Questioning Techniques and the Development of Secondary Stage EFL Students' Speaking skills

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Abstract

The present study was intended to identify the effect of a questioning - techniques based program on developing speaking skills of first year secondary students in Egypt. The study adopted the single experimental group pre-posttest design and the participants were 40 secondary school students selected from one of Cairo schools, named; Ahmed Orabi Secondary school for Girls. The study used the following instruments ; a list of speaking skills, a list of some questioning techniques , a pre-posttest for measuring speaking skills, besides, a training program based on using adapted activities from students' prescribed Text book "Hello 1". The total time assigned for the implementation of the program was 12 hours. The data collected was analyzed using the SPSS package and T-Test value was used to measure the effect of the used questioning techniques on developing the speaking skills of the study participants. Results revealed that the proposed training program was proved to be effective in developing major speaking skills of the study participants as there was a statistically significant difference between the mean score of participants in pre - post administrations of the whole test and in the test of each sub-speaking skill (pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary items) as well in favor of the post administration. A number of recommendations and suggestions for further research were proposed in the light of the study results.

Keywords : Questioning techniques, speaking skills, secondary school students in Egypt.

Introduction

One of the most important skills of English is the speaking skill because improving it helps students to express themselves and be active participants in the class room. As English is universally used as a means of communication, especially in the internet world and social communication websites, English speaking skills should be developed along with the other skills.

Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2017) ensured that although English language is supposed to be seen as an extremely important subject for
the doors it can open for a better job and a higher social standard, English language teaching in public schools in Egypt does not give enough attention to oral communication. It is based on the traditional approaches to language teaching that focus on grammar vocabulary and translation.

In the 21th century English language teachers' preparation courses are expected to upgrade student – teachers' abilities to meet their future students ' needs. If students need to learn language for communication, teachers need to know how to use language in communication and how to teach language communicatively.

Abedi et al., (2019) declared that one part of language development is spoken language and in order to improve it students need guidance and good knowledge of their own capacity. On the

other hand Nasri and Bitia, (2017) mentioned that by appointing seeking tasks, language teachers can enable students to utilize a powerful communication system. So, classrooms should support the use of spoken language and provide adequate space for developing speaking skills. Namaziandost dost and Ahmed, (2019) asserted that in English language acquisition and learning, speaking is considered as a skill that must be rehearsed and acted.

Gudu, (2015) added that speaking English is very important because it occurs in everyday life. Human beings use spoken language in every single situation of their lives. People are talking wherever they go, and to have skills in any spoken language helps in face to face conversation, to know where to say and what to say and when to say something. Asserting the importance of communication for students and consequently, for teachers. Wagner, (as cited in Saavedra   &   Opfer, 2012: 8) showed that "effective oral and written communication" is one of the survival skills that students need in the 21th century".

According to Zhang, (2009) Students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) usually have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. This might be one reasons for teachers to provide more situations and activities for students to strengthen their speaking competence. Bailey (2005) and Goh (2007) are of the opinion that in order to enhance students' speaking the

following should be taken into consideration: syllabus design, principles of teaching, types of tasks and materials and speaking assessment. Effective speaking skills result in achievements during ceremonial speaking activities, job training activities, job interviews and many other business purposes (Osborn, S, Osborn, M, & Osborn, R.(2008).

Clavijo, (2016) mentioned that nowadays, English speaking skill is the most important skill to be acquired by students for many basic reasons: First ,it allows people to communicate around the world with just one language. Second, English has become the most common language used in magazines, newspapers, books, guides, electronic devices and all mass media and of course the internet. This means that people of this world need to communicate in English.

Dincer (2017) mentioned that speaking is not just simply knowing the semantics and grammar of a language. It is also about the control of different types of activities, which include different mental and physical skills. In addition to being complex, it is not particularly supported with authentic situations in EFL Learning context, rather, it is used only within the confines of the classroom, which represents as the only setting for learners to practice English, this becomes challenging for language learners to be proficient speakers.

Banciu and Jireghie (2012) mentioned that using communicative approaches help students to develop an actual understanding of a language, rather than focusing on grammatical structures or acquiring native-like pronunciation. In classes, teachers should employ communicative activities such as role-play, interviews, group work, information gap, dialogues, opinion sharing, problem – solving skills, and so on. Furthermore, using the communicative approach instead of the grammar translation method in elementary schools in Egypt resulted in improvements.

Baker &Westrup, (2000); Abdel Halim, (2004) and Torky, (2006) conducted studies in which they recommended that much attention should be given to training students in practicing speaking through different classroom activities and teaching methods that give them enough opportunities and time to use the language in expressing their needs and ideas.. Thus, confidence and competence in speaking could be developed from appropriate syllabus design, methods of teaching, sufficient tasks and materials.

