An Investigation of the Practice of Teaching and Assessing Speaking Skills in Spoken English Classes: Dilla University in Focus

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Abstract
The objective of this study was to investigate the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in spoken English classes at Dilla University. Specifically the study aimed at identifying the activities of teaching speaking skills used by the teachers, the aspects of speaking skills emphasized in the teaching and assessment process, the techniques of assessment employed by the teachers and the problems that impeded the classroom teaching and learning process. The required data for the study were collected using questionnaire, interview and classroom observation from 90 randomly selected students and 3 teachers. Then the data were analyzed using percentages, frequency and mean of the frequency distribution. The analysis of the course material was also used to supplement the data obtained in the other tools. The findings of the study revealed that the teaching of speaking skills mainly relied on activities like discussions, debate, brainstorming, presentation, dialogue and occasionally on role play. The finding of the study also indicated that there is imbalance between the accuracy and fluency aspects of speaking skills. Most of the classroom activities are accuracy oriented. The same is true for the assessment of speaking skills done. The analysis also revealed that there has been a mismatch between the practices of teaching implemented by the teachers and the pedagogical procedures favored in the assessment of learners' speaking skills. The study also identified the students' poor language background and fear of making mistakes and lack of encouragement from the teacher as challenges to the teaching and learning of speaking skills.
Keywords: CLT: Communicative Language Teaching,   **EFL**: English as a Foreign Language, ESA: Engage, Study and Activate, **MoE:** Ministry of Education, **SNNPR:** Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Region, **SPSS**: Statistical Package for Social Science, **TEFL**: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

1.1 Background of the study

The beginning of teaching English in Ethiopia goes back to the time of the establishment of the first modern school Menelik II when English had been used as a medium of instruction along with French and Italian. Now days too, English is used in the education system of the country beginning from grade one up to tertiary level. It is taught as a compulsory subject beginning from grade one and used as a medium of instruction starting from grade nine up to tertiary level. It is also offered as an independent field of study as stated in education and training policy of 1994 of the country. A document from the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education (2005, p.1) also reveals that "English is a corner stone in the development of Ethiopia's commerce, communication systems, technology and education".

However, in the practice of teaching English as a foreign language, all skills do not seem to have been treated fairly equally. In line with this view Brown and Yule (1983, p.1) state, that "For most of its history, language teaching has been concerned with the study of written language". Similarly, Myhill, Jones and Hopper (2006, p.1) confirm that "we value reading and writing more highly than oral competence and our assessment system is still conducted predominantly in the written mode". A research article by Liao (2009, p. 11) also states that "the percentage of time devoted to activities in which students can communicate with each other in speaking English remains small in the whole class" despite the fact that speaking has been included in the educational plan for teaching English in colleges and Universities.

In reality, however, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires mastering speaking as one of the most important skills in the language. For instance, Nunan (1998, p. 39) states "mastering the art of speaking" as the most important aspect of learning a language and claims that speaking is also the most frequently used mode of communication to express opinions, make arguments, offer explanations, transmit information, and make impressions upon others. Students need to speak well in their personal lives, future workplaces and political endeavors. They may have meetings to attend, presentations to make, discussions and arguments to participate in, and groups to work with. Similarly, Yang (2010, p. 339) argues that " the ability to maintain natural conversation in real working or daily life setting is undoubtedly the fundamental purpose of oral English training". Given this fact, there have been efforts made by scholars in the field to come up with a well-designed classroom teaching procedures and techniques to promote the learners' language skills development (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

To this end, scholars like (Nunan 1989, p. 10), (Willis 1996, p. 234) and (Brown 1994, p. 245) share the

notion that classroom communicative tasks should involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning. This implies that communicative tasks should be designed in such a way that they provide learners with desire to communicate, purpose to communicate and freedom to use the language and then to encourage the learning of speaking skills. By implication, developing speaking skills of students require classroom activities that will allow them to exchange ideas with each other, express their opinions, and develop learning strategies and communication skills for successful negotiation. The teacher should then provide his/her students with the necessary input to let them develop their oral skills and to have a successful language class. This requires knowing the students' interests, having good competence in the foreign language, implementing new methodologies, techniques, and activities in the classroom.

