Improving the Oral Fluency of First Year English Major Students via Enhancing Their Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

This action research was aimed at identifying the challenges of developing oral communication skills and fostering students’ English language oral communication using active learning methods. The study adopted a descriptive research design and followed the qualitative approach. Nine respondents were purposively selected for focused group discussion based on their academic achievement. Peer observation was conducted during pre and post interventions to thoroughly assess the root cause of the problems and see the impact of the intervention.

In the first phase which was problem identification, causes of the problems were identified. These were; lack of active participation in the class, mother tongue interference, fear of making mistakes while speaking, and lack of exposure to practice speaking out of the class. Findings from focused group discussion and classroom observations during the post intervention revealed that learners have shown a noticeable improvement in showing motivation to share ideas in the class using the target language due to the intervention as per the identified problems. The warm-up and language game activities, and the active learning methods used, encouraged them to be involved in various classroom tasks. Changing learners’ attitude towards making mistakes whenever they were involved in speaking activities made them participate freely. The strategy of thinking in English also benefited students in bringing expressions to their memory so as to encourage them to spontaneously use the terms and expressions whenever they were ready to speak. All these were seen as reasons for learners’ improved classroom interaction and oral communication during the four-week intervention period.

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Keywords: ALMs – Active Learning Methods; Oral communication; Action research.

1. Introduction

Language is an instrument for communication used only by human beings to share their ideas, views, knowledge, and experience with each other [13]. It is impossible to imagine the world with no communication since it is the start for all human activities [19]. Therefore, it is a crucial tool that allows people to get together and consult each other to lead their life in the right way.

The term ‘communication’ has a broad concept, which embraces various forms. For instance, it may take place in the form of intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and mass settings [14]. On the other hand, oral and written communications are other forms of communications. Written communication uses writing as a channel to communicate with people. In contrast, oral communication is the most accessible and widely used means of communication, which is practiced just by word of mouth [21]. As a result, students of different levels learn to improve their oral fluency in various languages [18].

In the case of Ethiopia, where English language is a medium of instruction beginning from high schools to university levels, spoken English is taught mainly for the sake of improving learners English language oral communication skills. According to [4], students need to interact with their teacher and amongst themselves to learn and share ideas via the target language. Poor oral fluency, on the other hand, results in poor performance of expressing oneself, and this in turn has an impact on students’ confidence to participate in class even on familiar issues [19].

More than 50% of the subjects of this research were observed to have poor oral communication skills performance. They were not capable of communicating through English language though they were English language majoring students. This would lead them to come across various challenges in their academic life, and even on their job after graduation due to their poor oral fluency [25]. Since they were majoring in English language, they are expected to take part in different jobs, which would be directly related to their field of study when they graduate; such as teaching English language, serving as public officer, journalists, and other professions where their English language oral skills is required. Their motivation for accomplishing their duty will be reduced if their speaking skill is not well developed [6]. Failing to use the target language in the work environment hurts one’s job performance and efficiency [24].

Scholars argue that students’ problem in effectively learning the language they ought to learn mainly emanates from the teaching and learning practice though there are various external factors like lack of resource, inappropriate policy and the like [8,10]. According to [5], language is a skill that needs to be taught through continuous practices that are subject to the methods teachers use in the classroom. The methodology used in the class is a determining factor in improving students’ communicative competence [23]. However, some teachers of English as a foreign language hold a mere justification that students have no external exposure to use English for wider communication. This problem has been dogmatically affecting the practice of teaching the skills in a creative way [22]. As a result, the researcher was interested to make things possible in using interactive teaching...
methods for teaching English as a foreign language in the class through the implementation of action research. In fact, it is important to apply various practical ways to let students advance their oral communication skills [20], and action research is one of the major ways through which we can bring practical changes on the students’ dexterity [16].

