

Teachers' Level of Proficiency in English Speaking as Medium of Instruction and Causes for English Speaking Deficiency

Shahwar Gul^{*} and Shamsa Aziz^{**}

Abstract

The paper indicates the deficiencies /gaps to highlight the needs /requirements in terms of teaching competencies for the implementation of policy decision to use English as the medium of instruction. The present paper highlights the teachers' competencies for using English as a medium of instruction. The objectives of the study were to test the secondary school teachers' speaking proficiency in English as medium of instruction and explore the causes for deficient English speaking. The research study was delimited to the teachers of secondary level of three districts in Punjab i.e. Lahore, Rawalpindi and Mianwali. The population of the study consisted of 3235 teachers. Double Sampling technique was used to select the sample. 150 teachers were selected as samples who were interviewed using interview guide in order to test speaking competency of the teachers, however the perception of 200 teachers was collected through questionnaire about causes of deficient English speaking. It was found that, teachers were deficient in grammar and vocabulary, however average in fluency, pronunciation and confidence, while speaking in English.

Key words: English proficiency, medium of instruction, speaking deficiency

^{*}Doctorate Scholar, SS-Education, Government College for Elementary Teachers, Mianwali
Email: shahwargul@yahoo.com

^{**} Assistant Professor, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

An English medium education system is the one that uses English as the primary medium of instruction. Manivannan (2006) explained that because a working knowledge of English is perceived as being required in many fields, professions, and occupations, many states throughout the world mandate the teaching of English. In the context of Pakistan, it is very difficult to unify all the institutions at one medium of instruction (Muhammad, 2009). What should be the medium of instruction in the institutions of Pakistan? This is really a very controversial issue. (Mahboob, 2003)

According to Khursheed (1993) Education system in Pakistan is divided into government schools, private schools and religious schools. The public or government supported schools are impacted by a variety of problems. "There had been a great controversy in the medium of instruction between private and public sector educational institutions. "(Khalique, 2008). Almost in all the educational policies, there was lack of uniformity and unanimity in using the medium of instruction, but now in National Educational Policy 2009, the Government of Pakistan has announced the introduction of English lessons on a phased basis in all schools across the country. (Ijaz, 2011). Learning a language well depends on the quality of the classroom teaching and, not on whether it is an English medium or Urdu medium school (Imran, 2010)

Baloch (2003) reported that, when English is considered as the medium of instruction it is directly linked with the speaking competency of the teachers. Tahir (2007), while discussing the problems of the teachers using English, declared that, in the present situation, a teacher is not in position to do full justice to adopt English as medium of instruction in the whole sessions. Some of the problems are reported as; difficulty in overcoming the barrier of mother tongue, problems of forming new language habits, problems of pronunciation; problems of literal translation etc. (Mansoor, 2005)

Learning a language requires four fundamental competencies i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. (Bel & Luis, 2010). Shamim (2008) stated that generally, it is assumed that different teachers have different levels of language competencies i.e. some may be competent in reading and writing but poor in listening and speaking and vice versa. Furthermore Maley (2009), reported that teachers are exemplary for their students who demonstrate that they extensively speak. Teachers having good skill of speaking are more expected to have students who in turn speak as well. Coleman (2010), indicated that the common opinion among language experts

elaborate the four aims i.e. ability to speak, listen, write, and read. Usually our teachers as well as students do not get the chance to either in the classroom or outside to speak English. (Velasquez-Ocampo, 2003). Speaking is not a part of our examination. Learning to speak also requires a lot of practice and attention. We usually learn to speak our mother tongue just by listening and repeating. The teacher can also adopt the same natural way (Kamran & Hashmi, 2007; Cantoni, 2007). Another reason why listening and speaking are ignored is that Pakistani teachers are themselves not very proficient in these two skills, as they themselves have been through the same deficient system. (Mueen, 1992). “The teachers, who are shy and conservative, spend a lot of time to speak confidently, but if they make efforts their English can be better which contains lesser errors and such teachers feel conceited for their English capability. Pronunciation and grammar are necessary for effective oral communication and these are necessarily considered in speaking lessons.” (Fiorito, 2005)

The reasons which became the hurdle for speaking competencies may be the serious problems of cerebral palsy, sense of embarrassment, (Blondie, 2008), in front of over confident English speaker using latest terminologies (Finocchiaro & Bonomo, 2004); cultural biasness (Haque, 1993); lack of practice resulting in poor communication and vocabulary (Fiorito, 2005); missing opportunities and platform for speaking and practicing English (Karim, 2009).

So it was considered to be the great need of the hour to identify and establish the level of required competencies among teachers, for using L2 as the medium of instruction. As the role of teacher is pivotal in using English as medium of instruction, the major emphasis of this study was to explore the English speaking proficiency of teachers adopting English as a medium of instruction and to identify their training needs to meet their role of teaching at secondary level.

Objectives of the Study

The study was specifically designed with the following objectives:

- To test the speaking competencies (fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, confidence) for using English as medium of instruction
- Explore the causes related to personal characteristics, school policy and social environment as factors of weak speaking competency.

Methodology

The section of the article includes description of population, sampling, process of developing and validating instruments, data collection and data analysis strategy of the study.

The population of the study was 3235 teachers of secondary level in three districts of Punjab i.e Lahore, Mianwali and Rawalpindi. The sample of 150 (50 from each district) teachers was selected for interview to test the secondary school teachers' speaking proficiency, and 200 teachers were selected to get their perception about causes of deficiency/weaknesses in speaking English. In this way the total sample was consisted of 350 teachers which were selected using double sampling techniques.