Researchers like Zhou (2009) who conducted a study on "Cooperative Principle in Oral English Teaching" also argue that the ultimate aim of teaching oral English is to develop students' communicative competence. He found that the best way to do this is to apply the cooperative principle to oral English teaching in the classroom. Yang (2010) as well conducted a study on "How to Achieve Authentic Context in Classroom Oral English Teaching". In his article, Yang discusses some methods to achieve authentic context in classroom oral English teaching, including ways to optimize classroom setting and classroom instruction. He concluded that in spite of giving the student the correct ways to learn English, oral English classes should create natural and authentic environment for the student to speak English. In general, it seems that the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills needs to be given more emphasis.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

It seems that most second/foreign language teaching today does not only focus on massive memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules as it was before. It appears that scholars now believe learning language to communicate is more important than learning about the language. For instance Ur (1996, p. 120), states that "of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important." She adds that classroom tasks that develop learners' ability to express themselves orally are, therefore, an important component of language course. The primary motivation to learn a foreign language is also probably to be able to converse with the language for communication purpose. As a result, in countries like Ethiopia where English is considered as a foreign language the mastery of speaking skills could be priority for many language learners. Learners also tend to evaluate their success and effectiveness based on how well they feel they have improved in their language proficiency.

Consequently, there is continuing methodological debate on how best to approach the teaching of oral skills. In this regard, the inception of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in early 1970s, has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world (Richards, 2006). Similarly, Ethiopia has also taken initiative to improve English language teaching in its education system starting from elementary education focusing on developing the communicative competence of its students (witness the newly published textbooks for grade 1-12). Thus, it seems in the area of second/foreign language learning communicative language teaching is influencing our teaching practice. However, it is believed that such methodological changes alone could not guarantee successful teaching of speaking skills unless it is accompanied by proper classroom activities. In this sense, Moges (2009) conducted a study on "Exploring the Methods of Teaching Speaking and Factors Affecting them: Grade 10 in focus". The study reported that the teachers used very limited methods (like discussion, conversation and sometimes visuals and communicative games) to teach speaking. He also reported that the factor affecting the use of these methods includes students' lack of enough vocabulary, adequate grammatical knowledge, fear of making mistakes and teachers' lack of initiation to help and monitor students overall classroom activities. Meaza (1991) also conducted a study on "Classroom Interaction and its Influence on the Development of Speaking Skills in English at Grade 11 level in Government Schools". Meaza concluded that classroom interactions increase students' opportunity to practice speaking and helps in strengthening their language ability. These studies, however, didn't look into how the classroom practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills is going on. In addition to this, specific to Dilla University, I felt that there is inappropriate practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom while I was teaching Communicative English Skills (Engl 201) for two semesters under the mandate of the University. This also gave me the opportunity to hear complains of few teachers of the University on the communication competence of their students. I have also observed that many students face problems to communicate with their teachers and friends orally using the language. Again, the time spent on teaching speaking skills intuitively seems less than the time spent to teaching the other skills.

1.3. Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to look into the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in spoken English classes in Dilla University. Under this broad objective, the study had the following specific objectives:

- identifying the classroom activities the teachers use to teach speaking skills in spoken English classroom.
- identifying the aspects of speaking skills emphasized in spoken English classes.
- investigating the assessment techniques employed by the teachers to assess speaking skills of learners.
- looking at the challenges of teaching and learning speaking skills in spoken English classroom.

