SPEAKING IN A LANGUAGE VERSUS SPEAKING A LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE ATTAINMENT

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Abstract

This article aimed to promote speaking skill as part of communicative competence acquisition, under the auspices of Communicative Language Teaching approach in English as a First Additional Language in intermediate phase (Grade 4-6) in Free State province township primary schools. Moreover, this article aimed to ensure that proficient learners in English are produced for the senior phase, and that the conducive communicative environment is created as well as to be sustained by all stakeholders, to enable the learners' communicative competence acquisition, hence English is adopted as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in most Free State township primary schools. In the same vein, this article seeks to promote the adoption of English as LoLT in foundation phase, for better communicative competence acquisition in intermediate phase. English beyond the classroom approach, and English across the curriculum, are the two approaches advocated by this article to make communicative competence to be the goal and the responsibility of all the stakeholders inside and outside the teaching and learning classroom environment. For the intensive and the extensive knowledge regarding speaking as part of communicative competence, scholarly articles were consulted by the researcher.

Keywords: Speaking in a language, speaking a language, speaking skill, communicative competence.

1. Introduction

Speaking English is defined by Yudar, Aditomo, and Silalahi (2020: 15-16) as being able to effectively communicate information, express ideas and opinions, to build a social relationship in the form of different, normal, engaging, and exciting activities. Additionally, Gurler (2015: 14) states that, speaking amongst all four language skills is entirely important particularly in verbal communication as verbal communication constitutes a bigger part of communication. However, regardless of speaking constituting a bigger part of communication in general, Aprianto, Ritonga, Marlius, and Nusyur (2020: 149) are of the view that, speaking is one of the most challenging language skills, as speaking takes some requirements of the linguistic that the speaker consider. This point of view of the speaking skill being the most challenging skill, Irawan (2018: 518) posits that, in developing the ability of learners to speak fluently and accurately, it is not an easy task. In the same vein Gurler (2015: 15) explains that self-confidence at its maximum level is required to minimise the challenges posed by speaking.

In relation to speaking being the most challenging skill as posited by Aprianto et al. (2020: 149) the researcher is of the view that, various language speaking activities play a pivotal role to make speaking exercises interesting, enjoyable, effective, and they also serve as the cornerstones of the speaking skill. In addition to speaking activities, Teng (2020), Liao (2009), Maca (2020: 336) have highlighted the importance of manageable group sizes which seemed to be more effective than pair work, individual, and big groups for the effective speaking activities, as well as the using some techniques and learner interesting topics can help stimulating learners to participate, and at the same time they stimulate English fluent speaking by learners.

According to the researcher, speaking is the important first step of the language learning, and *speaking fluently* it is the second step or the milestone of the language learning. Therefore, if learners can minimally speak a language, they should not be expected to be perfect, but they should be engaged more in speaking activities as well as to be motivated for their attempts, and that will help to boast the learners' confidence in the language learning journey that is leading them towards language fluent speaking. From language fluent speaking level, learners' cognitive levels must be continuously raised until the language mastery level is reached as demonstrated on the figure below (Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Speaking as the cornerstone of other speaking levels.
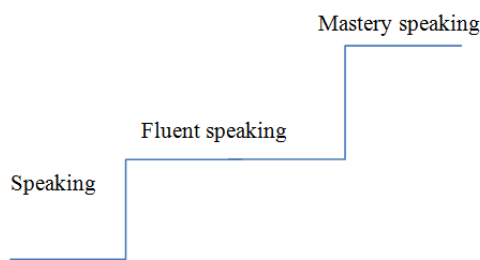
Mastering speaking is defined by Maca (2020: 330) as another level of speaking the language, which is the pivotal part of second language learning, and it is measured by the learner's ability to conduct a conversation in the second language. Additionally, Apriato et al. (2020: 149) state that, once the mastery of linguistic terms have been achieved by the learners, it is the clear indication that the speaking skills have been achieved. However, the researcher posits that, in *language learning* process it is *striving for mastering speaking* (speaking in a language) that should be prioritised, than mastering the language (speaking a language).

2. Speaking in a language versus speaking a language

On the same subject of speaking as a skill, the researcher found it imperative to distinguish between *speaking in a particular language* and *speaking a particular language* as there is a fine line between the two as demonstrated on Table 1. Speaking in a particular language is to *use the specific language as a tool* particularly by the non-native speakers to convey a certain message, and the message is given a priority over the language. It is at this point whereby the language grammatical errors are not prioritised, even though they would still be considered. On one hand, speaking a particular language has to do with *prioritising the language over the message* that is conveyed through that language. Home language speakers are the ones who are mostly used to speak a language rather than speaking in a language.

