

Investigating Difficulties and Problems of Speaking Skills Encountered by Second Class at Secondary School Students

A case Study of Second Class Shiek Hamad Secondary School, Atbara Town (2015-2016)

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Abstract:

This study intends to investigate teaching the speaking skills at Sudanese secondary schools and problems that face learners when speaking in English. The study also intends to find solutions for these problems. For data collection the researcher applied the descriptive analytic method. The study population was Sudanese secondary schools. (second class students, English language teachers). The study has arrived at the following results: teachers are not well – trained to teach the speaking skills. Moreover, most of teaching activities are of the traditional modes such as reading dialogues, reciting texts.... etc. Lacking of using educational technology such as tapes, video, computer, TV and pictures in teaching English language. Furthermore, the study revealed that secondary schools students (second class) are not exposed to practicing speaking skills outside the classroom because there are no real situations for conversation. Finally the researcher discusses the results and suggests some

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recommendations and encourages teachers of English to do further studies on the same area.

Key words: L1: The first language or mother-tongue. L2: The second or foreign language. EFL: English as a foreign language.

SECTION ONE: PRELIMINARIES

1.1. Introduction:

English has become most widely spread as a language of international communication. People learn English because it is the language of modern sciences and technology. From a personal experience in teaching English language at secondary schools, the researcher has noticed that some Sudanese learners are faced by many problems so that they are generally silent, reluctant and unable to speak English inside the classroom. The learners' reluctance is observable to the extent that sometimes there may be no one in the classroom wants to participate. Another thing the researcher has noticed is that: teachers do most of talking, while the learners listen almost all the time except for short utterances to answer specific questions directed to them. Therefore, the interaction is usually dominated by a few fluent speakers, and the rest of the class just listen, passive learners, consequently they lose interest in the lesson. So this study intends to investigate the actual speaking problems which are not only caused by mother-tongue interference but also the ones that are caused by other factors and try to find solutions for them.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

This study deals with difficulties and problems of the speaking skills. It contains some questions as the following :

1. Why do Sudanese learners of English at secondary school having problems with the speaking skills ?
2. Are there any difficulties of the speaking skills among Sudanese learners of English as foreign language and how they could be solved?

1.3 Aims of the Study:

The aims of this study:

- a. Investigating and knowing the actual speaking problems that encountered by Sudanese learners at secondary school and the ones that are caused by mother-tongue interference.
- b. Stating the significance and feasibility of learning the speaking skills to be taught in separate lessons. Hence, this skill can be developed by using different effective techniques for practising the speaking skills, pair/ group work, conversations, role- play...etc.
- c. Discussing the findings and offering solutions, suggestions and recommendation that help in overcoming these problems.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

The speaking skills is the key to effective communication between people from divergent cultural backgrounds and for better cross- cultural understanding.

The speaking skills is part of daily life if the learners travel to an English speaking country. *"Strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of utterance due to his own linguists short coming"*. (Paul, et, 1984: 72).

This study has a fundamental value for teachers as it enables them to know better their learners' problems and helps

in solving these problems. Moreover, it may enable syllabus designers and teachers to prepare textbooks and teaching materials to suit their learners .

1.5 Research Questions:

1. The study carries the questions that intend to see to what extent do you agree that second class secondary school students have problems with the speaking skills?
2. Do you think that using of modern educational technology in teaching promotes English language learning (the speaking skills)? How?

1.6 Research Hypothesis:

The researcher hypothesis is that Sudanese learners of English as foreign language suffer from problems and difficulties with the speaking skills and help in solving these problems through different ways.

SECTION TWO: A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE SPEAKING SKILLS' PROBLEMS

2.1 Introduction:

It is noticeable that oral communication skills which include listening and speaking are neglected and paid less attention in classroom if compared with reading and writing. However, they play a vital part in language learning. The learners are made to read and write more than to speak. Moreover, they do not have opportunities to practice the speaking skills in an authentic setting, nor do they hear English being spoken outside the classroom.