1.4. Research Questions

This study tried to answer the following leading questions:

1. What are the activities used by the teachers to teach speaking skills in the spoken English classroom?
2. What are the aspects of speaking skills emphasized in the spoken English classes?
3. What are the techniques of assessment used by the teachers to assess speaking skills?
4. What are the problems challenging the process of teaching and learning speaking skills?

1.5. Significance of the study

In a real second language-learning environment (i.e. within the target language speech community), language development may occur outside the classroom. But, such outside exposure to the target language is minimal in the Ethiopian situation where English is considered to be a foreign language. Students learn English in classrooms alone. Therefore, the findings of this research could help generate pedagogical insights into effective teaching/learning of speaking skills in the classroom. It may potentially benefit the following groups:

1. Helps spoken English teachers to evaluate their own practices of teaching and assessing speaking skills.
2. Initiate English language teachers to use different techniques and activities of teaching and assessing speaking skills.
3. Researchers who are interested in the area may also use the findings of this study as a basis for further study.

2. Review of Related Literature

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires learners' exposure to the language skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. The first and the last aim of acquiring such language skills is to achieve a high development of abilities of receiving and producing the target language either in oral or written form, i.e. achieving a good mastery in the productive and receptive skills. As far as speaking is concerned, it is regarded as the major skill to be developed because it is necessary for displaying learners' language proficiency. Thus, in this chapter, a review of related literature is made on the speaking skills with more details. This includes the definition of speaking skills, importance of speaking skills, Communicative Language Teaching approaches to teaching speaking skills, components of speaking skills, main types of speaking performance, speaking difficulties, classroom activities that promote speaking skills, assessing the speaking skills and finally classroom methods of assessing the speaking skills.

2.1. Speaking Skills Defined

Hedge (2000, p. 261), defines speaking as "a skill by which they [people] are judged while first impressions are being formed." That is to say speaking is an important skill which deserves more attention in language learning because it manifests peoples' thoughts and personalities. As to the arguments of Harmer (2001, p. 271) speaking involves interaction with one or more participants. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. In other words, speaking is a means to persuade others to do something, to clarify unclear thing, and to express opinion, feeling etc.

In broader-spectrum, speaking is a means of communication and its purpose is to communicate what is in one's mind to the other party. It is not limited to the case when people simply open their mouths and speak the words and sentences. Speaking is a means by which people are doing the purpose required of the interaction, which may be a conversation, or a task in a context that bring them into a relative degree of status and power (McKay, 2006, p. 179).

According to Nunan (1989), spoken language consists of short, fragmentary utterances, in a range of pronunciations as opposed to written language which is characterized by well-formed sentences. Brown (1994), on the other hand, defines speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information. Similarly, Harmer (2001: 271) states "effective speaking involves a good deal of listening, an understanding of how the other parties are feeling, and knowledge of how linguistically to take turns". Moreover, Brown (2004, p. 140) defines that speaking is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed.

2.2. The Importance of Speaking Skills

The speaking skill is one of the natural ways in which we communicate with another person. It encompasses

many important things - the way in which we respond to the person we speak, body gestures including the facial ones, pitch and tone of our voice and many other things. Normally, the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all interconnected. Proficiency in each skill is necessary to become a well-rounded communicator, but **the ability to speak skillfully provides the speaker with several distinct advantages.** The capacity to put words together in a meaningful way to reflect thoughts, opinions, and feelings are few of the advantages.

Ur also affirms that

> of all the four skills [listening, speaking, reading and writing], speaking   seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of the language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing (1996, p.120).

This implies that the mastery of speaking skills by the learners helps them to be considered as if they have mastered all of the other skills. In addition to this, it seems that the most frequently raised question to foreign language learners is "do you speak English?" not "do you write English". In line with this idea Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 103) argues that for most people "the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of human communication."

