



Problems Facing Tour Guides in Speaking in the Field of Tourism in Algeria. Case of the High National School of Tourism, Algiers

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Abstract ;

There is a general observation that tour guides students at the High National School of Tourism in Algiers lack competence in oral performance in English. This problem pushes us to investigate a needs analysis study to find out the real reasons behind it. The purpose of this study is to examine the oral communicative competence needs of tour guides taking the example of the above mentioned institute. The objective is also to collect data in order to find out the sources of the problem, then to identify possible solutions to improve the oral communicative competence of the tour guides. To gather the data in this study, we rely on voice recording and students' questionnaire. The results obtained from students show that they lack this skill because they do not have sessions of oral expression to make use of their English. Hence tour guides, are in need of more time of classroom practice in oral. This can be achieved through designing a syllabus that meets the students needs with serious objectives.

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Introduction

In recent years, tourism in Algeria is witnessing a considerable scale of prosperity according to the ministry of tourism in Algeria. This is so due to many reasons. The diversity and richness of the Algerian landscape; the relative stabilization in the country's political and economic spheres, in the last years; and the occasional turmoil many countries are undergoing, the ones that used to be favourite touristic destinations. The compilation of these reasons helped the country become a tourist area. Promising Algeria has to take the field of tourism in the consideration by enhancing the touristic requirements the field of tourism lacks. Providing an appropriate touristic infrastructure is crucial to a successful touristic industry. In this regard, appropriate specialized and trained personnel of tour guides can be of great help to launch such an industry. The tour guide's role is so intricate since he/she is in direct contact with tourists. As the tour guide's service quality is so defining at enhancing the image and reputation of touristic destinations, namely in our case Algeria, he/she should be, therefore, equipped with special skills mainly the linguistic ones. In Algeria, there exist different institutions and just one school for tourism. At the end of their training, the trainees are to be qualified with a two-year and half training diploma. A central school is established in the capital

where training abides by the international norms. The areas of interests provided in the institutions range from cooking, hotel reception, hotel management. It is worth mentioning that the tour guide training is provided in the central school of Algiers, which is our subject. The excellent graduates from the regional institutions can further their studies, a one-year-course, in the school; thereby, they will obtain a BA in tourism. This category of students might have the same problem.

2. Research Problem

A tour guide is a person who functions as a leader of groups of tourists around a local destination, and takes them around to various tourist spots of importance and provides a commentary on the history and special features of the location. The tours can last from as little as 10-15 minutes to extended periods of many days. Considerable importance is placed on the tour guide's knowledge of local stories, history and culture as he is expected to furnish the right information to tourists and not disappoint them. In this respect, the verbal communication is very important to help that foreign tourist. After few meetings with the student and the teachers as well at the school of tourism we came to the result that the tour guides are not competent in English oral communication. The students of the High National School of Tourism in Algiers are supposed to be in contact with tourists who came from different English

speaking countries. However, what we have noticed, when we visited the school of tourism, is that the guides speak poor English; they lack the oral communicative competence although they have been trained in tour guidance for a long period of time.

3.1 Research Questions

The question that can be addressed is what are the reasons behind this lack of oral communicative skills in English? And what kind of teaching needed to be adopted to improve tour guides' oral communication? Since the students of this school will be in different contexts. When they start their job, they need English more than any other language since it is a global language.

3.2 Hypothesis

The above question would lead us to think about the possible reasons of the problem. The lack of mastery of English, even before entering the school, might be quite a pertinent hindrance. If students enter the school with a poor level of English, the time allocated to English at the School will not suffice to enhancing students' English communicative skills. Being in contact with people mainly, as a guide, does require extra-linguistic skills: socialization, leadership skills... On the other hand, teachers have a very strong impact on the learner's feedback. The status of English in the school should be more important, to the extent that the time allocated to the English class might not be sufficient. In addition, the allocated teachers are not qualified or

specialized and English is considered as the second foreign language. If the students are to practice their English, they will do it only inside the classroom; hence, an absence of a convenient linguistic bath.