2.2 Speaking Definition:

“Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in variety context”. (Chaney, 1998:13). Nevertheless, living in the world of today requires achieving the aim of teaching speaking which is enhancing students' communicative skill because in that way they can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriately in each communicative circumstances in order to teach second language learner how to speak in the most ideal way. Speaking refers to the beginning of human creation. Thus, a child can learn language and speaking from the surrounding or from his environment where he lives. *“A child can utter words then gradually can form full sentences until he can speak the language fluently and accurately”.*(Chaney, 1998:13). It is known that speech is produced by vocal organs in different phonological aspects such as stress, intonation, vowels, consonants, pauses and rhythms...etc. to form words and structure and finally to convey meaningful utterance. (Yule, 1996:175). The child must also be physically capable of sending and receiving sound signal in a language. According to (Paul, 2000:82) *“Speaking is not as simple as it seems”*. Many people do not take speaking in front of large group of people because of may making or producing many errors. This is especially true in a foreign language. Recognizable pronunciation is necessary for speech to be intelligible. There are some clear implications here for teaching: Try to create a relaxed atmosphere in your classes so that most learners are not frightened of speaking in front of the rest of the class. Do many activities of speaking such as pairs, group work, so that the learners can speak English without the rest of the class listening. Expose the learners as much as possible to speak in and outside classroom in English. Roger Scott (1981-9) states that : Oral communication is typified as an

activity involving two (or more) people where participants are both hearers and speakers having to reach to what they hear and make their contribution at high speed. Each participant has an intention or set of intentions-goals that he wants to achieve in the interaction. Each participant has to be able to interpret what is said to him which he cannot predict exactly either in term of form or in term of meaning and reply with what language he has disposal in a way that takes an account of what has just been said and which reflects his own intention at this point in the interaction. Spontaneous spoken language has certain characteristics as the following:

a. Redundancy: Whereas good writing should be precisely and should avoid repetition. This hardly the case with spoken language particularly that which happens in normal conversation while language in general usually provides extra cues for the reader or listener. Spoken language provides even more in the form of repetition, restarting and back tracking. This aspect of language after referred to as redundancy can be an advantage to the listener. It is an advantage that if the listener does not hear what is said the first time, he may have a second opportunity, when it is repeated.

b. Untidiness: Another major characteristic of spoken language is its untidiness. Spontaneous conversation often contains language structure that may not be strictly speaking grammatically. It is also untidy in the sense that it may contain unfinished utterances, pauses and even moments of silence. The second aspect of untidiness is probably an advantage to the listener because it gives him time to think and understands what he hears.

c. Environmental interference: Most spoken language requires the hearer to scope with such environmental uncertainties as background noise. Atypical example of these announcements at such places as airports, which require a

listener to pick the message out from the hum of surrounding conversation and the noise of traffic. The voice quality, the emotional states of both interlocutors and the loudness influence the perception of the message. The result is that the listener is often placed in a situation where he has to guess and fill in what he did not hear. Besides these features there are other features such as stress and intonation and the frequent false starts (unsuccessful beginnings). John petcock (1991-13) mentions the possible characteristics of a good speaker. They are: a- The speaker has to take account of the hearer. He must constantly monitor his listener to check that the assumptions he is making are indeed shared assumptions and that the listener understand what he is saying .b- He has to check to see what the attitudes of the hearer is to what he is saying and indeed how what he is saying appears to modify the hearers attitude to the speaker. c- He has to construct for the hearer a comfortable interactive structure. It is the duty of the speaker to make it clear when he is giving up his turn, in extended monologue a lecture, a public speech. It is the duty of the speaker to make clear the structure of his message. d-The speaker has to take account of the pressure of time. In a conversation the speaker speaks against time. He must not take up too long a turn in the conversation. People who take a long turn in conversation are considered borers. Yet he has to complete, whatever he wants to say before his interdictor breaks in. e- The speaker should have something interesting to say. f- He should have an interesting way of saying things. g- He should be brief.

