

# **ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING: FROM DUMB BYSTANDERS TO SPRIGHTLY PARTICIPANTS FIRST YEAR LMD STUDENTS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MASCARA AS CASE STUDY**

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## 1. Introduction

The non debatable fact about the conspicuous position that the English language enjoys nowadays leads to the insatiable lust for learning it. Thus, to be able to meet the needs of globalization, a great deal of students enroll every year in universities opting for English as a field of study. Given that “speaking is a real language” (Finochiaro cited in Zulfiqua, 2013) students, via learning, should acquire the ability of going beyond only memorizing new words and their meanings to using them effectively in oral communication, i.e., to succeed in turning their gained input into a meaningful oral output.

Accordingly, it's of a significant importance to diagnose the obstacles that encumber students from excellently brushing up their speaking skill mainly in non English-speaking countries wherein English is seldom used outside the classroom walls. Hence, the kernel of the present study is to do so by selecting first year LMD students at the University of Mascara in the English department as a subject of investigation.

To meet this aim, the following questions have been raised:

- ❖ What are the difficulties that students encounter in the courses of oral expression?
- ❖ What are the hindrances that inhibit students from participating in the courses of oral expression?
- ❖ How are teachers responding to their students' passivity during the courses of oral expression?

To this effect the present paper is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. While the first one will be concerned with describing the main concepts and ideas that underline this study, the second part will be devoted to analyzing data collected from two questionnaires delivered not only to students, but teachers either.

## 2. Speaking Skill: Definition and Importance

Being a competent speaker is a sought-after wish for plethora of students who are in the midst of learning a new language beyond their native one. Correspondingly, speaking skill is, without doubt, a crystal medium for effective communication. Thereby, learning a new language cannot be perfectly attained by passing over this skill as asserted by Nunan, “to most people, mastering the art of speaking is the single most important factor of learning a second or foreign language and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language”. (1991:39)

Actually, a myriad of different attempts have been made to define this skill, yet most of them agree upon the fact that a potent speech equates transmitting a meaningful message as alluded by Comings, J. et al. “speaking consists of producing systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning.” (2006: 124). Subsequently, people intentionally conduct a speech not only to be able to interact with each other, but also to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings by dint of verbal and non verbal symbols. On this point Rizvi acknowledged

Speaking is the purposeful process by which people, using audible and visible symbols, communicate meaning in the minds of their listeners. It is flexible, changing, as well as complex and varied. Whether it is an informal conversation or a very formal business meeting, the function of oral communication is creating messages that stimulate in listeners’ meanings that bring about the desired change in their understanding or opinions (2005:91)

In the same vein, Heaton (1988:100 as cited in Zulfiqua, 2013) listed the main components that the speaking skill encapsulates. He believed that weaving together accuracy (good pronunciation, perfect grammar, and well-chosen words) with fluency (speaking with less hesitation), comprehensibility (reciprocal understanding of the speech by both speaker and listener) and lucidity of the content message that is intended to be sent, will engender an effective speech.

Similarly Canale and Swain (1980 as cited in Burns and Goh 2012:51-52) advocated this view by confirming that speaking is a combinatorial skill which requires four competences including, grammar competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. To put it in another way, a good speaker has to be able to produce a coherent speech and save it from being cut off using the suitable strategies whenever it’s necessary to keep the smooth flow of ideas. Furthermore, he should not only have an adequate knowledge in the language being used regarding its grammar,

vocabulary, and phonology, but also he ought to harness this language with the pertinent social and cultural meanings fitting the communication situation.

### **3. Oral English Teaching-learning Process**

The importance of the spoken feature of any language makes it of a requisite need to include oral teaching in the contents of learning any specific language. However, this task is not only complex for FL learners, but also for teachers. Akin to this situation is the EFL context.