Only a field research will display the role of each of the above-mentioned reasons in the existence of this unsatisfactory communicative skill among the tour guides. In this respect, the present work will try to situate the problem and understand the real causes standing behind this problem among tourist guides. While doing so, this work will examine the lack of practice (because of the limited amount of time allocated to English in the program) as main reason.

4. Review of literature

4.1 Previews Studies

Considerable research has been conducted on the topic of needs analysis and problems related to speaking skills. For instance, studies have been carried out to survey the needs and problems of English for tourist managers, as well as for tourism agents. The findings of these studies have consistently shown that speaking skills are crucial for individuals working in the field of tourism, and that emphasis should be placed on enhancing communication abilities, particularly in speaking, in order to effectively interact with foreign tourists. These previous studies highlight the importance of English, especially speaking skills, for tourist managers and tourism agents when communicating with foreign tourists. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study on the spoken language of tour guide students in Algeria to determine their specific needs. A

comprehensive diagnosis of their oral communicative English can contribute to a better understanding of the requirements for English learning among tour guides. Furthermore, the results of this study can provide valuable information for course designers and English teachers involved in training programs. Further research on this topic can potentially lead to the development of effective training programs that enhance students' English communication abilities.

4.2 Speaking Skills for Tour Guides

Public speaking is often cited as a common fear among individuals. For guides, conquering this fear is crucial as it is a rewarding aspect of their role. Numerous guides have found that guiding has helped them overcome their fear of speaking in front of a group. People are generally drawn to speakers who exhibit enthusiasm, authenticity, and ease with both their audience and topic. A relaxed and spontaneous speaking style tends to captivate listeners, whereas a lackluster or tense approach can deter them.

Zenaida (1999) emphasized that being comfortable while speaking in front of a group is essential for effective communication. To achieve this comfort, thorough preparation is key. Unlike simply memorizing speeches, true preparation involves understanding the subject matter thoroughly. This level of preparation boosts a speaker's confidence and ensures a smooth delivery. Successful presentations are the result of dedication and practice.

Finally, experience will definitely help develop confidence in speaking.

Those who are new in public speaking should know that overcoming nervousness takes time and practice. With practice, guides discover that they need less time to prepare for each tour and that they enjoy tours rather than fear them. In time, most guides gain confidence, overcome nervousness and become more relaxed, spontaneous and effective as speakers.

5. Methodology

5.1 The Aim of the Field Research

The main objective of this study is to find out the reasons behind the students' poor level in spoken English. To reach this objective, the spoken English has been a matter for investigation taking the students of the school of tourism as a population for this research. The institute of tourism is chosen in this study as an ESP field that needs speaking as a means for communication. We follow a combination of two methods to investigate this research which are needs analysis method and the descriptive method. as instruments of data collection, we rely on a voice recording to evaluate the students' oral communicative competence, then, to build the questions of the questionnaire on the this observation. This study is limited to speaking skills and limited to the third year students only.

At the High National School of Tourism in Algiers, the English language teachers who are not specialized in teaching English for tourism and who are not experienced at all carry out of teaching English for tourism purposes. The problem is that there are no predetermined objectives in teaching the

English language, and the students' needs are not taken in consideration.

The aim of the field research is to investigate the needs of the students in terms of oral communicative competence regarding their field specificities in terms of language skills. Since the most useful skill in English language in the field of tourism is speaking, we tend to focus on this side of the language. This study is meant to contribute in the improvement of oral communicative competence for the students to be tour guides in future and to help decision makers at this school to think about an appropriate curriculum to meet their needs. Though the study is concerned with only one skill of language, it may give a clear idea to investigate other researches to establish serious objectives to develop a good curriculum in teaching English for tourism. The results of this study may motivate other researchers to invest in the field of tourism to help in its development.

5.2 Choice of the Field Research

This field research takes place in the High National School of Tourism which is a public institution under the dual administrative supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. This School is chosen to be an area of investigation for many reasons. First, English for tourism is considered as an ESP field that it has specific language and specific needs and curriculum content. Second, English is taught for three years that gives an idea about the important of English language in tourism in general and this institute in particular. The third reason is that speaking is main

feature in English for tourism mainly for those who are interested to be tour guides. In addition to these reasons, the importance of tourism sector in the flourishing the economy of a such country like the case of Tunisia and Morocco motivate us to investigate in this institute.

