

## The Impact of Intensive Reading on Improving EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

ABDALLAH ADAM OSMAN ALGAZOLY  
Department of English, College of Languages  
Sudan University of Science and Technology  
Khartoum, Sudan  
TAJ ELSSIR HASSAN BASHOUM  
College of Languages  
Sudan University of Science and Technology

### **Abstract:**

*The study aims to investigate the impact of intensive reading on improving EFL learners' speaking skill. To achieve the aims of the study the researcher has used the descriptive and analytical method. The subject of this study is teachers of English Language from different representative of Sudanese Universities who have long experience in teaching English as a foreign language, and forty of them have been taken as a sample of the study. The researcher has used a questionnaire to collect the relevant data. Then, he has used the statistical program (SPSS) to analyze these data. After analyzing them, the researcher has come to: students can improve and develop themselves in speaking skill when they are reinforcing their reading skill and this view strongly supported by 90% of teachers who have long experience in the same field of teaching English as a foreign language. In addition to that the majority of teachers assured that students can achieve their accuracy and fluency in oral communication through intensive reading. And the researcher has recommended that students must be exposed to different components of topics in intensive reading so as to develop their speaking skill and teachers must consider the aspects of accuracy and fluency when students' exposed to intensive reading so as to develop them respectively.*

**Key words:** intensive reading, Speaking skills, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, accuracy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a formal system of signs governed by grammatical rules of combination to communicate meaning. This definition stresses the fact that human languages can be described as closed structural systems consisting of rules that relate particular signs to particular meanings (Bloomfield, 1914). So, one can say that Language is basically speech. It is universal among human beings who use it for carrying out various activities of life. In addition to that Language acquisition without reading is so difficult, because reading is a good way of comprehension. A good reader is able to understand sentences and structures of a written text and transfer them into oral communication. Students through reading can develop in both fluency and accuracy of expression in their speaking skill. Davies and Pearse (2000) stress the importance of communication as: "Real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom.

## 2. SPEAKING

Speaking is how to interact the process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information. As stressed by (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). This form and meaning of speaking are dependent on the context in which it occurs; it's including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving However, speech is not always unpredictable.

Speaking can help students to develop their vocabulary and grammar and then improving their writing skill. With speaking, learners can express their personal feeling, opinions or ideas; tell stories; inform or explain; request; converse and discuss, i.e. through speaking, people can display the different functions of language. Speaking is very important outside classroom as well. Many companies and organizations look for people who speak English very well for the purpose of communicating with other people. So, speakers of foreign languages have more opportunities to get jobs in such companies. Baker and Westrup (2003: 05) support that “a student who can speak English well may have greater chance for further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion.”

Nowadays, along with the strengthening position of English as a language for international communication, the teaching of speaking skill has become increasingly important in the English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) context. The teaching of speaking skill is also important due to the large number of students who want to study English in order to be able to use English for communicative purposes. In recent teaching context, a lot of attention has been paid to design activities which focus more on tasks that are balanced between the need to achieve fluency and accuracy. These criteria are also based upon in the assessment of the oral skills.

In the communicative approach, fluency and accuracy are of the main characteristics of this approach, and they are seen as complementary in accomplishing a given task. Although Richards and Rodgers (2001: 157) mention that “fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: Accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context”,

Many questions have been raised about the role of accuracy in Communicative Language Theory (CLT). Hedge (2000: 61) emphasizes the importance of speaking, pointing out that “The communicative approach somehow excuses teachers

and learners from a consideration of how to develop high levels of accuracy in the use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.” Learners then should develop a communicative competence through classroom practice; however, simultaneously they should know how the language system works in a correct and appropriate way.

## **2.1 Fluency**

The main goal teachers wish to achieve in teaching the productive skill of speaking is oral fluency; it is the main characteristics of the speaker performance. Hughes (2002) defines fluency as the ability to express oneself in an intelligible, reasonable and accurate way without too much hesitation; otherwise the communication will break down because listeners will lose their interest. To achieve this goal, teachers then should train learners to use their personal language freely to express their own ideas and then avoid imitations of a model of some kind. Hedge Tricia (2000: 54) adds also that “The term fluency relates to the production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate show-ness, or undue hesitation.”

