

English Background as the Predictors for Students' Speaking Skills in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper is based on the English background of the students as the predictors for students English speaking skills at the secondary level at province of Sindh, Pakistan. A questionnaire was designed for students of grade-11, which was used to collect data from 60 male students of the public institutes in district Hyderabad, Pakistan. There were three independent variables used in this study: (X_1) either students attended English language institute, (X_2) number of years students were educated in English medium schools, and (X_3) last class's English score. The dependent variable was English speaking score (Y). Students' speaking skills were assessed by a standardized rubric designed by language experts. There were four research questions formulated. Data was analyzed using linear and multiple regression, and t-test in SAS 9.2 (*Statistical Analysis System*). With $\alpha=0.05$, the result indicates that there is a significant relationship between student last class's English score ($N=60$, $M=50.45$, $SD=9.00$) and their speaking scores ($N=60$, $M=11.77$, $SD=3.21$), $r = 0.73$, $p<0.001$. The number of years educated in English medium school ($b = 0.22$, $t=2.05$) and last class's English score ($b = 0.26$, $t = 8.26$, $p < .0001$) were found significant predictors at $R^2 = 0.57$, $F(2,57) = 37.20$, $p<0.001$. No statistical significance was indicated in students speaking score between those who attended English language institute ($N=48$, $M= 12.04$, $SD= 3.43$) and those who did not attend an English language institute ($N=12$, $M= 10.67$, $SD= 1.83$), $t(58) = -1.34$, $p = 0.19$. Interaction with students showed that most of the students do not speak English with fellow students because of shyness and lack of confidence.

Keywords: English speaking, language, speaking skills, secondary school.

Introduction

The main motive of Education is to enlighten man from the deep slumber and the darkness of one's false convictions. It enhances man's mind to make him curious about different learning avenues to wander and capture the pearls and treasures. To cope up with world changing conditions and reaching to the top steeple, one has to climb a ladder and for that English Language is considered to be an important vehicle or source especially in developing countries such as Pakistan. No one can ignore the importance of it and its need to grasp the essence of knowledge. No country can live an isolated life in this modern era. According to Thirmumalai (2002, p.1), "Language so far we know is something specific to human from all living beings. Language therefore remains potentially a communications medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts". There is a dire need of political, economical, and cultural link with the rest of the world. We shall, therefore have to depend on English for contact with western thoughts and cultures. And these both are not understandable until we have Language proficiency.

Whether one accepts it or ignore the fact that man is judged by his language oracy. Appearance and affluence go sideline if the mouth is failed to express his thoughts with accuracy and fluency. The world is acknowledging the importance of English, countries like China and Japan who believed in their Language sufficiency are now changing their mode and exploring English to get in touch with fast paced life style. Our country, Pakistan, is yet facing the problem of bilingualism and trilingualism. A lot of Pakistani students can not follow English language properly in their classes as a result most of them fail in English examinations (Thirmumalai, 2002). English is compared to Urdu or Sindhi which should not be because English is learnt world-wide to get a closure to world's resources. At one side we get enthused by those who speak it and on the other hand we make ourselves realized that native speech is our first priority if that is so then we have to come out of its influence but we cannot do it.

English language learning has vast diversity and many ways are invented by pedagogues but yet our strategy is not well conversant. Learning any language requires skill. To achieve the objectives of learning, four skills are always discussed; these are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Categorically speaking comes at first,

speaking English is akin to good knowledge of the subject. An aura is imperative to speak English fluently. In our classroom situation stress is laid on reading. That is just to put a cart before a horse. Modern educationists are of the view that teaching a language should start with oral presentation because it can be a great help in the learning of reading and writing skills both these skills are based upon the spoken language. Speech is primary, original, under viewed and the only one of the skills that can be self-sufficient in practice (Tahir, 2009).

Rationale

The education system of Pakistan is devoid of equanimity. It fosters a teaching which has created class complex. Generally two classes have emerged, classified as public and private sector. The private sector has put up its effort to enhance the spoken skills of students but public sector which is a dominant part of our country is yet fail in providing an aura to increase proficiency in English speaking. Secondary level students' have lack speaking skills and hence passing from anxiety. Our instructional methodologies lack persistency and effectual impact on students' mind. Their base shows the pathetic picture of their language grasp albeit they are talented and curious to learn. They consider English as something difficult to reach.

Significance

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship of students' speaking skills with their last class's English score, their number of years educated in English medium schools, and whether they attended English language institutes or not. The findings will be helpful to policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, parents, and students.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between students last class's English score and their current speaking skills?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the number of years students were educated in English medium school and their current speaking skills?
3. What is the influence of English medium schooling and last class's English score to predict students speaking skills.
4. Is there any significant difference between the speaking skills of students who attended English language institutes and the students who did not attend English language institutes?

