Perspectives about U-Learning in the Oral Expression Class: Facts and Fiction

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Abstract

Amongst the four language skills, the speaking proficiency grows to surface as the most significant to be mastered, not only for educational purposes but for extra-educational aspirations as well. Speaking is a life handiness that requires full training and complete preparation. Hence, being able to express one's thought fully and clearly, especially in front of a mass, has become one field of interest of personal development trainers. In the specific context of EFL classes, enhancing students' speaking mastery has always been an integral part of FL training. The rapid technological developments have facilitated the changing over of the teaching skill from sole reliance on the teacher to reference to authentic data. Language laboratories are supposed to be a miniature of the bigger native speakers' community, so if they were further consolidated with a net connection they would smooth the teaching of oral expression skills. Technology is the medium through which access to genuine instances of the FL is realized. The research seeks out checking the pros and cons of combining technology-based applications with the classroom realities; it relies on the use of a students' Likert scale and a teachers' interview. The findings of the interview proved that FL teachers in Algeria are totally aware of the vitality of mixing up U-Learning with the classroom traditional teaching for better enhancement of the quality of speaking skill. However, they explained that it is still theory rather than real practice because of a collection of inconveniences. The students' scale showed that the latter are ready to exploit technological tools for bettering their oral expression skills. It showed as well that they rely on some applications but they declared that they lack perseverance, said very helpful to achieve the required goals.

Keywords : Oral skills, U-Learning, Web resources.

Introduction

It is usually acknowledged that language is primarily speech; the first obvious language trait is what one can hear. Though throughout the history, the very early codes of human communication were limited to oral symbols coupled with the use of tools like drums in the African tribes. Of course, all of the preceding data was emanated from the need to interchange since the homosapien is a social creature; this very co-existence necessitates the incorporation of codes to organize the give and take of those social relations (Ong, 2002). Hence, the very first lines of communication were focused on finding ways of accommodating to the community needs. A language, by definition, is there to be mainly performed orally and the bulk of the world languages function on the premise that the oral code would precede the written code. Another point of interest in relation to the previous point is the fact that there exist a big number of spoken languages; otherwise considered as dialects, that are just spoken without a written accompaniment for the oral form. Too much exposure to listening to different sounds, lexemes, clauses, sentences, and various form of phrases is cognitively translated into spoken discourse production. As a matter of fact, the four language skills are related in pairs; reading for writing and listening for speaking hence if the basics of one language skill are set well from day one, the product will be sturdy (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2020). The world's languages are transmitted from old to young generations through the medium of spoken language, and generally people have instinctive chances to listen and automatically speak in their environment. In current times, schools and institutions are defined as official sites for academic purposes in the example of teaching languages; accordingly one can observe that each period is marked by the introduction of a teaching trend. The latter would accommodate to the needs of the community and so syllabi would go hand in hand with the necessities expressed. Considering the case in point of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning, instructors and decision makers should be aware of the challenges presented to the learner amidst them is the exterior native environment that differs totally from things that they are being exposed to in the classroom (Manurung & Ria, 2018). This state of affairs dictates adopting the exact teaching learning strategy that would lead to better results. English has grown as a lingua franca for many years as a consequence it is known universally and a rising number of people around the world express their desire

to master it. International trade areas, in this context, are known to refer to English as the common means for the facilitation of the economic transactions. Added to the above point are the sweeping changes that have been introduced by modern technologies and that dictate an automated paradigm shift for teaching foreign languages (Salomova, 2020). In the particular case of (English as a Foreign Language) EFL, reference to media and to the web options becomes indispensable as the latter aid greatly the development and enhancement of the quality of students' performance in the four language skills. The availability, flexibility, and free-access of the web-based materials ordained the integration of novel teaching philosophies that would result in polishing students' mastery over the speaking skill not only for educational ends but primarily for extra-academic purposes. Both extremes of the educational pendulum should be concerned and encouraged to profit from the current technological tools to the boosting of the oral expression capacities. Actually, teaching languages has always occupied a big concern for academics. Subsequently, there have been various methods each of which would focus on a specific area of interest and that would respond to the needs of that very period. The shortcomings of every method would bring about new ideas to include in the syllabus of teaching and the speaking skill curricula would make no exception. Now it is the role of syllabus designer to scrutinize the modern age data for the sake of accommodating the teaching of oral expression in Algerian universities to the needs of the country and to the international data. In Algeria English is inculcated as a foreign language (Zahaf, 2021) . Only recently that bigger concern about the status of English in the country that decision makers began to care about shifting interest to enabling speakers to communicate with it in larger contexts. As a result, the import of managing to control the grammatical code of the language in spontaneous contexts where one is asked to speak should never be underestimated. On the whole, there are growing debates globally that the great majority of graduates are not really in a position to speak English fluently or at least with a near native-like production. Paradoxically speaking, at times, some students having excellent proficiency in writing are found stuck when it comes to expressing themselves orally. Of course, in the latter setting a multiplicity of factors would intervene in the example of psychological influences like stress. This is said, the issue of the dynamics of oral expression is another topic that needs to be discussed independently. Some research findings showed that students who suffer from low levels of linguistic competency habitually speak at a snail's pace, need