One can say, it is the ability to respond in a coherent way through linking the words and phrases effectively, pronounce the sounds clearly, using stress and intonation, i.e. doing all of these quickly. Hughes (2002) supports also that fluency and coherence refer to the ability to speak in a normal level of continuity, rate and effort in addition to link the ideas together in a coherent way. Speech rate and speech continuity are the key indicators of coherence.

Many of second language speakers think of fluency as the ability to speak fast, that is why they start speaking rapidly without pauses. Thornbury, (2005) argues that speed is an important factor in fluency and pausing too, because speakers need to take breath. Native speakers also need to pause from

time to time in order to let the interlocutors catch what they said. However, a frequent pausing is an indication that the speaker has problems of speaking. In such cases Thornbury suggests what is called „tricks“ or production strategies, i.e. the ability to fill the pauses. The most common pause fillers are “uh” and “um”, vagueness expressions such as “short of” and “I mean”. Another device for filling the pauses is the repetition of one word when there is a pause.

## **2.2 Accuracy**

Most second language teachers nowadays put emphasis on the term of accuracy in their teaching because learners seek more to be fluent and they forget about being accurate. Without structuring accurate speech, speakers will not be understood and their interlocutors will lose interest if they perform incorrect utterances each time. Therefore, paying attention to correctness and completeness of language form is of more importance for oral proficiency. (Skehan 1996: 23 cited in Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005: 139) define accuracy as referring “to how well the target language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language.

## **3. READING**

Reading is one of the most effective ways of foreign language learning. Reading simply is the interpretation of a written message. Walter R. Hill (1979, p.4) briefly defines reading as what the reader does to get the meaning he needs from contextual resources. Reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning and the goal of reading is comprehension (Nunan, 2003, p.68). The ability to read requires that the reader draw information from a text and combine it with information and expectations that the reader already has (Grabe, Stoller, 2001, p.187). Alderson J.C. (2000) states that

reading is built from two components: word recognition and comprehension. These two components gained through reading will foster learners' language competence. Krashen and Terrell (1989, p.131) point out that reading enables learners to comprehend better which is an important factor that can develop language competence.

Hedge (2003) writes the goals of learners' in a reading process as:

- The ability to read a wide range of texts in English.
- Building knowledge of language which will facilitate reading ability.
- Building schematic knowledge.
- The ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purpose (skimming, scanning).
- Developing an awareness of the structure of written texts in English.
- Taking a critical stance to the contexts of the texts.

Reading will add to learners' conversational performance. Reading will help learners to decipher new words that they need for conversations. Through reading language learners will have vocabulary knowledge which will facilitate their speaking performance and their usage of structure in the target language will develop. These components which are required through reading are all necessary for developing speaking skills. Similarly, Williams (1984, p.13) suggests some reasons why language learners should read in a foreign language:

- Learners can have further practice in the language that they have learnt,
- Learners can practice language in order to reuse it in other skills such as speaking and writing,
- Learners can learn how to get benefit from the texts to extract the information they need,
- Learners can find enjoyment or interest through reading.

Sanacore (1994, p.604), is of the opinion that encouraging learners to read will lead them guessing the meanings of words, phrases from the context, and the more they read the more they will understand the meanings of sentences and concepts. And an ongoing reading habit will enable learners understand a text easily; even they do not know meanings of some words in the text. Reading extensively will enhance their comprehension. Learners will easily comprehend in the foreign language if they advance their ability of guessing the meanings of words from context which will promote their speaking performance. Indeed, reading power relies on continuous improvement in vocabulary knowledge that provides oral communication and gives students self-confidence to practice English. The importance of word knowledge, which facilitates speaking skills, has been a major resource in the development of reading skills. Therefore fostering improvement in word knowledge through wide reading has the potential for fostering improvement in speaking skills. In addition to that intensive reading is a good classroom activity carried on under the guidance of the teacher. It is mainly concerned with texts and involves focusing upon new words, structures, expressions, functions, pronunciations, and on cultural insights. It is carefully guided so that thorough understanding of the content can be reflected in students' oral communication.

