

العدد الثلاثون - 25 / أكتوبر (2017)

Speaking Difficulties at Pre-sessional English for Academic Purpose (PEAP 2): What is the PEAP 2 students' perception of speaking difficulties?

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الملخص :

أجريت هذه الدراسة على مجموعة من الطلبة الغير الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية اثناء دراستهم برنامج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الاكاديمية. يهدف البحث الي دراسة مشاكل التحدث التي يعاني منها الطلبة الذين يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية خلال برنامج تعلم اللغة للأغراض الاكاديمية، حيث اضفت الدراسة على ان الطلبة الذين تناولتهم الدراسة يجدون صعوبات مختلفة عند التحدث باللغة الانجليزية ، و لا يستطيعون التواصل مع الاخرين ، و من اكثر المشاكل التي تعرقل الطلبة الدارسين باللغة الانجليزية هي عدم المامهم الكافي بالمفردات والقواعد و كذلك صعوبة النطق.

Abstract

The research aims at investigating the speaking problems that the students experienced during their study at Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (PEAP 2). the results of the study showed that the students of PEAP 2 experienced problems in speaking. However, there are different types of speaking difficulties. The most common difficult types were vocabulary, grammar and mispronunciation. Another problem which also has been raised during the research is that most of the students (87%) found it difficult to speak properly with native speakers.

Introduction

Students might be able to have command of the other skills (e.g. writing, reading or listening) but they still lack the ability to speak properly in English. From previous discussions that I had with some of my English speaking colleagues, I realised that although some students were able to use English almost perfectly, they still had problems with speaking. For example, they speak English very fast due to the effect of their own language, or mispronounce the words. These considerations prompted the researcher to look at the perception of difficulties in speaking and how the students can improve speaking. The topic would be of great help in the future to the students of

Centre for English Language Education (CELE). I am very interested in these speaking problems. Therefore, studying speaking difficulties and finding solutions is very relevant to my future research.

The research aims at investigating the speaking problems that the students experienced during their study at Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (PEAP 2). From my past personal experience as a learner I had this problem and I want to see how I can solve it. So, the main purpose of the study is to spot the difficulties and to find out solutions to improve speaking skill. questionnaires were given to 15 participants. The participants were CELE students at PEAP 2. the data was described, analysed

The methodology

The qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted as tools to describe and evaluate the data which were collected by giving questionnaires to 15 participants. The participants were CELE students at PEAP 2. They were easy to access because they followed pre-sessional English course at CELE, and the researcher was having the same course with them. Semi structured interviews were also conducted with three students to find more data. The participants were a small number because the research was carried out over a short period of time. Later, the data was described, analysed and represented as graphs and charts. Consent forms were given to the participants to agree that I could interview them.

Some of the students found it difficult to understand some language terms in the questionnaire. Therefore, I tried to avoid this by giving definitions to some linguistic terms that were used in the questionnaires.

Results and discussion

Briefly I will examine the main areas that are most significant to my research question. First, I will investigate the participant's responses whether they have difficulties in speaking. Secondly, I will investigate the types of speaking difficulty, and finally, I will analyse the students' solutions to the problem of speaking.

It is clear that the data shows that all the participants encounter difficulties in improving their English speaking skills. Responding to the question whether the students have difficulties in speaking, most of the participants answered with 'sometimes' which indicates that they have the problem. Other participants strongly acknowledged that they have difficulty in speaking. As can be seen from fig. 1, 11 (73%) of the participants answered 'Sometimes' and four (26%) of them replied 'yes.' If we consider the answers

of those who said 'yes' and 'sometimes' as the same answer, then all the students have difficulty in speaking.

