takes part of the English language assessment. When asking teachers and the coordinator about time devoted to English speaking in class, almost all agreed on a specific time. They gave a clear cut response regarding the time spent on speaking activities: ten to fifteen minutes. When teachers informed the interviewer about the way speaking is taught, two of them agreed that speaking still follows the old system of language teaching. It is based on a combination of grammar translation and the audio-lingual method. The third teacher emphasized that out of fluency comes accuracy, and that language is prompted by the need to communicate. She explained that the teacher in the first stage gave students a task to perform; she explored the topic, clarified it, and helped students to understand the instructions. In this case teacher domination was removed. Students, then, completed the task, in pairs or small groups.

As for the final stage, students were invited to discuss and examine specific linguistic features targeted in the task. It is only when the task was completed that the teacher discussed the language that was used by making adjustments and corrections.

In asking teachers and coordinators on the resources they use for speaking activities, all of them argued that they use "talking to them, expression of opinion and discussing a shared reading passage". They also used to skip some lessons because "Our students are not familiar with the discussed topics". As mentioned before the book is not designed for learners of English as a foreign language.

Moreover, students felt anxious whenever speaking activities took place because the book included stories that were not related to students' cultural background. Learners had difficulties to understand these activities and participate in open conversations. As a result "we, as teachers, tend to provide our students with additional materials from other sources," quoted almost every teacher interviewed. They searched for extra speaking activities whether by referring to "books used by public schools", or downloading some motivating activities from the internet. They also discussed those activities with the coordinator and worked with each other for the best of the students.

When it came to problems in practicing speaking activities, the teachers presented two kinds: internal and external factors. To begin with, one of the teachers listed several factors that one may encounter during the teaching of speaking: "the arrangements of seats, the size of the class, and the syllabus itself". When asked to clarify, she stated that the arrangement of the class should aid teaching and learning instead of discouraging teachers from giving adequate attention to the spoken language. Moreover, she claimed that teaching a large group is problematic because in large classes with little time allocated, students will have little time to talk, if they get a turn. She proposed cluster seating for communicative and interactive tasks provided that, "discussions and demonstrations require that all students have a clear view of each other or the demonstration material" (Moore, 1998, p.309). At the end, she added that the syllabus itself requires adjustment because it does not give adequate attention to the spoken language.

Another problem that interviewed teachers reported was students' use of mother tongue. A principal cause of this was the lack of interest in speaking activities because of the unfamiliarity with the cultural background of most topics. It was used to translate, explain and communicate with the teacher. As for the third interviewee, she complained from students' anxiety to use the target language in front of others. "Fear of negative evaluation and errors can be the source of anxiety for some students", admitted another teacher. Add to that, most teachers mentioned the lack of resources and materials. That is why they tended to "download new motivating types of speaking activities" sometimes, and ask the coordinator to provide them with extra materials to develop students' communicative competence.

Finally in answering how speaking was assessed and what percentage it occupied in the course assessment; all of the teachers along with coordinator argued that speaking was informally assessed. It was only through their oral communication in classroom activities such as "answering reading comprehension questions, and discussing illustrations in their book" that students were assessed, reported a teacher. Such kind of assessment functioned as a formative tool which aimed at evaluating students in the process of "forming" their competencies. Concerning the grade given to the speaking skill in the course curriculum, the majority agreed that speaking was graded over 4 (out of 60). It was clear from this that the speaking skill was given a low grade compared to other skills. In fact, English language was given 60 points in the students' curriculum. These points were divided as follow:
- Oral communication: 15 points. It involved listening (4points), speaking (4points), poem recitation (4points), and homework (3points)
- Reading comprehension: 15 points. This included vocabulary (7points) and comprehensive questions (8points).
- Language features: 15 points, it involved grammar (10points) and dictation (5points).
- Writing: 15 points.

Regarding this, students did not take the speaking skill seriously, neither did they show motivation or effort to acquire this skill. As a consequence this affected negatively the practice of speaking activities and formed another challenge for the teaching of speaking.

Students' Questionnaires

Questions 1, 2, and 4 were dropped from the study since all participants are 5th graders (nearly same age acceptable for class) [Q1], all are females [Q2], and living with father or mother means living with parents [Q4]. Proceedings/results of questions 8 to 14 of the questionnaire helped answer the third research question.

