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## The Use of Problem-Solving Activities in Developing Students' Speaking Skill

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### Abstract:

Problem-solving is one of the 21 century skills. Therefore, the current paper aims at investigating the relationship of problem-solving activities and the development of students' speaking skill. To fulfill this aim, the study opts for a descriptive study where T-test show that the hypothesis stated in the study is confirmed.

**Keywords:** 21 century skill; speaking skill; problem; problem-solving skill; problem-solving activities.

### المخلص

تعتبر حل المشكلات واحدة من مهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين ، و لهذا تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحري العلاقة بين أنشطة حل المشكلات وتطوير مهارات التحدث لدى الطلاب. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تم اختيار الدراسة الوصفية بالاعتماد على استبيانين. أظهرت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها باستخدام T-test تأكيد الفرضية الواردة في الدراسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مهارة القرن الحادي والعشرين، مهارة التحدث، المشكلة، مهارة حل المشكلات، أنشطة حل المشكلات.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim behind teaching speaking is to enable learners to develop their communicative competence in the target language. Many activities are suggested to achieve this goal. However, this paper has suggested the use of problem-solving activities.

Problem solving is considered as one of the survival skills among others such as thinking skill, agility and adaptability, collaboration and leadership; initiative and entrepreneurialism; accessing and analysing information; effective oral and written communication, and curiosity and imagination (Wanger, 2008, in Erdem, 2019).

Therefore, this paper raises the question of the role of using problem- solving activities in developing students' oral performance. As hypothesis, it is suggested that the use of problem-solving activity may be important.

To fulfill the objective, this paper is structured as follow starting by defining the speaking skill and problem-solving skill then the methodology adopted and finally data results and discussion.

## **2. Speaking skill**

Speaking is considered as the most difficult skill among the others (Lazaraton,2001; Martínez-Flor et al., 2006 ) since the speaker needs to decide which instance of a language is linguistically, pragmatically, and socially appropriate in order to communicate effectively in the target language. Thus, the central objective of speaking is to develop leaners' communicative competence (Martínez-Flor et al., 2006).

Teaching speaking is not that easy task for teachers especially when it comes to the activities and tasks they should use in the oral session to make their students motivated to speak

and to communicate effectively in the target language. Formerly, the activities used in oral sessions were drills and substitution exercises. Their aims concentrated on grammatical structures and patterns through intense aural-oral practice. The focus was on teaching pronunciation skills and grammatical accuracy rather than discourse skills (Bygate 2002, in Martínez-Flor et al., 2006).

However, this view has changed to a focus on communication rather than the usage of the code (language). This movement has shed light on meaning negotiation and the strategies used in speaking activities to minimize any breakdown in communication (Hedge, 1993, in Lazaraton, 2001). Also, learners are encouraged to be at the center of their learning process. That is to say, students can learn not only from their teachers, but also they can learn from their classmates and the outside world. For this reason, it is important to motivate learners to decide the content of the course and to start communication and to evaluate their progress (Lazaraton, 2001).

According to Lazaraton (2001), many activities are used in ESL or EFL class to enhance the oral skill. Examples of these activities are: discussions, speeches, role plays; conversations, audiotaped oral dialogue journal, and other accuracy based activities. These activities need to be tailored according to the students' needs and they should be meaning-focused. Therefore, learners require explicit instruction during the learning process (Shumin, 2002).

Problem solving is an activity that is suggested by scholars to help teachers to unleash their students' creativity by urging them to think 'outside the box' by providing them with different situations to be resolved. In this way, the teacher plays the role

of a guider rather than a lecturer (Sani, in Partiwı & Sofıawati, 2018)

### **3. Problem Solving**

The term 'problem solving' is initially related to psychology, yet the term was copied into different fields such as Education. It is considered as one of the important 21 century skills in multi-facets: It is important for learners since it helps them to discover the world. Also, this skill aids students to use various types of strategies and techniques to solve a particular problem and to consider different opinions and different ways for solving an issue (Erdem, 2019)

Before defining problem-solving, the meaning of the 'problem' needs to be identified first. The meaning of problem differs from one person to another: what seems obstruction to someone, it may not be for someone else. In addition, there are some obstacles that seem easy to be solved, yet there are some problems that are difficult to be resolved.