Therefore, this research was undertaken to improve the students’ oral fluency through implementing active learning method after identifying the challenges students faced in learning to speak English language. Increasing students’ classroom interaction implementing a range of strategies in the period of the action research was also the role of this research. Intervening in line with the problems identified, and building a foundation for students’ future oral fluency, was also the objective of the study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design of the study

Qualitative research design is important to understand processes, poorly understood phenomena, and differences between stated and implemented theories [11]. Furthermore, according to [12], qualitative research design depends on the idea that individuals in interaction with their world construct meaning. Thus, exploring students’ oral fluency problem, and intervening to improve it using purely qualitative research method was found to be significant. Moreover, action research using the spiral model of [15] was followed to improve the students’ oral competence. These were self-reflective cycles of planning, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change.

2.2. The participants of the study and data collection methods

The participants of this study were first year English language majoring students who were taking the course ‘Spoken English’ at Haramaya University, Ethiopia. These students were sampled to employ thorough active learning methods after identifying their actual classroom oral communication problems. This was to see the extent of their participation while learning speaking skills and to identify the teaching and learning strategies that work best in fostering students’ oral fluency. There were twenty-four students in the class and except for the focus group discussion, all of them were considered as sample of the study.

The choice of data collection methods was determined by the needs of a given research project, and in particular by the research questions confronted [7]. Due to the nature of this study, only qualitative data gathering tools were implemented which were observation and focused group discussion that were feasible for the action research.

Classroom observation helped to know how students participated when different active learning methods were employed in the classroom. Furthermore, this tool helped the researcher to get information that could not be obtained via the focused group discussion. The researcher’s colleague conducted the classroom observation twelve times (sessions) in eight weeks time to get validated data on the pre and post intervention phases. A session contained only two hours, so the observation was conducted for 24 hours.
It is argued that the focus group discussion approach produces a wealth of detailed information allowing the researchers to gain insight into the thinking of individuals [25]. This is to mean that this technique provided a means for in-depth study of the project. The focus group discussion comprised nine students who were selected based on their academic performance; from the top, medium and low achievers based on their classroom results. The reason to have only nine respondents was that using more than ten students in a focus group discussion would be difficult for the in-depth study [20]. Furthermore, the questions for the focus group discussion were general in nature and intended to stimulate debate. While the discussion was taking place, the researcher was acting as a facilitator and chairperson.

2.3. The data analysis methods

Data analysis in qualitative study involves word argumentations than numerical explanations [12]. Thus, the data obtained via the mentioned techniques and tools were analyzed based on word argumentations. First, the data obtained from all data gathering tools were assembled in a notebook. Then, in order to understand the obtained data, the notes were read thoroughly. Second, by creating thematic framework, it was categorized under different themes. That is, the responses were categorized using each of the research questions as specific thematic subtopics. Third, the quotes of respondents were sorted by emphasizing key words and phrases, which were then compared both within and between the cases that were carried out. Fourth, the quotes were lifted from their original context and similar ideas were put together by rearranging them under the newly developed thematic content. Mapping and interpreting the data followed in order to construct and develop intellectual and philosophical sense. Furthermore, respondents’ ideas were supported by relevant literatures and theoretical frameworks. Finally, the findings were carefully narrated.

3. Data Analysis and Discussions

3.1. Problem identification

To identify the problems in spoken classroom before intervention, observation and focused group discussion were employed. The data obtained via the tools were also analyzed depending on the objective of the study. This part is used to pin point the problems on students’ English language oral fluency.

3.1.1. Students’ Participation in the Class

Even though students who participated on the focused group discussion were aware of the importance of participation in their spoken class, they claimed that most of the time they did not participate. One of the participants stated,

*I sometimes wish to attend simply a lecture because I am not good at speaking English language, so why do I smash others language instead of simply learning by listening to my teacher* (Student 1).

In addition to this, another respondent said that his problem of speaking is deep-rooted and he believed that it could not be solved through this short course, so he was unable to participate in the classroom. As a result, he
preferred to be silent in class hoping to get some other day to improve his speaking skills (Student 4). Furthermore, another learner who participated on the focused group discussion explained that he had been trying to participate, but he was afraid of the mistakes he might make while speaking (Student 5). The rest of the respondents also revealed that even though they said something, they were not certain that they were addressing their feelings. For instance, one of the students expressed his/her feelings as follows:

I don’t think I am really expressing my idea correctly, for I could not get appropriate expressions and sufficient vocabulary, so that I am not bold enough to say I participate very well in the class (Student 3).