Review of Literature

Every nation has different languages to speak and communicate but the language which is connecting all races together is English, which has gained world popularity and fame. It is responsible for our contacts with the outside world as a link with the west and other part of the world. English is bound to retain a significant place. No country can live an isolated life in the modern era.

In Pakistan, English is being taught as a second compulsory language. It is a foreign language and occupies an international position hardly enjoyed by any other language. Moreover, the political supremacy of the English people led to the rapid spread of the English language. The rising power of the United States of America and its fast spreading influence played a vital role in guiding the growth of English and helping it assume an eminent position all over the world. Its privileged position is recommended for the following reason.

- An international Language of communication.
- Language of the Higher Profession.
- A language of world knowledge.
- A rich store of literature.
- International Exchange of Teachers and students (Tahir, 2009).

Mahboob(2003) argued that English is a powerful international language, and that this power refers that Education plays a vital role in education around the world, including in Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. He further argues that English is considered as the status of society (Mahboob, 2005). Though the national language of Pakistan is Urdu but still Pakistan is the 9th English speaking country in the world with 18 million people can speak English (Gazzana, 2010).

Thirumulai(2002) English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. In this computer age, English is bound to expand its domains of use everywhere. Everyone wants to appropriate English as their own.

English is the official language in Pakistan. Today, we need English mainly from the utilitarian point of view rather than the cultural purposes. As a language of great utility, English serves as the medium through which we can establish contact with the intellectual world abroad and thus know what is happening elsewhere. Therefore, the main purpose of teaching English is not to give our students access to literature but to make them active user of simple, natural and living English (Tahir, 2009). Abid (2005), in the modern world need of English is

imperative and it can very conveniently be granted the status of Lingua Franca. He further says, "We have to change our myopic outlook and concede this fact without feeling any danger to our sense of patriotism or independence that English is the most important international language...We must have proficiency in this language." (p. 250). In addition to this, a visiting professor of linguistics Dr. Peter Grundy, honorary fellow at the language center, of the University of Durham, UK, and a visiting professor of linguistics at the University of Vienna, Australia, was in Karachi for the Spelt (Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers). He does not agree with phrase 'Foreign Language' and terms it as an old fashioned British way of describing it he explains that if he wants to learn Urdu, he will learn it as Urdu not as a foreign language; similarly English be learnt as a language because it is the lingua Franca (language of communication) of the world. (Dr. Grundy, SPELT conference, October 14, 2011).

Problems of English pronunciation

There is a unique method to overcome pronunciation problems sometimes seems meaningless since the pronunciation errors change from one society to another and even among the learners (Menzel et. al., 2001). Pakistan being a linguistically diverse region has a diglossic situation in which two or more distinct languages can be used by the same speech community (Akram & Yasmeen, 2011). English pronunciations are more slipshod and slovenly than in any other language in Europe. There is no correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. Sometimes the words are pronounced alike but they are spelled differently and vice versa. The following are the difficulties that our students face in learning English pronunciation (Hussain, 2005):

- a) Difficulties with vowel and consonant sounds
- b) Difficulties with stress
- c) Difficulties with intonation
- d) Difficulties with rhythm
- e) Difficulties with orthography

Research Methodology

The researcher used multiple regression analysis techniques and t-test to analyze data. The emphasis was given in practical approach of research. One close ended questionnaire was designed for students for data collection. The students speaking skills was assessed by standardized rubric designed by language experts. The results of students' speaking skills were analyzed against their independent variable. There were three independent variables (IV) and one dependent variable (DV)

- Dependent variable – students' speaking skill score (Y)
- Independent variables – attended English language institute (X_1), number of years educated in English medium schools (X_2), students last class's English score (X_3).

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher with the help of related literature. The questionnaire was used to collect data from students. With the help of English language experts, the researcher also assessed students speaking skills by standardized rubric. The English speaking test was based on simple introduction, general likeness and dis-likeness, hobbies, and activities. The duration of the English speaking test was ten minutes. Students were not assessed by their knowledge. They were assessed by their pronunciation, structure, cohesion, coherence, and selection of appropriate words.

Population

The population for this study was all the students of grade XI (referred as first year of college) of public higher secondary schools and colleges in the district Hyderabad, Province of Sindh, Pakistan.

Sample

The 60 students were selected randomly as a sample for this study from all the public institutes of Sindh, Pakistan.