The actual importance of speaking is more revealed with the integration of the other language skills. For instance, speaking can help students develop their vocabulary and grammar and then improve their writing skill. Through speaking, learners can express their personal feeling, opinions or ideas; tell stories; inform or explain; request; converse and discuss, i.e. through speaking, we can display the different functions of language. Speaking is very important outside the classroom as well. Many companies and organizations look for people who speak English very well. So, speakers of foreign languages have more opportunities to get jobs in such companies. Baker and Westrup (2003, p. 5) also supports that "a student who can speak English well may have greater chance for further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion".

Similarly, Nunan (1991) says that success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak the language in the classroom they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are used in the right way for teaching speaking, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, rising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place.

2.3. The Communicative Language Teaching Approach to Teaching Speaking skills

The communicative approach to language teaching focuses on interaction between at least two people who share a list of signs and rules to communicate. According to authors such as Brown (2001) and Nunan (1991) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focuses on language as it is used in real contexts i.e., language for "real life" communication and so the students are given opportunities to express their ideas and opinions. The teacher acts as a facilitator during classroom activities so that students will ultimately be equipped with tools in order to generate a spontaneous language use outside the classrooms boundaries. Thus when teachers look for a significant method to meet the demand of learners to use this language for communication, the communicative approach (CLT) is considered to be the best approach for such purpose. It is mainly related to the idea that "Language learning will take care of itself" (Harmer, 2001, p. 70). A good understanding of CLT theory and its implication for classroom practice is very important for both learners and teachers, since it aims at helping learners to use the target language for communication.

Talking about the pedagogic importance of CLT approach Nunan (1991, p. 279) outlined five features that strengthen good practice in developing the learner's language competence. The five features are:
- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning management process.
- An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

2.4. Teaching Speaking

In teaching speaking we constantly have to keep in mind the fact that what we have in front of us is a mixed class with varied abilities, expectations, motivation level, knowledge and last but not least, different learning styles. Thus, we need to vary our approaches and offer as much opportunity as possible to make the whole class find a little something to hold on to, expand and grow. Specifically, Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2005, p. 35) state that teaching speaking means developing learners' speaking skills by focusing regularly on particular aspects of speaking (fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and body language). In line with this idea Brown and Yule (1983, p. 27) say that the purpose of teaching speaking is to enable students to express their

ideas, opinions, and feelings in the target language fluently, properly, and comprehensibly.

But in the process of teaching speaking skills, there might be problems faced by the students, such as the lack of knowledge on language aspects and language functions, the lack of fluency in expressing their ideas, and lack of confidence in expressing their ideas. These are factors that may cause students' low involvement in the speaking activities particularly in the classroom. The teacher is responsible for helping students solve those problems by designing tasks in which the students can involve actively in all speaking activities in the classroom. Engage, Study, and Activate (ESA), a model suggested by Harmer (1998), is one teaching models that can help motivate students to get involved actively in the teaching learning process. During the activities, applying ESA, the students will have a lot of opportunities to practice speaking in the classroom and they will be more confident because they will also learn or study the language aspects (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) of the target language (Harmer, 1998, p. 95).

2.5. Principles of teaching Speaking Skills
According to Willis (1996, p. 228), there are certain basic principles that can help teachers select and design classroom tasks that are most likely to stimulate learning. She says that most researchers would agree that in order for anyone to learn a language with reasonable efficiency, three essential conditions must be met. These could be applied to all learners, regardless of their individual cognitive styles. These principles are:
1.   The provision of exposure to the target language
2.   The provision of opportunities for learner to use the target language for real communication.
3.   The provision of motivation for learners to engage in the learning process, that is, motivation to process the input they receive, and motivation to use the target language as often as possible in order to benefit from exposure and use.

Exposure, use, and motivation then are the three essential conditions to successful language learning. One without the others, or even two, might not be enough.

2.6. Assessing Speaking Performance
Assessment is an instrument or systematic procedure for observing and describing one or more characteristics of a student in the teaching learning process. It refers to the general process of monitoring or keeping track of the learners' progress. Talking about the need to assess speaking performance Brown and Yule (1983, p. 103) suggested that

> ...one of the main aims of English teachers is to make their students able to communicate information effectively in spoken English. In pursuing this aim, the teacher may wish to be able to assess, at regular intervals, how his students are progressing and also to find out if there are areas of performance which are consistently weak and require additional attention.

