

## Factors Influencing Female Students' Participation in Speaking Skill of English Lesson: The Case of Grade 10 in Hassasa High School

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### Abstract

*This study was designed to assess factors that influence grade 10 female students' participation in English speaking lesson at Hassasa High School. The participants of the study were teachers and students of Hassasa High School. 174 students and 6 English teachers of grade 10 were participated in this study. Descriptive research design and three instruments of data collection, namely, interview, FGD and questionnaire were utilized. The collected data were analyzed using both qualitative (thematic analysis) and quantitative (frequencies, percentage and mean). The findings of the study showed that female students have poor English speaking background, low motivation to speak, limited initiation to ask and answer in English language. In addition, female students' individual and group participation were found to be low. The psychological factors like fear and lack of confidence were found to be among the factors. The study has also identified that teachers lack of encouragement, insufficient feedback and restricted use of teaching aids. Furthermore, teachers did not facilitate female students' participation through interactive methods like drama, debate, demonstration of pictures, etc. Finally, based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that teachers should encourage female students, apply interactive methods, give feedback and use teaching aids to enhance their speaking performances.*

**Key words:** Influence, Participation, female students, speaking skill

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### Introduction

#### Background of the Study

Language is one of the most important tools used in communication among the people of nations all over the world. Human beings communicate effectively through spoken and written languages. Among the languages, English is one of those widely used in most countries. In this regard, Richard (2008) states that a large percentage of people in the world study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. Besides, Susanto (2007) argues as English language becomes popular and one of most important languages in the whole aspects of human life. This shows that English plays a pivotal role in all walks of life.

Although English is used as foreign language in Ethiopian context, it has been used as language of instruction in Secondary Schools and Higher Institutions. The ability to speak confidently and fluently is something which learners will develop during their time at school, and something that will help them throughout their life.

Rebecca (2006:144) stated that “speaking is the first mode in which children acquire language, it is part of the daily involvement of most people with language activities, and it is the prime motor of language change”. Speaking has an intellectual meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. Speaking can be also considered as a productive and active skill. According to Richard and Renadya (2002:210), “speaking is one of the central elements of communication”. This means speaking is very essential, and someone can express his or her feeling, emotion and idea by speaking. In addition, Speaking gives us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand.

However, not all language learners after many years of studying English can communicate fluently and accurately because they lack necessary knowledge and this is true in relation to female students in many parts of the world. Hurwitz (2001) explained that there are factors contribute to speaking problems and are classified into two as linguistic and nonlinguistic problems. The Linguistic problems are lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, and the Nonlinguistic problems are psychological associated with fear of making mistake, lack of confident, and apprehension of other evaluation.

A study by Eleana and Hellen (2017), analyzed the factors that influence the lack of speaking skill in students of grade ten at Salvador Mendieta Cascante School showed that the influencing factors were: “using the mother tongue during the class instead of English language, lack of vocabulary that makes a limitation in students to speak in class, lack of didactic resources to motivate students to participate, the majority of students do not have previous knowledge about the English language so they have difficulties in the learning performance, the majority of students do not have relatives who speak English language and support, lack of motivation to participate in class due to they fear to make mistakes, lack of confidence and poor teaching strategies”. The above example clearly indicates the prevalence of female speaking problems in other countries and could insight a similar situation in our country.

In addition, the study by Meli (2017) revealed that lack of vocabulary, students’ tendency to speak more in their mother tongue than English, fear of making mistake lack of confidence, grammar, and pronunciation were identified as the major problems in students’ English speaking practice. Tesfaye (2014) included participation of female students in his thesis on assessment of factors influencing academic achievement of female students in Holeta Secondary School and suggested that their participation was low.