2-3 The Features of Speaking: Features of speaking have important points they are as follows:

2.3.1 Fluency: (Gower, et al, 1995) state that, fluency can be thought of as ability to keep going when speaking spontaneous. When speaking fluently, students should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they have got regardless of grammatical and other mistakes. Normally, students should not be corrected during fluency activities. However, in feedback afterwards you can comment favorably on any strategies the students used to increase their fluency. For example, the use of natural sounding incomplete sentence, when did you go? On Tuesday (not I went Tuesday). "The use of common expressions like I see what you mean, never mind, what's the matter. Also fluency if you speak English quickly and easily if you are fluent in language, you usually speak it without hesitation. Your speech flows easily, both accuracy and fluency are important in language, you should aim to speak language both accurately and fluently ". (Hillary, 2001:42).

2.3.2 Accuracy: If you speak English, you speak it correctly try to make sure you avoid errors. (Hillary, 2001:42). According to (Gower, et al, 1995)" accuracy involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In controlled and guided activities the focus is usually on accuracy and the teacher makes it clear.

Ongoing correction is often appropriate during accuracy activities, in free activities the teacher is hoping for the correct use of language but is also keen to encourage the students' attempts to use the language they have in order to communicate".

2.3.3 Pronunciation: " Pronunciation is an important factor or aspect during the development of the speaking skills students' abilities to pronounce well show that they have stepped forward for learning English and this what teacher

should be given emphasis " (Gower,et al & Adam,2005). Elsasgheer, (2001:33) said that, "Too much attention should be given to proper pronunciation. Many students will not be able to make all the sounds, especially at first stage, and constant correction may discourage them. So, it is recommended that pronunciation should be taught to the students ". The aim of teaching pronunciation to non-native students is not necessarily to make them sound like native speakers of English. With the exception of a few highly gifted and motivated individuals such as a goal is quite unrealistic. The more modest and realistic goal that we have in mind is that of enabling learners to get above their level so that the quality of their pronunciation will not detract significantly from their ability to communication. (Elsagheer, 2001).

2.4 Significance of Speaking: In fact learners might have a question in their minds what is the significance of speaking English as a foreign language according to (Ur,1996:120), " of all the four skills listening, speaking, writing and reading " , speaking seems the most important. Indeed whether for business or pleasure, primary motivation to learn a second language is to be able to communicate with speakers of that language. This shows why so many language learners are very interested in the speaking skill. However, speaking is being an important skill, it is also a great challenge for foreign language learner and student must master several difficult micro skills, including the pronunciation of unfamiliar phonemes, the correct placement of stress and intonation. (Ur, 1996). But learners have less chances to speak English outside of classroom; also speaking classes do not provide opportunities for oral interaction this refers to teacher because she/he talks on throughout the lesson without giving learners a chance to speak.

2-5 Speaking Activities: There are some useful speaking activities to use with your pupils. The first ones are more controlled and can be used to practice in using certain structures (particularly in the early stages of learning English). The later ones are freer and can be used to give the pupils a chance to use English more independently. (Ibid, p;42). Some examples of speaking activities or communicative activities as that can be developed in class from the communicative point of view (Berns, 1984, p: 5) as cited in (Nahla, 2008):

a-"Language Game: are used frequently in the student find them enjoyable and if they are properly designed, they give students valuable communicative practice ". Games that are truly communicative according to (Marrow,1981 : 103) have the three features of communication " : information gap, choice and feedback.

2.5.1 Oral Activities in the English Class: If English teaching is to be successful, it must to become more student-centered. Another way of saying the same idea is that English teaching must become fewer teachers –centered. If the teacher feels that learning takes place only because the amount of talking he does, then he is probably deceiving himself about his own oral abilities. Students can learn from talking with and listening to their peers and can benefit socially from these activities. They should be given a lot of class opportunity to speak and listen.

2.5.2 Purpose of Oral Activities: Besides practicing the speaking skills, oral activities increase greatly the socialization possibilities in the classroom because in the classroom dominated by the teacher's voice, students may never get to know their classmates except through hearing them answering

teachers' questions. Goals of education should include social aims as well as cognitive goals.