3. Research Methodology
3.1. Research Design
The purpose of the study is an investigation of the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in the actual spoken English classroom. Thus a descriptive research design was used. This is because descriptive study is helpful when a researcher wants to look into a phenomenon or a process in its natural contexts (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

3.2. Research Setting
The site of this study was Dilla University. This University was selected as a study site for two reasons. In the first place, the researcher has relatively better exposure to the practice of teaching speaking skills in the university. The second reason is the proximity of the University to the researcher's work place.

3.3. Target Population
The primary sources of the data were second year English major and third year Afan oromo major students taking Spoken English course and the instructors offering the course during the first term of the academic year 2011/2012 in Dilla University. Thus, the total population of the study includes 118 students taking the course and three instructors offering the course.

3.4. Sampling Technique
The recommended sample size for the precision level of 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval is 90 for a population of 118 students (Isaac and Michael, 1981 as cited in Taylor-Powell, 1998). When calculated in percentage this covers 77% of the total population. In order to give equal chance of being selected for every member of the population, simple random sampling technique was used to draw this sample size of the study. On the other hand, since the number of teacher population was small all were taken as a sample. Thus, the study

included 93 participants as a sample. Purposive sampling was also used to select students for the interview.

3.5. Data Collection Tools
To collect the required data for this study, four types of instruments: questionnaire, classroom observation, interview and content analysis were used. The reason for using such multiple data collection tools is to triangulate the data and to increase the credibility of the study.

3.6. Data Collection Procedure
The task of the data collection was started with the classroom observation. Then administering the questionnaire to both teacher and student participants of the study followed. After the classroom observation was finalized, the interview with selected participants was done. These procedures help to avoid the risk of sensitizing the participants to show behaviors different from the usual ones.

3.7. Method of Data Analysis
The data that was collected from the participant teachers and students through questionnaire was analyzed descriptively in terms of the percentage, frequency distribution and mean score of the frequency of the students and teachers response. SPSS 16.0 was used to do this. The data from the classroom observation was also carefully recorded in to Yes/No category and rating scales (always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never) as they happen in the speaking classes. Then, the frequency distribution of the observed practices was summarized and interpreted together with the data obtained in the questionnaire and the activities of speaking skills in the course material.

4. RESULTS
4.1. The types of classroom organization used in spoken English classes
There are no clear cut limits to the way in which teachers can organize students in a classroom regardless of the interfering factors. However, pair work, group work, individual work and whole class teaching are the commonly used ones. All have their own advantages and disadvantages. In addition to this, each classroom organization is more or less appropriate for different classroom activities (Harmer, 2001). The same is true for speaking skills activities. Students taught in whole-class teaching possibly didn't practice the language (speaking skills in this case) as students put in pair work or group work. Pair work and group work activities can increase the amount of time that learners get to speak in the target language during lessons. Thus it is possible to say that the classroom organization used can influence the practice of the language element either positively or negatively. Similarly, the table given below (table 4.1) presents the students' and teachers' response on how often pair work, group work, individual work and whole-class activities are used in spoken English classroom.

Table 4.1: Students' and teachers' response on the types of classroom organizations used in spoken English classes (Item No. 1-4).