In a study conducted by Ahmed (2007) to investigate the effectiveness of compensatory strategies training (CST) on developing English speaking skill for first year secondary school students, the results showed the suggested CST had a large effect on enhancing 1st year secondary students' speaking skill.

In a study conducted by Isou (2005) to discuss improving speaking skills through instruction in oral classroom participation. Results showed that using instruction about classroom participation increased students' oral participation in class, and led to the improvement of students' speaking proficiency.

Hence, comes the importance of this study which aims at developing first year secondary students speaking skills through training them on questioning techniques. Many Techniques are recommended in the literature and related studies to enhance EFL Student's speaking skills and a great deal of empirical research pointed out the significance of teachers, questioning strategies on the learning process in class. As for the field of teaching English, a number of studies proved the effectiveness of questioning techniques in developing the speaking skill.

For example, Yang (2006) stated that the teachers' questions can be considered as the most powerful device to lead, extend and control communication in the classroom pointing to the significance of questioning in the process of improving and leading classroom conversation. On the other hand, Ellis (2008) proposed two reasons why teachers ask questions in their classrooms. First, questions require responses, therefore, they serve as a means of obliging learners to contribute to the interaction. Learners' responses also provide the teacher with feedback which can be used to adjust

content and expression in subsequent teacher- talk. Second, questions serve as a device for controlling the progress of the interaction through which a lesson is enacted

Most scholars agree about the importance of questioning in language teaching and learning some of these problems. Supporting this view. Moghadm and Barjesteh (2014) pointed that, "Teachers, questions serve as a means of engaging learners' attention to promote verbal responses and evaluate learners' progress ", Thus, one of the measures that can be taken to improve teachers' questioning skills is in assessing how teachers ask questions in an EFL classroom.

A study was conducted by Gambrell (2013) revealed that teachers asked question every forty three seconds. Thus, classroom teachers spend most of their lesson time conducting questioning sessions. This implies that students can actively participate in the classroom when they are asked, and they need to answer the questions by using the target language.

Beyond penguins , (2017) is of opinion that the purpose of asking questions in the classroom is to ensure active participation, evaluate their completion of work, stimulate independent learning and assess mastery of goals and objectives of teaching – learning process.

On the other hand, cotton, (2010) declared that the content of the questions and the manner in which teachers ask them determines

whether or not they are effective. Furthermore, Erinoso, (2008) & Adebule, (2014) declared that questioning is very important in the teaching and learning situations as interaction. This is because questions explain issues while answers express complete thought only when an answer generates a further question does thought continue its life as such. Thus, it is a fact that only students who ask questions are really thinking and learning.

Berger, (2014) said that considering the founders of leading technology companies such as Facebook, Amazon and Google as individuals who ask eligible questions, the importance of questioning can be revealed. These individuals, capable of utilizing question critically have contributed to discoveries in new technologies in today's competitive environment. The ability to ask eligible questions will become much more important in the future.

Entrepreneurs in the U.S's Silicon Valley have asserted that "questions are new answers" and the critical use of questioning is crucial in the field of education, as well. Boaler and Brodile (2004) state that the teacher questions illustrates the importance of the different questions teachers ask in shaping the nature and flow of classroom discussion and the cognitive opportunities offered to students.

Caram and Davis (2005) decided that when teachers' questions are used effectively, they can enhance pupil learning by

developing critical thinking skills, reinforcing pupil understanding, correcting pupil misunderstanding and providing feedback for pupils. Cakmak (2009:p.670), classified some purposes teachers' questions include as:

- To focus attention on a particular issue or concept.
- To develop an active approach to learning.
- To stimulate students to ask questions themselves and others.
- To express a genuine interest in the ideas and feelings of the students.

Bloom's taxonomy is divided into two types of questions: lower order questions that focus on knowledge, comprehension and application, while higher order questions include analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In fact this classification is employed in order to obtain the types of question teacher ask in EFL classroom and to determine how the teacher questions types are effective. (Yang , 2010).

"In the 21st century, teachers should promote students' inquiry and thinking, and to assess students' knowledge or understanding. This study is an attempt to promote the development of speaking skills through using questioning techniques in the English language.

Developing speaking skills through questioning techniques:

Some questioning techniques are suitable for the nature of the speaking skills and student's age such as: Open and closed

questions "question words"- probing questions such as: Are you happy? No,… why…? Because …… Brain storming questions such as: What kinds of animals are there in the world?- Prompting question: in this technique, the teacher uses a half-finished sentence containing hints help students remember and complete their answer- Reflective questions such as: "what is the main idea of ….? What is the meaning of ….? Explain why…? Explain how …? What is the difference between …. And ...? what conclusions can be drawn from …? This idea is important because ….. .