In the High National School of Tourism, a specific training is established to cover the following points. First, the training covers long-term education in hotel management and tourism. Second, training and retraining of the staff within the tourism sector. In addition to these trainings, there is a specialized training for several of organizations and institutions such as hotels, tour guides, and catering management. The length of training is three years, and in alternating weeks (Theory and practice). The school has switched to the BMD system for the academic year 2006 / 2007.

The English language is a part of the curriculum in the school of tourism. But the objectives of teaching English are not clear. It's up to on the teacher to design his/her program. Since the teachers engaged in staff of teaching are not specialized in the field of tourism, instead of teaching specific subjects related to tourism, they teach other elements of language such as grammar, vocabulary and syntax. On the other hand, the teachers focus on teaching writing and reading instead of listening and speaking. However, from time to time they provide students with texts related to tourism which are not enough to develop their competence mainly in speaking. In addition to these points, the time allocated to English is limited to one

session weekly which is not enough to cover all the skills and features of language.

6 Population and Sampling

We randomly chose third-year students from the school of tourism to complete two tasks for the study: voice recording and answering a questionnaire designed to assess needs analysis.

The decision to choose third-year students was influenced by three main factors. Firstly, these students are mature enough to evaluate their oral communicative competence. It is essential that students involved in the study comprehend the tasks assigned to them. This is supported by Robinson (1989, p. 398) who stated that "the students are normally adults, albeit young adults, rather than school children." Secondly, third-year students are close to completing their studies, suggesting that they should have a good understanding of all the modules they have studied, including English.

Furthermore, the students are focused on the current needs analysis being carried out, emphasizing the importance of incorporating their viewpoints. By considering the students' expressed opinions, it becomes evident that they have particular goals in mind. As Robinson (1989, p. 398) points out, "ESP students typically have very specific goals, making needs analysis a crucial aspect of ESP courses: determining what exactly students require English for in a particular course." Therefore, it is essential for the course to align with the students' needs and expectations, serving as the basis for lesson objectives set by their instructors.

Working with the entire population, especially in voice recording, can be challenging as it is a daunting task to cover everyone. Additionally, a significant number of students declined to participate in speaking activities. Therefore, we attempted to choose a representative sample from the population we were interested in. It is evident that it is feasible to work with a portion of the overall population. As mentioned by Brown (1988, p. 11), "Sampling involves working with a smaller set of data obtained from a sample or subgroup of students within a specific population."

In our study, the sample we work with consists of ten (10) students for the voice recording and ten (10) students for the questionnaire: (1/6) of the entire population of the third year students at the school of tourism. The sample is constituted of males and females. So we are to work with both. But the majority are males.

The voice recording was designed to get some information about the students' abilities in speaking. The voice recording will help in designing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to the third year students. It was distributed to **10** students (out of **60** students). It was divided into three sections; each one of these sections served a different relevant purpose.

7 Methods and Techniques of Data Collection

In order to gather the needed information for this study, we focus on the learner dealing with his requirements and objectives attained during his training. It is possible to carry out needs

analysis through making students answering the questionnaire.. Another data collection will be used which can be suitable for needs analysis. It is direct observation in which spoken interaction of the students can be analyzed. In this sense we will make a voice recording of students' speaking for the sake of analysis.

The use of the descriptive method in this study aims to collect qualitative and quantitative data because a little is known about the needs of the students of tourism in terms of oral communicative competence in Algeria.

8 Research Procedures

Before preparing the voice recording and administering the questionnaires, we met a teacher and some students of the third year. We were provided with a clear idea about teaching English at the school of tourism. This gave us an idea about how the tools of the study should be.

First, the third year students of the National Institute of Tourism were asked to answer five questions related to the field of tourism in order to investigate the weaknesses and the needs in their oral communication competence. In order to make them feel at ease, they are given the questions in papers to prepare their answers. Only six students accept to do the recording whereas four students refused to do. The recorded voices were rewritten in form of script to be analyzed and discussed.