#### **3.1. Oral English Teaching**

Living in a community wherein people have scarce exposure to the English language, complicates matters for teachers who are supposed to teach their learners how to speak a language which is not theirs. What turns matters to be more intricate is to help learners speak English confidently while using the right intonation, stress, rhythm, and choosing the correct words that correspond to each given situation. By doing so, learners will slowly, but surely acquire the ability to engender a genuine communication which is clarified more by Febriyanti

In genuine communication, speaking is purpose-driven or it can say that to communicate is to achieve a particular end, expressing a wish or desire to do something; negotiating or solving a particular problem; or maintaining social relationships and friends, etc. (n.d: 3)

By the same token, to be able to create the aforementioned communication, teachers should be aware of the nature and importance of the speaking skill which necessitates habit formation in the classroom, i.e., ongoing practice from the part of learners. (ibid, 2). Thereupon, teachers should go beyond resorting only to the textbooks content to presenting more real-life situations as argued by Venkateswaran “students must learn to cope with utterances they have not previously got exposed to, and they need opportunities to acquire vocabulary from outside the syllabus” (1995:81)

Moreover, successful learning cannot be procured without providing learners with a helpful atmosphere that best galvanizes them in practicing the input they receive from their teachers and help them to free their caged abilities as emphasized by (Willis), “Learners need chances to say what they think or feel and to experiment in a supportive atmosphere using language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened” (1996: 7 as cited in Al Hosni, 2014:23).

#### **3.2. EFL Students’ Obstacles in Learning Speaking**

Given that speaking is a “real time phenomenon” (Kaneko, 2008:6) which is a highly complex activity that does not vouchsafe its participants with the opportunity of planning and editing their oral output, students who are driven by the desire of learning English as a foreign language usually find

themselves crippled when it comes to practicing this skill. This is indeed an inevitable outcome of the minimal exposure to the target language coupled with the less contact with native speakers. This view is expanded by Ur (1996, as cited in Al Honsi, 2014:23) who noted that the main hindrances that debar students from speaking a foreign language in the classroom are as follows:

1. Inhibition which entails students' bashfulness and endless fear of making mistakes; therefore paving the way for their lack of confidence to be begotten hampering them from speaking in the classroom.
2. 'Nothing to say' which refers to the non-presence of the necessary motivational aura that propels students to participate and express their ideas freely and effectively.
3. Low or uneven participation which indicates the imbalance of oral participation within the same class. While some students extensively participate, others display their reluctance to do so, because of their feeling of inferiority.
4. The use of Mother tongue which affects most of EFL students. Whenever they try to speak in the target language and words fail them, they unconsciously resort to their native language to solve the problem.

#### **4. Oral English Teaching-learning Process under Scrutiny**

A valuable number of students every year apply for English studies in the Algerian universities. The University of Mascara being of no exception experiences this process wherein three years circle for the fulfilment of license degree is required followed by Master degree for two years and Doctorate degree for three years.

##### **4.1. Oral English Teaching Situation in the English Department of the University of Mascara**

It goes without saying that teaching speaking in non-English speaking countries is a highly challenging task since the outside environment is less helpful if it does. In the department of English, in the University of Mascara, oral English teaching occurred within the frame of the listening comprehension and oral expression module which is studied for three years. Concerning first year LMD students, this module is scheduled twice a week with the aim of devoting one session to the listening skill; the other to the speaking skill.

##### **4.2. Students' Questionnaire**

The first questionnaire is addressed to the first year LMD students at the department of English in the University of Mascara. The subjects of this questionnaire are 70 students from three classes; they were randomly selected to dissect the main factors that affect their participation in the module of oral expression. The questionnaire embodies eleven questions conflates closed

questions with open-ended ones. They are designed mainly to meet the purport of the present study.

**4.2.1. Analysis of the Result**

**Table 01: Student’s Gender**

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	57	81,42%
Male	13	18,57%
Total number	70	100%

**Table 02: Students’ Age**

Age	Number	Percentage
19-25	61	87,14%
26-33	09	12,85%
Total number	70	100%

The results as displayed in table 01 and 02 reveal the preponderance of girls over boys. The former are inclined towards studying English more than the latter with percentage of 81, 42% and 18,57% respectively. Moreover, the outcomes show that a great deal of the participants’ age varies between 19 and 25 years old; the others, however, between 26 and 33. While some students study English for the first time, the remaining are divided between repetitive students and those who are applying to acquire an additional diploma.