Therefore, a problem is defined as 'a gap between a current and a desired state' (VanGundy, 2005, p.23), i.e., according to Meyer, when there is a certain goal to be achieved and there is no apparent solution or regular method to fulfill your objective, this is called a problem (as cited in Rahman, 2019). In the same way, as quoted in Dostál (2014), problem is considered as: "a practical or theoretical difficulty that a pupil has to solve independently by his own active research" (p.02)

A problem solving, thus, is defined as 'the process of making something into what you want it to be' (ibid, p. 23). In other words, when the students try to find a resolution to change the problem from a status to another status and they do not find

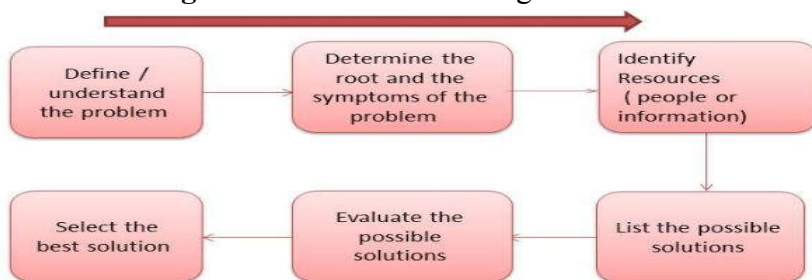
a specified solution to reach that goal, this is called ' a problem solving'

Problem-solving is a complex mental activity that includes different cognitive skills because it involves higher order thinking skills such as: "visualization, association, abstraction, comprehension, manipulation, reasoning, analysis, synthesis, generalization—each needing to be 'managed' and 'coordinated'"(Garofalo & Lester, as quoted in Rahman, 2019, p.73).

Similarly, Shoimin sates, problem solving is "a skill that includes the ability to search for information, analyze situations, and identify problems with the aim of producing alternatives so that decisions can be taken to achieve goals" (as cited in Partiwi & Sofiwati, 2018, p.55)

This model suggested could be given to students to show them how to solve a certain problem.

**Fig.1.** Procedures for Solving a Problem



**Source:** Adapted from (Anker, 2010, p.770)

According to the model, the objective behind problem-solving activity is not to find ultimate solution to any problem, yet it is to make the students think critically of the various ways of solving the problem. Also, they could continuously adjust the

six steps of this model. This kind of work could be done individually, in pairs, or in groups. Throughout the process, this activity is highly interactive where learners are supposed to be motivated and teachers are assumed to be encouraging and giving feedback whenever it is necessary.

In addition, this model provides a systematic approach towards problem-solving. Furthermore, this activity helps learners to think critically, to listen and talk to others and to negotiate meaning in a shared context.

These types of activities are supposed to be suitable activity for speaking because it includes two main skills: observation skill and critical thinking skill. The first one is concerned with finding the main points of problem by gathering information. The second one is divided into six sub-skills: conceptualizing, logical reasoning, application, analytical thinking, decision making, and synthesizing skill.

Conceptualizing skill helps students to identify the problem either partially or completely. Logical reasoning helps learners to make inferences about the suitable information, the way of interpreting them to formulate arguments. Application skill assists students to resolve the problem by using suitable strategies or procedures. Analytical thinking skill helps learners to break the problem into parts, recognize the root of the problem, and identify a list of actions and resources needed to solve a problem. Decision making skill aids learners to evaluate the effectiveness of a solution based on logical arguments. The last skill is synthesizing skill helps students to determine alternatives and to generate new ways to achieve a specified task

#### **4. Data collection**

To fulfill the aim of this paper and to test the hypothesis suggested, a descriptive method was adopted where two questionnaires were submitted to teachers and students. The first questionnaire was devoted to ten teachers of oral comprehension and expression (OCE). It is composed of two sections. The first one is related to background. The second one is concerned with the importance of using problem-solving activities in the classroom and its effects on their students. The second questionnaire was devoted to 23 first students licence in the academic year 2022-2023. The chosen of the sample was done randomly. The aim of the questionnaire was to see if the use of problem-solving activities develops their speaking skill. The analysis of the results was done using SPSS.