longer time to produce complete utterances, have a terrible fear to participate in classroom debates, the type of the utterances they produce sounds unnatural, and they experience troubles with grammatical structuring of English sentences. Related observations were noticed in the Saudi context where EFL students do not have enough exposure to English and the consequence of this is their low oral achievements. Alharbi (2015) explained that multiple factors can negatively influence students' oral productions, for instance; the various ways in which one's mother tongue is incorporated in and outside the classroom contours, the respective position of the English language in the particular language, students' perceptions about the English language, the teachers' teaching method that is the situation where instructors switch to the use of the mother tongue instead of English for the sake of facilitating the understanding of some difficult structures, reference to teacher-centred instruction and the resulting students' inactiveness. The presence of the previous data affects prosperous training upon speaking skills. In the modern times, and with the unparalleled rising of technology-use, communicative competence becomes an exigency. The speaking proficiency grows as the most essential skill to handle in EFL contexts. Amidst the exigencies of the speaking skill is the ability to assume one's person, identity, world perspectives, and essentially ability to control the psycho-affective impressions in the example of delivering speech in front of a mass. The latter is a must-be-taught competence for any EFL learner. With the fast across-the-board technological change, FL instructors are obliged to cope with the current state of affairs. Although it is considered as essential, "teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues" (Jollibekova & Abdiganiyeva, 2021.p, 115). Despite the fact of introducing many teaching assumptions, oral expression sessions still rely on drilling students to repeat the heard extract. Indeed, rehearsal and repetition are helpful strategies to polish students' mastery of the EFL oral code, but there is more to be told as to the internal cognitive processes that would intervene to shape the message and that would decide about quality of the interchange. Hence, instructors must pay attention to training students in line with the dual, flexible character of the human being that is to say through direct exposure with the native speaker. The latter tactic can perfectly fit within the competency-based approach together with the availability of the computer assisted language learning methods. There exist a variety of Google play applications together with the web sites and

social media resources that render the teaching and learning of speaking skills a trouble-free task. The next step is finding suitable ways of training students on the habitual reference to web offerings in relation to teaching oral skills.

1. An Overture to the Speaking Skill: Is It Flair or Enactment?

As a whole, speaking does not only refer to the general ability of transmitting a message orally. At times non-verbal messages are part of the communicative act and in their turn they serve as well delivering information in differing contexts. In general terms, speaking describes the human ability to transmit the type of verbal or non-verbal messages in a variety of quotidian life contexts. Within the boundaries of FL teaching and learning, speaking skills are considered vital, otherwise; why one would devote time and energy to study a FL. The latter case is equally important to the teaching staff where instructors rely solely on their oral communicative codes to preach about different disciplines related to the foreign code.

While this skill is of crucial import, it had suffered marginalization throughout the history of FL teaching assumptions; most of the time it was taught as a repetitive act of memorizing short or longer stretches of language structures where learners are drilled about and trained to repeat (Christine & Goh, 202). One short coming is their inability to act spontaneously in real contexts where the language is naturally used. Namely, the audio-lingual and situational approaches, not to mention the rest, relied on assigning learners to learn by heart ready-made structures, in a behaviouristic like manner, and to act them out once confronted to real contexts. There are instance where speaking is defined in terms of writing since both of them depend massively on some intellectual energy from the speaker or the writer, hence; they are categorized as productive skills. Moreover, speaking is usually linked to listening abilities as both seem to work in parallel. Oprandy (1994) explicates that speakers are actually playing a double role being in themselves listeners; in every interchange both partners of the speaking pendulum are playing double roles while keep swinging between both extremes.