In this study "questioning techniques" are numbers of procedures and behaviors which the teacher uses inside the class to increase the effectiveness of his question. In the present study, the researcher adopted three of questioning techniques as following :

- Open and closed questions.
- Critical thinking questions.
- Reflective questions.

Context of the problem

In spite of the importance of the speaking skill at the secondary stage, students suffer weaknesses in their speaking performance. This can be attributed, in the light of the researcher's experience, to the prevailing traditional methods of teaching speaking. Students most of the time are rarely required to say more than a few words in response to some "display" questions raised by the teacher".

Moreover, Speaking also is not given enough time or attention while teaching English to First year secondary students. This may be due to the evaluation system adopted that focuses only on reading and writing while neglecting listening and speaking skills. Thus, the methods adopted rarely offer students a clear explanation or instruction of what constitute speaking and how native speakers actually speak.

Most EFL Teachers neglect the speaking skill and their teaching in
a way or another is a grammar based teaching which focuses on usage of the English language rules rather than the use of English in real situation. According to the researcher's experience in the filed of teaching, as an inspector of English, when most of the Egyptian students try to communicate orally in the target language. They feel awkward and frustrated. When they try to carry out a certain task orally in the target language they tend to translate every single word into the foreign language more often, they may ask a more fluent person to speak for them. In addition, the researcher attended some English lessons in some secondary schools to investigate the students' speaking skill through their answers to the teacher's questions and the methods followed to teach speaking skill at this stage.

The researcher noticed that:

- students were required only to answer displayed questions following a reading text or guided by some structures which have no impact on improving their speaking skills. Even in dialogue drills students just memorized the whole dialogue.

- Students lacked motivation to speak. Moreover, most of the students could not express themselves adequately and even found difficulty answering simple open – ended questions. Students continued to make the same errors even after being corrected many times.

- Some of the problems encountered by the students were in using correct grammatical structures (verb tenses, interrogative, pronunciation sound system, stress, intonation).

The problem of the study was further supported by the results of previous related studies in the Egyptian context such as the studies of Ghoneim and Elghotmy (2016) mentioned in their study on Egyptian EFL pre-service teacher that most English major students face serious problems in the oral production of language. They explained that English major students are obliged "by constraints of time and syllabus" to memorize language forms and rules and reproduce them in their final exams with no attention to the oral practice of language

Desouky, (2012) mentioned in her study that learners in industrial schools struggle in speaking and listening which make

them unable to express themselves in English – she attributed their weakness to neglecting teaching these skills due to the limited time of the English language class learners huge number as well as their low proficiency level in English. The focus in more on memorizing vocabulary and grammatical chunks in order to pass – the exams that depend mainly on the written form of language.

A lot of researchers reported the poor proficiency of EFL Speaking skills in the context of the Arab Countries, especially in Egypt. (Abdelmaged & EL – Naggar, 2018, Eissa, 2019, Etomy, 2015; Ghany, Latif, 2012, Torky, 2006). They asserted that EFL students in secondary stage schools as well as university students In Egypt face a lot of difficulties while speaking.

Thus, the first secondary students at Ahmed Orabi Secondary scool for Girls do not have the chance to practice the speaking skills in English due to the lack of programs that promote its skills.

b. Pilot study:

To come to a closer identification of the problem, the researcher conducted a pilot study based on interviews with both teachers and students at Ahmed Orabi Secondary school for Girls. The researcher held interviews with fifteen students and seven English teachers. During these interviews, Certain questions were asked to teachers, such as: Do you communicate with your students in English? Do you use strategies to facilitate speaking skills? What types of questions

are used during the daily practices? Are you satisfied with your students' level of speaking skills?

Results of these informal interviews showed that teachers do not communicate with students in English that they focus on grammar, and lecturing rather than practice questioning techniques, that they do not use speaking skill in English classes and that they are dissatisfied with their students' level of speaking.

Most of teachers reported that they do not have adequate knowledge of the speaking skills necessary for first year secondary students. They also reported that students are not provided with adequate opportunities to practice speaking due to the short time of the lesson. Thus, speaking practice is just restricted to giving short answers to some questions.

Furthermore, teachers expressed their need for better teaching strategies and methods that would increase their students' motivation and willingness to activity engage in speaking tasks and consequently improve their speaking skills. Similarly, Fifteen students were asked the following questions: Do you practice the speaking skills? Do you like speaking in English? The students expressed their problem in the following points:

1. They can not express themselves using proper English.
2. They think in Arabic before producing English, which causes stops, hesitation and Confusion in the message.