**Table 03: Reason behind studying English**

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	56	80%
No	14	20%
Total number	70	100%

The results of table 03 show that a great deal of students willingly opted for English to be studied in the university; thus, they are supposed to be more motivated to brush up their skills regarding this language.

**Table 04: Skills that students hope to ameliorate**

Option	Number	Percentage
Listening	10	14,28%
Speaking	40	57,14%
Reading	8	11,42%
Writing	12	17,14%
Total number	70	100%

The results in table 04 shed light on the most important skill that the students hope to develop. Through the gleaned data, it’s palpable that speaking skill topped the rest of the skills. Students strongly wish to be able to speak like native speakers do.

**Table 05: Students' attitude towards the module of oral expression**

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	59	84,28%
No	11	15,51%
Total number	70	100%

Table 05 displays students' attitudes towards the module of oral expression. Through the collected data, the majority of students like this module as they consider it a crucial opportunity for them to realize their aim regarding the speaking skill.

**Table 06: Participation of students in the courses of oral expression**

Option	Number	Percentage
Always	13	18,57%
Seldom	39	55,71%
Never	18	25,71%
Total number	70	100%

Table 06 provides us with an idea about the degree of students' participation during the courses of oral expression. While a few number of students (18, 57%) participate extensively, the great portion (55, 71%) does it scarcely, yet the remaining (25, 71%) are loath to do so because of the different reasons displayed in table 08. As a matter of fact, lack of participation will for sure affect negatively the improvement of their speaking skill.

**Table 07: Students' evaluation of their speaking ability**

Option	Number	Percentage
Low	23	32,85%
Average	34	48,57%
Good	11	15,71%
Excellent	2	2,85%
Total number	70	100%

When students were asked to evaluate their speaking ability, most of them (48, 57%) measured it as being average; only two students (2, 85%) regarded it as excellent. The rest varied between low (32, 85%) and good (15, 71%). This signifies that students still face problems in developing this skill.

**Table 08: Student's reasons behind not participating in the course of oral expression**

Option	Number	Percentage
Fear of making mistakes	11	15,71%
Fear of using mother tongue	4	5,71%
Fear that the others will mock your English	5	7,14%
Fear of teacher's criticism	8	11,42%
Lack of vocabulary and knowledge	9	12,85%
Lack of motivation and encouragement	22	31,42%
Shyness	11	15,71%
Total number	70	100%

Table 08 represents the reasons that debar students from partaking in the course of oral expression. Indeed, a great deal of them (31, 42%) believes that their non-participation is due to the lack of motivation and encouragement from the part of the teacher. Sharing the same portion (15, 71%), some are afraid of making mistakes; the others feel shy to participate. Then, about (12, 85%) suffer from paucity of vocabulary and enough knowledge to speak. While about (11, 42%) fall prey to fear of teacher's criticism, (7, 14%) are afraid that their classmates will mock their English. The remaining portion (5, 71%) is afraid of using their mother tongue while others use the target language actively.

**Table 09: Type of atmosphere created by the teacher in the oral lessons**

Option	Number	Percentage
Fearful	21	30%
Friendly and Motivating	10	14,28%
Neutral	39	55,71%
Total number	70	100%

Table 09 throws light upon the kind of atmosphere engendered by teachers in the classroom. Students indicates that the majority of teachers (55, 71%) are neutral, not creating neither fearful atmosphere not a motivating one. Others responded that 30% of teachers create a fearful arena; therefore, students'

anxiety increased preventing them from expressing themselves freely. Yet, the remaining stated that only (14,28%) creates a motivating and a friendly atmosphere that urge students to participate without being afraid.