#### **4. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The paper aims to identify The Impact of Intensive Reading on Improving EFL Learners' Speaking skills; in particular to investigate the two terms of fluency and accuracy which one is improve better than other in the application of intensive reading.

## **5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aims to find out the areas of weakness and strength of students' performance in order to reinforce the strength and find solution of weakness to provide practical ways for boosting the students' self-confidence.

## **6. METHODS**

The researcher provides description of the study methodology, specifically the research tools utilized for data collection which includes the measuring instruments, the population (subjects) the procedures and the statistical analysis applied in the study. The researcher has followed the descriptive analytic method. He has used (SPSS) (statistical package social science) program to analyze the data. The study was designed to answer the following question;

**1- Which aspect of speaking improves better than others, accuracy or fluency as a result of the application of intensive reading?**

### **6.1 Subjects**

The subjects of the study have composed from teachers of English language in some representative Sudanese Universities, they have been teaching English as a foreign language at the departments of English language and linguistics for long time.

### **6.2 Sample**

Forty teachers were randomly selected from different Sudanese representative Universities. And all of them have been teaching English as a foreign language.



### 6.3 Instruments

The researcher has used a questionnaire as an instrument for collecting relevant data of the study. The questionnaire was designed on liker scale of five points. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). Before the questionnaire could be given to the universities teachers, it was exposed to the long experienced teachers to judge it. After tryout and piloting, the questionnaire had become a valid tool to collect the relevant data.

### 6.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher was distributed forty questionnaires to the forty teachers by hand and he collected their questionnaires and analyzed them by using (SPSS). Then, the answers which had given to the questionnaires were descriptively analyzed and presented in the findings below.

### 6.4 Findings and Discussion

**Variable 1:** (As students develop stronger reading skills, they further develop more speaking skills).

**Table (1)**

Variable 1	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	16	40.0%
Agree	20	50.0%
Neutral	3	7.5%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Total	40	100.0%

According to the table (1) above, it shows that 16 teachers have chosen the alternative strongly agree which represent 40% and 20 of them have responded agree which represent 50% while 3 teachers have chosen the alternative neutral which represent 7.5% whereas 1 teacher had chosen disagree which represent 2.5%. From the explanation above 36 teachers have responded

the alternative strongly agree and agree which represent 90% from the whole sample. From these interpretations I can able to say that students can improve and developing themselves in speaking skill when they are developing and improving their reading skill and this view strongly supported by 90% of the teachers who have long experience in the same field of teaching English as a foreign language.

**Variable 2:** (In intensive reading, the learners' accuracy can be achieved in oral communication).

**Table (2)**

Variable 2	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	15	37.5%
Agree	15	37.5%
Neutral	8	20.%
Disagree	2	5.%
Total	40	100.%

From the table (2) above the answers of teachers like this; 15 teachers have chosen the alternative strongly agree it means 37.5% and 15 teachers selected agree which represent 37.5% while 8 teachers neutral it means 20% and 2 of them disagree which represent 5%. from the explanation above 30 teachers have chosen strongly agree and agree which represent 75% from the whole sample. So, I can say that the variable is strongly supported by the majority of teachers this means that students can achieve their accuracy in oral communication through intensive reading. And this is assured by: (Nunan, 2003). (Harmer, 2001) note down that from the communicative point of view, speaking has many different aspects including two major categories – accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practiced through controlled and guided activities; and, fluency, considered to be ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously’. Bygate (1991) also emphasizes knowledge of the language, and skill in

using this knowledge for an effective communication. Language knowledge and skill in using it are considered two fundamental elements of an effective communication.

