



The Effect of Project Work on the Speaking Ability of Iranian EFL beginner Students

Esmail Zare-Behtash

Associate Professor, Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

Hooshang Khoshsim

Associate Professor, Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

Tayebe Sarlak *

MA in TEFL, Chabahar Maritime University, Iran

Abstract

EFL learning context stresses on the speaking skill as a vital communicative tool. The students will be more proud if they are able to interact with the other interlocutors. Since the Iranian students are far from the native context and the most of their learning happens in the classroom, application of an appropriate teaching method increases motivation, self-confidence, autonomy, and consequently speaking skill as whole. The present research endeavored to illustrate the effect of PW on students' speaking skill. The participants were selected from a mixed-class students enrolled a general English course in Islamic Azad University of Chabahar (IAUC). The pre-test was administered and indicated that the students were homogeneous and at the elementary level. Then, one of the classes was assigned as control group and the other was the experimental group who respectively underwent conventional teaching method (teacher-centered method) and PW (student-centered method). After 10 sessions, the post-tests were administered for both groups in order to measure their speaking achievement. The outcomes demonstrated that while the control group and the experimental group were homogeneous before the treatment, their speaking performances were significantly different after implementing PW. Therefore, the researcher concluded that PW influences total speaking ability of elementary adult EFL students.

Keywords: speaking foreign language, project work, teaching speaking method

INTRODUCTION

Learning other languages is significant these days. If a person wants to take apart in an international society, he/she should be able to communicate with at least one international language as well as his/her first language (L1) (Şimon, 2014). Nowadays

the language students are considered successful language learner, if they can speak FL. Manurung (2015) explained the speaking skill as a significant skill of language learning. He stated that the speaking provides opportunity for language users to state their meaning orally. Speaking a language is a useful tool to transfer feeling. This Indonesian prober (Manurung) uttered his overall description of speaking in this way that "speaking is a process of message and of information that lead to produce utterances orally to meet special purposes" (2015, p. 45). Many EFL students demand to communicate with FL orally, but they cannot. Due to the difficulty of learning FL speaking, some language students possess poor FL speaking ability. A solution for speaking improvement is selecting an appropriate method which focuses on communicative orally. The well-organized teaching method is necessary to enhance speaking skill by endorsing self-confidence, motivation, and attitude and lessening their anxiety as well as collaborating in group. Group work is available in project work (PW) method. Richards and Rodgers (2004) categorized PW as a technique of cooperative approach. They argued the use of PW is a useful tool which helps foreign language students to improve their speaking capability. To depart speaking problem of students, the current research attempted to seek the effectiveness of project work on speaking dilemmas. Eventually its result encourages foreign language teachers to choose PW in their curriculum.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since 1980s people have made contact with other people from different countries more than before. They have required and demanded to communicate with native speakers of other languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2004). People considered that knowing a language means speaking it (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Hence, students regarded speaking skill as communicative competence (Chastain, 1988). Because of importance of communication, it is regarded as the foremost goal of the FL instruction. Thus, instructors should apply a method which provides students chance to communicate.

Traditionally, to improve speaking skill, the teacher asked the students to write an essay about a topic. New methods suggested that the teacher pays more attention to factors which facilitate learning speaking (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Each human beings who is learning FL possesses distinctive characters such as self-confidence, autonomy, motivation, attitude, and anxiety. Numerous studies have indicated that learning speaking is depended on affective factors, too. For example, Dincer, Yesilyurt, and Takkac concluded that FL students are silent and cannot speak FL because their anxiety is high while their self-confidence and motivation are low (2012). Krashen (1981) introduced affective factors as mediator variable which affect relationship between input of FL learning and students' ability (as cited in Henter, 2014). To promote learning a language, the teacher should take account to affective factors.

Motivation, a devastating variable, impacts development of learning language (Henter, 2014). In 2009, Lee McKay and H. Horenberg defined motivation as a result of students' desire and effort to learn language. Communication is too difficult for learners, so they are not interested in speaking activities. If tasks become selected appropriately, they

provide learners opportunity to speak and facilitate learning. As a result, the learners obtain desired outcome and become motivated in communication.

Attitude is another affective factor of FL learning. Lee McKay and H. Horenberg described attitude as an outcome of persons' beliefs and values about activities in which they should participate (2009). Beliefs determine that a person can learn language or not. Positive attitude toward language learning improve learning, but negative attitude doesn't (Henter, 2014). Thus, attitude toward language learning is crucial and the teacher should take consideration to attitude and try to help students take a positive attitude toward foreign language and language learning to be successful in learning course. PW makes the learners' attitude positive toward language learning and their speaking ability promotes.