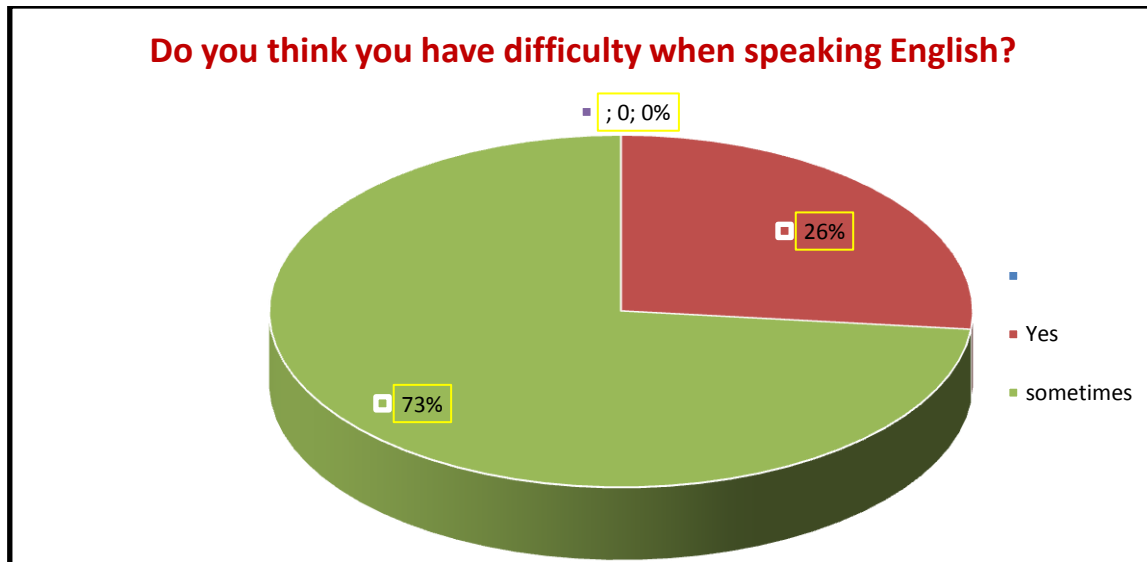
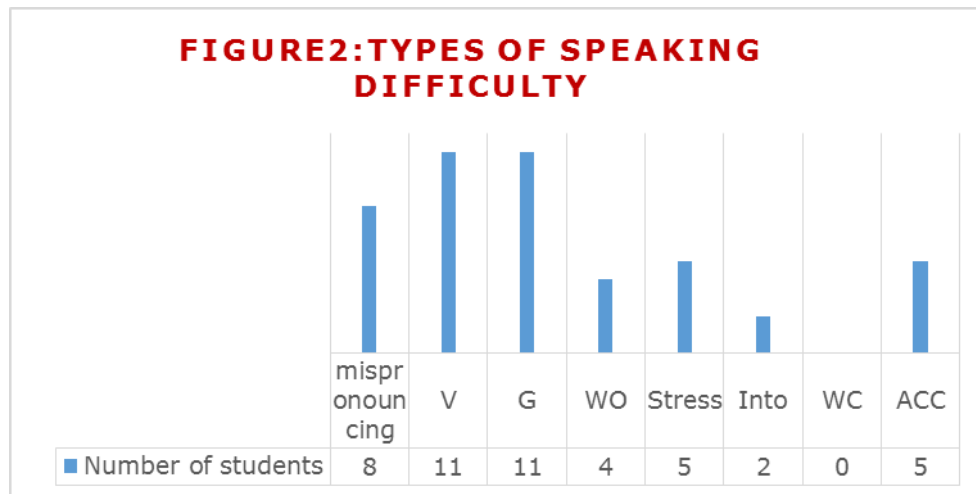


Fig. 1: Students' speaking difficulties

In order to know what type of difficulty the participants face when they speak, they were given eight choices of speaking difficulties (see fig. 2). Figure two below shows that 11 out of 15 participants select both vocabulary and grammar as the most problematic components. Eight find mispronunciation as another important difficulty. Five participants suggest that stress and accuracy could be problems in speaking English. Four students claim that word order is one of the difficulties in speaking. Only two participants select intonation as a difficult component when they speak English. Based on the students' choices, it seems that the components such as word choice, word order, stress and intonation are less problematic, or they might be not aware of the importance of using intonation. However, students should recognise that using the wrong intonation can lead to misunderstanding. Nolasco and Arthur (1987: 12) stated that "Good conversationalists use stress and intonation to keep conversation going. A fall on words like 'ok' or 'so' often serves to show that we are about to change the subject. A rise on 'really' is a way of showing interest."