**Variable 3:** (Teachers give little attention to intensive reading therefore; students are weak in speaking skill).

**Table (3)**

Variable 3	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	45%
Agree	15	37.5%
Neutral	6	15%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Total	40	100%

According to the table (3) above the teachers indicate that 18 teachers have responded the alternative strongly agree which represent 45% and 15 of them have chosen agree which represent 37.5% while 6 teachers have decided neutral it means 15% whereas only 1 teacher had chosen disagree which represent 2.5%. It is very clear that 33 teachers have chosen the alternative strongly agree and agree which represent 82.5% this means that the majority of them accepted and supported the variable which is saying " teachers give little attention to intensive reading therefore; students are weak in speaking skill". So, teachers must focus and concentrate on intensive reading so as to reinforce their students' ability in speaking skill, otherwise they will remain weak in their talking. As intensive reading is used around the world it is believed that in teaching reading comprehension intensive reading can be beneficial to expand reading comprehension (Yang, Dai, & Gao, 2012). Waring (1997) argues that intensive reading is very useful for learning vocabulary and understanding how text is organized. Stahl (2003) found that there is relationship between intensive reading activities and overall language proficiency. Some scholars believe that some students who find reading

difficult cannot successfully derive the meanings of words as well as those who are at higher level of vocabulary knowledge.

**Variable 4:** (Students read intensively to develop fluency in their speaking skill).

**Table (4)**

Variable 4	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	7	17.5%
Agree	21	52.5%
Neutral	9	22.5%
Disagree	3	7.5%
Total	40	100.0%

From the table (4) above, it shows that 7 teachers have responded the alternative strongly agree which represent 17.5% and 21 teachers have chosen agree which represent 52.5% while 9 teachers have chosen neutral which represent 22.5% whereas 3 of them have chosen disagree which represent 7.5%. So, from the above interpretation 28 teachers have responded the alternative strongly agree and agree which represent 70% from the whole sample and this means that the majority of teachers have strongly supported and accepted the variable. Therefore, students must read intensively to recognize new vocabulary, pronunciation of new words, expressions...etc. this is actually will raise their capabilities to develop and reinforce their speaking fluency.

**Variable 5:** (Students learn new vocabulary from text is crucial to enhance their speaking skill).

**Table (5)**

Variable (5)	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	15	37.5%
Agree	19	47.5%
Neutral	4	10.0%
Disagree	2	5.0%
Total	40	100.0%

The table (5) shows that 15 teachers have chosen strongly agree which represent 37.5% and 19 of them have responded agree which represent 47.5% while 4 teachers have selected neutral it means 10% whereas 2 teachers have chosen disagree. From the above explanation there are 34 teachers have responded the alternative strongly agree and agree which represent 85% and this means that the majority of them supported and accepted the variable. Therefore; students can learn new vocabulary from text to enhance their speaking skill. Because, vocabulary knowledge indispensable for effective communication. Lewis (1993, p.2) writes that learning vocabulary is the core task in second language learning and any language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating cannot exist without vocabulary. Vocabulary understands the meaning of a word, so communication does not occur if there are no words. Therefore reading is probably the best way to learn new words. Reading results in incidental vocabulary acquisition (Lechmann, 2007). Nation supports this idea and says: "Reading has long been seen as a major source of vocabulary growth" (Nation, 1995, p.7). Most people recognize the important relationship between knowing words and reading well. Eskey, supporting this notion, states that "the relationship between reading and vocabulary is well documented and reciprocal" (Eskey, 2005, p.567). And, "in fact the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is well established in the reading literature" (Dole, Sloan, Trathen, 1995, p.452). Hedge (1985, p.77) also states that through extensive reading learners advance their ability to of guessing the meanings of unknown words and phrases from clues in the context and he concludes that students who read a lot outside the classroom may increase both their comprehending the context and improving their vocabulary which are essential elements to advance speaking skills. Students' performance in speaking can be raised when their teachers give them intensive reading materials from

different topics because these topics enable them to recognize different things and enlarge their repertoire which reflected in their speaking skill. And this point of view strongly supported and accepted by Koizumi (2005).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Students must be exposed to different components of topics in intensive reading so as to develop their speaking skill.
- Teachers must consider the aspects of accuracy and fluency when students' exposed to intensive reading so as to develop them respectively.
- Teachers must focus and concentrate on intensive reading more and more to reinforce their students' ability in speaking skill; otherwise they will remain weak in their talking. As intensive reading is used around the world it is believed that in teaching reading comprehension intensive reading can be beneficial to expand reading comprehension and it leads to good oral communication.
- Teachers must encourage students to read intensively to recognize new vocabulary, pronunciation of new words, expressions...etc. this is actually will raise their capabilities to develop and reinforce their speaking fluency.

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