

Enhancing Moroccan EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

Hammani Mohamed

Department of English, Faculty of letters and Human Sciences, IbnTofail University, Kenitra, Morocco
Corresponding Author: Hammani Mohamed

Abstract: Learning to speak a language is not a question of acquiring a set of rules and building up a wide vocabulary. Rather, it is how one can communicate what has been learnt effectively. In Moroccan high schools, the EFL learners find themselves in the position of violinists who have learnt a great deal of things about harmony, but they cannot play the violin. That is, they are bombarded with a lot of grammar rules without being able to speak correctly and intelligibly. Moreover, such learners are trained to use their eyes instead of their mouths, and this definitely makes them unable to speak fluently. This paper is exploratory in nature. It investigates and examines the reasons why Moroccan EFL learners cannot achieve certain degree of fluency in speaking although they seem to have a wide breadth of knowledge about English grammar rules. The data collection instrument used in this study is a questionnaire for Moroccan EFL teachers. The targeted research participants are 50 Moroccan EFL teachers. The findings reveal that Moroccan EFL teachers use and integrate different speaking approaches in the teaching of speaking skills. However, the use of new technological tools (ICTs) seems to be still very limited in Moroccan EFL classrooms, and most of the Moroccan EFL teachers are not familiar with implementing or trying new ICT tools in their classes. The study ends with some pedagogical and practical recommendations to help EFL teachers enhance the Moroccan EFL learners' speaking skills.

Keywords: speaking skill, Fluency, ICT tools, Moroccan EFL Learners

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I. INTRODUCTION

The status of English language teaching and learning is increasingly gaining ground in Morocco. Therefore, the need for reaching fluency in English has greatly increased. Speaking is thought to be the most essential skill to master in English language learning. In fact, the mastery of speaking skills seems to be the main concern for EFL learners. In fact, EFL Learners' evaluation of their success in learning English revolves around their ability to speak it (Febriyanti, 2016)[1].

Nowadays much more emphasis has been placed on writing and reading at the expense of speaking. This has, in fact, become crucial in the modern approach to the learning process and English teaching where great attention is directed towards the oral communication skills of the target language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

No matter how great a topic is, if it is not communicated well, it becomes ineffective. Learning a language means being able to speak it smoothly and properly. This helps us communicate our feelings, opinions and the acquired knowledge. Although EFL learners study English for a long time, they still encounter difficulties in speaking English, and they are unable to express themselves fluently and efficiently. Therefore, this article aims at investigating and examining the reasons why Moroccan high school EFL learners find it difficult to speak English fluently. It also seeks to provide pedagogical suggestions and recommendations to improve the Moroccan EFL learners' speaking skills.

2.1. Definition of Speaking

Speaking is the primary tool for communicating, thinking, and learning in general and learning a language in particular. Through speaking, students can learn concepts, develop vocabulary, and perceive the structure of the English language as essential components of learning. Moreover, speech is a vehicle to link individuals to society, and a medium through which human beings communicate with each other. According to Chaney (1998, P.13) [2], speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Speaking also refers to "students' ability to express themselves orally, coherently, fluently and appropriately in a given meaningful context"(Torky, 2006, P. 30)[3].

2.2. Teaching speaking to Moroccan EFL students

The Moroccan ministry of education has adopted the standard based approach which is based on the principles of the communicative approach. Speaking skills give students a high level of self-confidence, motivation for learning and appropriate training for real-life tasks. In fact, a lot of speaking takes place in real life situations; this lends credence to the belief that teaching this skill is not just a fad, but it is a necessity. Teaching speaking provides learners with the opportunity to grow as effective world citizens and share cultural patterns of different speakers (Chaibi, 2006, p.12) [4].