Why do you think English is important? Answers showed a diversity of students' way of thinking towards the use of English language. 43% = 8/15 were equally distributed between games, TV shows, and because English is a must. 6.66% = 1 gave different reasons such as the need to understand what is written on several items. After the implementation, results revealed a remarkable change in students' attitude towards English use. Thus for example, 57.2% = 8/14 shifted towards communication whether chatting face to face with people or through the use of technology. Add to that, 21.45% = 3/15 thought of English as the bulk of most people's daily engagement. As for the rest 3, their answered varied between using English for entertainment, or to show off.

Which language is spoken at home? Students of the experimental group were given three possible answers, (1) Arabic and French, (2) Arabic and English and (3) only Arabic. Pre-study results showed that only 2/15 students use English as their primary choice of spoken language (13.3%), while the rest 13/15 = 86.7% used other languages such as Arabic or French. After applying the above mentioned methods to this group, post-study results showed a significant increase in the frequency of students who prefer speaking Arabic and English to other choice. This frequency rose from 2 to 10 (i.e., 13.3% to 66.7%). On the other hand, the frequency of those who prefer to speak only Arabic or Arabic and French decreased from 13/15 (86.7%) to only 5/15 (33.3%).

Do you like speaking English? This was a direct question to students and was concerned in the level of likelihood of speaking English. Answers were divided into three categories: never, occasionally and all the time. Only 3 students (out of 15) preferred to speak English all the time (20%), and 4/15 (i.e. 26.7%) who never liked to speak English. The rest (8/15, i.e. 53.3%) occasionally like to speak English. After undergoing the experiment, the students, who never liked to speak English, vanished in the post test results. They became fans of speaking English all the time. In addition, only 3/8 students who occasionally liked to speak English, remained in this category, and the rest shifted to like speaking English all the time. Again, paired test of the pre and post study answers was used to determine the significance of the results, so Wilcoxon test was used. 8/11 students improved (4[never] +5[occasionally] -1 [missing]) and test statistics showed that the significance was 0.008, which is less than p (0.05). This proved that the implemented activities affected students' attitude towards speaking English language.

Do you use this language while speaking on the phone, with your friends? Usually, students have an immense imagination, which they use freely, as they tell stories or speak of their activities within their entourage especially with family and friends. This question addressed the use of English language as a mean of interaction while communicating over the phone or face to face. Answers were distributed amongst the following options: (a) I never use this language while speaking on the phone or with my friend, (b) I sometimes use this language, and (c) I always use this language. Test statistics and frequency tables showed that those who answered never decreased by 2 (13% of pre-study answers), and 3/ 8 (20%) of those who answered sometimes became all the time fans. Test of significance using Wilcoxon test revealed 0.02 as a result, which is less than p=0.05. In fact, the number of students who changed their answers positively was 6. Adding up those who transferred from never [2] and sometimes [3] and voted for always [1] gave positive ranks.

What do you do in your spare time? Children have plenty of activities to do in their spare time if not assigned a specific activity. One of their favorites is the tendency to speak and never stop. They tell stories, chat with family and friends, ask questions, and comment on everything. Since students were 5th graders, influencing them to turn to the activity required to fulfill one goal of the study, was considered a success. This was what students answered as their major spare-time activity, with a rate of significance = 0.005. In fact, multiple choices were given to answer this question, and according to the target of this study, development of speaking skills through listening and practicing, was what I aimed at and needed. The first given choice was listening to spoken English. Other activities were not of that interest to the study. Tests of 2-related samples of pre and post-study were carried out on the 3 answers. The 1st spare-time activity (listening to spoken English) yielded 0 negative ranks (ranks a), while the remaining 2 answers gave 3 (ranks d) and 4 (ranks g) consecutively. Accordingly, and based on the results, these 2 answers were dropped from discussion, since their significance = 1, much bigger than the p value.

Do you like participating in the speaking activities in your class? The act of participating in the speaking activities in class was considered as one of the problems of teaching speaking to 5th graders. Only 2 students (out of 15) answered "yes" to this question in their pre-study questionnaire, while others (13/15) had many reasons not to like this activity. Integrating students in the role play, encouraging them to take actions, speaking out loud, resulted in flipping the percentages (numbers): 13/15 said "yes" we like to participate in speaking activities in class. Students no more felt shy, their friends no more laughed at them, and they know now how to speak English.

Do your classmates use the English language while chatting? Chatting is a form of communication, whether it was spoken or written. In this study, oral chatting was examined between participants in both stages. The outcome was very encouraging. The number of students who never used English language while chatting dropped by 9 (out of 10), that is 90% decrease. This number was split between the other two categories. Actually, 55% of those who never used English language while chatting (30% of the total population), switched to use it all the time, while the remaining 45% became frequent users of it.