## 5. Data Results and Interpretation

The followings are the results of teachers' and students' questionnaire with their interpretation

### 5.1. The Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Questionnaire

#### 5.1.1. Section 1

Q1- Which degree do you hold?

Most of the teachers has answered that they hold PhD degree, while the others hold magister. This indicates that teachers are well-experienced. The results are seen in the following table:

**Table1.** The Results of Teacher's degree

Options	Frequency	Percent
Magister	4	40

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PHD	6	60
Total	10	100

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Q2- Do you teach the Module of ' Oral Expression'?

As shown in table 2, most teachers answered that they teach the module; however, the others said that they do not teach the module. This shows that most teachers are aware of the nature of the module. For those who answered by ' no', they mean that they do not teach the module for first year students.

**Table2.** The Results of teaching the Module

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	80
No	2	20
Total	10	100

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Q3- If yes, for how long have you been teaching the module?

As indicated in table 3, most teachers answered that they teach the module for less than three years, while the others has said that they teach it for three years or less. The results demonstrate that teachers have considerable experience for teaching this particular module.

**Table3.** The Duration of Teaching the Module

Options	Frequency	Percent
Less than three years	5	50
More than three years	3	30
Three years	2	20
Total	10	100

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### 5.1.2. Section 2

Q1- Can you describe your students' level in oral sessions?

As seen in table 4, the results show that the majority of students have an average level of 50%, and a rate above average



of 20%, while the rest of the students have a similar percentage of 10%. That means that learners could be given activities of different levels to make them speak in the classroom.

**Table 4.** Students' level

Options	Frequency	Percent
Low	1	10
below Average	1	10
Average	5	50
above average	2	20
High	1	10
Total	10	100

Q2- Do you think that your students' participation is sufficient in the classroom?

The results of table 5 show that the participation of students is weak in the sessions at a rate of 60%, while the participation in the session for others is at rate of 40%. This shows that students are not motivated to speak in the session because of certain reasons.

**Table 5.** Students' participation during the session

Options	Frequency	Percent
yes	4	40,0
No	6	60,0
Total	10	100,0

Q3-If No, what kinds of problems do they face?

As seen in table 6, most of students' problem during the session is language problems (such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) and other reasons with a percentage of 40.0%, followed by problems with the activities used in the classroom with a percentage of 10 %, and problems with self-confidence

by 10%, This shows that learners are worry to make mistakes while speaking or because of inner problems.

**Table 6.** Problems Faced by the Students

Options	Frequency	Percent
Problems in language (such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation )	4	40
Problems in the activities used in the classroom	1	10
Problems in self-confidence	1	10
Other reasons	4	40
Total	10	100

Q4-Which one among the following activities do you use most in your session?

As indicated in table7, the majority of teachers use role-playing at a rate of 30%, while the rest of the activities which are problem-solving, debates and presentations are used with a percentage of 20%. In contrary, other activities are used by 10 %. This demonstrates that teachers use a variety of activities during the sessions in order to activate students.

**Table7.** Types of Activities used during the Session

Options	Frequency	Percent
Debates	2	20
Problem-solving	2	20
Presentations	2	20
Role plays	3	30
Other type of activities	1	10
Total	10	100

Q5- Do you think that the use of problem-solving may help your students to speak more in the classroom?

According to table 8, 90 % of teachers agree that the use of problem-solving may help their students to speak more in the classroom, while 10 has answered negatively. This shows that using these types of activities may affect students' development positively.