In the light if the results of the voice recording, a questionnaire was designed to look for the reasons of these weaknesses. Later, the students were informed about the objectives and the

significance of the study. They were also requested to state real and honest responses. In addition to that, they were informed for the time they would spend in filling the questionnaires and the questions that would be included in the voice recordings. Moreover, the students were allowed to ask each other for more clarifications they might need. Then the questionnaires were distributed. Once they finished answering the questionnaires, they were asked to check their answers for the last time for incompleteness or missing answers. Then they gathered their questionnaires.

9 Discussion of the Main Findings

9.1 Voice Recording

The results of the voice recording are summarized as follow:

Some students have a major problem that is pronunciation. Throughout our analysis we noticed that a number of students have difficulties in sounds articulation. e.g. They are not able to differentiate between the /p/ and /b/ sounds, they have a difficulty pronouncing the sound /v/, in addition to some vowels such as /ai/ and /ei/. This problem is a result of their mother tongue interference, over generalization, and intralingua interference.

Another problem in students' phonological competence is the mastery of supra-segmental features of English pronunciation. Students make errors in stress as well as in intonation. Their misuse of stress and intonation changes some meanings of their utterances and leads to a misunderstanding that is directly reflected on their communication.

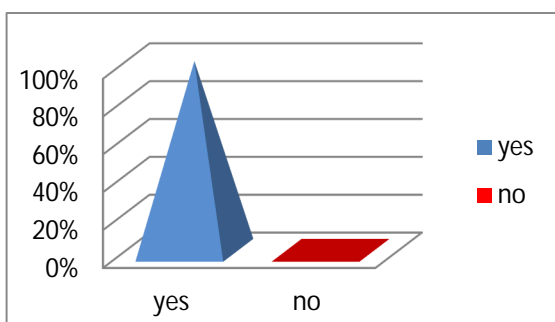
The learners of English as the foreign language have to be able to pronounce the English vocabulary correctly when they practice this language. So, the problem is how well they pronounce all vocabularies which they use, so that their audience can understand what they mean. Furthermore, correct pronunciation makes the language more natural. Whereas, mispronunciation will make miscommunication.

Learning by practicing are the key words in learning a language. Pronunciation as a sub-component of language skills is one of a number of serious problems faced by the learners of English as a foreign language. By always taking time to practice it, it is possible for them to be close and closer to the right way to pronounce the words of this foreign language.

Practice is the key word for the four basic skills in English. Concerning with the speaking skill, the learners of English as the foreign language have to be able to pronounce the English vocabulary correctly when they practice this language. So, the problem is how well they pronounce all vocabularies which they use, so that their audience can understand what they mean. Mispronunciation may lead to miscommunication.

9.2 The Questionnaire

Fig.1. Speaking English language



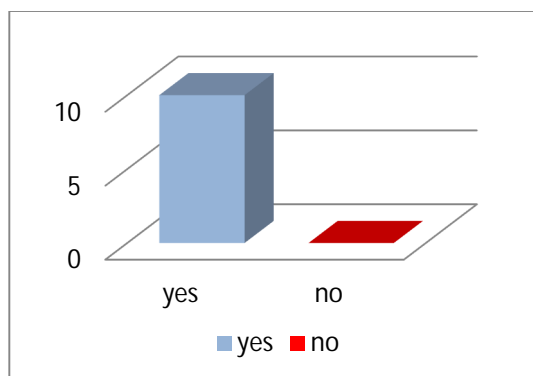
According to the results shown in the figure 1, all the students show that they like to speak English language. The results justify the attitude of students in terms of needs. The students expressed a positive attitude towards English speaking . In the course of their studies, they might have acquired a valuable experience in their previous English learning. They may also feel a further need for learning English because of the specificity of their subject discipline. Due to the diversity of tourists' linguistic background, tour guides, therefore, must resort to English as the world's lingua franca, par excellence. Other factor may influence their attitude towards English which is media and other means of communication.

- Do you think that English is important in your future professional life?

All the students stated that English is important in their future professional lives. This question has been devised in order to know the importance of English for this category of learners. The learners are aware of this value of English in the field of tourism. In the field of tour guidance, spoken English is considered more important than other modules; knowing places, history and other components of tourism without knowing how to communicate verbally might be useless mainly when guiding tourists.