In modern times, it becomes clear that FL learners are in the need of finding ways to communicate flexibly using the FL; this time not in limited spaces but rather in the open space of the web where people issuing from multiple origins can come together under one heading. In the particular case of English, for instance; focus is rather shed on conveying the message even if the grammar of the discourse is not well adhered to. Still, speaking proficiency touches upon the phonetics of what is being said as well, hence; one needs to

know what to say, how, and when altogether. The feasible final product of oral expression sessions is reflected in the types of language that will be used as a means of interchange. In this vein, Laborda (2009) believes that oral exchanges are portrayed in line with existing practices; that is they can be normalized patterns of information exposure with special focus either on the informative or the interactive side of language use. Informative when the interchange sheds light solely on frequent categories of information for the sake of exposing or evaluating a given data. Interactive when focus is rather on creating lines of communication with the other. Concerning the steps of mental processing for training on speaking skills; there is no big difference between learning how to speak a native language and how to speak a foreign one. Despite this Thornbury (2007) explains that not all the oral abilities that are acquired in the mother tongue can be transmuted into the FL context. The author adds that the sum total of grammatical and vocabulary acquirements in the FL cannot warrant being successful in controlling the FL oral proficiencies. In this case, the type of techniques that rely on verbalizing expressions in the other tongue, then; translate them literally into the FL which is not correct because it does not resemble the production of utterances in real world contexts.

2. Philosophies about the Didactics of Oral Skills in the Age of the Web

Considered as a stand of FL proficiency, speaking can be taught within the boundaries of the classroom even when the latter is seen as a restricted setting. Despite the fact that it is an overstatement, FL learners without a doubt sense the inadequacies of the academic-based oral practice in that the FL class is not able to prepare them for the authentic real life situations. Mostly, students show up oral and listening skills as the most substantial learning challenges in part because they demand greater effort and much devotion. In the case of foreign languages, it is not always evident that learners can imitate the native speakers' accent or tone of speaking. Only those brilliant elements that are endowed the talent of using their articulatory organs in the same way a native speaker would do.

Starting from the audio-lingual approaches, teaching speaking skill was effectuated through drills, repetitions, and rehearsals of ready-made utterances (Abdul, 2016). While efficient to a greater extent, the latter method is deemed unproductive since it restrains learners' higher order skills of producing spontaneous stretches of speech in real world contexts. The situational assumption, for instance; was a better step forward in realizing some of the

objectives of FL learning, it showed as well a list of shortfalls that are all the same traced to the lack of using FL code concretely. Most of the time, classroom setting offers learners rituals of FL summarized in activities like debates, exposés, round tables, and role plays and sometimes learners are trained about the exact use of a certain grammatical point. While grammar accounts in learning languages, it does not tell the whole story about real use and usage of the foreign code. In plain terms, most of classroom practice lacks providing FL learners with tangible patterns of real interchanges as they appear in the target language contexts.

In modern times, it is observed that the focus is not really shed on the production of grammatically correct structures. Specifically, in areas of international trade encounters concern is rather about delivering an understandable message. Still, when the speakers arrive to produce the right phonetic tone, they favour compliance on their part to conform to the target language criteria. Pithily, what learners need is a pragmatic way of coaching that serves their future competence and guides their autonomy and sense of independence from the classroom contour. Being able to speak a language does not connect only to powers of impersonating native-like speaking manners, but it relates as well to understating the hidden intentions of the speakers. Even within the same cultural nest, deciphering the unseen intents is imperative. Hence, a certain amount of pragmatic and socio-cultural knowledge about the Other is helpful. Finding the right way to teach speaking skills is no easy task for FL instructors; learners often may show an array of symptoms that range from psychological, linguistic, and sometimes socio-cultural hurdles that complicate the success of developing FL speaking abilities. Scarcella and Oxford (1994) propose a narrowed down list of issues that are summarized as follows:

- Fluency and accuracy discords: Instructors may let students at ease to develop a certain sense of confidence. While this step is fruitful, they may continue to be imprecise while using the FL code orally.
- Confidence deficit: It is observed that the major part of student seem hesitant in letting lose themselves speak in the FL code.
- Phonation: Speaking is about phonetics, the charm of FL learning is one's ability to imitate the natural flow of native speakers' speech. However; students may show problems related to native tongue interference which result in imperfections.

Not far from this, Brown (2003) retorts that there exist there exist a collection of speaking types:

- Imitative: It refers to one's ability to mimic shorter or longer stretches of FL utterances.
- Responsive: It refers to interchange and comprehension tests that start first with short phrases and expressions.
- Intensive: It is used mainly to assess oral aptitudes within limited scopes.
- Interactive: It refers to testing oral skills with a rather multifaceted interchange models.
- Extensive: Is the ultimate objective where learners are expected to get into full conversations that include a theme and related sub-themes.
  The above represent a gradation of activities that can be used throughout the way of polishing students' speaking proficiencies over an extended period of time.