2.3. Previous scholarship on Speaking

Since English is a foreign language in Morocco, the majority of students seem to be unfamiliar with it and find it quite challenging to speak it fluently. According to Hartmann and Stork (1976, p. 86), [5], "A person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he/she can use its structures accurately when concentrating on the content rather than the form, and using the target language patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed." Speaking skill is considered as the most important skill and the ultimate goal for language learners (Frey & Sadek, 1971) [6]. In fact, the case of Moroccan EFL learners is no exception. According to Bziker (2015), [7], most teachers think that speaking is the most enjoyable activity by students. However, Moroccan students still find and encounter difficulties in speaking English. Such students can't reach fluency in English due to numerous reasons. Bziker (ibid) [7] argues that students are unable to be fluent speakers of English due to their fear of making mistakes while they try to speak or express themselves. He also argues that the majority of students experience uneasiness and anxiety while speaking in class. Moreover, some students think in their mother tongue in the classroom. For instance, when the teacher explains in English, learners automatically translate what he/she says into their mother tongue. Thus, the target students miss the opportunity to practice their English in class. Furthermore, Moroccan textbooks do not focus much on speaking. Rather, they focus on grammatical structures.

2.4. Enhancing Learners' Speaking Skills

No one can deny how difficult it is for foreign language learners to acquire certain native sounds, native-like pronunciation and distinguishing and producing some sounds after critical period. Yet, adults can "master a proficient use of the second/foreign language, not only in grammatical issues but also in phonological ones" (Navarro Romero, 2009) [8]. This means that foreign language learners' speaking skills can be improved. The role of the teacher is very crucial in enhancing students' speaking competence. Teachers should do the following so as to be successful with their students. They need to analyze the students' needs and find practical solutions that can help them increase their speaking skills. In this respect, Corder, (1973, p.139) [9] argues that there are two appropriate questions teachers should ask when teaching languages: what to teach and how to teach. He explains that "these are the problems of content and method, or, using an industrial analogy, the problem of product and process design respectively". Besides, language teachers should train their students to use and practice different speaking skills that can help them face difficult situations (Navarro Romero, ibid) [8]. They can use, for instance, exercises in class, such as poems, rhymes, dialogues, monologues, role plays. In addition, teachers need to make better use of ICT tools in their classes to improve students' communicative competence. Kuppuraj (2017) [10] argues that ICT tools provide immediate feedback on language performance. That is, ICT tools help the target learners acquire not only the pronunciation, but it also the non-verbal signs while speaking.

To conclude, teachers play an important role in developing the students' speaking abilities. Hence, teachers who seek to help their students improve their oral skills need to know what they want to teach and how they want to do it and which technological tools they should integrate in the teaching speaking process.

2.5. The role of ICT in enhancing the students' speaking skills

Technology is believed to be able to improve the quality of education and make students respond positively in the classroom. As a matter of fact, new technology such as computers and the internet are used to enhance students' involvement in the learning process.

Kuppuraj (2007) [10] defines ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as the study and the use of Computers, Internet, Video and other technological tools. He states that ICT tools are chiefly used "to communicate, disseminate and manage information". The use of new technologies in the classroom to enhance students' speaking abilities has made pedagogists and theorists refine and improve the practices of English Language Teaching. That is, ICT imposes itself as a feasible tool for enhancing the teaching of English as a foreign language speaking skills. Thus, ICT has to be properly incorporated in EFL classrooms so as to increase the students' oral performance (Al Meriouh & Bouyze, 2015) [11].

The use of ICT in the classroom helps improve the quality of teaching speaking in many ways. First, it increases learners' motivation and participation by facilitating the acquisition of basic skills. Second, it can add

a value in teaching and learning by improving the efficiency of learning. Finally, it can help learners achieve correct pronunciation (Kupporaj, *ibid*)[10].

Benmeddah (2017) [12] believes that ICT is a major challenge for teachers. According to her, teachers use it so as to change speaking classes' atmosphere and encourage learners to use the different ICT tools and resources such as CD-ROMs and DVDs to improve their speaking skills. So, Teachers need some useful and effective techniques to integrate ICT in speaking activities.