Since all the students stated that English is important for their professional lives, so their motivation is high to learn it. This motivation should be taken into consideration in terms of specified needs expressed by the students. It is important to find out this motivation and to match it with the course content to increase the learner's language learning. To make the learners speak English is much better for them because the important of English is in its spoken form mainly, and all what they learn they should be a matter of practise, whether it is grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or syntax.

Fig.2. The importance of the English language in the students' professional lives



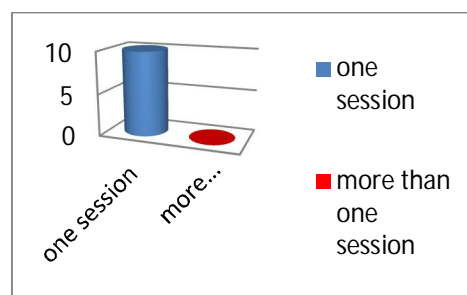
- How often do you have English class weekly?

This question has focused on the students' perception of learning needs related to the period of time in which this learning has taken place. Most needs analysts, in fact, consider that time is an

essential factor which must be taken into account when conducting an ESP course.

In this question, the students were provided with two options which were either one session or more than one session a week. The amount of time allocated to English language class is only one session weekly which is not enough to cover the whole needs of the students in terms of theory and practice. Theory is based on learning the rules of grammar, new vocabulary, sentence structure and pronunciation. These components should be applied in terms of tasks and dialogues because practice makes perfect.

Fig.3. Weekly English classes

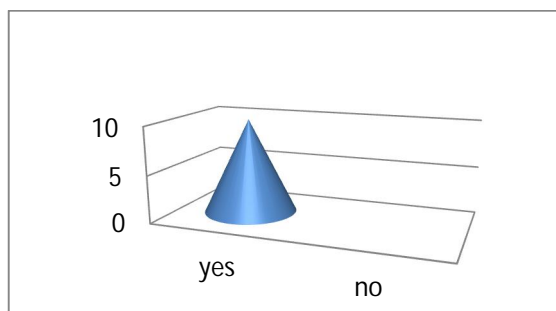


- Do you think English is becoming a major tourist language in Algeria?

All the students think that English is becoming a major tourist language in Algeria. So English is a necessity for them in the sense that many people around the world travel for the sake of business or tourism. The language may differ. In these cases, English is the language that can solve this problem. It is like a universal language. As a Lingua-

Franca, English is as a common means of communication for speakers of other languages. This feature is mainly concerned with spoken form of English.

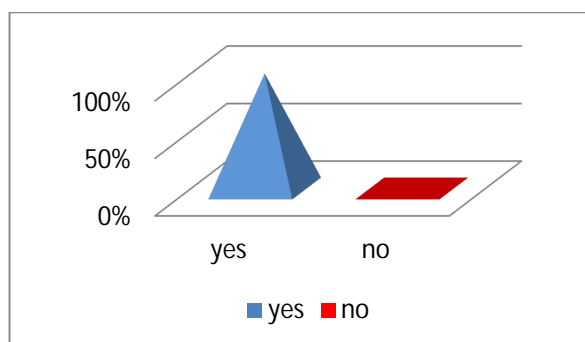
Fig.4. The necessity to learn English



- Have you ever taken English courses for tourism before this time?

The students stated that they have already taken English courses for tourism. It is essential part in their studies. But all what they have is a general idea which does not serve their needs to work in the field of tour guidance. This could be explained by the busy time table allocated to classes that have to do with tourism, though, if this is true, they are mistaken to give less importance to such main module in the field of interest. The tiny space given to English justified the attitude of decision makers at the school of tourism towards English by seeing it as a subordinate optional class. Equally important, we might reckon the absence of the necessary components and skills for teaching English for the field in question.

Fig.5. The English courses for tourism



- Are you tested for English language before being admitted to tour guidance?