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Whilst looking at the interview data that have been extracted from three interviewees, all the respondents emphasised the difficulties in speaking; however, each interviewee claimed different types of difficulty. For example, interviewee (A) indicated that mispronouncing and using the wrong words made it difficult to speak:

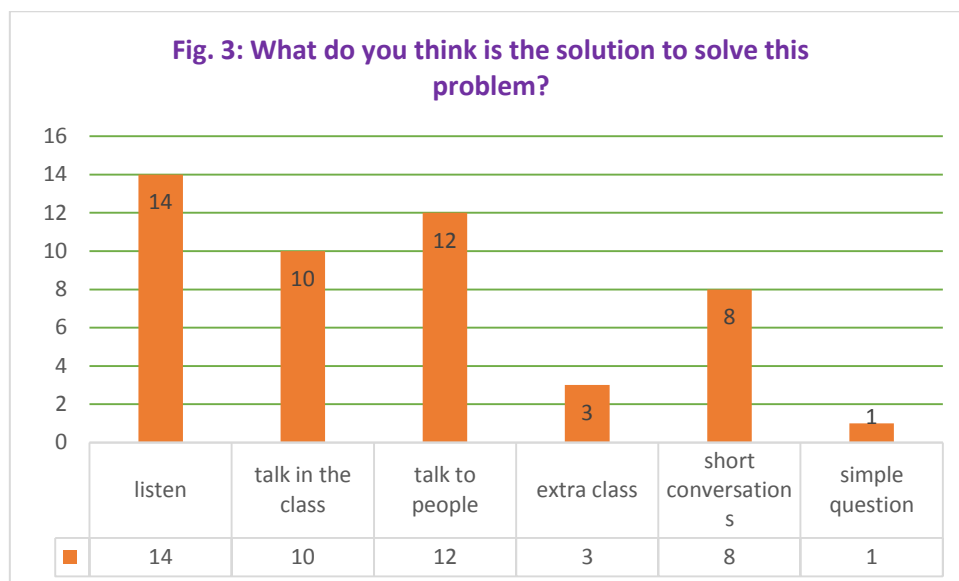
"...People sometime cannot understand me...may be from pronouncing, or wrong words...", whereas interviewee (B) stated that he lacked the opportunity to practise speaking: " ...I need more activities to participate ... to speak with native speakers."

Another interviewee claimed "I think the difficulty ...we as non-native speakers tend to translate the words before answer the question."

We can infer that more than one type of speaking difficulties was experienced by the respondents: pronunciation, word choice, and translating in their own language.

Another interesting point is that the majority of the participants (87%) found it difficult when they talk to English native speakers (see the appendix 2, fig. 4)

After identifying and investigating the types of difficulties, the participants were asked about the solutions to the speaking problem by giving them six choices.



As can be seen in figure three, 14 of 15 participants consider listening as their first choice. Twelve confirm that talking to people is the right choice to improve speaking skills, whereas 10 students select talking in the class as a solution to the difficulty of speaking. So, it can be deduced that listening to the radio and talking to people are the most important methods that the students suggest to solve the problem and reinforce their speaking ability.

In conclusion, it is clear that all the participants confirm that they find difficulty in speaking English, and there are different reasons for this weakness. The main difficulties the students claim are related to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The other choices of difficulties such as intonation and stress were selected as secondary types of difficulties (see fig. 2).

Limitations

The research has two limitations. First, some linguistic terms such as intonation and stress were not recognised by the students. They did not understand them. I tried to avoid this problem by defining these terms in the questionnaire, but they did not read them. This limitation might have affected the reliability of the research because some students answered the question about one point, but the others did not. To solve this problem, I think it is better to give explanations to these terms face to face with examples when distributing the questionnaires.