This in general shows that students were anxious to participate in their spoken class. [6] stated that the existence of anxiety firstly attributed to the students’ poor participation in classroom, which could hinder their communication with others, and block them to express themselves adequately in class and answer teacher’s questions properly. In addition to the data gathered via focus group discussion, students were also observed to be reluctant in actively participating on the issues raised in the class given the lack of opportunities to speak English outside the class.

3.1.2. Mother-Tongue Interference

The participants were asked whether they were interested to use only English language in their spoken class. To start with respondent 3,

I am here in this University to obtain change on my English language oral competence and English language proficiency in general. Having this in mind, I always try to talk to my group members using English, but most of the time they refuse to talk to me in English and they immediately switch on to the local language, and use the local language in between, for it is easier to them.

The other student respondent claimed that he was interested to communicate using his mother tongue due to his broken English language (Student 1). “…to speak English like others is too difficult for me; I am not able to learn it enough, so I by default use my mother tongue in between my speech (Student 9).”

Another student also added saying,

...in learning spoken English, I usually look for help, but I consider that if I ask someone in English they would probably laugh at me or I may seem weak student among my classmates. Thus, instead of being overwhelmed using the target language, I better use my first language even in English language spoken lessons (Student 3).

Thus, except two students out of the nine participants, seven of them did not feel at ease to use the target language without the help of their mother tongue in between their speech. Supporting this idea one of the participants explained that it was only due to the supervision of the teacher that he used to use English in the class during group work activities (Student 5). Another respondent also reported that most of the time he struggled to use the target language, and unconsciously he found himself using the local language, Amharic, for he lacked appropriate expressions in English (Student 7). In addition to this, as per the data obtained via
observation, some students were seen using their mother tongue when the teacher was not around their group. The teacher was also seen using local language to clarify instructions and questions in the class.

This in general indicated that the degree to which students use English in class to interact was low especially when they were involved on different activities. This would hurt students’ oral competence. However, language is skill, which is like doing any sport, and if one cannot practice it frequently, acquiring or learning it would be hard [21]. Thus, these students were facing difficulty in developing their English language speaking skills for they were not exhaustively using the target language due to the interference of their local languages.

3.1.3. Students’ Previous Learning Experience

Students who participated in the focused group discussion were asked if their elementary and high school English language teachers used to give them a chance to participate in class so as to help them develop their oral competence. It was indicated that students’ poor English language background was seen to be the cause for having problems in oral communication. “…starting from my elementary school, I have rarely practiced speaking English language …” (Student 8). Another student stated, “…, for the class was teacher dominated throughout the period, I did not have time to practice in my elementary school… (Student 7)”. Student 9 also said,

…it is obvious that teachers did not sufficiently motivate us to enable us be engaged in different activities in spoken classes, so most of the students were reluctant to talk in English. Furthermore, the focuses of the teachers were to complete the course book than letting us get involved in different practical tasks (Student 1).

From the above mentioned quotes it could be deduced that students had come across traditional language learning approach in which the teacher dominated every activity in the classroom. This means that interacting using the target language in the classroom was not emphasized, and this on the other hand influenced students’ current oral competence. According to [9] teachers play a central role in the classroom, but if they control everything that happens in the classroom, and if they normally speak most of the time, they are the only ones who benefit from the situation with respect to practicing speaking English in the classroom. As could be understood from the students, it is possible to infer that a chance to adequately practice speaking had not given for the students. This would lead the learners to believe that active participation while learning language is not mandatory, and that might later make them form incorrect habits [2].

One of the respondents stated that in their high school classes teachers used to focus on grammar of the language than the skills, so they could not get adequate chance to practice speaking in the class (Student 2). In line with this idea, [10] claimed that

The teaching/learning process is like a triangle inside a circle. Teachers, students and the curriculum form the triangle and their interactions occur within the educational system: The circle. The weakness of one component among these will dramatically affect the entire teaching/learning process.