How much attention is paid to English speaking in your class? Usually students' behavior and attention within class differ according to many factors, be it the teacher, type of material, level of difficulty or acceptance and the language, to name a few. Once the difficulty of language was overcome then, their level of attention and interaction increased and they performed better. Results showed that all of those who were not paying attention at all to English speaking in class (3/15) in the pre-study results, turned to be paying a lot of attention after practicing in the speaking activities. Post-study results revealed that 6/8 out of the total population (40%) who were paying some attention, made progress and paid a lot of attention, which increased the number to become 13/15, i.e. 86.7% of the population.

If you were in the place of your teacher, what would you like to practice the most? Listening, writing, speaking, grammar and why? The majority of students agreed on the same skill: "speaking". A rate of 56% = 9/15 believed that speaking is the most interesting session. They argued that it is the language of the world and it is used everywhere. 6/9 of those who chose speaking believed that it helped them deal with foreigners, understand what other speakers say even when it comes to understanding music lyrics. The other 3/9 split between showing off (2/9 cared about learning speaking to show off before their neighbors, 1/9 chose this activity because they get bored with the other choices such as reading and writing). The remaining 6/15 rate were equally separated into smaller proportions each of 1/15, each favoring a different activity (reading, writing, listening). Add to these, 1/15 who gave no interest at all in any of the program,

thinking of the whole set as a boring idea. An additional 1/15 were even uncertain of what to choose. Students liked the play and wanted to perform the "Wizard of Oz".

Although such analysis showed some variety, it was obvious that the English language was looked at as "the" language to acquire. Most students showed great interest in learning how to speak English, for they believe that once they learn how to speak, they learn all the language.

Speaking Tests

Among the macro skills of language, speaking was the most difficult skill to assess. It involved reading aloud, conversational exchanges, and tests using visual material as a stimuli are common test items for pretesting speaking. Oral interviews, role play tests and simulations were useful for post-testing. As for a sample of a qualitative description for students' small talk, this can be explained as follow:

-Student A: she was one of those students who showed discomfort talking in front of others in order to avoid being mocked and losing her self-esteem and dignity. Even when I offered help by encouraging her, she became more anxious and refused to talk.

-Student B: her communication was shy and awkward. She used a number of isolated words (when I have || * hour || I like || ice_skate because || fun). She was limited by the target language context and memorized few phrases. When responding to direct questions, (do you watch television? what kind of movies is your favorite?) she uttered only one or two words (yes; scary movies) at a time or an occasional stock answer. In addition to that her pronunciation was so poor that her utterances are not easily understood (ice-skate = |askhet|, sometimes = |s a m ta j m z |, to = |t u :|.

-Student C: to begin with, she was not able to get the gist of most everyday conversations, and showed difficulty understanding the language. Her utterances were minimally cohesive. One can notice frequent errors in her speech because she was not able to fully elaborate on the linguistic structure of her sentences, nor was she capable of showing control. Her talk was hindered by gaps in basic vocabulary. That is why her ideas did not flow logically and her talk was too short, too difficult. There was too much interference from L1 to get a reasonable language sample.

-Student D: this individual used to look at the floor, mumble, and speak inaudibly. Generally speaking her articulation and pronunciation tended to be "sloppy." Other areas of weakness lied in her uncontrolled basic grammatical structures of speech. In the commonly taught languages these were simple markings such as plurals, articles, linking words, and negatives or more complex structures such as tense, aspect usage. During her interaction, one noticed her frequent pauses as she searched for simple vocabulary or attempted to recycle her own words. She did not produce individual sounds while speaking, neither were her prosodic features of language sufficiently well understood. L1 accent caused difficulty.

Thus, this analysis revealed that students classified under both categories: control and experiment, showed deficiencies in verbal communication.

With quantitative assessment of students' level in concern, it was carried out using The Cambridge ESOLFCE Analytic Rating Scale test. It involved four categories: Grammar and vocabulary (GV), discourse management (DM), pronunciation (Pr), and interactive communication (IC). Notes (grades) were taken before and after speaking activities were implemented among both the control and experimental groups. If one looks at the mean scores of pre-study test in each category, one notices that they are very close, if not equal. This means that the level of the two groups is almost the same. Since speaking progress is tested, then pronunciation test (Pr) would best describe it. For example, pre Pr mean in experimental group = 2.767, which is almost 2.8, and pre Pr mean in the control group = 2.8, i.e. they are the same. Further investigation using (Independent Samples Test) t-test for equality of means, did not show

any significance. Actually, all value are > p=0.05, (.889, 1.0) (see, following table1). The Total mean of the two groups is almost the same ≈ 11/20, and may be considered as average.

