
An Analytical Study on Speaking Skills Among College Students in Dimapur, India

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Abstract

In this globalized world, the aim of teaching speaking skills must improve the students' communicative skills so that the students could express themselves in the social and cultural circumstances by using rules in their day to day communication. English language is regarded as most spoken language around the globe which holds a significant place across industries today. It is essential in order to have better career, job security or communicate more effectively with more people. The importance of Speaking English is inevitable in this generation. From the elementary level to the university level, the medium of instruction and learning is in English. However, the researcher feels that their standard of English is not good in Dimapur district as expected to be especially that of speaking skills. Hence, this paper is an attempt to explore such loopholes in the context of college level.

Key Words: Analytical study, Speaking Skills, Nagamese Language

Introduction

In the era of globalization, communication skills in English language, to be more precise in speaking, have gained a vital significance. Speaking is considered to be the most important language skills. "A large percentage of world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. We may use speaking to describe things, to complain about people's behaviour, to make polite requests, or to entertain people with jokes." (Richards and Renandya 201). English has become one of the most influential subjects in the world. This fact makes it mandatory to be offered as a compulsory course. The subject is learned/studied by a higher number of people because of its importance

in the modern world: a mean to communicate and a greater opportunity for jobs. In the modern world no one can deny the importance of English.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate and analyse the speaking proficiency level among the college students in Dimapur (Nagaland)

SAMPLE

Due to limitation of time and space, only an undergraduate class (consisting of 47 students) of a college in Dimapur, Nagaland was taken for the study.

METHODOLOGY

The study comprises of 47 students of BA (second semester) of an Arts college in Dimapur, Nagaland (India). The data was

collected through observation method and questionnaire. The researcher also acted as a participant observer. The observation part was used to observe students' activities in the teaching and learning process, and to observe the teaching material and activities used by the teacher in the classroom. Towards the end of the study, a questionnaire was distributed among the students to understand their proficiency level and attitude towards speaking skills.

Literature Review

According to the Oxford (2009) pocket dictionary speaking is "the action of covering information or express ones thought and feeling in spoken language." Timothy J. Scrase (1) writes - "English is an international language. You feel humiliated if you cannot speak English. Everyone will think that you are dumb." The above quote wires that English as a language in India enjoys a respectable position. It is also considered as the prestigious language in Indian context especially when people communicate in English. Fauziati also points out that "mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language and success is measure in term of ability to carry out a conversation in the language (Fauziati 15)."

Tran Ngoc Mai (2015) investigated factors affecting students' speaking performance. "The sample size was grade 11 students and 10 teachers of English at Le Thanh Hien High School for the study." There were a variety of factors that affect the students' speaking performance. Topical knowledge was a hindrance for the students' speaking performance. Other than that two important

factors were listening ability and the motivation to speak. Besides, the teachers' feedback during speaking activities was also reported to affect the students' speaking performance. Confidence was also considered to be a factor influencing on students' performance.

Lai-Mei Leong and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi (2017) had analyzed on the factors influencing learners' English Speaking Skill in an ESL classroom context. This paper reviewed the factors that affect students' English speaking performance. The findings of this paper indicated that learners with a low self-esteem, higher anxiety, and low motivation have serious difficulties in speaking skill in spite of having acceptable linguistic skills. The paper showed that students who have higher motivation and lower anxiety can speak easily and effectively. Thus, students should have a friendly and cooperative environment that can help them overcome their difficulties in oral performance.

Boonkit (2010) carried out a study on the factors increasing the development of learners' speaking skill. The results represented that the use of appropriate activities for speaking skill can be a good strategy to decrease speakers' anxiety. The results also revealed that the freedom of topic choice urged the participants to feel comfortable, persuaded to speak English, and increased the speaking confidence among EFL learners.

Ali Dincer and Savas Yesilyurt (2013) carried out a study towards teachers' beliefs on speaking skills based on motivational orientations. The results of their study

indicated that the teachers had negative opinions about speaking instruction though they believed that it was of great significance in speaking skill. The results also revealed that the teachers felt unskilled in oral communication though they had various motivational orientations towards speaking English.

Urrutia and Vega (2010) demonstrated that learners' oral performance was influenced by their lack of vocabulary, diffidence, and fear of being despised. It was also indicated that learners' cooperation, self-confidence, vocabulary knowledge, and the class environment encouraged them to improve their speaking skills.