2.5.3 Types of Oral Activities: A wide variety of oral activities can be used in the classroom. But some teachers think that oral activities are waste of time. They are bothered by the organization of group work or listening to the students talking in pairs. They don't like sitting by and letting class discussion go on without their intervention, but if teachers of English believe in the effectiveness of oral activities in the class in improving the students' speaking skill, their students will be provided with some exciting moments of significant learning. A few of the more promising activities are described below.

2.5.4 Group Discussions: Group discussion, both total class and small groups are valuable as a factor in improving the students' spoken English. At the presentation and practice stage of learning it is normally both economical and effective to teach the whole class as a single unit Even in the productive stage group discussion is effective. The school is micro – cosmic society and must have communication and social interaction. Group work helps the students to communicate easily and freely and to work together independently with only the minimum amount of direction from the teacher. When the students are speaking and listening together, they are acquiring social skills as well as improving their spoken English.

2.5.5 The Role of the Teacher in the Discussion lesson: a) The teacher must select activities that are suitable with the language of the students. He must explain to the students how they can do the activity. Sometimes an activity may need new language and the teacher must decide either to pre- teach the

new language or let the students ask when they feel they need it. The success or failure of an activity depends on the teacher's instruction. So the teacher must use simple language as far as possible and he can use the mother language if necessary while the activities are in progress. The teacher's main role is to move around the class and listen carefully in order to find how the students are getting on and provide help whenever it needed.

As for feedback the teacher in some cases, may ask the students to give their ideas before his comments. He can use the noticed mistakes as feed back or remedial teaching. Group discussion may involve many problems. Some teachers may feel dissatisfied because group discussion is time consuming and they can not see their students making obvious progress. It is true that progress can not be measured as it could be at the practice stage but teachers must remembers that students are not merrily reinforcing what they have learnt, but also using what they have learnt superficially at earlier stages. It is also, sometimes argued that lazy students will take advantage of group discussion to be over more lazier. This may sometimes happen however since students usually get more deeply involved in group work activities than in regular class work, laziness is not likely to increase. The teacher should be aware of the non- participating students and encourage them to participate.

b)-Role Play: It is very important in the communicative approach because it gives students opportunity to practice communicating in different social context and in different social roles. Role play can be set up so that it is very structured e.g. the teacher tells the students who they are, what the situation is and what they are talking about, but the students determine what they say. The latter is more in keeping with communication approach, of course because it gives students

more of a choice. In the role play, the students play roles, developing their language as they perform the characters they are pretending to be. This can affect excitingly in exploration of students' spoken language.

2.6 Normal Conversation: The researcher suggest to teachers of English especially Secondary Schools to set time for normal conversation. Although some teachers may feel bothered by the noise of their students' talk, no doubt they will gain a great benefit from this time allowed for conversation. As adults the students feel freed from the shyness and fear of errors and this will give them courage to participate. The teacher who tries classroom conversation may have to be cautious making his pupil to be so loud that he gets troubled by inability to manage the classroom. He may also encourage the shy ones to get involved by talking to them himself.

2-7 Speak Situation: A language varies according to the groups people belong to and interact with, and that most of the people are members of a number of social network, for example, our immediate community, colleagues, friends and those with whom we share particular interest or hobbies. Most of speech situation, or most situations in which people interact whether in speech, writing or other media are connected with social networks. In other words a conversation between members of youth gang differs from conversation between travelers on a train, because the members of gang shared "code ". Therefore, these two communicative situations are distinct from contextual points of view. (Davies and Dain, 2005:108).

2.8 Qualities of a Good Speaker:

"A speaker's skills and speech habits have an impact on the success of any exchange"(Duzer,1997). Speakers must be able

to anticipate and then produce the expected pattern of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting (Burns and Joyce, 1997). For example learner involved in the exchange with the sales person previously described must know the usual pattern that such an interaction follows and access that knowledge as the exchange progresses.

The learner must also choose the correct vocabulary to describe the item sought, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if the clerk does not understand and use appropriate facial expressions to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service, (Brown, 1994). Teachers should monitor learners' speech production to determine what skills and knowledge they already have and what areas need development.