20% of the respondents stated that they were tested for English before they were admitted to tour guidance. And 80% stated that they were not tested. This means that they did not understand the question. But they might have been tested for tourism background knowledge in Arabic or French but not in English. These tests are important because they are objective in the sense that they tell us about the level of the student as well as his abilities. Of course this test cannot tell us about everything we want to know about the students' performance, but they could give us an idea about the student's linguistic qualities. This allows us to improve the student's qualities and abilities. As speaking is concerned, it can give us clear idea about all the students performance like what is being done in the high national schools such as Bouzereah, Laghouat,Oran...etc

- Do you think your English course responds to your oral communication needs?

Concerning the question about the usefulness of the English language course regarding the students' needs in terms of oral communication, the students were provided with choices:

Useful

Of some use

Not useful

The results show that 50% of the students thought that the English language course regarding their English language needs is useful, whereas, 50% thought it is of some use. But no one thought it is useless. So not all the students are utterly satisfied. This means that there are needs in the course that should be enhanced at the same time there are positive points that should be kept.

- Is the time allotted to English language enough to you to use the English language effectively?

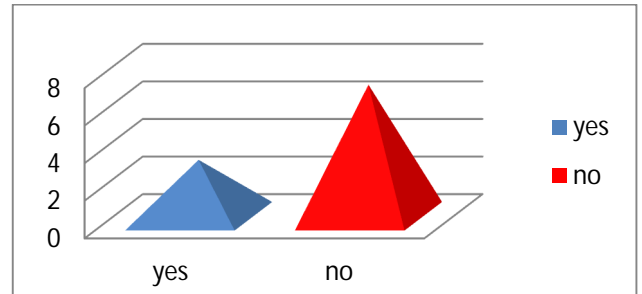
70% of the students thought the time allotted to oral expression is not enough to them to use the English language effectively.

This question investigates the issue whether the time allotted to English is sufficient to

the language effectively. The results show that the number of hours provided

for English is not enough. The results are summarized in the following table:

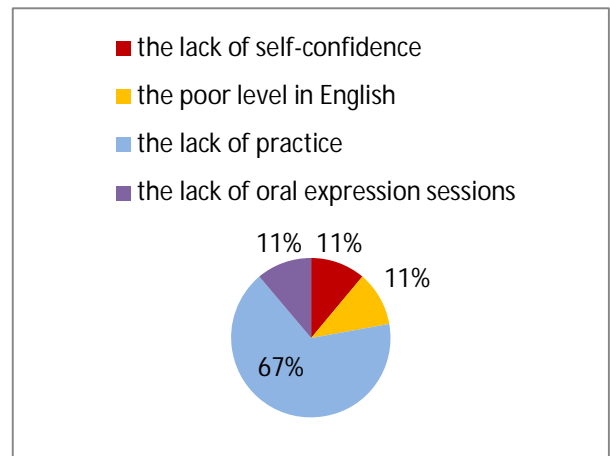
Fig.6. The sufficiency of the time allocated to English language



- Do you have problems in oral communicative performance?

The majority of the students show that they have problems in oral communication. These problems differ from student to another. The next question will give them the choice to show their own problems.

Fig.7. The reasons behind the students' oral communication problems



The results of the questionnaire are summarized as follow:

- The staff conducting tours should be composed of both males and females. Conducting a group of women might be better by woman and vice versa. In terms of fluency, women are better than men in

speaking English mainly in North Africa. Guiding tourist might need more physical efforts, in this sense; this job is suitable for men more than women. In terms of social parameters, the specificities of the Algerian society, men are accepted to do this job, whereas women are more suitable to work in hotels and museums.

- The age in conducting tours is significant in the sense that the elder tour guides are with more experience and wiser in solving the problems that may face them while conducting touristic trips. Younger guides are more active mainly physically. They also last for long time in the field as they started in early age.

- Among all languages around the world, English is the most useful one in the international relations and business. This position pushes people to think to learn it either for a specific need or for prestige. In our case, students have to learn English mainly the spoken side of it. In conducting tours, tour guides need to speak for long time and in various subjects. They should develop their fluency to meet the needs of tourists.

- In specific, tour guidance as a future job for this category of students needs English as a means of communication. The importance of English can be justified by the position that it gained in the last decades. Visitors, businessmen and politicians around the world used English as a common means of communication.