Procedure

As a first step, a questionnaire was filled by students in which they were asked to give their background information regarding English language. The researcher with the help of English language experts assessed English speaking skills of students by standardized rubrics. The scores of the English speaking test ranged from 1 to 20 which was the independent variable in this study. The scores of students speaking skills were then matched against students' number of years attended English medium schools and their previous English examination score. The sample had one dichotomous variable of either they have attended English language institute or not. The required statistical procedures were run on SAS to interpret the results.

Results

As there are three independent predictors and one dependent variable, linear and multiple regression analysis were used as the main statistical procedure for the purpose to answer the research questions.

With $\alpha=0.05$, the two variables last class's English score (X_3) and students English speaking scores (Y) are highly correlated. The result indicates that there is a significant relationship between student last class's English score ($N=60$, $M=50.45$, $SD=9.00$) and their speaking scores ($N=60$, $M=11.77$, $SD=3.21$), $r = 0.73$, $P<0.001$. The coefficient of determination r^2 is 0.53, which means that 53.42% of the variance can be explained by the model. It shows that 53.42% English speaking scores can be predicted by knowing student last class's English score. English language institutes are also the factors that affect students speaking skills. The results show that the students who attended English language institute, their last class's English score ($N=48$, $M=51.46$, $SD=9.40$) is correlated with English speaking scores ($N=48$, $M=12.04$, $SD=3.43$), $r = 0.73$, $P<0.001$. The coefficient of determination r^2 is 53.75% while the students who did not attend English language institute, their last class's English score ($N=12$, $M=46.42$, $SD=5.93$) is correlated with English speaking scores ($N=12$, $M=10.67$, $SD=1.83$), $r = 0.5765$. The coefficient of determination r^2 is 33.23%.

With $\alpha=0.05$, the result indicates that there is no significant relationship between the number of years educated in English medium school ($N=60$, $M=5.25$, $SD=2.61$) and students English speaking scores ($N=60$, $M=11.77$, $SD=3.21$), $r=0.22$, $p=0.10$. The coefficient of determination is 4.7% which means that only 4.7% students speaking scores were explained by their number of years attended English medium school.

When students' speaking skills is predicted, the results show that with $\alpha=0.05$, the number of years educated in English medium school ($b = 0.22$, $t=2.05$, $p=0.0448$) and last class's English score ($b = 0.26$, $t = 8.26$, $p < .0001$) were significant predictors. The both predictors predicted the proportion of variance in English speaking scores, $r^2 = 0.56$, $F(2, 57) = 37.20$, $p < 0.001$. The overall model fit was $r^2=0.5662$ which means that 56.62% students speaking skills were explained by two predictors (i.e. Last year's English score and the number of years attended English medium school). The multiple regression equation to predict students speaking score is defined as, English speaking score = $-2.36 + 0.26(\text{Last year's English score}) + 0.22(\text{number of years attended English medium school})$.

An independent t-test was used to find if there was any significant difference between the speaking skills of students who attended English language institutes and the students who did not attend English language institutes. The t-test result with $\alpha=0.05$, no statistical significance was indicated in students speaking score between those who attended English language institute ($N=48$, $M= 12.041$, $SD= 3.4268$) and those who did not attend English language institute ($N=12$, $M= 10.6667$, $SD= 1.8257$), $t(58) = -1.34$, $p = 0.1863$.

Discussion

Pakistani educators are concerned that the English language is taught in Pakistan in very unsatisfactory condition (Warsi, 2004). Teacher of English has a big responsibility to foster and especially if the matter is of intermediate level the student need much concentration and conducive pedagogies. English teachers need sound knowledge and of general linguistics which will help them to formulate for their relationship between language and literature, to find out the essential elements in the learning of the English language, to have knowledge of contemporary English and also to study their local variety of English. English teachers have to secure a stable basis for teaching and maintaining a reasonable spoken standard through a study of phonetics of English. The methods of teaching a foreign language like English are determined by the aims of teaching the language.

Though students are considered to learn English speaking from their educational institutes, there are other internal and external factors that affect English speaking skills in students. The internal factors like self-confidence, competence/ learning ability, and tendency towards speaking English language and the external factors like environment, family, teaching methodology, and school curriculum. Family status also determines learning of the English language. According to Rahman (2002), English is considered as the language of the elite class. Parents with higher levels of education are also more likely to deem strongly in their abilities to help their child's education. Students who do not get the same atmosphere of language learning in their homes get difficulty in learning English language. If family environment is conducive for English learning and speaking then it will affect student's learning in classroom. Coleman (2010) argued in his study that parents should speak English at home so that studying in school should be easier for their children.