This is what was happened in the students’ preceding educational level’s teaching and learning process that
finally resulted in hindering their language competence in general and oral communication skill in particular.

3.1.4. The teaching methodology being used

Concerning the techniques and methods the teacher used in the classroom currently, except three students all of the participants in the focus group discussion were interested in what was being implemented. One of these students said “our spoken English teacher sometimes uses games and it is very interesting but due to the anxiety in us and poor language proficiency, we could not actively take part” (Student 8). On the other hand, out of the nine students, three of them were not happy with the techniques and methods the teacher was using. They were asked to explain the reasons and one of them said that the teacher forced them to talk in English in front of the class, which was a shame for them (Student 1).

However, it was possible to understand from the majority of the focus group participants (7 out of 9) that the methods were satisfactory for them. Six sessions were also observed to identify the problems in relation to teaching and learning methods. The teacher was seen implementing group work and presentations, but there were few problems observed which included few students dominating the groups, and failing to encourage inactive students in the group tasks. In those six observation sessions, it was possible to identify around thirteen out of the twenty-four students who sat passively and were overlooked by the teacher. Furthermore, in the observed sessions the methods implemented were similar to what the participants stated during the focus group discussion. These were group work and presentation, but these methods were the dominant and the only ones in the class. The teacher was not observed using a range of methods to motivate and involve students in the classroom lessons. This could be considered an impeding factor which contributed to having less active participants [6].

Among the observed lessons, group discussion was seen implemented in every session. It was also observed that above 50% of learners used to participate in oral communication skills when the teacher used group discussion as a method. The second dominantly used method was presentation. The teacher was seen to use lecture method at the beginning of each session specially when he explained language functions. This time, watching, listening and taking notes were the primary job of students’ that rarely contribute to their oral communication. The least used method was presentation by students.

As could be understood from the above discussion, group discussion was adequately used by the teacher though there were points to be considered to make the most out of the group work such as involving all the group members equally, and adequate supervision. However, other than the group discussion, other convenient active learning methods to teach speaking skills were not used. This could reduce students’ involvement in the class [22].

3.1.5. Students’ Confidence while Speaking

When students lack confidence in themselves to communicate, they suffer from communication apprehension which results in fear to participate in class discussions [8]. Students also reflected that they experienced anxiety at input stage when the subject matter presented to them was not well understood or remained ambiguous.
Hence, some students reflected as follows: “...sometimes I don’t understand what my teacher is saying....
difficult to arrange my ideas” (Student 6). Similarly, another student reported “when what the teacher is saying is
difficult to me to understand, I feel unease to say anything about it, or even ask for clarification” (Student 2).
Strengthening this idea, another student gave the following information.

...speaking in classroom is always a problem ... you find many students and a teacher looking at you and
listening to you and trying to find mistakes, you feel you might be blamed for any mistakes you may commit
though nobody does so (Student 7).

In addition to what were stated by the students, this problem was understood via observation. One of the
students was asked to give a direction to the hospital from the picture drawn on the board while learning ‘giving
and asking for direction’, he stood up and started talking. After a while, he paused for a minute and he felt
ashamed and sat down. Few of them were also seen refusing to talk using English in the class.

In general, all the points obtained from the student respondents and the observation show that due to different
reasons students were not confident enough to speak or interact freely among their partners. This was another
challenge that hindered students’ oral communication competence.

3.1.6. Other Challenges Impeding Students’ Speaking Skills

In the focus group discussion, students reflected on the challenges they came across that impeded their oral
communication. They said that the period given for the course was not enough to practice the speaking, for it
was only three hours a week. This situation was identified as a serious problem by the researcher because
spending only three hours with twenty-four students and talking about improving their speaking skills was close
to being a nightmare.

The other challenge pointed out by the respondents was lack of out –of- class exposure. One of the respondents
said that classroom was the only place to use English to communicate with his friends (Student 2). In line with
this idea all the students who participated in the focused group discussion stated that they did not use any
English language out of the class, for English was a foreign language learned only in classrooms in the country.
Therefore, this could be considered as the basic problem that obstructed the learners’ from improving their
English language oral competence [17].