Abera (2019) studied the relationship among language learning anxiety, teacher and peer support and achievement in Kunzila preparatory and secondary school and reported that “all anxiety variables had negative and significant relationships with teachers support”. Kedir (2017) in his study at Robe teachers college, pointed out that “students did not practice speaking skills both in and outside classroom due to lack of motivation, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, poor grammar knowledge, shortage of vocabularies, lack of exposure and poor background experience”. Learning English language skills requires interaction in the classroom as well as practice in real life situation. Therefore, since female students’ make part of the classroom learners, their participation in English classroom is very crucial to make sure they acquire the necessary skill and knowledge based on real usage of English. This is because learners’ participation in classroom is one aspect of classroom interaction to practice language.

However, in spite of the importance of the speaking skill at all level, students suffer weaknesses in their speaking performance. English language teachers in Hassasa High School complain female student's lack of participation in group discussion, oral presentation, and asking and answering question. Furthermore, from the observation of the researchers as English language teachers, it was possible to say that there was lack of participation of female students in speaking English lesson which the cause should be addressed through research. Therefore, the researchers, planned to fill the gap that cannot be addressed by other researchers in relation to assessing factors that influence female students participation in English speaking lesson particularly in Grade 10 Hassasa High School.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to investigate factors that influence female students' participation in speaking English lesson at Hassasa High School. To achieve the general objective the following specific objectives were designed. These are:

1. to identify teachers related factors influencing female students' participation
2. to assess students related factors influencing female students' participation

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate factors that affect female students' participation in speaking English lesson classroom. Identifying the factors can help the teachers to be aware of the main problems influencing female students' participation in speaking English. The study could provide English language teachers and the school administration with valuable information regarding the factors that influence female students participation in speaking English and this could initiate teachers to strongly work to overcome the problems and promote speaking skill. In addition, this study would help female students to identify the problems that hinder their participation in English speaking lessons and help them to improve their speaking skill in the classroom.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This study was conducted at Hassasa town, Hassasa High School, which is located in West Arsi Zone, Oromia Regional State, at the distance of 287 km from Addis Ababa and 130 km from Madaa Welabu University, Ethiopia. The researchers employed descriptive research design because it enabled to obtain detailed information concerning the issue under study. Creswell (2003) stated that descriptive method is used to generate views and opinions of relatively large number of respondents and used to indicate a clear picture of the situation.

### **Population and Sampling Techniques**

The population of the study was grade 10 students of Hassasa High School and the target population are grade 10 female students. There are 960 students out of them 580 female and 380 male students. 174 (30%) of female students were selected through systematic random sampling techniques for questionnaire. 32 students in 4 groups were purposely selected for the Focus Group Discussion/FGD. In addition, 6 English teachers teaching in grade 10 were taken through comprehensive sampling technique as they are a few in numbers for semi-structured interview.

Pilot study was conducted in order to check the validity and reliability of the tools before actual data collection. In doing this, necessary modification and adjustment in administration of the instruments were made.

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used in the study. Quantitative data which were collected through questionnaire from Students and teachers observation were organized, tabulated and described quantitatively by using percentage, frequency and mean by using SPSS version 20, while qualitative data collected through interview, open-ended questions and from FGD were analyzed through narration. The data obtained through the three tools were triangulated properly during data analysis.

### **Results and Discussion**

The findings obtained from female students' questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion/FGD and teachers' interview were summarized as follows.

The result of the study has helped to judge that among the three stages of teaching, the teachers applied the pre discussion and during/while discussion tasks but most of them did not give post discussion (giving feedback/evaluation); and this was due to large classroom size, lack of time and weak participation of female students.

Almost all of the respondents replied that the use of the interactive methods like drama, debate, demonstration of pictures, maps and the likes by the teachers was very low. But, Harmer (2007) Nunan (2003), and Brown and Yule (1989) pointed out as drama, role play, debate and use of various pictures assist students speaking skill practices.

The data analysis has shown that some of the teachers and majority of female students were speaking in both English and students' mother tongue during English speaking lesson and lack of teachers' interest to teach and to speak English fluently. Most of the female students agreed that they have lack of knowledge on importance of speaking in English in their future career development, agreed that they have poor speaking background and low motivation of speaking English. In addition, the FGD has shown that teachers' motivation was not satisfactory.