In the era of technology, teachers are increasingly modifying their teaching methodologies. It is believed that students who use different types of computing and networking materials perform and interact better than those students who do not. ICT tools "speed up information transfer and enable faster knowledge processes. They also create enjoyable and fun learning atmosphere" (Benmeddah, *ibid*)[12].

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

The design of this study is exploratory in nature. A questionnaire is used as a major data collection procedure because it is considered as an effective means of gathering data. In fact, using a questionnaire as a data collection method makes it easy to get a sense of the participants' beliefs, ideas and opinions from the way they answer the questions. Also, it is an effective way of gathering a wide-range of information about the target topic efficiently. Another reason is that the research participants are usually more truthful in a questionnaire compared to if a person was asking them (Bergman and Kasper, 1993)[13].

This study included 50 teachers: 20 females and 30 males with different teaching experiences. Their age ranges from 25 to 54. The research participants were randomly chosen. They teach in different Moroccan cities: Kenitra, Beni Mellal, Ouezzane, and Azilal.

3.1. Research Objectives and Questions

Developing Moroccan EFL students' speaking skills has become a controversial issue in language teaching. So, this study seeks to answer the following three questions:

1. Why can't Moroccan EFL students achieve a certain degree of fluency in speaking?
2. How can Moroccan EFL teachers enhance their high school students' speaking skills?
3. Do Moroccan EFL teachers use the technological tools (ICTs) effectively to enhance their students' speaking skills?

3.2. Research Hypotheses

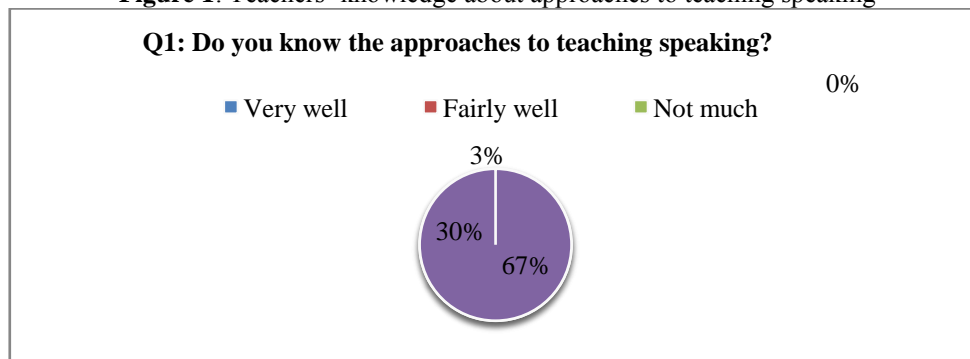
These are three hypotheses that emanate from the research questions:

1. Moroccan High School EFL teachers stress the importance of speaking skills.
2. Applying different approaches to teaching speaking help EFL learners develop their speaking skills.
3. EFL Moroccan teachers do not use the technological tools (ICT) effectively to enhance their students' speaking skills.

IV. FINDINGS

This section aims at analyzing the questions raised in the questionnaire given to Moroccan High School EFL teachers. The analysis of data is presented in pie charts. Each pie chart describes and analyzes the percentages of the research participants' choices.

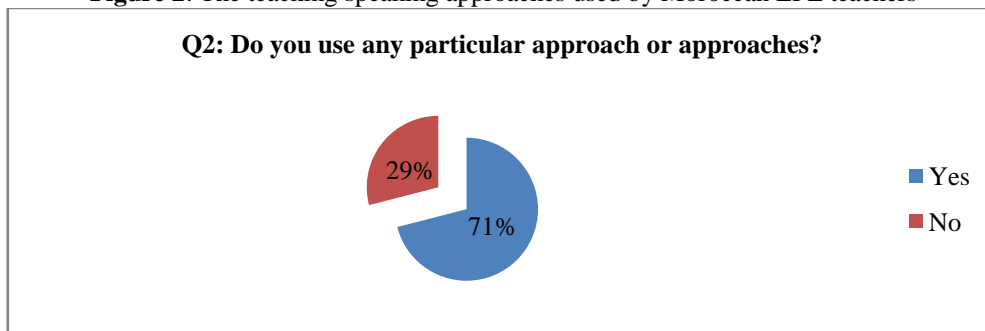
Figure 1: Teachers' knowledge about approaches to teaching speaking