The results of this study indicate that English speaking scores is influenced 53% by students' last class English score. Students learned in the last class with English as a subject, they showed their competency in English speaking in the next class, meaning that their skills were reflected in their speaking. Further, it can be concluded that speaking scores are not related to the number of years English language studied rather it can be the effect of some other factor such as the quality of teaching. If a student is able to learn English under qualified and skilled teachers then he/she will learn English quickly, so a number of years doesn't matter rather quality of teaching matters. The results also indicate that there is no significant difference between the speaking skills of students who studied at English institutes and those who did not; it is recommended that in order to improve students speaking skills, they need not to attend English institutes or English medium schools but they should devote their

full time and efforts to their regular class English learning. According to Rahman (2002), it is very important to know English to get a good job in military, bureaucracy, and the private sector.

There is a dire need of political, economic and cultural link with the rest of the world. We shall, therefore, have to depend on English for international business, politics, and mainly on English for contact with western thought and culture (Shahid, 2002). There is also a lack of English environment in Pakistani educational institutes. Students do not get any chance either in the classroom or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations. Learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention (Bashir, 2011). Knowing a language implies mastery of basic speech sounds, grammatical patterns and essential vocabulary (Tahir, 2009).

In school level, Teachers usually follow Grammar –translation and direct –method in classes which have importance for the students of learning English as a second language but when one wants to give it an importance of first language much effort is needed to be fostered.

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Table 1. The correlation matrix of all variables

	Speaking skill (Y)	Attended English Language institute (X ₁)	Number of years attended English medium school (X ₂)	Last year's English score (X ₃)
N	60	60	60	60
Mean	11.77	0.80	5.25	50.45
S.D	3.21	0.40	2.60	9.00
Y	1.00	0.17	0.22	0.73
X ₁	0.17	1.00	-0.1	0.22
X ₂	0.22	-0.09	1.00	0.05
X ₃	0.73	0.23	0.05	1.00

Table 2. Regression model summary of the number of years attended English medium school (X_2) and last class's English score (X_3) with students speaking score (Y)

N	Df	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
60	2	0.75	0.57	0.55	37.20	<.0001

Table 3. Regression model summary of all independent variables (i.e attended English Language institute (X_1), the number of years attended English medium school (X_2), and last class's English score (X_3)) with students speaking score (Y)

N	Df	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
60	3	0.75	0.57	0.54	24.44	<.0001

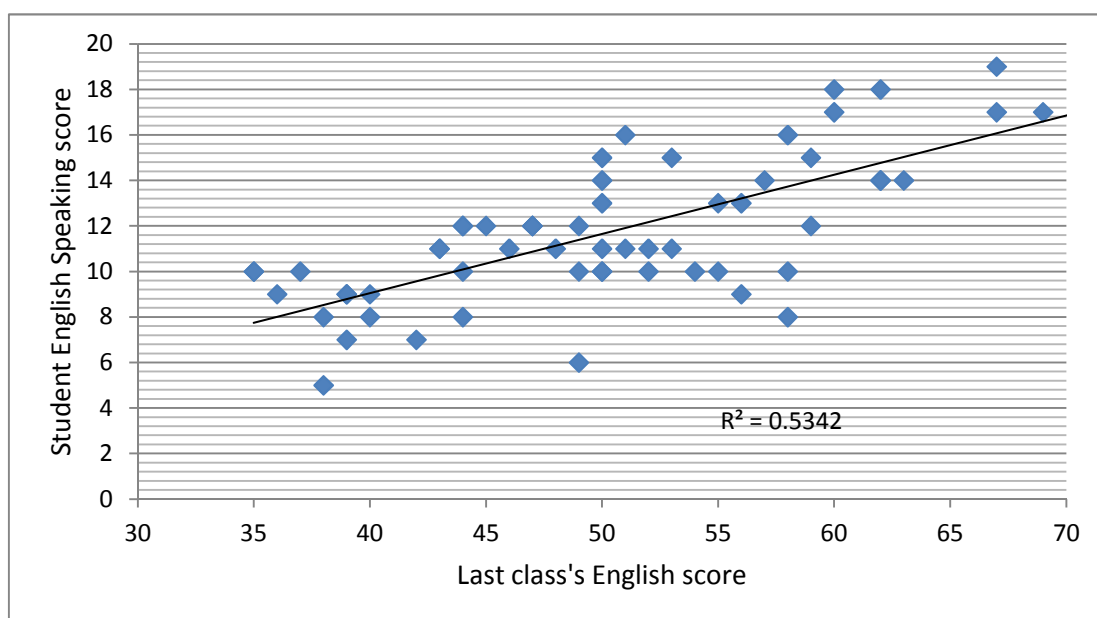


Figure 1. Scatter graph of student English speaking score against their last class's English score.