2.9 Definition of Communication "Most notions of Cs restricted the concept of problem solving activities: "used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey individual's thought". (Thronike, 1977 : 195). "Potentially conscious plans for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal". (Faerch & Kasper, 1983 : 36 " Strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of utterance due to his own linguistic short coming". (Paul, et al, 1984: 72). To communicate is to convey idea and concept from person to another via a message. All living creatures have some means of conveying information to others of their own group. A communication being ultimately important for their survival, some use vocal noises or sounds other physical movement or facial expression. Birds use vocal signals man also is able to exploit a

range of techniques of communication. Man uses his body for gesture or to convey information by Facial expression. (Geoffery et al: 23). Ahmed et al, 2002 : 9) states that:

- a- "Communication skill such as structuring information, using an appropriate style of language using visual aids and adopting the right body language.
- b- Language to language such as the use of linkers and connectors emphasizing and minimizing information and contrast between written and spoken language".

2.9.1 Kinds of Communication :

Communicative competence from baby hood on words every body starts to learn how to communicate effectively and how respond to the people. In the process of communicating every speaker adjusts the way he speaks according to the situation he is in, the reason which motivates him and the relationship for foreign learner. It sometimes is more important to achieve this kind of communicative competence than to achieve formal linguistic correctness. (Ibid : 30).

2-9.2 Mood and Purpose : The way people communicate is a matter of choice but is restricted by the conversation of the speech community and the language itself . The external factors governing usage plan their part in decreeing what is appropriate to different circumstances. But it would be native to think that the speaker is linguistically at the mercy of the physical situation in which he finds himself. What the individual says is What he has chosen to say it a matter of his intention and purposes. (Ibid : 33) . Some situation in which certain intonations are expressed, certain transactions carried out, doesn't mean that this is typical of our language use I may have gone to the post office, not to buy stamps, but to complain the none arrival of a parcel to change

some money. So that I can make a telephone call, or to ask a friend of mine who works behind the counter whether he wants to come to a football match on Saturday afternoon. (Wilkins, 1976 17 : 33). Given freedom to choose the mood he wishes to convey as well as he wants, to say the speaker is constrained by the available resources of the language to fulfill his aim. (Ibid,34).

2.10 Problems in Speaking English as Foreign Language:

There are many experts that suggest about problem. One of them defines that a problem is something that if it appears many people will get dissatisfaction. It can make trouble and difficulty for people, they want to lose it. According to (Munjayanah,2004,:17), there are many problems of speaking as the following :

1. Inhibition: Learners are often inhibited about trying to say thing in foreign language in the classroom: worried about mistakes or simply shy of the attention that their speech attract.

2. Mother tongue use: For the student it is easier to use their mother tongue in the classroom because it looks naturally, so most of the students are not disciplined in using the foreign language in the learning process.

3. Nothing to say: Even the learners are not inhibited, they are often hear them complain that they cannot think of anything to say: they have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be spoken.

4. Low or uneven participation: Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard ; and in large group this means the each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not. There are other difficulties face students in speaking English:

Environment: Means the people outside the class. It does not help students to speak English frequently. Those people may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation. The response that the students get makes them lose their self-confidence to improve their speaking. Since the students do not want to be rejected by the people around them, so they use their native language in daily conversation. That makes the students unable to communicate in English fluently outside the class.

Grammar: Most students are very easy to get confused with English grammar, while grammar is very needed to form a right sentence. If the students do not have grammar mastery, of course they will not be able to produce sentences that are grammatically right. As it is known that the grammar students have is very weak. Thus, they feel embarrassed when they want to produce English sentences orally.

SECTION THREE: PROCEDURES

3.1 Research Method: The study followed descriptive analytic method for finding out difficulty and problems of the speaking skills encountered by second class secondary school (teachers' views) through a questionnaire directed to (110) teachers of English language at secondary schools including both males and females in Atbara town- participated in this study.