Structured interviews were conducted through interview guide to investigate speaking competency. Through interviews, the researcher assessed: Pronunciation, Fluency, Vocabulary, Grammar, and Confidence. Ten questions were asked during the interview and interviews were audio taped. Total marks for interviews were 25. While questionnaires were used to collect perception of the teachers regarding causes of deficiency in English speaking, related to personal characteristics of the teachers, social environment, and school policy. Questionnaire was consisted of 20 items on five point rating scale. Both the instruments were improved and validated in the light of expert opinions and Pilot-testing. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was also found of through Cronback Alpha using SPSS. The Cronback Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.82 which was quite reasonable.

Data were collected with the help of three research associate (one from each district), after getting permission of the heads of the schools. The data collected through interviews were scored against each category of speaking and frequencies were calculated on the basis of five levels for obtained marks of the respondents against each category of speaking. These five levels were as:

Table 1

Scoring Levels

Scores	5	4	3	2	1
Levels	Very Good	Good	Average	Below Average	Poor

The detail of total scores of categories related to Speaking competencies was as follows:

Table 2*Total Scores of Categories Related to Speaking Competency*

Sr. No	Category/Skill	Total Score
1	Fluency	5
2	Grammar	5
3	Vocabulary	5
4	Pronunciation	5
5	Confidence	5
Total Marks of Speaking Competency		25

Frequencies were calculated against each score, and Percentages, mean scores and Standard Deviation were calculated of each category. Furthermore, ranks were allotted to each category to determine the competency and deficiency level of the teachers, in each category of speaking. The data collected through questionnaires were also analyzed through frequencies distribution, percentages, mean scores and rank order.

The data collected through interview was analyzed through frequencies, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation, using SPSS version 17.0. The data were analyzed on the basis of five skills i.e. confidence, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar regarding speaking competency. The summary table is presented below:

Table 3*Summary Table of speaking competencies*

Sr. No	Category/Skill	Mean Score	Ranks	Combined Mean	Combined SD
1	Confidence	2.73	1		
2	Fluency	2.65	3		
3	Pronunciation	2.65	3	2.5	.13
4	Vocabulary	2.44	4		
5	Grammar	2.42	5		

Table 3 shows all the categories/skills related to speaking competency. Mean score of all the categories are presented and ranks are allotted on the basis of Mean score of each category. The confidence of the teachers in speaking English is at the highest rank, fluency and pronunciation contain equal that is 3rd rank; vocabulary is at 4th rank; while grammar is at 5th rank. It shows that teachers were confident to speak in English, while fluency and pronunciation was average, but weak in vocabulary and grammar while speaking in English. The table also shows combined mean score of the speaking competency that was 2.5 out of the total score of 5, which shows that overall speaking competency of the teachers, was below average. Teachers were found to be weak in vocabulary and grammar.

Table 4*Summary table of Causes for week speaking competency*

Sr. #	Causes for week speaking competency	Mean score	Ranks
1	Personal Traits/characteristics	3.3	2
2	Social Environment	3.5	1
3	School Policy	3.2	3

The table 4 shows the summary of the perception of teachers about the causes responsible for teachers' week speaking competency. The mean scores of causes related to social environment on the basis of the perception of teachers is 3.5 out of the total of 5 and is at first rank; mean score of personal traits is 3.3 and is at rank 2 and mean score of the causes related to school policy and environment is 3.2 and is at the last rank. So the mean score and the ranks shows that according to teachers' responses, the social environment is more responsible for the weeknes in speaking English, then the personal traits of the teachers. And the personal traits are more responsible for week speaking competency than school policy.

Conclusions and Discussions

1. Teachers were confident to speak in English, while their fluency and pronunciation in speaking were average, but they were deficient in vocabulary and grammar, while speaking in English.
2. According to teachers perception the main cause of the week speaking competency is social environment. The personal characteristics are also more responsible for it than causes related to school policy.
3. The study conducted by Arshad, (2009) was also supported by the study findings as he found that the teachers had gaps in their English teaching competencies, like vocabulary teaching, oral communication, pronunciation, intonation, assessment and preparation of valid test.
4. Some aspects of the study conducted by Edward (2010), are also supported by the findings of the study as he explored that fluency and grammar competency of teachers were rated the lowest by the teachers themselves.

Recommendations

1. As speaking competency was found deficient among teachers, so the Teachers may enhance their speaking competency by occasionally watching films where English native speakers perform, listening them and practicing accordingly. They may also improve their fluency while speaking in English, by commenting on some usual events, pictures etc. Teachers may also develop speaking competency by practicing conversations in English with people who have different levels of skills in the language. Teachers may improve their speaking by recording their speaking in English, and evaluating the fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation by replaying the recorded speech in English, to remove their deficiency in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency.
2. Teacher may develop their English language competencies by rehearsing the use of English teaching techniques and reflecting on the degree of success obtained in each competency.
3. Training authorities may organize trainings to provide such activities for the teachers during training in which they can exercise all the four language competencies i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.
4. During English training, teachers may be given activities for dialogues and speeches in English language, on some topics, so that teachers can be confident enough to speak in English on usual matters.
5. Training authorities may bring the quality in teaching through English by continuous monitoring and follow up to ensure whether teachers are adopting their competencies in their teaching or not.
6. The teachers may be provided such social forums in which they can practice speaking English. School may conduct competitions of speaking English among teachers in order to motivate them to improve English speaking skills.

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