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RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring the Academic English Speaking Competence of Social Sciences Students at Higher Level: A Case of Southern Punjab

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research work has two-fold purposes. First, it examines the existing speaking competency of the Social Sciences students of Southern Punjab and was delimited to Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Second, it suggests a need oriented EAP course by measuring the existing competency level of the students in the specific academic context. To execute the Target Situation Analysis, the information is obtained about the students' existing level of competency. Data is collected from the students of three departments of social sciences through a test which is comprised of Limbo followed by different questions for the discussion of the students. For data analysis, an evaluation sheet is prepared that consists of multiple speaking traits such as shyness, recitation, vocabulary, pronunciation and accent. Later it is quantitatively analyzed to know the mutual imperative disproportion among the learners. The research is significant as it provides valuable cognizance to the various collaborators: researchers, policy makers, instructors and material designers

Introduction

English has supremacy over other languages in Pakistan. It is not only valuable for the professionals but also an indication of success, power and preeminence. It is not difficult to get people familiar with its usefulness; it gains significant place and plays vital role in all fields. English language is also known as the language of higher education (Mahboob, 2003). It is important to make English

language the only medium of instruction in the universities in order to enhance the standard of education. It is taught as a mandatory language in Pakistan at all school levels, colleges and universities; and is considered as a medium of instruction. In order to enhance the awareness and intellect; and to communicate the comprehension of a subject, it's essential to augment the Academic English Language Skills; which include reading, writing, speaking and listening. In academic institutes, speaking skills is not given due consideration. However, speaking skill is essential for communication and students need to develop it in order to communicate well in English. The students hailing from diversified academic backgrounds have no sufficient proficiency regarding speaking skills in order to cope up the target situations. Different factors have been affecting students' speaking proficiency; which are medium of instruction, examination system, syllabi, family backgrounds, educational policies and teaching methodologies. The students feel hesitant to present in front of the class and audiences due to shyness, fear of speaking and lack of confidence.

According to world social sciences report (2010) that the Social Sciences subjects are not   recognized as compared to the science subjects in Pakistan. In the case of Pakistani students, due to the current standard of the Social discipline, the students are losing interest in this field; in this regard, necessary measures need to be taken for enhancing and improving these disciplines (as cited in Inayatullah & Tahir, 2005). According to the National Educational Policy 2009, it is implemented that English is the only medium of instruction and examination for all social sciences disciplines to encourage the masses to come forward to make a discipline of higher learning and research. It is enunciated that students are not able to perform the academic tasks appropriately as they have low English. In order to execute the target situation analysis, the information is obtained to check the current proficiency level regarding the speaking skills. To bridge this gulf, the present research has been conducted on the social sciences students of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. This paper focuses on the students' competency level concerning speaking skills. Hence, the research question is: What is the students' existing level of competency with reference to speaking skills?

Review of Literature

Januleviciene & Kavaliauskiene (2002) highlighted the concrete features of learners' language ability strategic competence and reinforced the inconstancy between diverse forms of verbal in contrast to written performance regarding language fabrication in class room settings. They proposed various procedures that support preservation of vocabulary and recovering; along with useful clues on triggering ESP speaking skills. Similarly, in 2011 they executed a research on public speaking in context of ESP and made the contrastive study among the students hailing from different cultures to cope up the academic and social settings by measuring the attitude of the learners and pointing out the causes which slow down the students' proficiency. On the other hand, Madsa (2012) carried a out a

study by employing observation and questionnaires to motivate the students through simulation in the environment of ESP. The findings reveal the students get significantly motivated and it will be so useful for the discussions, negotiations and business companies. Kubra (2014) explored the impact of drama on the speaking skills and approaches of ESP students of Physiotherapy and Nutrition. He determined the possible ways in order to develop the speaking strategies through drama and learners' attitude by employing rubrics and reflection sheets consisting of vocabulary, grammar, motivation, fluency, anxiety and making mistakes.

In response to this, Waninge (2015) investigated about the students' perceptions of 'what they felt in language class'? He found the students' interest in the domain of contextual factors is the major object to keep them alive in the class. On the other hand, Cho (2015) highlighted the effects of two categories of role plays with the purpose of improving English speaking skills in context of tourism; SSRP (Semi-scripted Role play) and SSRP-NSRP (Semi-scripted Role play followed by Non-scripted Role-play), in Korea. Likewise, Sterba (2014) presented a connection between creation and application of speaking activities proposed to fulfill the requirements of an ESP classroom and students' acquaintance and proficiency to cope up the target situations concerning to the learners of tourism program. Conversely, Marsakawati (2016) presented a role of task based learning techniques in order to develop the students' speaking skills in ESP context. Then again, Medianeira (2017) stressed on the speaking activities exhibited in five educational portals with the purpose of classifying different kinds of pedagogical tasks and exercises and their textual configuration in the digital context. And, Didier & Javier (2016) focused on the practice of business vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and accuracy by executing an action research using virtual resources to develop speaking skills of business students. The research instruments were observations, transcripts collected by conducting interviews videos and questionnaires. In response, Ramadhani (2017) focused on teaching speaking skills in context of ESP to the Computer Engineering students of STMIK Budidarma Medan and presented the barriers of developing speaking skills faced by the students and teachers in academic situations.