**Table 10: Frequency of teachers’ push for their students’ participation in the oral courses**

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	12	17,14%
No	58	82,85%
Total number	70	100%

Table 10 represents frequency of teachers’ push for their students’ participation in the oral courses. According to the students’ responses, the numbers of teachers who don’t motivate their students dominate those who do it with a percentage of 82, 85% over 17, 14%.

Finally, the last question which was handed to students was about their opinion on what can boost their success in the module of oral expression. In spite of the various answers that we’ve received, most of them acquiesce in the fact that the role of teacher as being the most important factor that gives them spurs to actively take part in activities during the classroom. They assert that teachers, who sweep aside students, will negatively affect their motivation. Being the authority in class, teacher is the only one who can push students to get what is inside them out without fear, shyness and anxiety by constantly encouraging them.

**4.3. Teacher’s Questionnaire**

The second questionnaires is directed towards teachers whose number is six and are in charge of teaching the module of oral expression at the department of English in the University of Mascara. Analogous to students’ questionnaire, teachers’ embraces nine closed questions and one open-ended question.

**4.3.1. Analysis of the Result**

**Table 01: Teachers’ gender and degree**

Gender	Number	Degree
Female	06	Magister
Male	/	/
Total number	06	/



Table 01 indicates that all teachers who took part in this investigation are females with Magister degree. One of them has been teaching this module for 5 years; three for four years, whereas the rest for only one year.

**Table 02:  
Teachers’ use of a specific program in oral expression**

Option	Number
Yes	05
No	01
Total number	06

Indeed, table 02 reveals that five teachers adopt a specific program to teach oral expression. They stated that to achieve their goal, they devote one session to listening skill wherein students are repeatedly supposed to listen to native speakers’ speech to get an idea about the different features of the spoken English including intonation, stress and rhythm. The second session however is directed towards practice by tackling different topic. On the other hand, the remaining teacher does not follow a specific program, yet she gives the students the opportunity to speak about any topic of their choice.

**Table 03: Teachers’ evaluation of their student’s proficiency in speaking English**

Option	Number
Low	02
Average	04
Good	/
Excellent	/
Total number	70

Teachers’ views about their students’ proficiency varied in that some of them believe that their level is still low since they are not able to send a meaningful message with correct English. Others mentioned that students’ level is subsumed under the average column since they are able to express themselves yet with still a lot of mistakes regarding grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and even coherence of

the dispatched message.

**Table 04: Teachers’ evaluation of their students’ participation in oral expression courses**

Option	Number
Yes	01
No	05
Total number	06

As it is shown in table 04, five teachers have the same problem which is students’ participation in the course of oral expression. However, only one teacher noted that nearly all classroom members participate actively during the course because of her relentless motivational encouragement.

**Table 05: Teachers’ evaluation of the reasons behind their students’ passivity during the course of oral expression**

	Teacher 01	Teacher 02	Teacher 03	Teacher 04	Teacher 05	Teacher 06
Fear of making mistakes	√		√	√	√	
Fear of using mother tongue		√		√		√
Fear that the others will mock your English	√		√		√	
Fear of teacher’s criticism	√			√	√	
Shyness	√	√	√	√	√	√
Lack of vocabulary and knowledge	√		√		√	√

According to the results gathered and represented in table 05, shyness is the most salient impediment that encumbers students’ participation in the course of oral expression. It can be the result of many reasons such as their fear of grammatical mistakes and lack of enough vocabulary and knowledge as

teachers asserted. Three teachers believe that some students are crippled by fear of integrating their mother tongue while speaking; therefore they may be mocked at by the other classmates. Furthermore, teachers also have thrown light upon student’s great fear of receiving negative and harsh criticism.

**Table 06: Teachers’ motivation of students motivating students**

**Table 07: Difficulty of**

Gender	Number
Yes	06
No	/
Total number	06

Age	Number
Yes	05
No	01
Total number	06

According to both table 06 and 07, all teachers stated that they do their best to motivate their students, yet the task is demanding especially with the deficiency of time allocated to the oral courses. Moreover, most of them affirmed that students can by themselves create a motivating atmosphere via their willingness to study and brush up their speaking skill.