The second limitation is that the period of conducting the research was very short. This put pressure on the researcher to process the research, in particular, when it came to collecting data by using the questionnaire and the interview. All the PEAP 2 students were collecting the information for their research report at the same time. They were busy with their tasks, and they were not ready to answer the questionnaire or to have interviews. For example, it was difficult to find the right participant to interview. Even when you found one, they were in a hurry, and their responses may not have been accurate. To tackle this, I think, more time should be given to the researcher to do their job as perfectly as they could.

Conclusion

Based on the research question, the results showed that the students of PEAP 2 experienced problems in speaking. However, there are different types of speaking difficulties. The most common difficult types were vocabulary, grammar and mispronunciation. Another problem which also has been raised during the research is that most of the students (87%) found it difficult to speak properly with native speakers. The reason for this could be their fast speech, word choice, or mispronunciation. The students use words in their speech, but the listener does not understand them. Consequently all these difficulties form a problem and affect the students' speaking skills. They could not speak properly if they mispronounce the words or they lack the vocabulary. When the speech is unclear, the conversation will be boring, and the process of communication will not continue further.

Therefore, listening to the radio and talking to the people are the most appropriate methods to improve speaking skills. In addition to these suggested solutions, we may recommend that the students can be more exposed to speaking contexts with native speakers with different kinds of speech. Extra classes could be arranged focusing on the word choice and pronunciation, more specifically intonation and stress. These two last terms can be added to the textbooks with examples in order to make them familiar to the students. Finally, due to the short period of time, the research did not cover the types of difficulty in detail. Therefore, further research could be conducted on the students' perception of vocabulary difficulty.



References

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3. Brown, H. (2001). Teaching by Principles: an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. New York, Longman.
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Appendix 1

Interview transcripts

1. Interviewee A:

Q1. What difficulties do you have when you speak English, why?

A: People sometimes cannot understand me.... May be from the pronouncing, or wrong words...

It may be because it is not my mother language, I am speaking as in Arabic, or I did not have time to study, and it is not the subject I study.

Q2.How successful are you when you speak continuously?

A: It is good as far as no one stops me. When someone interrupts me when speaking, I lose the thing when I speak

Q3. In what situations do you find it difficult to speak with people, why?

A: The difficult problem I faced when I tried to sort out something related to electricity. I cannot understand... and even the speaker was speaking fast and could not understand his words.

Q4. How is it important to you to improve speaking skill?

A: It is more important. learning is coming through speaking... to reflect the speaking if you do not have grammar or vocabulary...

The interviewer: How?

I tried to concentrate on what I was saying...

Q5. How can you solve speaking problems?

A: I tried to listen to other accents and watch some moves.

2. Interviewee B:

Q1. What difficulties do you have when you speak English, why?

B: One of the biggest problem, we do not have more experience in speaking. When I was in USA for example and have chance to speak with native speakers, my speaking was well developed. I need more activities to participate in different discussion to speak with native speakers.

Q2.How successful are you when you speak continuously?

B: It depends from my using of my English. The more I use my English I will improve better. And this depends also in my listening.

Q3. In what situations do you find it difficult to speak with people, why?

B: The difficulty is the native speakers. They use slang which was very difficult. I always asking them to repeat.

Q4. How is it important to you to improve speaking skill?

B: Speaking can be improve by listening, mainly speaking, speaking

Q5. How can you solve speaking problems?

B: I already mentioned this. More participations in the activities

The interviewer: How?

B: Speak more and more

3. Interviewee C:

Q1. What difficulties do you have when you speak English, why?

C: I think, the difficulty as non-native speakers we tend to translate the words before answering before answer the question. So I think this may be the limitations, or the difficulties to move on to speaking fluency.

The interviewer: Could you give me example.

C: Yes. if you are going to ask me question, I have to translate you question from English. This may be make it difficult to me, little bet.

Q2.How successful are you when you speak continuously?

C: I think you have to give me grade to assess myself. I cannot say have problem and I cannot say I speak fluently. Something in the middle you can say.

Q3. In what situations do you find it difficult to speak with people, why?

C: I think when you become stressed; I think you will affect your ability to speak. Certain condition, if you are going to take IELTS exam, you are going to speak in second or you have speak for two or three minute. It is pressure of time on the speaker I think will affect the fluency of speaking.