4. Proposed and Implemented Actions

The teacher researcher planned and implemented the following actions to be carried out in the four weeks
intervention period to eliminate or reduce the problems identified from the data analysis and interpretation:

Students’ awareness level was improved in order to make them understand the value of making mistakes in
trying to advance their language proficiency or in their attempts to achieve near native fluency. The classroom
teacher planned to take one session to change students’ mind on making mistakes in the class. It was important
to make students know that making mistakes was natural, and even teachers and students could learn from the
errors made in the class as far as they are handled carefully. Thus, the teacher planned to have a discussion with students to help them consider mistakes as a stepping-stone to learn language, and to make the most out of their errors in practicing speaking.

To reduce students’ anxiety level, the teacher planned to place the learners into different small groups (3 – 4 students in a group) to help them practice speaking in their own groups on different issues rather than bringing them into the front of the class to talk or put them in large groups. The students in the groups would be reshuffled once in two weeks because it was easier to work with somebody they knew more than talking to a strange person in their class [3]. The use of arranging students in small groups was considered to allow learners who might be scared to speak in front of the whole class until they feel confident in their speaking. Furthermore, teacher’s time would be saved, and better chances would be created for learners to practice speaking, and this was implemented.

The topics or issues to be discussed were also planned to be selected based on students’ interest and background knowledge because unfamiliar topics may create lack of interest and/or reluctance among students. The teacher planned to work more on activities to be depicted in the class to reduce anxiety in oral practice and increase learners engagement. Thus, these issues were considered during intervention phase; sport, HIV AIDS, life in university, Education, and jobs. Furthermore, clear and precise instructions were also given for the learners during their classroom activities.

To discourage the use of mother tongue in the class, and help them exhaustively use the target language, the teacher prepared cards to be given to all the students. Then, three cards were aimed to be given to each of them and if for example, one of the students heard somebody in his group using his/her mother tongue, that person would snatch the card from the one who used his first language. Three students who collected the highest amount of cards from the class would be winners and would be awarded, and this was also implemented during the intervention period. Language learning ought to be practiced through meaningful interaction. If learners avoid interacting using the target language, their language performance will not be fostered [22]. Therefore, the teacher explained the importance of interaction in spoken class. Furthermore, the teacher communicated that students’ active involvement and participation would be valued.

The students were found to search terms and expressions when they were to speak, and this reduced their oral fluency. This was due to the infrequent use of the target language, and lack of exposure out of the class [21]. To combat this challenge, the students were instructed to think of their daily routines in English than using their mother tongue to access the words they already knew when they were in need. Only active learning methods were planned to be implemented in the class during the intervention period. The methods, which the teacher did not implement in class were identified as to be implemented. These methods were role-play, storytelling, naming games, spider diagram, simulation, balloon game and debate.

5. Action Evaluation

This step was considered to show the effectiveness of the processes and the methods the researcher employed
helped reduce or alleviate the challenges regarding students’ oral competence. Classroom observation and focused group discussion were used to see the effectiveness of the intervention. Six consecutive sessions were observed besides the focus group discussions to get validated data. The results are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The researcher used panel discussions with all the students in the class to help them feel free during speaking English. They were told the values of making and learning from errors especially in language class. Hearing about the opportunities to be obtained from mistakes was unusual for them, and they were amused. Though the discussion session was very short, it challenged the students to come out of their belief which lead them to anxiety. Thus, in the six sessions observed, the students’ participation was better than the pre-intervention sessions. Even though few students kept quiet, the majority (19/24) of them were seen actively participating and engaged in the activities. The students who participated on the focused group discussion stated that the discussion they had about the normalness of making mistakes with the researcher was very strange because in their previous learning experience what they internalized was that the reward of making mistakes was punishment. One of the respondents claimed,

*I remember my grade 9 English teacher, he was very conscious of our mistakes. His belief was that once we start making mistakes we form a bad habit which would lead us toward bad language usage. Thus, he used to stop us here and there during presentation in the class* (Student 3).