The aim of this question (Q1) is to make sure whether or not the Moroccan EFL participants know the approaches of teaching speaking. In the pie chart above, we notice that most Moroccan EFL teachers know the approaches of teaching English very well (67%), while 30% of them know the approaches fairly well. The pie

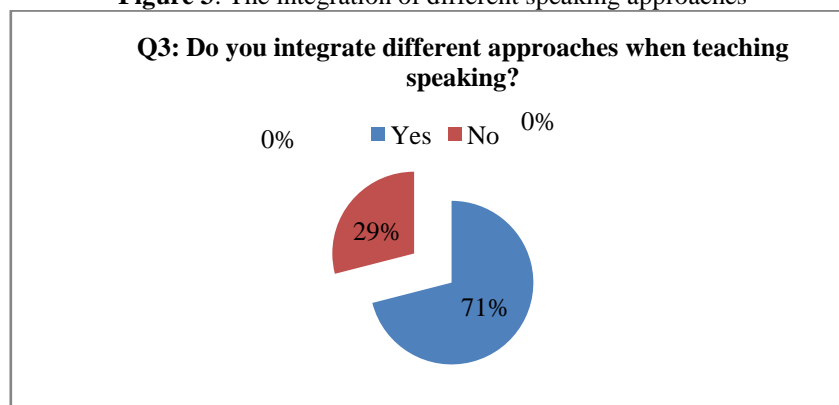
chart also shows that 3% of them do not know much about the approaches of speaking. Generally speaking, the majority of EFL participants seem to know the approaches of teaching speaking skills.

Figure 2: The teaching speaking approaches used by Moroccan EFL teachers



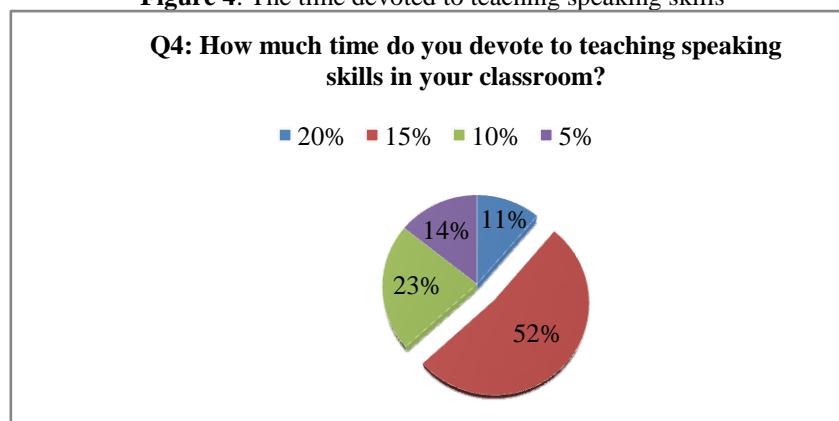
This question (Q2) aims at examining the different approaches of teaching speaking used and implemented by the Moroccan EFL teachers in the teaching process. The pie chart shows that the majority of the Moroccan EFL participants (71%) confirm that they use approaches of teaching and only few do not use any approach in their classes. It is concluded that the majority of Moroccan EFL participants seem to use different approaches to teaching speaking skills.