Prieto (2007) carried out a study about the cooperative learning tasks. The findings of her study showed that one way to improve speaking skill is to interact with others, learn from others, and the choice of the topics based on the learners' interests in order to encourage them.

OBSERVATION

Use of Mother Tongue or Nagamese (a common spoken language)

In the present study, it has been noticed that although the students are exposed to English language (their courses), they often tend to use their mother tongue or Nagamese even in English class. So this could be very obvious that even in other subjects class, using of mother tongue/Nagamese would be predominant. Though, they are more comfortable and natural to express themselves in their own tongue/dialect, it affects their fluency level and reduces chances to speak English confidently.

Grammar

Grammar is also a barrier to their spoken English. It has been observed that most of the students were making grammatical errors. To mention few- Sentences like, I didn't **knew** (know), I didn't **went** (go), also in simple present sentences like a verb's third-person singular form, example- He **don't** (doesn't) know, She **have** (has) many toys, **Childrens** (children) are playing in the park. Another common error in grammar was on subject-verb-agreement. Some noticeable errors were- My friend is one of the best **musician** (musicians), Many things **is** (are) there, Each and every **students** (student), Everyone **are** (is) here in the classroom.

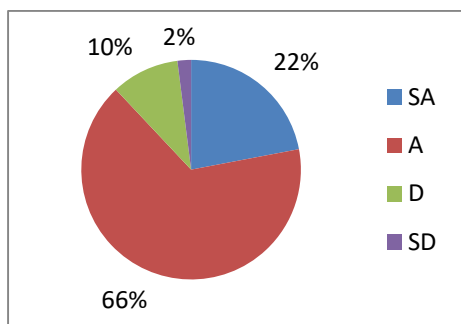
Pronunciation

Many of them have the problem of MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) in their spoken English. It was observed that a handful of students found speaking quite fluently but when it comes to pronunciation or diction, they too have loopholes. It was also found that there have been inaccuracies in some sounds. For instance, 'ng' sound /ŋ/ sound is missing in the words like song and pronounce as son. Another example would be the usage of ʃ (sh) –as in worship/she is used as /s/, twenty is pronounced as ton-ty.

Data Analysis

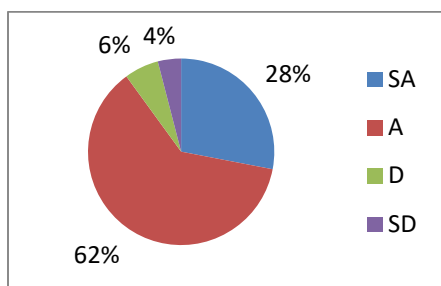
The number of respondents in the questionnaire is 43 (out of 47). Hence, the following interpretation is done based on their responses for each question. It is to be noted that SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

1. My speaking proficiency level is not very satisfactory



The pie chart shows that 22% of the respondents have strongly agreed that they are not much satisfied with their speaking proficiency. Besides that 66% of the respondents have agreed with the item. It was seen during the observation that their speaking level was not to the standard of college students. Although, 10% and 2% of the those surveyed have disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively, with respect to the majority we can conclude that the students lack proficiency in speaking and do not reach the standard parameter of speaking skills set for college level English.

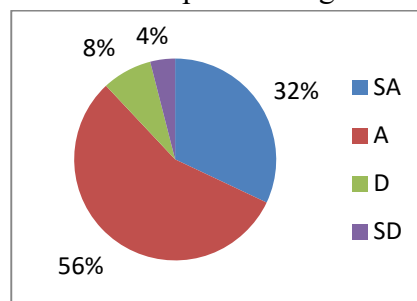
2. I am not good at speaking English because of the constant use of my mother tongue and our common spoken language (Nagamese)



It is apparent from the data that 28 % of the research participants have strongly agreed that they are poor at speaking skills because

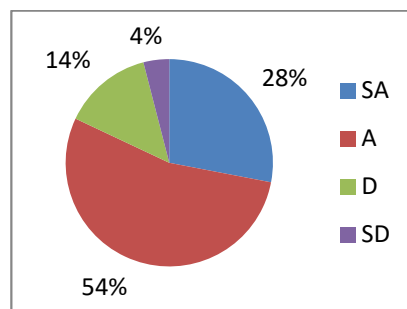
of their regular use of their mother tongue and Nagamese. 62% of them have agreed with the posed. This could be one of the reasons affecting their fluency and confidence. Hence, it can be concluded that they lack English speaking environment which affects their development of oral skills.