The relevant researches prove that there has been a lot of development in the concerned area since the birth of ESP. Further, it has been noticed that different researches have done in different disciplines in different parts of the world. However, no research has been carried out that investigates the academic speaking skills of the students of the social sciences Departments of Bhauddin Zkariya University, Multan. The present research has been carried out to fill this gap. The findings of the research in the field of social sciences prove beneficial for pedagogical consideration.

Material and Method

This study is empirical in nature that intends to check the proficiency level with reference to speaking skills of the social sciences students of Southern Punjab; subsequently was delimited to The Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. The researchers conducted this test in three disciplines of Social Sciences: Economics, Mass Communication and Education. One hundred and fifty students appeared in the test: 50 from each department. The students are given an activity 'Limbo' followed by a variety of questions for oral interaction. The students are divided into groups of three or four for oral interaction. In order to judge the speaking skills which includes pronunciation, accent, fluency, shyness, recitation and vocabulary, an evaluation sheet is formulated containing five point likert scale: not at all, to little extent, to some extent, to great extant and unable to judge, to measure the extent of proficiency. Time allocated to the students was 30 minutes and the students were divided into different small groups in order to discuss with each other. The investigators themselves administer this test and gave directions to the students in the classes. The result is quantitatively evaluated by applying statistical formulas as given below:

Analysis

Data relating to speaking skills is analyzed by calculating the weighted average and chi square in order to find the current situation of the students and mutual difference among the students of three social sciences departments. The data takes into account an overall discussion about the elements of speaking skills which were evaluated while taking the test with respect to each department to conclude the study.

Analysis of Speaking Skills

The study presented detailed findings of the speaking skills of the students. In this regard, an activity 'Limbo' that is comprised of few questions has been given to the students. The students had to discuss the given questions with one another and through it different elements of speaking skills were analyzed such as fluency, pronunciation, shyness, accent, vocabulary and recitation. For data analysis, an evaluation sheet was prepared while considering the above mentioned elements in order to find out the extent of students' competency in English Speaking Skills. The data was statistically analyzed, interpreted and tabulated through weighted average and chi- square test. The detail of data analysis has been presented below: Each set of responses is given a numerical value to find out the relative weightages of each set of responses. Thus, on a 5-point scale, the responses given numerical values are under: great extent '4', some extent '3', unable to judge '2', little extent '1', & not at all '0'.

By using these numerical values, we find relative weightages of the responses or the "Weighted Averages". On this numerical scale, the "Weighted Mean"= 4+3+2+1+0/5 =10/5=2.00. Hence, the weighted average of any response is

equal or greater than the "weighted mean", that point is regarded +ive, otherwise it is –ive with respect to the items.

Analysis with reference to different aspects involved in the speaking skills (i.e. shyness, recitation, vocabulary, fluency, accent and pronunciation) is presented below:

Shyness

Shyness is regarded as a composite of emotions. It arises from nervousness, anxiety, strain, hesitation and embarrassment. It hinders the students' learning and social development. The shy students are high esteemed, self-conscious and less confident. In classroom settings, the students' shyness plays an important role to impede the speaking skills. Table 1 below shows weighted average in this context:

Table 1
Weighted Average

Departments	Not at all × 0	Little extant × 1	Unable to judge × 2	Some extant × 3	Great extant × 4	Total	Weighted Average
Economics	0	0	7	3	40	50	3.66
Mass Communication	1	6	1	37	5	50	. 2.78
Education	7	8	5	7	23	50	2.62

Cut off value = 2.00

The weighted average of the departments of Economics, Mass Communication and Education exhibiting value 3.66, 2.78 and 2.62 respectively, which is greater than 2.00, it makes clear that shyness is an important element as a barrier to English speaking skills.