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The different findings reveal that most of students give due weight to the speaking skill; thus being unable to speak perfectly for them is an ordeal. Actually, the results show that psychological problems including fear and shyness are the most dominating reasons that cripple them from being active participants in the oral course. Since studying English in the university is for them a new experience totally different from the one in middle and secondary school, it’s the duty of teachers to get them involved in the courses by engendering a warm and protective arena via creating funny and real-life activities, adopting an ongoing encouragement method to boost their moral an interest in learning. At the same time, teacher should control the classroom prohibiting students from making fun of each other. In addition to that, teachers should work collaboratively to bring the module of oral expression into alignment with the other modules. For instance, if students are supposed to get an idea about the intonation and rhythm of native speakers, they must first be acquainted with those concepts in the course of phonetics. By doing so, students will be able to turn the input they gain and store from the other modules into a meaningful and perfect output in the module of oral expression.

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**Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire**

Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria  
 Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
 University of Mustapha Stambouli, Mascara  
 Faculty of Letters and Languages  
 Department of the English Language and Literature

Dear students,

You are kindly requested to endow us with your answers which are necessary for our research to be valid. Actually, this questionnaire is a bid to glean the needed data for the accomplishment of a research conducted to accentuate the main obstacles that encumber EFL learners from taking part in participation in the oral expression course.

Please, tick the appropriate box (☐) and make full statements whenever necessary.

Thank you for your corporation.

1. **Gender:**

Male

Female

2.

**Age**

3. **Was studying English your choice?**

Yes

No

4. **Which of the following skill do you find difficult to ameliorate?**

Listening

Speaking

Reading

Writing

5. **Do you like the module of oral expression?**

Yes

No

6. **How often do you participate during the course of oral expression?**

Always

Seldom

Never

7. **How do you evaluate speaking skill abilities?**

Excellent

Good

Average

low

8. **If you don't participate in the course of oral expression, what impede you from doing so?**

Fear of making mistakes

Fear of using mother tongue

Fear that the others will mock your English

teacher's

criticism

Lack of motivation and encouragement

Lack of vocabulary

and knowledge Shyness

**9.** What type of atmosphere does your teacher create in the oral lessons?  
 Fearful  Friendly and motivating  Neutral

**10.** Does your teacher push you to work and participate?  
 Yes  No

**11.** According to you, what helps you to succeed in the module of oral expression?  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**Appendix B: Teachers' Questionnaire**

**Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**University of Mustapha Stambouli, Mascara**  
**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
**Department of the English Language and Literature**

Dear teachers,

You are kindly requested to endow us with your answers which are necessary for our research to be valid. Actually, this questionnaire is a bid to glean the needed data for the accomplishment of a research conducted to accentuate the main obstacles that encumber EFL learners from taking part in participation in the oral expression course. I'll be so grateful sharing your experiences.

Please, tick the appropriate box (  ) and make full statements whenever necessary.

Thank you for your corporation.

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**1. Gender:**

Male  Female

**2. Degree held**

Magister  Doctorale

**3. For how long have you been teaching oral expression?**

**4. Do you adopt any specific program in teaching oral expression?**

Yes  No

**5. If 'yes', what are the objectives you wish to accomplish from this program?**  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**6. How do you evaluate your students' proficiency in speaking English**

Excellent  Good  Average    
low

**7. Do all your students participate during the course?**  
Yes  No

**8. According to your observation, what are the reasons that inhibit students from speaking?**  
Fear of making mistakes  Fear of using mother tongue   
Fear that the others will mock your English criticism  Fear of teacher's criticism   
Shyness  Lack of vocabulary and knowledge

**9. Do you try to create a motivating atmosphere in the class?**  
Yes  No   
**If yes, how do you usually do it?**  
.....  
.....

**10. Is it difficult to motivate students?**  
Yes  No   
**Why?**  
.....  
.....