3. I am shy and worried about making mistakes to speak in English



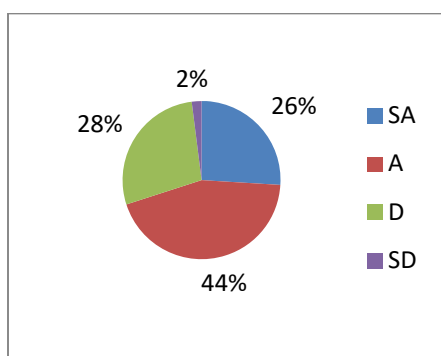
32% of the respondents have strongly agreed to this item and 56% of them have agreed to have the problem of speaking because of their shyness and fear of making mistakes. 8% and 4% of the participants have disagreed and strongly disagreed, as they might have other problems and not the ones that are listed on this item. With majority, one can conclude that they have not been exposed more openly with learner-centred method in classroom and the fear of making mistakes and shyness remain in them. It is a psychological barrier.

4. My major weakness in speaking skills is Grammar



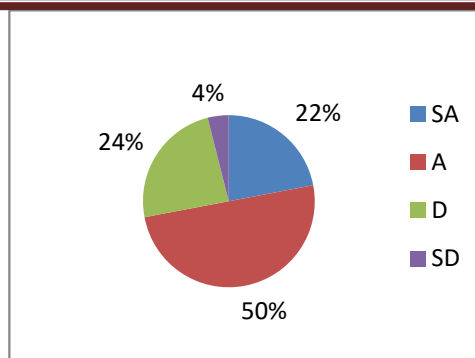
The data reveals that 28% of the research participants have strongly agreed as grammar being on their weaknesses while speaking. Besides that, 54% of the respondents have agreed on the item asked. This was seen during the class observation. Some participants expressed that grammar is not the issue and have disagreed while a small number of those surveyed (4%) have strongly disagreed; perhaps they are good at grammar. However, this result shows that there are poor grammatical structures being used during their conversations.

5. My major weakness in speaking skills is Pronunciation



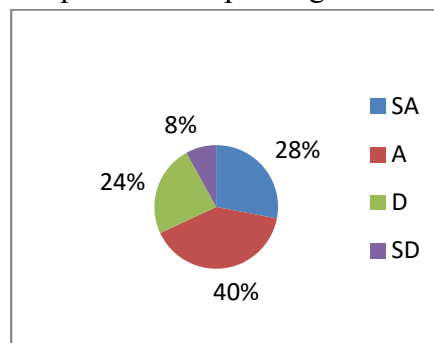
In response to this item, a range of responses was elicited. 26% of the respondents have strongly agreed by admitting that pronunciation is their major weakness while speaking. Close to half of the population (44%) have agreed with the item and could be one of their weaknesses. Although 28% of them have disagreed on the statement and a small amount (2%) of participants has strongly disagreed, it is apparent from the data that they do have problems in pronunciation and diction (phonetics/sounds).

6. I have MTI (Mother Tongue Influence)



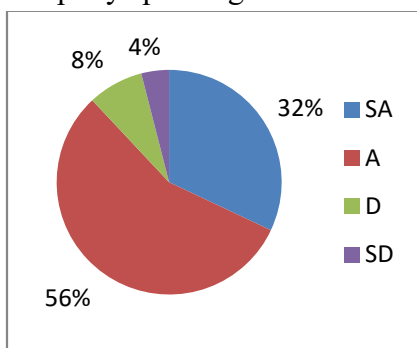
The above data reveals that 22% of the respondents have strongly agreed to have MTI and half of the population (50%) has agreed that MTI affects their speaking skills. It does affect their accent. 24% and 2% of them have disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively as they might be the ones with good pronunciation or good at speaking skills.

7. The present curriculum and teaching (English) in class give less importance to speaking skills



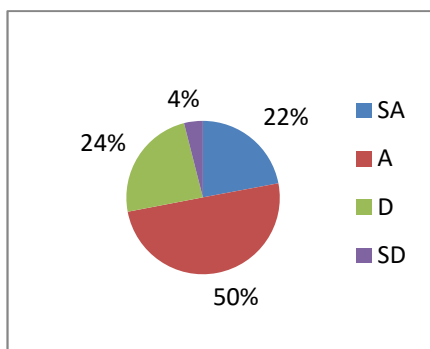
As shown above, 28% (strongly agree) and 40% (agree) of the respondents stated that the present curriculum and teaching (English) in class give less importance to speaking skills. Although a few of them disagrees (24%) and strongly disagrees (8%), it is to be considered that they lack good speaking skills because the present curriculum itself gives less importance to speaking skills.