Similarly, the statistical data concerning chi- square test of chi-square test for comparing differences of speaking skills (shyness) among the students of the social sciences departments has been given below:

Table 2
Contingency Table

Departments	Not at all	Little extant	Unable to judge	Some extant	Great extant	Total	
Economics	0	0	7	3	40	50	
Mass Communication	1	6	1	37	5	50	
Education	7	8	5	7	23	50	
Total	8	14	13	47	68	150	

As well, in view of contingency table 2, the information related to chi square test is given below:

Chi square = $\chi^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$

= 93.6201

Degree of freedom = d_f = 8

It is evident that the chi square value of 26.12 with the degree of freedom 8 is significant at probability p=0.001 level. Resultantly, at this level the calculated chi-square value of 93.6201 is significant beyond the level of three departments.

Recitation

Recitation pertains to the demonstration of knowledge. It includes the presentation of supplement material of the students in a class under the supervision of an instructor. It is employed as a vehicle to make discussion among the students in the class. Table 3 reflects weighted average in this context:

Table 3
Weighted Average regarding Recitation

Departments	Not at all × 0	Little extant × 1	Unable to judge × 2	Some extant × 3	Great extant × 4	Total	Weighted Average
Economics	12	10	14	9	5	50	1.7
Mass Communication	2	5	2	13	28	50	3.2
Education	3	17	4	13	13	50	2.32

Cut off value = 2.00

The findings of departments of Education and Mass Communication revealed weighted average 3.2 and 2.32 respectively and it is greater than 2.00 in respect of the element recitation while Department of Economics exhibited 1.7 weighted average which is less than cut off value 2.00. Thus, it is clear that two departments had more than expected cut off value while third department bare minimum value.

On the other hand, the statistical information of chi-square test used for comparing differences of speaking skills with respect to recitation among the students of the social sciences departments is presented below:

Table 4
Contingency Table

Departments	Not at all	Little extant	Unable to judge	Some extant	Great extant	Total
Economics	12	10	14	9	5	50
Mass Communication	2	5	2	13	28	50

Education	3	17	4	13	13	50
Total	17	32	20	35	46	150

Similarly, taking into consideration the contingency table 4, the information related to chi square applied on the data is presented below:

Chi square = $\chi^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$

= 52.328

Degree of freedom = d_f = 8

According to the chi-square table of significance level, it is obvious that at probability level p=0.001, the value of chi- square is 26.12 with 8, but in the context of the 'recitation' of speaking skills the calculated value of chi square is d_f 52.328 which is greater than that mentioned value in table. Thus, the differences among the students of the three departments are significant less   than the 0.001 level.

Fluency

Fluency pertains to deliver the information quickly with accuracy. It is concerned with the measurement of performance rather than content of the language. Fluency is realized by the production of the language spontaneously or unconsciously. The language proficiency demands speed, coherence, length and prosody. The problems raised in fluent speech are due to repetition, fear, reluctance, pauses and fragmentation. The following table 5 presents the weighted average of fluency:

Table 5
Weighted Average Regarding Fluency

Departments	Not at all × 0	Little extant × 1	Unable to judge × 2	Some extant × 3	Great extant × 4	Total	Weighted Average
Economics	14	8	24	4	0	50	1.36
Mass Communication	2	13	3	26	6	50	2.24
Education	2	22	9	14	3	50	1.88

Cut off value= 2.00

In the context of fluency, the students of Economics and Education departments showed weighted average less than 2.00 which indicates low fluency level whereas in the Department Mass Communication the students had better fluency.

Additionally, the statistical data of chi-square test for comparing differences of speaking skills in terms of fluency among the students of the social sciences departments is given below

Table 6
Showing Contingency Table

Departments	Not At All	Little Extant	Unable To Judge	Some Extant	Great Extant	Total
Economics	14	8	24	4	0	50
Mass Communication	2	13	3	26	6	50
Education	2	22	9	14	3	50
Total	18	43	36	44	9	150

Suchlike, in light of contingency table 6, the information related to chi square test has been presented below:

Chi square = $\chi^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$

 =65.043

Degree of freedom = d_f = 8

As mentioned in the chi-square table of significance level, that at probability level p=0.001, the value of chi-square is 26.12 with d_f 8, but regarding "fluency" the calculated value of chi square is 52.328 which is greater than that mentioned in the table. Hence, the differences among the students of the three departments are significant less than 0.001 level.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a significant aspect of the communication skills. To build up the speaking skills, vocabulary leads a positive impact on learners' faculty. It develops the other aspects of language learning skills. Less vocabulary creates frustration among the learners to express their ideas and thoughts and impedes the speaking skills. The following table 7 presents the weighted average of vocabulary:

Table 7
Weighted Average Regarding Vocabulary

Departments	Not at all × 0	Little extant × 1	Unable to judge × 2	Some extant × 3	Great extant × 4	Total
Economics	11	13	12	11	3	50
Mass Communication	0	6	3	27	4	50
Education	6	14	2	23	5	50

Cut off value = 2.00

The result exhibited that the weighted average in the departments Mass Communication and Education looked more than 2.00 concerning vocabulary whereas for the Department of Economics, the weighted average is lower than 2 which indicated students' intense need of vocabulary to speak.