Q4. How is it important to you to improve speaking skill?

C: I think it is very important especially I am going to study my PhD in pharmacy and I am going to interview people at the city hospital so I have to have very good skill and as you know the language, or speaking is the key in this situation. You have to explain very well, take the expression from the people in very good manner. So I have to improve my language skills.

Q5. How can you solve speaking problems?

C: I think I have to speak more and get some table talk, something like that even to listen to conversations between native speakers. This will help skills and the knowledge.

Improve vocabulary. The more you read the more get vocabulary

Appendix 2

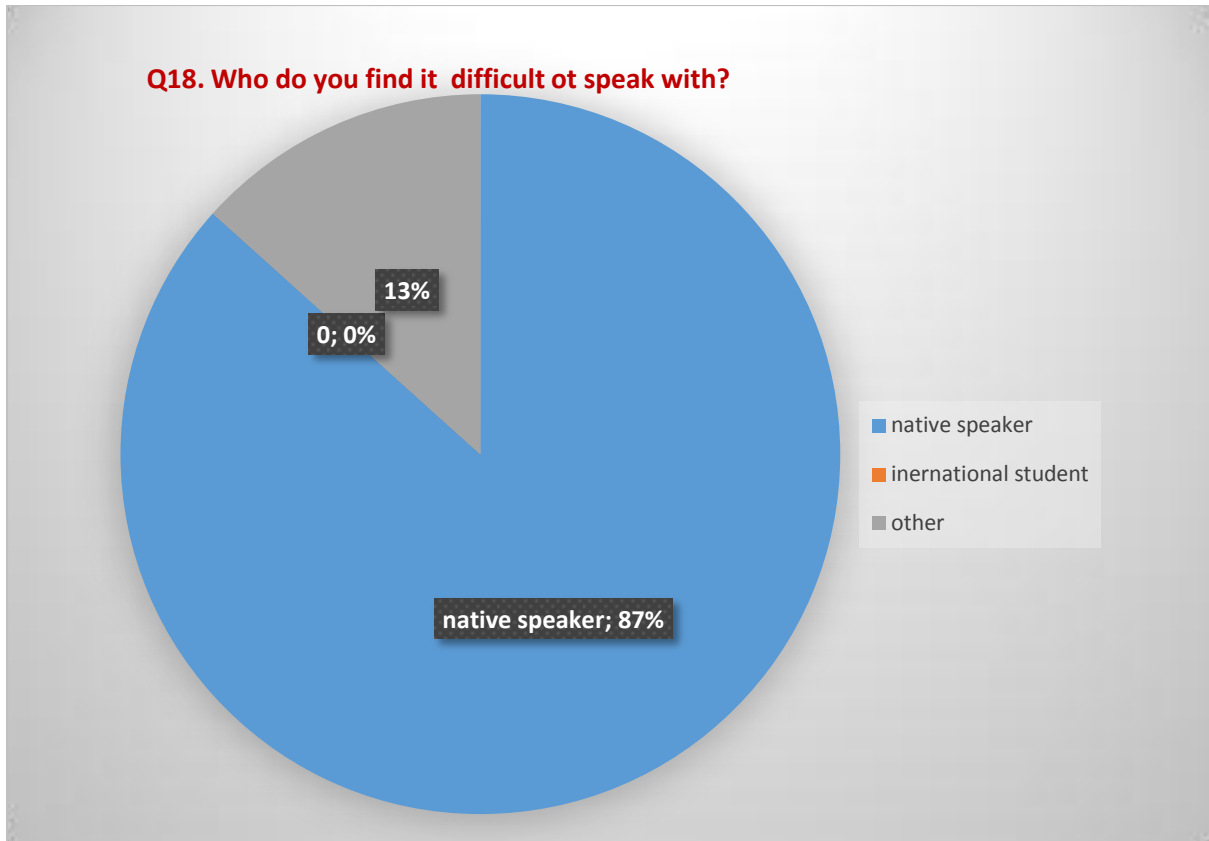


Fig. 4: the majority of the students find difficult to speak with native speakers.