Anxiety, another main affective factor, can prevent language learning. There are five factors which cause speaking-in-class anxiety (Henter, 2014): 1) students fear negative evaluation, 2) they feel uncomfortable when they speak with native speakers, 3) they have negative attitude towards English learning, 4) they evaluate themselves negatively, and 5) they fear that they do not achieve successful results. PW makes a comfortable learning environment which decreases students' fear because the students are not evaluated individually, but their group will be assessed. Therefore, their anxiety will be decreased. Bailey (1983) added that the competition is another reason of their speaking anxiety (as cited in Mak, 2011). PW decreases competitive and enhances cooperative among students to remove speaking anxiety.

Project Work

PW is launched by Dewey in 1938 (Lam, Cheng, & C.Choy, 2010). Buck Institute for Education (2007) noted that PW is originated from Dewey's philosophy work (as cited in Cheng, 2013). PW is a method because PW specifies the role of the teacher and students, and students' behavior. PW does not provide any nature of language and language learning like an approach, but PW follows theory of language and learning of cooperative approach. Also it is not like a technique because a technique refers to widespread activities through the teaching procedure. Technique doesn't determine role of the teachers and students while PW determines them. Consequently, the present researcher called PW as a method in this study. PW is a wide spread teaching method (Ergul & Kargin, 2014). Gulteking (2007) claimed that PW can be developed individually or in group (as cited in Ergul & Kargin, 2014). PW is characterized by different specialists (Fernandes, 2014; Ergul & Kargin, 2014; Zhou, Chen, & Luo, 2014; Brown, 2007) as follows:

- The students attend in learning situation actively.
- The students are responsible for their own learning. Zhou, Chen, and Luo expressed that students construct and reconstruct their knowledge network actively (2014).
- PW provides students a creative learning environment.

- PW is a student-centered method. Teachers are as facilitator and guider rather than providing knowledge.
- Students can increase their communicative ability. Then they can cooperate in real life to identify their need and solve large- scale open-ended projects.
- PW enables the students to think critically and manage projects.
- Students not only read and listen to content knowledge, but they use them in real life. In other word, PW relates theory to practice in real world. Consequently it causes deep-level learning.
- PW prepares students for future life.
- PW is interdisciplinary.
- Main factors of PW are increasing willing to take risk, participating in social activities and helping each other.
- In 2007, Brown arranged roles of the teacher in a string that begin from controller, director, manager, facilitator to resource. At the beginning of the course, the teacher acts as the controller, then the director, next the manager, the facilitator and at the end of the course the resource. The teacher should conduct activities which engage students in interaction. The most known interactive teacher exist in group work.

METHODOLOGY

The basic aim of the study was the examination of the effect of PW on speaking ability of Iranian elementary adult EFL students. The speaking ability is the dependent variable in which the researcher is going to measure its progress. The researcher attempted to evaluate changes in the speaking ability with some instruments such as pre-test and post-test after and before using the independent variable. Independent variable is PW which is expected to affect the speaking skill, the dependent variable. The participants were selected from a mixed-class students enrolled a general English course in IAUC. According to proficiency test, the proficiency level of all students was elementary and they were homogeneous. Students in the experimental group were exposed to the treatment (project work) while the students in the control group were involved in traditional method, teacher-centered method; the experience shows that it is the current teaching method in Iran.

The instruction lasted 10 weeks of the semester. The students passed one hour and half as a session of English course a week. This study managed the groups based on criterion-based selection. The teacher formed the group member of four to five persons. Six groups attended in the projects. Each group developed one project each session. Of course students made some change in their group. A between-groups design was adopted in order to address the research question. The second session and the last session of the term were devoted to the speaking tests as the pre-test and the post-test respectively. Each student's speaking test lasted outmost ten minutes. Scores were calculated on an interval scale from zero to maximum of 28. Then, three raters listened to recording voice and examined their speaking ability base on criteria adopted from Speaking Scoring Criteria (Phillips, 2007). Each component of the speaking ability was

scaled from zero to four scores. Next, to assess the reliability of the pre-test, the researcher asked three experienced English teachers to rate the students' performance in the speaking test. Then the researcher calculated the reliability of rating the speaking test via Pearson conduct moment. Inter-rater reliability equals 0.94. It demonstrated that rating scores are related to each other strongly.