No	Items	Scales	Students' Response		Mean	Teachers' Response			Mean
			No	%		No		%	
1	Pair work	Always	32	35.6		2		66.7	
		Usually	33	36.7	4.04	_		_	4.33
		Sometimes	23	25.6		1		33.3	
		Rarely	1	1.1		_		_	
		Never	1	1.1		_		_	
2	Group Work	Always	26	28.9		2		66.7	
		Usually	28	31.1		_		_	
		Sometimes	28	31.1	3.79	1		33	4.33
		Rarely	7	7.8		_		_	
		Never	1	1.1		_		_	
3	Individual Work	Always	20	22.2		_		_	
		Usually	21	23.3		1		33.3	
		Sometimes	32	35.6	3.4	_		_	2.67
		Rarely	16	17.8		2		66.7	
		Never	1	1.1		_		_	
4	Whole- class teaching	Always	51	56.7		_		_	
		Usually	21	23.3		1		33.3	
		Sometimes	15	16.7	4.32	2		66.7	3.33
		Rarely	2	2.2		_		_	
		Never	1	1.1		_		_	

As the response from student respondents shows, 65 (72.3%) of the students pointed out that their teachers organize them to work in pair frequently. On the other hand, 23 (25.6%) of the respondents reported that their teachers give them pair work sometimes where as insignificant number of respondents reported that the teachers use pair work activity rarely in their spoken English classes. The mean value of the frequency at which teachers organize pair work is 4.04 and this implies frequent use of the pair activity in the classroom. Similarly, 2 of the teachers said they use pair work frequently to deliver speaking skills lessons to their students and 1 teacher said that he practice it sometimes. This gives a mean value of 4.33. Based on this it is likely to say that the teachers use pair work frequently for teaching speaking skills in the spoken English classroom. In addition, the classroom observation revealed that out of the nine observed speaking sessions, teachers were seen giving pair works to their students in 7 (78%) of the observed sessions together with other activities.

Students were also asked on how often their teacher use group work to deliver the speaking skills lesson in their spoken English class. Here 54 (60%) of the student respondents reported that group work is frequently used by their teachers in spoken English classes and 28 (31.1%) of the respondents said group work is used sometimes whereas the remaining 7.8% and 1.1% of the respondents reported that it is used rarely and not at all in their classroom respectively. The mean value calculated for the frequency of using group work is thus 3.79 for the students' response and this shows group work is frequently used for teaching speaking skills. The response from the teachers also confirmed that they use group work frequently in their classrooms and this is represented with a mean value 4.33. The researcher also observed such an attempt in 8 (88%) of the observed speaking sessions. Based on this information, it is possible to say that organizing group work was one of the preferred ways of the teachers to deliver speaking lessons. Similarly, Lindsay and Knight (2006) state that pair and group work give better speaking practice opportunities for learners than the discussion limited between the teacher and the learners. Harmer (2001) also state using pair work and group work dramatically increase the amount of talking time for individuals.

In contrast, it is unlikely to practice speaking skills individually. Similarly, engaging learners on individual activities does not help to develop the learner's speaking skills, though it can serve as a "way of restoring peace and tranquility to a noisy and chaotic situation" (Harmer, 2001:116). Nevertheless, 41 (45.5%) of the sample students pointed out that their teachers engage them frequently in individual work in the classroom and 32 (35.6%) of the respondents, on the other hand, responded that the teachers make use of individual activity in the spoken English classroom sometimes. The remaining 16 (17.8%) and 1.1% of the respondents answered that individual work is practiced rarely and not at all respectively in their classroom. The mean value calculated for the frequency of practicing individual work in the classroom is thus 3.4 for the student's response. This means the teachers deliver the speaking skills lesson through individual work sometimes. Similarly, as it can be seen in table 4.1 above 2 of the teachers reported that they engage learners in individual work rarely and 1 teacher said that it is used frequently. In terms of mean score, this gives a mean value of 2.67. This shows that the teachers are not in agreement with what has been said by the students on the use of individual work, but in the information elicited through the observation, it was also found that in (4) 44% of the observed sessions, the teachers were giving individual works to their students. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the individual work given was not serving as independent teaching activity up to the end of the class time rather it was serving as a prerequisite for the group work, pair work and even for the participation in the whole class discussion.