3. They feel shy while speaking English in front of a group of people. In addition, they report that they do not know how to practice the speaking skill.

4. They cannot understand someone who speaks in English for a long time.

Thus, their answers showed that they are poor speakers of English although they desire to improve. The pilot study as well as literature revealed that there are many points of weakness in the speaking of the Egyptian secondary students. As a result the researcher adopts strategy based on questioning techniques through the Egyptian students might be enhanced.

Statement of the problem:

The problem of this study is that secondary school students of English cannot speak or communicate fluently and appropriately in English. This could be due to absence of clear effective learning strategies that can used to develop their speaking . In order to handle such a problem, this study attempted to answer the following main question:

" What is the effect of using questioning techniques on developing EFL first year secondary students' speaking skills?

In order to answer this question, the following sub- questions will be also addressed:

1- What are the appropriate questioning techniques that can be used to develop EFL first year secondary students' speaking skills?

2- What are the appropriate speaking sub-skills that EFL first year secondary students need to improve ?

3- To what extent are the suggested questioning techniques effective in improving EFL first year secondary students' speaking skills?

Hypotheses of the study:

The present study tried to verify the following hypotheses:

1. There would be statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the research group on the speaking pre and posttest administrations in overall speaking skill in favor of the post administration test scores.

2. There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the research group students on the speaking pre and post test administration in each speaking sub skills (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency) in favor of the post administration test scores.

Delimitations of the study:

This study was delimited to:

1- Developing and measuring the following:

the English languages speaking sub-skills for the secondary first students which include: "pronunciation: vocabulary, grammar, and fluency".

2- One class of first year secondary classes in Ahmed Orabi School for girls in Cairo governorate. This class was randomly assigned to be the research group.

3- Units "1,2,3,7" from the students' text book (Hello 6) that can be suitable to be redesigned and taught through the suggested questioning techniques.

4- The following questioning techniques types: open and closed questions , reflective questions and critical thinking questions.

5- The first term of the academic year 2017-2018.

The Significance of the study:

1- This study is expected to be useful for teachers, students and curriculum developers in the following ways.

A) For Teachers:

1- It may attract teachers' awareness to the importance of using questioning techniques.

2- It may provide EFL teachers with a practical model to overcome English speaking problems that secondary school students face.

B) For Students:

- It may encourage students to use higher order thinking questions to promote their speaking English.
- It could create a social motivating instructional environment inside the classroom, conducive to developing speaking.

C) Curriculum developers and designers:

They might design or develop curriculum in the light of questioning techniques taking into consideration the development of students speaking skills.

2. This study is expected to provide EFL researchers with theoretical foundation as well as recommendations for further research.

Definitions of terms:

The speaking skill:

According to Luoma (2004) the speaking skill refers to a person's ability to express himself orally in everyday life situations, or the ability to express a set of ideas fluently, appropriately and comprehensibly through correct grammar, pronunciation and suitable vocabulary as well. Brown (2001) defined speaking as "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing receiving and processing information"

In the present study, speaking is defined as secondary school students' ability to express themselves fluently and accurately as a result of practicing the oral language through the selected

questioning techniques, i.e, open and closed questions, reflective questions and critical thinking questions.

Questioning techniques:

According to a debule, (2014). Questioning is very important in teaching and learning situations as it ensures proper student – teacher interaction. This is as questions define tasks and express problems. Thus, students who ask questions are really thinking and learning. Questioning technique is defined in Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistic (1992, P. 303), as "the different procedures teachers use in asking questions and the different kind of questions they ask".

Questioning is an instructional technique or activity that includes the process of generating questions, peers questions, and reviewing the questions with the teacher (King, 1992 a; 1992b). Danielson, (2007), Marzono & Kendall, Tienken, et al., (2009) assured that good questions are generated by the teacher or student test process and procedure forcing reformulation and paradigm shifts, criticize claims and opposing views that expose similarities in dissimilar concepts or dissonance with in a concept, bring deeper understanding to complex ideas, are couriers and creative in nature, and produce new learning.

In the current study, Questioning technique's is a method of instruction where teaching takes place through series of learning and probing questions in line with lesson contents by the teacher.

Organization of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter two: deals with review of literature and related studies . literature review is divided into two main parts. The first part is concerned with speaking skills. The second part is concerned with questioning technique related studies about both parts were included.

Chapter three: tackles the method used in the study in terms of the design, the participants and the instruments of the study. Moreover, it deals with the implementation of questioning techniques – based program.

Chapter four : discusses the results of the current study in light of verifying the study hypothesis.

Chapter five: consists of a summary of the current study along with recommendations and for further suggestions research .