Respondent 7 stated that he felt free of what the researcher advised him concerning making mistakes either while speaking or writing. He also added that he would not be scared to participate in different class activities.

Therefore, the researcher considered the panel discussion on committing mistakes was effective in helping the students to overcome their fear regarding making mistakes. This on the other hand motivated the students to share their ideas using the target language [6].

The second action implemented was encouraging and enabling students to discuss their idea in small groups than letting them present their opinion for the whole class or in large groups. This system also worked to create a conducive learning atmosphere especially for anxious students. During observation, the researcher’s colleague (classroom observer) saw almost all the members of each group in the class participating in different group activities. Furthermore, the student respondents were asked about the difference between presenting in front of the class and in small groups, and all of them replied that presenting in small groups was much better than presenting before the whole class. Thus, small group discussions were widely used during the intervention period. It was found to be effective in encouraging everybody to be involved in the activities given, and interact actively, for it created a relaxed environment for the participants [8].

The third action implemented was selecting issues that were more familiar for the students. This was also found to be very effective. In one of the observed sessions, the teacher used debate and the motion for the debate was, “Is having a lover in university important?” First, the teacher divided the class into two large groups against and for the motion. There were three small groups containing four members in both large groups. This was to help
them share ideas first and forward convincing ideas to win their opponent. During that time, all the students forgot where they were, their attention was on the motion because it was an arguable issue. It was a very effective lesson. Therefore, what could be understood from this was that always the issues that should be provided for the students to discuss ought to be familiar to them [22].

The fourth action taken was to positively discourage the use of mother tongue. The teacher prepared seventy-two cards where three cards were given all the twenty four students in the class. Then, the learners were instructed to snatch the card from a person sitting beside them when they hear that person using his/her mother tongue. It encouraged the learners to use the target language, but it also made the class unmanageable. The students were more eager on snatching the cards from one another than conversing and improving their speaking skills. Therefore, the system was not effective to the fullest because of the diverted focus.

The fifth action implemented was telling students that they would be awarded of their active classroom interaction. The students were informed that active participants would get mark out of five percent at the end of the course. The teacher explained this seriously, and it positively initiated the participation of the students in the class, for everybody was eager to score a good grade.

The sixth action implemented was thinking and talking to oneself in English. Students were advised to talk to themselves in English language for ten minutes at home before they go to their bed. They were ordered to think of their family, friends, plans, educations or incidents they came across. Then, when they came to class, they had to report what they were thinking and talking to themselves to their group members for the first five minutes before the lesson started. This method was found to be interesting and effective. One of the students said, “I always think in English for ten minutes before my bed and this made me to remember the words I have to use while speaking”. All the respondents in the focused group discussion stated that they were highly benefited from this method. The students were also seen being active and interactively sharing their thoughts in the class. Therefore, it is possible to say this strategy helped students in their journey to improve their oral communication.

Finally, in addition to the methods that were being implemented during the pre intervention period, role-play, storytelling, pair works and different games were used in the class for the planned sessions. Except presentation, all of these methods were found to be successful in enabling the students to become active participants. However, students could not feel at ease to come to the front of the class to present their work. The students were asked how they felt about the new methods being implemented. As a result, one of the participants stated that he found the naming-game, role-play, storytelling and balloon games more participatory and helpful. However, on the presentation, students had a problem and it was possible to understand that this method would not be effective until they develop confidence to talk in front of many students. Hence, using games and active learning methods in general found to be important in enhancing the learners’ oral communication skill [24].

6. Reflection

The effectiveness of the methods was satisfactory to the researcher’s expectation, for the class was seen to be
involved in various activities implemented through the active learning methods planned to be used during the intervention period.

Before the researcher carried out the action research, he had been already using some active learning methods and that encouraged the students to do more. Moreover, the suggested possible actions made valuable differences on the students’ confidence and interaction.

Mother-tongue interference and fear of making mistakes were the other challenges the researcher encountered, but through the proposed and implemented actions these challenges seemed to be reversed and the learners were seen to practice English language speaking which would lead them to an improved oral fluency. However, the card game implemented to reduce mother tongue interference was ineffective, for it diverted students’ focus from interaction to waiting to grab the cards.