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Appendix 3 Questionnaire

I am conducting this research to know the PEAP 2 students' perception of speaking difficulties. I would like to thank you very much to take part in this questionnaire. Please answer all the questions as fully and as honestly as possible. All answers will remain anonymous.

1. What is your gender?

Female (....)

Male (....)

2. What is your first language?

3. How long have you been learning English?

4. Do you think you have difficulties in speaking?

Yes (.....)

sometimes (.....)

No (.....)

5. If 'yes' or 'sometimes', what are the difficulties? Choose as many as you like.

- Pronunciation (.....)
- Vocabulary (.....)
- Grammar (.....)
- Word order (.....)
- Stress (extra force used when speaking a particular word or syllable)
(.....)
- Intonation (rise and fall of the voice in speaking) (.....)
- Accuracy (.....)
- Word choice (.....)
- Other

6. Do you think you cannot speak continuously (without pausing)?

Yes (.....)

No (.....)

Sometimes (.....)

7. Why?

.....

8. How much time do you spend working at your speaking each day/week?

.....

9. Who do you speak to in English?

.....

10. Are you comfortable when speaking at length?

Yes (.....)

No (.....)

Sometimes (.....)

11. If 'no' or sometimes, Why?

.....

12. Do you think when you speak that the meaning is clear?

13. Do you feel anxiety when you speak English outside of the CELE?

14. If 'yes' Why?

.....

15. Do you feel anxiety when you speak English in class?

.....

16. If 'yes' Why?

.....

17. Do feel you embarrassed when you speak academically/ formally?

Yes (.....)

sometimes (.....)

No (.....)

18. If 'yes' or sometimes, Why?

.....

19. Who do you find difficult to speak with?

Native speakers (.....)

International students (.....)

both (.....)



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20. Why

.....
.....

21. What do you think is the solution to solve this problem? Circle all the solutions you like.

- Listen to TV/ radio
- Talk in the class
- Talk to the people outside
- Have extra classes in speaking
- Practice giving short presentations
- Practice answering simple questions

22. How do you try to improve your speaking?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Consent and information sheet for participants

Research Title/Topic:

Aim of this research project

What you will need to do

Do I have to take part in this study?

- no, participation is completely voluntary
- you can withdraw from the study at any time, and if you do, any data relating to you will not be part of the research

What happens to the data?

- digital versions of the data (audio files, transcription) will be stored by the researcher
- any paper versions of the data will be kept securely by the researcher
- you have the right of access to any data kept on you
- the only people to have access to the data are the researcher and the CELE tutors
- the data will form part of a written report used for CELE student assessment purposes, but all participants will be anonymised (no names used)

Participant's full name (PRINT):	Participant (signed):
Researcher's full name (PRINT):	Researcher (signed):
Researcher's email:	
Tutor's email:	

Thank you very much for your help. We really appreciate it.

PEAP 2 Research Ethics Statement

Name: Hidob I. G. Mohammed

Group: Dunlop

Course of Study: PEAP 2

Research question/topic:

Section 3

Please ensure that you have considered the following points in your research project. Tick (✓) the boxes to agree.

1. The purpose of the research will be fully explained to research participants and I will make it clear that I am a CELE student.	
2. Details of my identity and my tutor's identity will be given to participants (full names and email addresses).	
3. Participants will be informed that data collected will be treated in confidence and will only be reported in anonymised form (no participant names used). Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from the project at any time.	
4. At all times during the conduct of the research I will behave in an appropriate, professional manner and take steps to ensure that neither myself nor research participants are placed at risk.	
5. The dignity and interests of research participants will be respected at all times, and steps will be taken to ensure that no harm will result from participating in the research.	
6. The views of all participants in the research will be respected.	
7. Special efforts will be made to be sensitive to differences relating to age, culture, disability, race, sex, religion and sexual orientation, amongst research participants, when planning, conducting and reporting on the research.	
8. Data generated by the research (e.g. transcripts of research interviews) will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be used only for this research project. No-one other than research colleagues and CELE tutors will have access to any of the data collected.	
9. Research participants will have the right of access to any data kept on them.	