Table 1# Pre-study speaking evaluation of the two groups according to the four categories: Grammar and Vocabulary, Discourse Management, Pronunciation and Interactive Communication

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
			Statistics		
Pre G V	Experimental	15	2.967	.7432	.1919
	Control	15	3.000	.5345	.1380
Pre D M	Experimental	15	2.700	.7270	.1877
	Control	15	2.700	.7020	.1813
Pre Pr	Experimental	15	2.767	.7761	.2004
	Control	15	2.800	.5916	.1528
Pre I C	Experimental	15	2.667	.6726	.1737
	Control	15	2.867	.6114	.1579
e_Total	Experimental	15	11.100	2.6939	.6956
	Control	15	11.333	2.1353	.5513

Table 2# Mean values of Post speaking test Post- study speaking evaluation of the two groups according to the four categories

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean
	With post-study speaking evaluation of groups in concern, mean scores of all the four categories showed an increase (see, following table 2).				
o_GV	Experimental	15	3.367	.5499	.1420
	Control	15	3.067	.5300	.1369
o_DM	Experimental	15	3.467	.6935	.1791
	Control	15	2.900	.7121	.1839
o_Pr	Experimental	15	3.267	.4952	.1279
	Control	15	2.833	.6172	.1594
o_IC	Experimental	15	3.367	.8121	.2097
	Control	15	2.933	.4952	.1279
oTotal	Experimental	15	13.400	2.2377	.5778
	Control	15	11.767	1.9536	.5044

If one took the same previous example, the pronunciation test, one finds that the mean score of the experimental group is 3.267, an increase by (3.267 – 2.767 = 0.5, i.e. 10%), while it remained [almost] unchanged in the control group, being 2.833 (was 2.8). Further investigation using t-test for equality of means would show that significance is now equal to 0.043 which is <p = 0.05. Furthermore, the total mean score of the experimental group increased to 13.4/20 (was 11/20) which is a good progress. The total significance (2-tailed) score equals to 0.042 <p =0.05, a significant increase.

Thus, all students enhanced their level of speaking English. Number of those who were weak (or average) decreased from 15 to 10 of the total population (30 students), that is a 16.6% increase, and those who were good became better.

Parents' Questionnaire

As stated earlier, a survey with parents of the experimental group was conducted to see if external factors had an impact on the progress of pupils while studying English language speaking. The questionnaire was composed of questions concerning educational level of parents, language usage at home, their profession, how do they observe their child's behavior and use of

the English language. Usually, regardless of their level of education, parents may not be accounted for language enhancement at their children. Most important results to consider in parents' questionnaire were answers to the question how their children changed their way of speaking English language after the implementation process (see, following table 3), and whether this change had any relationship with parents' level of education or language fluency. Eight out of fifteen noticed change in the way their child changed the way of speaking English language, which is a 53.3%.

Table 3# Frequency of students who changed their way of speaking after they underwent program enhancement

Usage_Change		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
	from time to time	5	33.3	33.3	46.7
	Yes	8	53.3	53.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Parents were also asked about their kids' favorite activities and how they believe their children favor one activity to the other. On one hand, some parents were completely ignorant on the issue; they had no idea on what their kid preferred. A rate of 20% = 3/15 said that their daughter/son are self-dependent and they were unable to follow them in their studies. On the other hand, an equal partition of 6.66% = 1/15 were interested in either: fill in the gap, poetry, bringing a personal project to the class and describing pictures. These students integrated what they learned during their study program in their everyday life. 6.66% = 1/15 of students made a full description of a relative's photography (describing images), another 1/15 used the poetry activity to write song lyrics and an additional 6.66% = 1/15 of students transformed their "fill in the gap" skills into fill in the blank activities.

Role play and drama activities were popular among all students. In fact, 6/15 favored drama because they felt free to express their inner feelings and they could easily compromise in front of their classmates. One parent affirmed that their daughter was not that shy anymore, due to taking a role in the play. She gained self-confidence and is now able of expressing her feelings freely. Individual taste was the main criteria that made the difference among the kids' choices; students picked the activity they found the funniest and most appealing to their heart.