In the school context what is implied by speaking in a language for English First Additional teachers as well as the subject content teachers is that, teachers need to be developed to understand that, learners in township primary school are the English First Additional Language users, and therefore speaking in a language is what they need to be guided through to reach the point of speaking a language. Moreover, the CLT approach goal which is communicative competence must not be forgotten or be compromised.

Table 1. Differentiating between speaking in a language and speaking a language.

SPEAKING IN A LANGUAGE	SPEAKING A LANGUAGE
It is for the non-native speakers	It is for the native speakers
Message is prioritised	Language is prioritised
Language errors are not prioritised	Language errors are prioritised
A cornerstone of speaking a language	An identity of the native speakers
The language usage is somehow limited	Language usage is vast

3. Research questions

(1) Do EFAL teachers prioritise meaningful communication over grammatical perfection?
(2) What is the level of learners' participation in comparison with the teacher's participation during the English FAL period, particularly during the speaking activities?

4. Research objectives

(1) To establish whether EFAL teachers prioritise meaningful communication over grammatical competence or not.
(2) To investigate the level of learners' participation in comparison with the teacher's participation during the English FAL period, particularly during the speaking activities.

5. Methodology

5.1. Design

The study used a quantitative design to collect data, and the application of quantitative design as the sole research method was due to a time constraint of the researcher.

6. Instrumentation

6.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was first piloted, and then distributed to 128 (39 males and 89 females) English FAL teachers across the three districts i.e., Motheo, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana. Questionnaire questions were related to the teaching and learning of the speaking skill under the auspices of Communicative Language Teaching approach which should be consistent and continuous inside and outside the classrooms, and inside the classroom the learners' participation should be dominant to that of the teacher.

6.1.1. Results from the questionnaire data. From the completed and analysed questionnaires, more especially for questions or items related to speaking, the following findings were made: About 67.9% of the participants have indicated to know that CLT is based on meaningful communication rather than on grammatical communication. Conversely, to one specific question related to communicative competence versus grammatical competence, 74% of the respondents have agreed that grammatical competence is more important than communicative competence, and to another question again related to communicative competence versus grammatical competence , it was only 30.4% of the respondents who have agreed on not focusing on the learners' grammatical mistakes, but they have agreed on paying their attention on what learners were trying to say, while 60.6% have demonstrated to be too much focused on the learners' grammatical competence. This clearly indicates that, communicative competence is only known in theory, but in practice, the respondents were still applying Grammar Teaching Method than Communicative Language Teaching approach.

It was revealed again by majority of the participants that, English speaking as well as speaking in English by learners that was so highly compromised by the following key role players i.e., content subject teachers, and parents who fail to continue speaking with learners in English at home. Learners' negative attitude and lack of proficiency were also highlighted by majority of the respondents as one of the hindrances against the learners' active involvement in speaking activities. On the same subject of learners' active participation in speaking activities, 56% in Motheo, 42% in Lejweleputswa, and 60% in Thabo Mofutsanayana districts of the respondents have shown to agree with the fact that learners' participation must dominate the teachers' participation during speaking, for the attainment of communicative competence. Regarding the effective engagement of learners in speaking activities through the usage of the effective and the relevant strategies such as the *inclusive text usage* that seemed not to be used by majority of the respondents.

7. Conclusion

This research indicates that speaking skill as the most used component of communication cannot not be achieved through Communicative Teaching approach (CLT), and as the results communicative competence becomes the unreachable goal based on the fact that CLT activities are not satisfactorily implemented. Moreover, three environment in which speaking had to be inculcated and promoted are not giving any stimulus to the learners, i.e., classroom environment, outside classroom environment, and home environment. The reason being that the key role players EFAL teachers, contents subject teachers, department, the school management, and parents are not effectively playing their roles in making a contribution in as far as speaking or communicative competence is concerned. Then, if learners are expected to master the speaking skill, rather than to be taught, supported, or guided first to speak in a language as a strategy, learners cannot ultimately find themselves speaking a language or mastering the language, and in the process they cannot be actively involved, neither to be dominant in a teaching and learning process. Actually, learners' active and free involvement in speaking activities, it is a demonstration of a CLT aligned lesson plan, and also an indication of the achievable communicative competence.

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