RESULTS

Among different techniques to analyze data, the independent sample t-test and the paired sample t-test were chosen to estimate similarities and differences between the participants' scores before and after the treatment. There were four groups of scores: 1) the pre-test scores of the control group, 2) the pre-test scores of the experimental group, 3) the post-test scores of the control group, and 4) the post-test scores of the experimental group. The independent sample t-test analysis was applied twice: between the scores of the pre-tests for the control and the experimental groups, and the post-tests for the control and the experimental groups. On the other hand, the paired sample t-test compared: between the score of the pre-test and the post-test of the control group, and the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistic of the speaking performance of the groups in the pre-test. The number of people of the control group and the experimental group is 20 and 25 people respectively. Numbers of students in groups are different. This research has taken account the mean of the students' performance not the individual number of students in groups. As a result, the difference in number of cases is not important. Table 1 shows that mean of the control group is 4.35 and of the other group is 3.58.

Table 1. Descriptive statistic of the pre-test for the control and experimental groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
pretest	25	3.5800	5.92256	1.18451
	20	4.3500	6.80770	1.5225

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the independent t-test between the control group and the experimental group in the pre-test. It shows that Sig. value of Levene's test is 0.62 which is larger than 0.05 and equal variance is assumed. Mean difference between two groups is 0.77 and the value of the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.68>0.05. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the speaking scores of the control group and the experimental group. In other words, two groups are homogeneous.

Table 2. Independent sample t-test of pre-test of both experimental and control groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.237	.629	-.406	43	.687	-.77	1.89868	-4.599	3.059
Equal variances not assumed			-.399	37.9	.692	-.77	1.92881	-4.674	3.135

The teacher administered the post-test and, then, conducted the paired t-test for the post-test and the pre-test of the control group to determine the effect of the conventional teaching method on the speaking ability of the participants. Table 3 presents the outcomes where the Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than 0.05. It means that the participants in the control group showed different performances before and after the treatment.

Table 3. Paired sample t-test of the pre-test and the post-test of the control group

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Post-test pre-test	2.5500	2.6253	.58703	1.321	3.779	4.344	19	.000

Again paired sample t-test was used to compare means of the post-test and the pre-test of the speaking scores of the experimental group. Table 4 reports the mean difference is 8.58. Also Sig. (2-tailed) is $0.00 < 0.05$. The researcher concluded there is different between the students' performance in the pre-test and the post-test.

Table 4. Paired sample t-test for the experimental group in the pre- and post-tests

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
posttest – pretest	8.5800	3.39632	.67926	7.17807	9.98193	12.63	24	.000

To compare the scores of the post-tests of the control group and the experimental group, the researcher applied the independent sample t-test. Table 5 determines that the control group includes 20 students. Their mean and standard deviation are 6.9 and 5.83 respectively. This table also describes that the experimental group contains 25

participants. It demonstrates that mean of the experimental group is 12.16 and their standard deviation is 5.63. The mean difference is 5.26.

Table 5. Group statistics of the post-test for both experimental and control group

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Control	20	6.9000	5.83005	1.30364
	Experimental	25	12.160	5.63235	1.12647

Table 6 shows that significant value of 2-tailed was less than 0.05 ($.004 \leq 0.05$) and mean difference is 5.28. As a result there is significant difference between the speaking performances of the experimental group and the control group. Eta square equals 0.18. Therefore, the magnitude of difference is large. Then, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6. Independent samples test for post-test of experimental and control group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.03	.86	3.1	43	.004	5.26	1.7162	1.7990	8.721
Equal variances not assumed			3.0	40	.004	5.26	1.7229	1.7785	8.741

DISCUSSION

As it was mentioned, the present study made an effort to examine the following research question: Does the PW method influence speaking ability of Iranian elementary EFL adult learners? Based on the research question, the following hypothesis is conducted: The PW method does not influence speaking ability of Iranian elementary EFL adult learners.

The marvelous goal of this research was to probe improving the speaking ability through implementing PW, as it is mentioned in the first research question. In this paper, English speaking skill was evaluated through the 10-min interview between the present researcher (as examiner) and examinees. The speaking tests were held before and after the instruction. In the second week, an examination was distributed before the treatment to measure the students' speaking ability before implementing PW method (pre-test). The findings of the pre-test demonstrated the homogeneity of students' level of speaking ability; the level of all students was elementary. After implementing the independent variable, another test was constructed to assess how much PW method affect elementary EFL adult students' speaking development. The raters used speaking criteria scores and a check list to increase reliability of speaking rating to make true

conclusion. Then, the research compared the students' achievement in both groups by SPSS 20th.