On the other hand, when responding to how often teachers rely on whole-class activities to present the speaking skills lesson, 72 (80%) of the respondents reported that whole-class teaching is practiced frequently in their classroom. The remaining 15 (16.7%), 2.2% and 1.1% of the sample students answered that whole class teaching is practiced sometimes, rarely and not at all in their spoken English classroom respectively. The mean value of 4.32 calculated for whole-class practice of teaching speaking skills reveals that it is a frequently used type of classroom organization. However, the response from the teachers indicated that they organize whole class teaching sometimes as indicated by a mean score of 3.33. Yet, the observation made is in agreement with the students response confirming that whole-class teaching is frequently used classroom organization being observed in 5 (56%) of the nine observed sessions. However, it is important to notice that the observed whole-class teaching did not mean a lecture where the teachers talk the whole class time. It simply refers to the short lecture type instructions and explanations given by the teachers at the beginning of activities, in-between activities and at the end of activities. It also refers to the case where teacher-lead large group (whole-class) discussion took place in the classroom.

4.2. Activities of teaching speaking skills employed by the teachers There are a number of activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, debate etc. Students also need to be engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than in traditional teacher-led classes. These activities include role-play, simulation, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling/completion, picture narrating, problem solving, presentation, discussion and debate among others. Bringing in such a wide range of activities into a classroom is beneficial to

learners offering a wider opportunity of practicing variety of the language in different contexts.

The application of various speaking skills teaching activities obviously helps students to capitalize on the language output they produce. Similarly, the first leading question of this study was concerned about identifying the activities used by teachers for teaching the speaking skills. Regarding this point, the analysis of the data indicated that discussion, debate, brainstorming, presentation and dialogue are the frequently used activities for teaching speaking skills. Role play is occasionally used activity for teaching speaking skills and simulation is used in rare cases. Other activities like information gap, problem solving, storytelling and picture narrating has never been used for teaching speaking skills in the spoken English classes of the target University.

The second point was about the aspects of speaking skills emphasized in the practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in spoken English classes. Here the data obtained indicate that the emphasis put on the accuracy aspect of speaking skills is much more than the emphasis put on the fluency aspect in both the teaching and assessment of speaking skills in spoken English classes.

In the third place, the question raised by the study was about identifying the techniques of assessing speaking skills used by the teachers. In this case, the analysis of the data indicated that the assessments employed by the teachers are of two types: continuous assessment and written final exam. The continuous assessment, which covers 40% of the total mark, employed techniques like presentation, discussion and assignment. It is also indicated that role play is used in rare cases. The subject teachers have never used other assessment techniques such as oral interview, self and peer assessment and picture description and the like. The remaining 60% was found to be covered through written exam, which is unlikely to address the fluency aspect of speaking skills.

The last point was about the problems that impeded the teaching learning process of the speaking skills. Teachers faced the problem of having passive students who show no willingness to speak in class, or students who seem interested enough to speak but find it difficult to express themselves which is directly and indirectly associated with the students' language background. It was also noted that when students work in pairs or groups they just end up chatting in their own language/mother tongue. It was also motioned by the students that there is lack of reinforcement and motivation from the teachers. The students also indicated shortage of practice time as one challenge to their learning.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study presented so far, the following conclusions have been drawn.

1. The teaching of speaking skills in the target University was found to be dependent on few commonly used activities. This can limit the opportunities of learners to practice the target language in various situations to develop their communicative competence.
2. The classroom practice of teaching and assessing speaking skills in the target University emphasized the teaching and assessing of the accuracy aspects of speaking skills.
3. The assessment techniques used by teachers for assessing speaking skills are not the reflection of the instructional procedures used in the practice of teaching the skill.
4. Concerning the problems that impeded the practice of teaching and learning speaking skills, student' poor language background, mother tongue use in discussions, student's lack of interest, absence of encouragement/motivation from teachers, students' fear of making mistakes and shortage of practice time are found to be major problems.

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