Figure 3: The integration of different speaking approaches



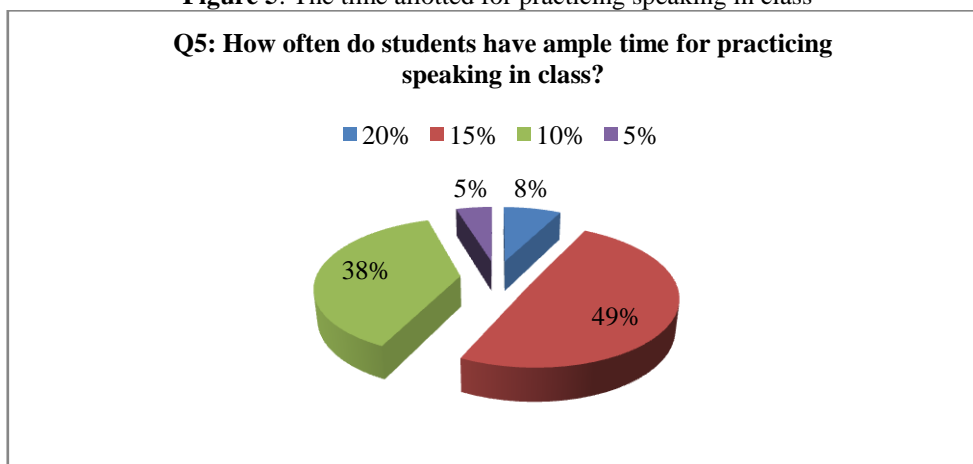
The aim of this question is to see whether the Moroccan EFL participants integrate various approaches when teaching speaking. The pie chart above demonstrates that 71% of the Moroccan EFL participants integrate different approaches when teaching speaking, and only 29% of them do not integrate any approach. This is because those Moroccan EFL participants do not even use the approaches of teaching speaking skills. Therefore, it is no small wonder that they do not integrate the approaches.

Figure 4: The time devoted to teaching speaking skills



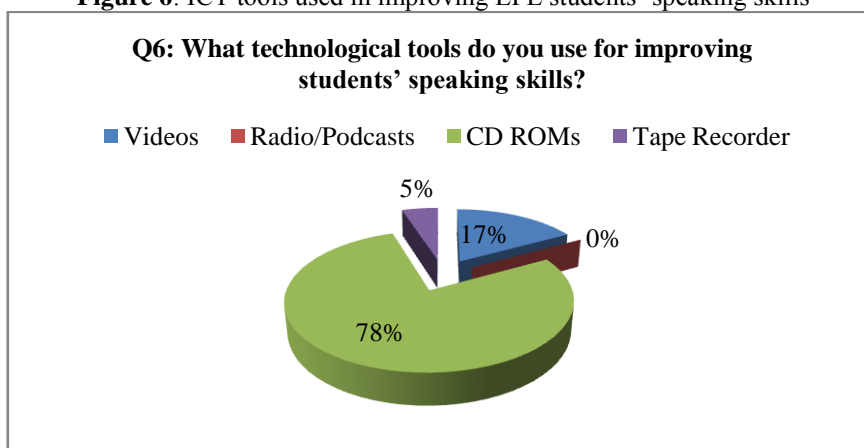
This question aims at showing the amount of time the Moroccan EFL participants devote to teaching speaking skills in the classroom. This pie chart shows that most Moroccan EFL participants (52%) devote 15% of the time to teaching speaking in the classroom. It also shows that 23% of them devote 10% of time to teaching speaking in their classes, whereas 14% of the Moroccan EFL participants claim that they devote 20% of time to teaching speaking skills. 11% of them argue that they do not devote time to teaching speaking skills in their classrooms. Generally speaking, the majority of the interrogated Moroccan EFL teachers at public high schools confirm that they devote enough time to teaching speaking in their classrooms.

Figure 5: The time allotted for practicing speaking in class



The reason behind devising this question in the given questionnaire is to show whether or not Moroccan EFL students are given enough time to practice speaking in the classroom. This pie chart shows that only 8% of EFL teachers state that their students are given 20% time to practice speaking in the class, and 49% of them declare that their students have 15% time to practice speaking. 38% of EFL teachers state that their students are given 10% to practice speaking in the class, and 5% of them state that their students are given time (5%) to practice speaking in the class. It is concluded the majority of Moroccan EFL participants seem to give enough time for their learners to practice speaking. In general, the Moroccan EFL students seem to be given sufficient time to practice their speaking in the class.