The quantitative findings of comparison between students' performance in the control and experimental groups exhibited a significant difference in speaking mean scores of both groups (Table 6). Therefore, the research hypothesis is rejected. So the researcher concludes PW is a useful recommendation to promote the speaking ability. The findings of the present study supported the previous works (Balagiu and his colleague, 2014) which claims that the speaking ability is available through employing PW. Iranian researchers such as Soleimani, Rahimi, and Sadeghi (2015) and Shafaei and Abdul Rahim (2015) probed the impact of PW.

Maftoon, Birjandi, and Ahmadi (2013) confirm that the PW enhances learners' motivation in their work. Beccarie et.al (2014), Cheng (2013), Colomar and Guzman (2009), and Ahluwalia (2010) approve the influence of PW on self-confidence, motivation, attitude, and autonomy. Then PW enables learners to develop their speaking skill because Ellis (2008) states that affective factors affect speaking ability positively. With respect to the above line, the present researcher selects PW to investigate the effectiveness of the mentioned teaching method on progress of the speaking ability. Thus the researcher as an observer observes implementing PW. It provides a fun learning setting. The students were happy. This fun learning environment decreases anxiety. This observation makes the researcher more rely on the other works which discover that PW increase motivation, self-confidence, autonomy, and attitude.

The existing study is developed to fulfill EFL adult learners' need. Chance of practicing for each student is equal in group. On the other hand, they have time to think and answer. Some students who possess introversion have opportunity to activate. The students are involved in activities. Engagement in learning activities increases learning. Also they correct their errors, and the teacher does not correct them. PW is effective because it use FL rather than students' First language. Their speaking is increased because the students learn speaking when they practice speaking. In Iran, English is not available for students outsides the classroom. Therefore, a method which provides chance speaking in the class and outside of the class is helpful. PW increase chance of practicing speaking. One advantage of PW is that the students received peer feedback when they made ungrammatical structure. Then they correct themselves. In addition, when their peers used grammatical sentences, the learners learned the right form of language. Students learned more vocabulary when they used vocabulary in the text rather than when they try to memorize them separately. Shokri (2010), Musa, Mufti, Abdul Latif, and Mohamed Amin (2011), and Chou (2011) confirm that PW provides students opportunity to interact orally and eventually it leads to improving speaking ability. The present study approves their finding.

CONCLUSION

Speaking FL is considered as one of chief factor of successful EFL learning. Willing and need to speak English cause the teacher is interested to apply a teaching method which enables the EFL students to speak English. A suitable teaching speaking method is one that the EFL students have opportunity to practice speaking. The splendid characters of PW method such as enhancing motivation, self-confidence, autonomy, communication competence, students' involvement, and decreasing anxiety make PW method as a useful method to develop the level of speaking ability. Consequently, the research recommended PW method as a helpful teaching speaking method. The result of the research indicated that PW method impact on learning speaking rather than traditional methods.

The result shows that Iranian EFL students possess poor speaking ability because of lack of applying inappropriate teaching speaking method. Language teachers select appropriate method to solve EFL students' specific problems. Inasmuch as learning FL happens in different contexts and varied needs, the language teachers should acquaint with methods. Then teachers choose a method that fulfills students' need.

The splendid characters of PW such as enhancing motivation, self-confidence, autonomy, communication competence, students' involvement, and decreasing anxiety makes PW as a useful method to develop level of the speaking ability. This reason causes that the research recommended PW as a helpful teaching speaking. The result of the research demonstrated that PW impact on learning speaking rather than the traditional methods. The students noticed that they could speak more fluently and comprehensibility. Besides they used more vocabulary in their speaking with correct grammar. This work determined that PW leads to progress the speaking ability if the teachers diagnose needs of students correctly.

The research designates that if PW method is selected accurately, it will speed up learning speaking. The results of the observation the whole instruction as well as quantitative findings indicates that PW provides a fun learning environment, enhances their motivation, self-confidence, and autonomy, declines their anxiety, gives more chance to interact each other, and increases their communicative competence. Subsequently, their speaking ability will be progressed to desired level. Observations showed that experimental group was more eager to the instruction than control group. A number of students were late at the first sessions; they were on time the rest of the course. Applying PW suggests support to the earlier research that a cooperative method guides students to develop their oral skill.

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