**Table 8.** Problem solving and Speaking

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	90
No	1	10
Total	10	100

Q6- The use of Problem-solving activities may help your students to:

Table 9 shows that 40 % of teachers think that the use problem solving activity may help students to think critically followed by 30 % who answered that it helps them to express their emotions. However 20% said that it will assist them to develop creativity and the other 10 % said that it will aid them to cooperate together. This indicates that critical thinking is crucial

**Table 9.** The Use of Problem-Solving Activities

Options	Frequency	Percent
Think critically	4	40
develop creativity	2	20
cooperate together	1	10
Express their emotions	3	30
Total	10	100

Q7- Which types of problems do you suggest to your students to be solved?

Table 10 shows that the majority of teachers with 90% suggest to their students problems that are related to real-life situations, while the rest with 10 % suggest to their learners problems related to workplace. This indicates that teachers are aware of the importance with providing students with authentic situations.

**Table10.** Types of Problems Suggested to Students

Options	Frequency	Percent
Problems related to real-life situations	9	90
Occupational problems	1	10
Total	10	100

## 5.2. The Analysis of Students' Questionnaire and Interpretation

Q1- Do you enjoy the oral session?

In table11, it is noticed that the majority of students (73.9%) enjoy the oral session, while the others (26.1%) answered negatively. This indicates that most of students like speaking during the session to express their opinions and emotions.

**Table 11.**The Enjoyment of the Oral Sessions

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	17	73.9
No	6	26.1
Total	23	100

Q2- Do you think that you are motivated during the session?

As indicated in table 12, 52.2% of students have answered that they are motivated during the session, while the rest with a

percentage of 47.8% are not. This shows that the tasks used in the sessions are well-designed by teachers.

**Table 12.** Students' Motivation during the Session

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	52.2
No	11	47.8
Total	23	100

According to table 13, the majority answered that they are not motivated because of self-confidence; however, the others have other issues such as language problems, motivational issues, tasks used in the class, and other problems. This shows that the types of activities used in the classroom make students unlock their full potential.

Q3- If no, what is the reason?

**Table 13.** Reasons behind not being motivated

Options	Frequency	Percent
language problems	5	21.7
Self-confidence	12	52.2
Motivational issues	2	8.7
Tasks used in the class	1	4.3
Other problems	3	13
total	23	100

Q4- Which activity do you enjoy most in oral sessions?

As shown in table 14, the most enjoyable activities in the oral session are both role plays and presentations with a percentage of 30.4%, followed by debates with percentage of 26.1%. The rest has chosen problem-solving with a percentage of 13%. This indicates that students are interested of activities that they prepared at home rather than activities that require critical thinking skills. The reason behind this is because of self-confidence or they are not get used for such activities.

**Table14.** The most Enjoyable Activity in the Oral Session

options	Frequency	Percent
Role plays	7	30.4
Debates	6	26.1
Presentations	7	30.4
Problem-solving activities	3	13
Total	23	100

Q5-What is your attitude when your teacher asks to solve a problem?

As seen in table15, the majority of students (34.8%) are interested when they are asked to solve a problem, followed by 21.7% who are motivated. The rest, their percentage, varies between enjoyed, self-confidence, lack of interest. This shows that students are interested to solve problems

**Table15.** Students' Attitude when solving a Problem

Options	Frequency	Percent
Motivated	5	21.7
Interested	8	34.8
Lack of Interest	3	13
Self-confidence	3	13
Enjoyed	4	17.4
Total	23	100

Q6- Do you think that problem solving activities help you to develop your speaking?

Table 16 shows that all the students agree that the use of problem-solving activity develop their speaking skill. This indicates that the hypothesis suggested in the beginning of the work is confirmed.

**Table 16. Problem- solving activities and Development of Speaking skill**

Options	Frequency	Percent
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Yes	23	100
No	00	0
Total	23	100

## 6. Conclusion

In short, problem solving activity will not only help students to develop their communicative competence by thinking in the target language, but also to survive in their lives either at university or at work or at their personal lives because this activity will teach them to be creative and to develop their cognitive skills (Pavlikova, 2019). Based on the methodology adopted in this paper, it was confirmed that the use of problem solving activities develop students' speaking skill; however, it is preferable to use action research or an experimental design for further researchers.

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