- English has lower position in any system of education in Algeria, at any university branch and in our daily life conversations. People in Algeria lack the awareness of the important of English.

The amount of time given to English in the time table is too limited. At the school of tourism, decision makers either are not aware of the importance of English or do not care about it. To have better results in teaching tourism and establishing a good touristic industry, they should give English more valuable treatment as Tunisia and Morocco did.

- The students are aware of the important of English and they know that English is becoming a major language of communication in Algeria in the coming years. So they have to be ready to be involved in the expected change in terms of language use.

- Taking courses for tourism is necessity at the school of tourism. Courses should be designed to meet the needs and the specificities of the field.

- Testing the students before being admitted to the school is necessity. Testing and evaluating students can provide teachers with a clear image about the students' abilities and needs. This can also help teachers to establish a suitable program to enhance the students' level.

- The English course has to respond to the needs of the students. It should be useful in their field to meet their needs. The course should encourage students to participate by containing real-life situations and easy tasks. The successful course for the students is the one that allow them to learn something new and useful.

- Teaching English may help in enhancing the level of the student. Teaching language without practice might be useless and fruitless. One of the ways to practice the language is to use it in its spoken form. The oral expression

session which is absent in the school of tourism is one of the reasons behind the poor level that student have. Oral expression session will provide students with more opportunities to enhance their level in addition to be more active. It also contributes to cope with stress and lack of self-confidence.

- One session for English at the school of tourism is not enough. There are many activities and tasks should take place in classroom, it needs more amount of time to be covered. The four skills should be taught separately. At least one session for speaking and listening and other session for reading and writing in addition to one session to linguistic competence; grammar, vocabulary and phonetics...

- Students like to have the opportunity to speak in classroom. This may be faced by the fear to speak in front of classmates, but it is the job of the teacher to deal with the situation. Showing a great interest in speaking might be justified by the desire to speak English in particular and to participate in general. The students who like to speak they want to have better English. English for them is a good opportunity to be open minded on what is going around the world by speaking with different cultures.

- The teacher has the duty to encourage students to speak in classroom, however, they usually do not speak, this can be justified by the way the teacher manage the classroom and the tasks. Many students do not interact with some teachers and interact in better ways with other teachers.

- Conducting debates and discussions in spoken English classrooms plays a major role in developing the oral skills of the

learners. Debates essentially revolve on talent to use the arguments. The importance is to emphasize on the fluency and expression of the language rather than the content and the ideas. If the teacher is skilled, the participants will have an enjoyable discussion.

- Communication with non-native speakers of English helps in such way to develop the students' oral performance though the students fear mistakes. The communication with non- native speakers has some drawbacks such as the use of mother tongue, the pronunciation will not be enhanced.

- Being in contact with native-speakers of English has a positive side in which it enhances the pronunciation, structure of the sentences...etc, because people from different cultures have different perceptions of politeness, seriousness...etc. These perceptions are reflected by their behaviors. Understanding how questions and sentences are built. In order to be effective speakers with native-speakers of English, the students must obtain the appropriate linguistic and cultural knowledge.

- Oral expression performance in the classroom is typically structured in the form of presentations. Oral expression activities should be appropriate to enrich the student's performance. oral performance is appropriate for learning objectives that focus on the content of the course which is related to the field of interest. Oral performance is the ability and the right to speak freely and clearly.

- The majority of students face problems in speaking. These problems differ from one to another. Some students have

problems in terms of level in English which mostly is poor, whereas others have problem in interaction because of the lack of self-confidence or shyness, others have problem with pronunciation he has and there are others who have nothing to say.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the voice recording and questionnaire , we come to draw upon the following conclusion; the serious problem of the third year students in the school of tourism concerning their poor communicative English is the lack of practice in the classroom. Indeed, the

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questionnaire shows that the time allocated to English language is not enough for good practice. In addition to the lack of oral expression sessions which can be considered as a great opportunity to practice English. The results of the questionnaire and the voice recording show that students are aware of the importance of English in their future lives as tour guides. In fact needs analysis should be ongoing process rather than a onetime investigation. There are varieties of factors including the target population and the resources of data can influence the decision to conduct another needs analysis for further studies in field of tourism and tour guidance.

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