Figure 6: ICT tools used in improving EFL students' speaking skills



The aim of this question is to see whether or not the Moroccan EFL participants make use of ICT tools while teaching speaking skills. The pie chart given above demonstrates that 78% of the interrogated Moroccan EFL participants use CD ROMs in the teaching of speaking skills, whereas 17% of them claim that they rely on videos while teaching speaking skills. Only 5% of them state that they make use of tape recorders while teaching their EFL students the speaking skills. What is striking is that no single Moroccan EFL teacher out of 27 participants seems to use Radio/podcasts in the teaching of speaking. What can be deduced is that the most common ICT tools used by the EFL teachers in the public high schools are CD ROMs. In brief, the use of new technological tools seems to be still very limited in Moroccan EFL classrooms.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that Moroccan EFL teachers give much importance to developing their students' oral skills. They seem to know the different approaches of teaching speaking and integrate those approaches in their EFL classes. The findings also show that most of the Moroccan EFL teachers devote ample time to teaching speaking activities, and they give students the chance to speak in the classroom by using a variety of activities to improve their speaking skills. As for the use of new technological tools in the classroom, the results show that it is still very limited in Moroccan EFL classrooms, and most of the Moroccan EFL teachers are not familiar with implementing or trying new ICT tools in their classes. To sum up, teaching English as a foreign language at Moroccan high schools swerves into giving much more importance to the teaching of speaking skills, but ICT tools are not yet exploited effectively in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Finally, the findings seem to confirm the hypotheses set to answer the research questions. This finding calls for an urgent ICT training in a form of continuing professional development.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article aims at investigating and examining the reasons why Moroccan EFL learners cannot reach a certain degree of fluency in speaking. It also aims at providing pedagogical suggestions and recommendations to facilitate the teaching of speaking skills. It is concluded that the use of new technological tools seems to be still very limited in Moroccan EFL classrooms despite integrating different teaching approaches and giving ample time to students. This may justify why Moroccan high school EFL learners cannot reach certain fluency in speaking though the majority of interrogated Moroccan EFL teachers seem to be fully aware of the different speaking approaches and the importance of teaching speaking skills. All in all, developing and enhancing EFL students' speaking skills is not an easy task as some EFL teachers may think, but, as it were, it requires a lot of decent training and effective professional development, especially in ICT tools that play a crucial role in enhancing the target learners' speaking skills.

The main goal of EFL learners is to develop communicative skills. That is, they strive for developing their ability to interact successfully in the target language. In fact, Practice is the only key to language learning. Therefore, the Moroccan high school EFL Students should be always encouraged to practice speaking as much and as often as possible. According to Renandya (2010) [14], "only perfect practice makes perfect". That is, the Moroccan EFL teachers should offer practical guidance to enhance the Moroccan EFL students' speaking skills. As EFL teachers, we should give our learners guidance on effective practice so as to improve their speaking skills effectively. In order to help our EFL learners practice and improve their speaking skills, the following points should be considered:

- The 21st century is considered as information based technology. Language teachers should have decent knowledge on how to use ICT tools in pre-service and in-service trainings.
- Seeking professional development such as participating in the MATE (Moroccan Association of Teachers of English) activities and annual conferences.
- Guidance for students' speaking practice should be given at the beginning of the course as this can help EFL students save time in finding ways to improve their speaking skills.
- Speaking activities should involve and motivate the students in the teaching-learning process, and touch their real life situations.
- Good management of group work and pair work helps achieve the active and equal participation of all learners in the class. Also, good management can help increase the effectiveness of speaking activities.
- When practice is well planned and combined with hard work and commitment on both sides, students' speaking skills can be enhanced and developed outstandingly.

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