Having achieved all of the studied phases, parents were asked if they had any notes or any suggestions for this program. The received answers were all supportive and encouraging. The majority of parents wished me luck, success and improvement because of the great progress that this experiment had on their children. Remarkably, very few cases gave negative comments, a rate of 6.6% which is the equivalent of 1/15 thought that their kids still prefer their native language on English language for some unknown reason. The rest of the whole study group was extremely proud of their children's results. 93.37% = 14/15 believed that it was a very beneficial program that had positive impacts on children and they wished for prosperity. It was obvious for all member parents that the new study technique took quite a long time to be fully achieved, yet they all agreed that the effort that was put in it came with the required results. They thanked the researcher for putting English speaking "under the spot". Many students are now actually willing to use English more than any time before. PPP was extremely motivating and touched the students who started to use English in their daily spoken language.

Congratulations, wishes for continuity and luck, and mostly gratitude were the global reaction towards the projects' obtained results. In fact, all parents shared a common opinion on how important such a strategy was to be taught all around due to its success. They insisted on the

need for such a program to come to the light and be spread among all schools. From the foregoing, it can be seen that allowing more space for talking, reducing students' anxiety, motivating them to speak, in addition to the use of PPP left an inedible mark on students' oral communication.

CONCLUSION

The current study is an action exploratory research conducted in Tripoli, Lebanon. Subjects under study were fifth graders who showed a negative attitude towards speaking English through the analysis of several data. In brief, the analysis of students' textbook indicated that the book was not suitable for teaching and practicing speaking for several reasons mentioned earlier.

Moreover, pre-study questionnaires revealed that there were not enough opportunities for practicing speaking either because there was no support outside school since most of the students' parents and some of their friends and neighbors are not familiar with English language, and because it was not given enough time in class. As for the pre-speaking tests, these showed weakness and deficiencies in several areas: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and particularly interactive communication.

With the interviews in concern, data indicated that the methodology of teaching speaking did not respect the different types of speaking and the activities used were not engaging for students. They were very typical, not varying according to students' different needs.

Add to that, students' anxiety toward using the language was not addressed by the teacher. In fact, there was no balance between teacher talk and students talk. Learners were only communicating with the teacher when they were answering some of her questions. With this, the teacher was following only one language function which is transactional where emphasis was on content, language clarity and precision disregarding students' ability to establish and maintain relationships through communicating with one another.

At last, the method used was traditional, as a consequence the learners were not able to communicate verbally; whether to express their ideas, opinions, desires or to establish social relationships and friendships. For these reasons, the textbook and the methodology of teaching were changed and speaking activities were integrated for the sake of providing a student-centered classroom.

Students came on board faster than I thought. In fact the implementation enhanced students' learning and subsequent conversations were notable in the more advanced level of large discussion that occurred immediately following each activity. The best thing done was keeping the learners busy all the time working on different and motivating activities that engaged them all in speaking such as dialogues, guessing games, role play and drama.

Overall, increasing the frequency, type and order of student-centered learning methods in the classroom appeared to have a positive effect on students' speaking fluency, satisfaction, and motivation. The use of achievable tasks helped in building students' confidence in their abilities, and thus enhancing their verbal communication. As suggested by the teaching and learning experience discussed above, utilizing teaching approaches that encourage students' active engagement with the subject matter and with each other had the potential to be effective, in terms of students' satisfaction and class performance. This was particularly notable in the post speaking tests and the post study questionnaires.

IMPLICATIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH

A number of important issues arose for future research beyond the scope of the study. First, the sample of this study was thirty students form one class. Results underscore the need for a follow-up study utilizing a larger number of subjects form different classes in order to corroborate the results of the study in general terms. Second, to what extent can one alter speaking in English, language attitude and motivational behavior? Future language studies should

address these questions by investigating characteristics of the environment that lead to changes in either of these attributes. Another suggestion concerning further research requires less time limitation and more observations to find out more on the way speaking is, practiced, and assessed.

After four months of hard work, qualitative and quantitative results showed an improvement in most significant areas of speech: discourse management and pronunciation. If this duration was duplicated, will the results be different? Future findings may spark additional research to shed more light on other significant details affecting speaking English fluently such as psychological and political issues. As a follow up on the results of this study, it is advised to retest the method after some time has elapsed to check if students' progress in discourse management, interactive communication and pronunciation maintained its level or not.

Taking into consideration the implications and limitations of this study, it can be noted that the curriculum can be modified in a way that suits best students speaking interests and needs. Needless to mention the effectiveness of computer technology that allows teachers to implement effectively specific pedagogical tasks such as speaking activities that might be beneficial for students. Learners, then, will be given opportunities to produce large quantities of sentences on their own and modify their output during conversations.

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