8. There is no activity –based in class to develop my speaking skills



The above pie-chart shows that 32% of those surveyed have strongly agreed that there are no activities in class to promote their speaking skills. More than half of the participants (56%) have agreed with the item posed. A few participants have disagreed and strongly disagreed (8% and 4%), which gives an idea that there could be some /few activities conducting in class but apparently not very much able to saturate the needs of the students.

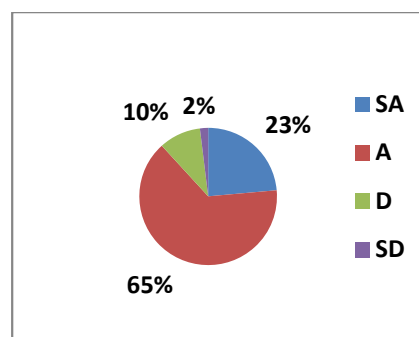
9. I use/communicate in English only when it is related to my studies/when in class



The above information shows that of 100%, 22% of the respondents have strongly agreed and half of the respondents (50%) have agreed that they use/communicate only when it is related to their studies/ when in class. Though 24 % of them have disagreed and 4% of them strongly disagreed, it is to

be understood (with respect to majority) that they speak less or don't speak in English outside the classroom much. This could be another factor as to why they don't develop their speaking skill.

10.To enhance my speaking performance, I would like to have more interactive means (tapes and videos) and conversation in class



Majority of the respondents which constitutes 23 % (strongly agree) and 65% (agrees) want to enhance their speaking performance by having more interactive means (tapes and videos) and conversation in class.

FEW REMEDIES

Speaking is an act of creativity. So to develop the speaking skills is to design interactive activities, which consider all the skills conjointly as they interact with each other in natural behavior. They can promote some innovative methods to promote speaking skills. To name a few:

JAM talk (just a minute talk) could be useful, asking them about their previous day activities in a nutshell or an anecdote to share. They teacher may act as a mentor helping them in between their conversations if they fail to articulate. This may be helpful to do regularly just for few minutes before they start with the lesson for the day.

Using tapes and videos in a smart classroom would be fun and creative to learn. The material such as news reports being played on a computer can be used for background or as input for interaction. After they have listened to a segment, they will negotiate the meaning and answers questions, which motivates students to speak. While watching or listening students can pay attention how people use language in real life situations, they will be exposed to different registers, accents, intonations, rhythms and stresses.

They should be exposed to some college activities like morning assembly, sports and other events to face the crowd and give welcome address, speeches, recite poems, sing, perform drama in English language. This will create confidence and interest for the language among the students.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should promote interactive techniques while teaching English. And segregate good amount of time devoting to speaking skills.
2. The management should cultivate English communication culture within school premises.
3. Refresher course for better teachers' training for the creation of English speaking environment within school should be held time to time.

Findings and Conclusion

This paper focused on analysis of speaking skills among college students in Dimapur. It has come up with the conclusion that the students do lack the proficiency of speaking

English, although all their courses are in English language. It was confirmed that they have less time in class for speaking and interactive sessions are hardly found.

The observation part also witnessed various loopholes in teaching-learning processes. The teacher was under some kind of pressure of completing the prescribed syllabus and had less time to make students involve for speaking. It was also observed that the students are weak in some basic components of speaking skills such as grammar and pronunciation. On the other hand, the students had very less chance to speak in the classroom. There were only few students who would come up and speak in English language, and rest of them would remain quiet during the entire lecture. The findings prove that there is a necessity to develop some innovative methods in classroom learning and importance should be given to speaking skills. The study suggests that English language teaching in college has to adapt some changes to make them good learners. Instead of teacher – centred approach, more emphasis can be laid on student-centred with speaking skill activities, use of audio-visual aids, encouragement to make them independent learners and use of innovative teaching methods. In addition, efforts can be taken to make them active participants in language classes especially to develop their speaking skills. Hence, the above remedies and recommendations are given to help improving the speaking skills in the context of the study.

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