Moreover, the statistical information of chi-square test for comparing differences of speaking skills with reference to vocabulary among the students of the social sciences departments is given below:

Table 8
Contingency Table

Departments	Not at all	Little extant	Unable to judge	Some extant	Great extant	Total
Economics	111	113	112	111	33	550
Mass Communication	00	66	33	227	44	550
Education	66	114	22	223	55	550
Total	117	333	117	661	112	1150

Cut off value = 2.00

As well, taking into consideration contingency table 8 regarding vocabulary, information associated with chi square is given below:

Chi square = $\chi2$ = $\sum(f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$

= 32.894

Degree of freedom = d_f = 8

According to the chi- square table of significance level, it is clear that at probability level p=0.001, the value of chi- square is 26.12 with d_f 8, but in the context of "vocabulary" of speaking skills the calculated value of chi square is 32.894 which is greater than that given in the table. So the differences among the students of the three departments are significant less than the 0.001 level.

Accent and Pronunciation

In order to produce a speech, accent and pronunciation play a significant role. It is concerned with articulation of speech sounds by shaping the mouth. It includes pitch, tone, rhythm and stress on syllables which provide clear sense to the speech. Different factors depend upon pronunciation and accent depends upon the environment, area, education and language. The following table 9 presents the weighted average of accent and pronunciation:

Table 9
Weighted average regarding accent and pronunciation

Departments	Not at all ×	Little extant	Unable to judge	Some extant	Great extant	Total	Weighted Average

	0	× 1	× 2	× 3	× 4		
Economics	11	15	19	3	2	50	1.4
Mass Communication	9	17	0	23	1	50	1.8
Education	2	29	11	8	0	50	1.5

Cut off value = 2.00

In the perspective of accent and pronunciation, the table shows weighted average lower than 2 of all the departments which refers to intense need of drill in sense of accent and pronunciation.

Likewise, the Statistical data of chi-square test for comparing differences of speaking skills in relation to accent and pronunciation of the students of social sciences departments have been presented below:

Table 10
Contingency Table

Departments	Not at all	Little extant	Unable to judge	Some extant	Great extant	Total
Economics	111	115	119	33	22	550
Mass Communication	99	117	00	223	11	550
Education	22	229	111	88	00	550
Total	222	661	330	334	33	1150

Such as, concerning the information related to contingency table 10, findings of chi square test has been presented below:

Chi square = $\chi^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$

= 50.039

Degree of freedom = d_f = 8

The chi square value is 26.12 at probability 0.001 level with d_f 8 but the calculated value is 50.039, that is greater than the table value, thus it reveals that there is a great significant difference at less than 0.001 level.

Conclusion

The overall statistical information in relation to the social sciences disciplines is presented below at probability value =0.001 with d_f = 8:

Table 11
Calculated Values of Chi-Square of All Evaluated Elements Regarding Speaking Skills

Evaluating Elements	Calculated Value of Chi Square	Table Value of Chi Square
Shyness	93.6201	26.12

Recitation	52.328	26.12
Fluency	65.043	26.12
Vocabulary	32.894	26.12
Accent & pronunciation	50.039	26.12

As presented in the above table overall, there was statistically significant difference among the students of the three departments concerning shyness, recitation, fluency, vocabulary, accent and pronunciation: In relation to shyness, accent and fluency, the weighted average of three departments was lower than cut off value, it requires drill and interactive environment to enhance the English speaking skills while the weighted average concerning recitation, fluency and vocabulary bare minimum value in two departments; Economics and Education, whereas in the third department, Mass Communication, had better level.

In a single whole, it could be declared that analysis of the obtained data through weighted average and chi square test highlights the students' lower level of speaking skills. It is necessary to improve the syllabus by providing greater interactive environment to bridge the gulf between the existing level of students' skills and the required academic language needs.

Suggestions

The research is consequential in a number of ways. Considering the findings, the existing courses in the context could be improved by the policy makers, teachers and administrators. The research is also useful for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP) stakeholders in general to get familiarity with the issues related to real life EAP and ESP situations, problems and solutions. Further, the research creates openings for new researchers in the related areas by designing innovative courses by keeping in view the present situation and needs of the learners by sparking the interest through different tasks, techniques and strategies by the instructors. The teachers are suggested to employ task based language teaching and communicative language teaching methodology by integrating technology embedded activities to motivate the students to make a pace in the academic situations regarding speaking skills.

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