Tackling the issue of the impact of modern technologies on classroom practice, the oral skill context is not an exception. Being a pillar and indicator of language proficiency, the speaking ability cannot escape reference to modern technologies just like the rest of the skills. Indeed, technology can kindle learners' interest while integrating them in a boundless number of scenarios. The model of blended learning or U-learning offers learners the opportunity to immerse in enthusiastic chances to create lines of self-paced learning where feedback is a process of auto-observation. This type of corrections help students get rid of stress or reluctance since the mistakes are corrected by the software and the only witness is the learner. As a matter of fact, new technological software helps both FL instructors and learners to create new atmospheres of learning that adds support and guidance. Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) suggested that language teachers and students equally should be encouraged to integrate modern technologies in the teaching of oral skills; these may include: communication laboratories, speech recognition programmes, podcasts, authentic video extracts, and direct links to radio programmes amongst others to polish students' oral performance. The wide spread of the internet globally is a helpful factor that should be exploited to enhance students' speaking competency.

3. Research Question

The current inquiry aims at findings plausible answers to the following Question:

- To what extent are FL learners aware of the hardships that restrain them from acquiring the necessary speaking proficiency?
- To what extent are students ready to shift to exploiting technology in polishing their speaking abilities?
- What are some of the propositions that instructors can propose to make full profits from modern technologies in FL laboratories?

4. The Method

4.1. Research Tools

For the sake of checking general perspectives about the relevance of u-learning in the particular context of teaching oral skills, the researcher used a mixed research design. Mainly a Likert scale questionnaire was used that was analysed in line with descriptive statistics and a teachers' interview. The scale is composed of 13 statements to which participants would respond with varying degrees of agreement and disagreement or neutrality while the interview is composed of 9 questions ranging between close and open-ended questions.

4.2. Participants

The Likert scale was administered to 60 students that were randomly selected and all belonging to the same level. The interview was conducted with 13 FL teachers belonging to different higher education institutions.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The Scale's Findings

The forthcoming table gives a summarised view about the general frequencies relative to each statement in the scale. 88.33% of participants believed that reference to the net material is a high prerequisite in modern era; 6.66% were neutral and 5% disagreed with the idea. 75% of students thought that the internet resources (apps, platforms...etc) are easy to manage while 24.99% of them disagreed that they represent an easy challenge. 91.66% of participants believed that the content offered by platforms, apps, and sites can replace the teacher's talk and classroom context of practice. 11.66% disagreed and are still stuck to older paradigms. 59.99% felt that language labs can function better if they were linked to online streaming materials directly from

the web. 31.66% disagreed with the idea while 8.33% were neutral. 26.66% of participants always refer to Google apps to train themselves on the right pronunciation, 21.66% sometimes use playstore apps to do so, 8.33% sometimes refer to apps for reshaping their phonetics; 13.33% rarely do that and 30% never refer to these media. 51.66% of participants agreed that oral expression debates should be presented in accordance with on line authentic audios, 38.33% disagreed while 16.66% were neutral. 16.66% of participants always devote sometimes to listen to native speakers podcasts about different issues, 8.33% often do that, 33.33% sometimes devote time to listen to podcasts, 20% rarely do that and 23.33% never do that. 51.55% of respondents believed that they are agents of action in developing their pronunciation and speaking skills, 48.33% disagreed with the idea (traditional teacher spoon-feeding), 13.33% were unbiased. 28.33% of respondents believed that reading translations while watching or listening to authentic productions is not helpful, 54.99% disagreed and still think that the translation is a reference to offer a base to develop further knowledge about the FL, 16.66% were neutral. 21.66% agreed that contextual clues are helpful to decipher the message (the need for being exposed to authentic materials), 71.66% disagreed and believed that contextual clues are of no use, 6.66% were neutral. 31.66% of students agreed that participating in online discussions with native speakers had changed their perspectives about language practice, 45% disagreed about the idea, while 23.33% were neutral. 64.99% of respondents believed that it is their role to make an effort searching available apps to polish their pronunciation problems, 33.33% disagreed and think that this is the role of the institution and the instructor. 94.99% of respondents agreed that current state of FL labs does not help advancing FL speaking skills, 1.66% disagreed while 3.33% were neutral. Hence, in general the scale showed that students are conscious about the open scope offered by technological applications in helping them ameliorate their English pronunciation. The questionnaire illustrated as well that a portion of students are regular users of online software in that they rely on themselves and their own available tools to train themselves on native-like styles that can be used while speaking in English. Equally, the scale's results proved that FL students are ready to adapt new technologies in their classroom oral practices.