Related to group participation, most of the female students' agreed that they participate better in small group sizes (3-5), in homogenous groups (groups with similar gender) and in groups with similar ability and strongly disagreed to participate in heterogeneous groups (mixed ability group). However, the teachers' interview has shown that it is better to participate in heterogeneous groups (mixed ability group). The data analysis has shown that female students' participation is influenced by seating arrangements of desks which are difficult to move. Nevertheless, Brown (2007), Rao (2019) and Tarone (2005) confirmed that teachers should use different types of group dynamics and seating arrangements in order to help students exchange their ideas freely and enhance their communication skill.

Regarding the main factors influencing female students' participation, the interviewees mentioned that linguistic factors (poor vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) and non- linguistic factors (psychological, teacher, parent, social and the likes) were mentioned by the respondents. The teachers elaborated that poor speaking background experienced during elementary and junior school levels, lack of the use of teaching aids/resources and time to give feedback.

Most of the interviewees suggested that the approaches and strategies to solve the problems should involve a coordinated effort among students themselves, teachers, school administration focusing on improving communicative competence, specially speaking English. They added that the goal of teaching speaking skill is to enhance students' motivation, vocabulary power, grammar knowledge, fluency and good pronunciation. The approaches are to be based on group discussion, drama, role play, brain storming, storytelling, information gap, interviews, story completion, reporting, and picture describing, find the differences, picture narrating and the likes.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to investigate factors that influence female students' speaking participation in EFL lesson at Hassasa High School in Grade 10. Accordingly, based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were arrived at.

The result of the study has helped to judge that among the three tasks of teaching, the teachers applied the pre-discussion and while/during discussion tasks but most of them were not able to apply the third task post discussion (giving feedback/evaluation) and this was due to large classroom size, lack of time and weak English speaking participation of female students.

It was possible to deduce that most of the teachers' preparation and initiation to teach speaking lesson was fair, teachers' introduce the speaking lesson and followed up students' activities, however, teachers' motivation of the learners was not satisfactory.

Furthermore, the results indicated that most of the teachers' activity to make sure that female students are aware of the objectives and tasks to be done was low. The teachers assigning of female students to function and play roles in group participation was also limited. Evaluation of group participation of female students was not successful and supplementary teaching resources were rarely used.

From the findings, the researchers were able to conclude that teachers frequently used group discussion method and did not focus to apply other methods like drama, debate, puzzle/joke, narration, demonstration of maps, pictures and so on to teach English speaking lesson.

The results of the study also showed that most female students speak using their mother tongue during class discussion and some teachers also speak both in English and local language(Afan Oromo).

The study disclosed that female students have low perception about the importance of speaking English in their future career development. Fear of making mistake and low motivation, linguistic factors (poor vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation) and non- linguistic factors (psychological, teacher related) were among the main problems.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded.

**Female Students** should develop high motivation to try to speak in English, participate in classroom discussion, work hard to improve speaking skills. They should also participate by asking and answering questions in the classroom discussion, develop self-confidence, avoid fear and shyness to participate in EFL speaking lesson.

Female students should minimize speaking using their mother tongue during English speaking lesson, better focus on building vocabulary, improve grammar knowledge, pronunciation and develop good perception about the importance of speaking English in their entire life.

**English Language Teachers** should motivate female students in order to develop confidence to participate in their individual, pair and group discussion. The teachers should give feedback and evaluate female students' progress. In addition, the teachers should teach the speaking lessons in the textbook and prepare additional interactive methods like drama; debate and demonstration of pictures to assist female students' participation.

It is important that the teachers should speak fluently in English while teaching speaking lesson and update their language skill and knowledge on the subject matter. And they should help female students' improve their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency and the likes which are important elements of good speaking skill. Finally, the results of the study also indicated as some students are shy and anxious to speak in front of their friends. Hence, teachers should motivate and assist the students in order to develop confidence in using the language meaningfully for different purposes.

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