3.2 Research Design: The research was designed to investigate the difficulties and problems of the speaking skills that face secondary school students. The study collected data through questionnaire directed to (110) English language teachers. The questionnaire was designed with reference to what the teachers have already taught.

3.3 Research Population: The research population of this study is represented Sudanese secondary school students second class.

The subject of this research were teachers of English language at secondary school.

3.4 Research Sample: As for the research sample, it is represented in second class secondary schools students in Atbara town.(110 English language teachers) (teacher's views)

3.5 Instrument of Data Collection: For collecting data for this research, questionnaire as a data collection tool for Sudanese English language teachers at secondary school consisting of different items was designed.

3.6 Questionnaire Validity: English Language experts were requested to check the validity of questionnaire to give their views and advice. It was approved by a committee consisted of three associate professors from Sudan, Nile Valley and Khartoum university. They all approved the original copies and the necessary modification were done according to their recommendation.

3.7 Questionnaire Reliability: For checking the reliability of the questionnaire the researcher used the half split method and came up with the fact that it turned out to be (68%) and part two (79%).

SECTION: FOUR: RESULT, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTIONS.

4.1 Result Analysis:

The study has arrived at the following results:

- Teachers are not well – trained to teach the speaking skills.
- The brain – drain of competent teachers in the Sudan had destroyed not only the learning of English but also the whole educational system.
- The overcrowded classes in general education hinder the students from practicing the speaking skills inside classroom.
- Most of teaching activities are of the traditional modes such as reading dialogues, reciting texts etc.
- Lacking of using educational technology such as tapes, video, computer, TV and pictures in teaching English language.
- Secondary schools students (second class) are not exposed to practicing speaking skills outside the classroom because there are no real situations for conversation.

Table (1) bellow which has been resulted from the (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Science shows that the correlation is significant at (0.01) level

Statement	Option				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Most of students are not consistent in using the target language in the learning process, because they use their mother tongue in class.	44 40.0%	58 52.7%	3 2.7%	5 4.5%	0
Using Arabic language in daily conversations, makes EFL students unable to communicate in English outside the classroom fluently .	57 51.8%	40 36.4%	6 5.5%	6 5.5%	1 0.9%
Most of the EFL students are not involved to use the target language in the learning process .	18 16.4%	60 54.5%	13 11.8%	18 16.4%	1 0.9%
Communication skills are not introduced and tested in the secondary school EFL syllabus nowadays .	34 30.9%	38 34.5%	9 8.2%	26 23.6%	3 2.7%
Students may not want to speak inside the classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes .	43 39.1%	40 36.4%	7 6.4%	15 13.6%	5 4.5%
The type of tasks given to second class Secondary School students motivates them to communicate .	19 17.3%	29 26.4 %	17 15.5%	38 34.5%	7 6.4%
The Grammar Translation Method is not suitable for practicing the speaking skills .	40 36.4%	36 32.7%	11 10.0%	19 17.3%	4 3.6%
Most of the present textbooks' lessons focus on reading and writing rather than speaking.	49 44.5%	50 45.5%	1 0.9%	9 8.2	1 0.9%
Secondary School students should be provided at least with some visual aids to be used in teaching the speaking skills.	44 40.0%	56 50.9%	5 4.5%	4 3.6%	1 0.9%
Using of computer as a teaching aid develops speaking.	39 35.5%	47 42.7%	11 10.0%	11 10.0%	2 1.8%

4.2 Conclusion:

Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communication in second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in the school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language's teachers pay great attention in teaching speaking rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning processing and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

4.3 Recommendation:

Finally the researcher recommends that:

- * Teachers of English should be well – trained before starting their jobs.
- * Textbooks should be prepared well to encourage and motivate students to speak the language and learners should be given enough time to practice their speaking skills.
- * Encouraging forming English societies in schools.
- * School should be provided with language labs.

4.4 Suggestion for future Studies:

1. Investigation on materials used for teaching the oral skills will help to solve the spoken English fluency problem.
2. A comparative study on L¹ L² will reveal whether there is an influence of the former on the later or not.
3. Teachers of English should be encouraged to do further studies on the same area.

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