Table 1

General Frequencies of Students' Reactions to the Scale's Items

Statement	Levels of agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Statement 1	33.33%	55%	06.66%	05%	00%
Statement 2	45%	30%	00%	03.33%	21.66%
Statement 3	48.33%	43.33%	00%	06.66%	05%
Statement 4	28.33%	31.66%	08.33%	15%	16.66%
Statement 5	26.66%	21.66%	08.33%	13.33%	30%
Statement 6	28.33%	23.33%	10%	10%	28.33%
Statement 7	16.66%	8.33%	33.33%	20%	23.33%
Statement 8	31.66%	20%	13.33%	15%	33.33%
Statement 9	15%	13.33%	16.66%	23.33%	31.66%
Statement 10	10%	11.66%	6.66%	26.66%	45%
Statement 11	16.66%	15%	23.33%	25%	20%
Statement 12	31.66%	33.33%	01.66%	23.33%	10%
Statement 13	46.66%	48.33%	03.33%	1.66%	00%

5.2.   *The Teachers' Interview Results*

15.38% of interviewees believed that the lab context, on its own, can be sufficient to train students on oral skill proficiencies while 18.33% were not in agreement that it is enough.

All participants' answers diverged with the fact that current generations of FL students can be good manipulators of modern technologies. 46.15% believed that FL instructors can exploit modern technologies to enhance the quality of oral skill teaching, 38.46% believed in the co-existence of collaboration between traditional and modern hybrid teaching, 15.38% stated that they often ask students to download some material before coming to the oral class. 38.46% of interviewees mentioned that they urge students to listen then answer a set of multiple choice questions, 30.76% stated that they rely on listening then repeating or acting out the audio or video extract, and 30.76% stated that they invite students to make pertinent comments about contextual clues governing the pragmatics of the message.

76.92% of participants stated that current FL labs are not able to reach their intended function (lack of material both hardware and software) and are not able to connect to modern teaching based mainly on collaboration with modern technologies,5% were hesitant and they insisted on the fact that teachers are always in a position of preparing the lab material by themselves since the latter is not available on lab computers. 61.53% of interviewees claimed that they assign students to homework since most of them are connected to the net, yet this is not a fixed technique. 38.46% stated that they are satisfied with the lab teaching time.

All of the interviewees stated that they encourage their students to devote time to download and exchange authentic materials but also to create atmosphere of debate where they can practise using the FL on real grounds. 46.15% of teachers declared that they usually download ready-made material for lab use. All of the participants stated that there is no feasible link between outside realities and current calls for integrating modern technologies in labs practices. They explained that there is a gap between what students afford to do and what is required, in theory and that the priority is rather finding how to reach the aimed at position. Some suggestions that were offered by teachers to bring reality and practice into one mold include:

-Encouraging students

6.   Implications of the Study

- It is high time, the educational staff referred to internet resources to polish students' speaking proficiencies.
- It is necessary to re-consider the usage of language laboratories and create direct links with technological means in this domain.
- FL students are aware of the unlimited possibilities of internet materials to enhance their speaking of English.
- FL instructors can profit from the availability of mobile data to stimulate students on autonomous learning; mobile dictionaries are useful for the correct pronunciation.
- It is essential to look for feasible ways to exploit online platforms and make them part of the FL class.
- FL students can be assigned homework via Google play applications where they can listen, repeat, and record themselves repeating the heard extract.

- Bringing technology to teach speaking can create a sense of adventure and attractiveness on the part of students. Audio novels in the context are one example.

Conclusion

In the age of growing contact between the world's cultures, peoples and languages; the responsibility of FL instructors as well as learners is heavier. Actually, the flexible dynamics of the relationships existing between various educational domains helps polishing the research skills of students. Within the boundaries of FL context, the bulk of FL learners prove that they have enough potential to enhance their overall level of the four language abilities. The major part of the current generations of students deems speaking and verbal proficiencies as decisive with reference to international market demands. Besides, this generation is internet-referenced and they seem having enough predispositions to exploit web applications for the enhancement of their FL phonetics. The findings of the present study show that both teachers and learners are aware of the positive side of importing moden technologies or U-learning as a necessary replacement of traditional trends to teaching oral skills. The laboratory settings can function better if teachers and students equally are given enough pace to bring novel technology software into the class context. Consequently, students will be agents of action, autonomous, independent while guided by teachers to scrutinize authentic ways in which the target language is used in its native nest. Hence, it is high time decision makers considered the various ways of bringing U-learning into more feasible applications for producing generations of students able enough to manipulate the oral code of English in every needed context.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest

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