Presenting their ideas in front of the whole class was another major problem that caused anxiety. This happened because students were not confident enough to present and express their ideas in front of their classmates. However, this was be alleviated through familiarizing the students with presenting their ideas to their small group members until they became more confident. Furthermore, familiar and interactive activities should be designed to increase students’ participation. This would increase learners’ interaction and confidence, which could create convenient condition for practicing their target language oral communication skill. Above all, small group discussion was found to be effective in encouraging the learners to actively participate on discussions.

The idea of enabling students to think about specific topic at home encouraged them to be familiar with English language expressions and terminologies. In turn, this encouraged them to come to the class and share what they thought at home with their classmates in their small groups. The problem of this method was that every student was requested to tell his/her partner before the start of each lesson, and this consumed a lot of time apart from the lesson. But, on the other hand it was found to be a very important strategy to let students practice speaking in and out of the class.

In general, teachers need to be very patient and ready to face and overcome the many challenges in spoken language classrooms. Building students’ confidence, showing them that making mistakes is nothing to be ashamed of, and encouraging them to practice oral language more in and out of the classroom besides helping them in employing rigorous learning methods are the ways by which teachers can make a difference on students’ oral fluency.

7. Recommendation

- To eliminate language difficulties in the classroom, teachers and students should only communicate in English. In this way, students can improve their speaking skills through real practice.
- To reduce students’ anxiety level of making mistakes while practicing speaking should be improved via panel discussions that let them understand the value of making mistakes in trying to advance their oral language proficiency.
• Small group discussion (3-4 students in a group) is important to be employed in the class to encourage all the students to use the target language, and to pave a way for the anxious students to share their ideas freely in the small group, for presenting their ideas in front of the whole class will be a major problem that causes anxiety.
• The topics or issues to be discussed in the class should be selected based on pupils’ interest and background knowledge because unfamiliar topics may create lack of interest and/or reluctance which will reduce the classroom interaction.
• Oral communication skill teachers should inform their students about the importance of classroom interaction in enhancing the learners’ oral fluency.
• It is a good idea if teachers praise, give bonus marks, reward, or use any other type of reinforcement methods to inspire the students to use the target language in and out of the class.
• Students should be advised to talk to themselves in English language for ten minutes when they are out of their classes. The monologue could be about their daily plans, friends, families, or school to make them familiar with the terminologies and expressions they are to use while communicating in the target language.

8. Conclusion

This research focused on identifying the basic challenges students faced in improving their oral communication skills besides finding out the rigorous measurements, which could be vital in alleviating the challenges. Thus, 12 hours pre-intervention lessons were thoroughly observed besides collecting data from focused group discussion to identify the causes for students’ inactive participation and poor English language speaking skills. The findings showed that students’ previous language learning experience, first language interference, lack of exposure in using the target language out of the class, inadequacy of active learning methods implemented, and an anxiety of speaking in front of students were the causes for having poor oral communication competence. After identifying these challenges, systematically planned actions were implemented for four successive weeks and they were found to be effective. The panel discussion on how students should learn from their mistakes helped them to be willing to freely discuss in the class. In addition to the games employed, the new active learning methods used in the class were seen to reduce anxiety, and increase classroom participation. The mother tongue interference was also considerably mitigated by the card games used by the researcher during the intervention phase. Bringing familiar topics to the class, and informing students that any of their participation in the classroom would be marked, encouraged them to be actively involved in group works. An advice on using thinking in the target language was also supportive to improve students’ oral fluency. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that students’ oral communication could be affected due to several situations, and hence, teachers are expected to first identify the challenges and then accordingly intervene.

Acknowledgement

It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge Mr, Admasu Kassa, who was a lecturer of English language in the School of Foreign Languages and Journalism, for his hard work in observing my lessons and collecting data during my action research. My heartfelt appreciation goes as well to Dr. Julia Devardhi, Mr. Ahmed Dedo and
Mr Wondifraw Mihret for their illuminating and inspiring professional guidance, constructive criticism for the betterment of the study.

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