

Role of Teachers and Students: An Analysis of Higher Education Commission Speaking Curriculum at Graduate Level in Pakistan

Subtitle: Implication of the Role of Teachers and Students in Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT

An effective curriculum must clearly define the roles of both teachers and students in achieving its goals. The HEC undergraduate educational policy 2023 emphasizes that the speaking curriculum should align with fieldwork requirements, reflecting in the roles of teachers and students. This study explores these roles in teaching and learning speaking skills at the undergraduate level in Pakistani universities. Teachers need to enhance their knowledge and skills to effectively use various instructional methodologies. Curriculum developers must ensure their curricula support student learning, provide the necessary tools to meet learning objectives, and improve the education system. This qualitative study used a language teaching model, collecting data through interviews with teachers and students, analyzing the functional English curriculum, and observing classrooms focused on speaking skills. Findings indicate that the speaking curriculum needs improvement to redefine teachers as facilitators rather than directors and ensure proper classroom implementation. Additionally, students need more involvement in pair/group activities to develop workplace-related speaking skills. The study suggests revising the curriculum to incorporate practical learning activities that encourage student engagement and speaking skills development.

Keywords: HEC's Speaking Curriculum; Higher Education Commission (HEC); Speaking Skills; Role of Students; Role of Teachers

Background

Proficiency in oral communication is critical for career success and enhances personal life, leading to balanced development (Leyaley, 2023). Rao (2019) emphasized that speaking skills are paramount for

effective global communication, surpassing other language skills. Speaking creates a powerful impression (Ansary, 2019). Saeed *et al.*, (2016) suggested that traditional language instruction should prioritize speaking over writing and reading, as the grammar-translation approach often neglects speaking. Although crucial for engaging in conversation, speaking has been less prioritized than other language aspects (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Speaking is considered the most important language skill since proficiency in a language is often equated with the ability to speak it (Ur, 2000).

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) aims to enhance the educational system, but rising unemployment hinders achieving essential goals. Current curricula do not sufficiently develop students' intellectual growth or prepare them for workforce demands (Zafar, 2016), (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). HEC's policy allows institutions to create and deliver their English language curricula, tailored to students' needs and the job market (Imran & Wyatt, 2019; Kamal, 2019). This decentralization has significantly impacted curriculum development, allowing universities to make decisions about creating, implementing, evaluating, and improving curricula (Zamharir, Karami & Sani, 2023).

Teachers play a vital role in designing and delivering lectures, imparting knowledge, and using various instructional methods to cater to diverse student needs. Effective teaching techniques are crucial for a productive learning experience, and some students may require additional support (Kamal, 2019). The global spread of English highlights the need for exceptional communication skills in English and the associated challenges. English language learners often experience anxiety and psychological obstacles when speaking the language (Ayub & Lodhi, 2016). Saeed *et al.*, (2016) noted that inadequate content or lack of language usage hampers learners' communication abilities. Encouraging active classroom participation can enhance fluency and proficiency (Mackey, 2007; Zucker, 2005).

Speaking proficiency in the target language becomes evident when learners understand its significant impact on their future professional success (Saeed *et al.*, 2016). Students recognize the necessity of consistent practice to overcome shyness and hesitancy (Taous, 2013). Teachers need to encourage student engagement in the classroom to help them express thoughts and emotions fluently. The teacher's role is essential for student engagement and the success of the learning process (Kamal, 2019). Saeed *et al.*, (2016) emphasized that enhancing speaking abilities requires classroom interactions where students are active participants and teachers are observers and facilitators (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Teachers' beliefs significantly influence classroom achievements, attitudes, and activities, impacting lesson planning and decision-making (Effendi *et al.*, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan is working to enhance the educational system, but rising unemployment hinders achieving its key goals. Current curricula fail to prepare students for intellectual growth or workforce demands (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). While much research has focused on curriculum analysis, the cooperation between educators and learners in developing speaking skills for the workplace is often overlooked. Kamal (2019) highlights that teachers significantly impact students' speaking abilities, particularly in English classes. Pakistani graduates often lack oral communication skills necessary for the workplace. Factors like time constraints, strategic planning, performance quality, and available support affect speaking performance (Nation & Newton, 2009). Competent professionals in international business need strong oral communication skills, not just written ones (Mahsar, 2021).

Curriculum designers and instructors must carefully analyze all elements when creating curricula and teaching strategies (Kapur, 2021). In Pakistan, English is typically the third language for most students, following their native tongue and Urdu (Ayub, 2020). This multilingual environment complicates the development of good communication skills due to a lack of social interactional skills. Effective teaching requires teachers to act as mediators and facilitators, providing reliable instruction to achieve educational

objectives (Kamal, 2019). They must evaluate student performance, develop and execute learning strategies, and assess the process's effectiveness.

In Pakistan's diverse educational context, where English is the medium of instruction at universities, collaboration between educators and students is often neglected in the curriculum. This lack of focus impedes a comprehensive understanding of speaking skills. The study aims to assess the impact of teacher and student roles on English-speaking skills at the undergraduate level in Pakistani universities.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

- 1) What are the roles of students in English-speaking classes at the BS level at the universities in Pakistan?
- 2) What are the teachers' roles in enhancing students' speaking skills at the BS level at the universities in Pakistan?

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate the role of teachers and students while teaching and learning English speaking skills at the graduate level. The data collection was initiated by attentively observing and interviewing individuals, focusing on their relevance to the research issue. The research was a multiple case study conducted at one public and one private university in Islamabad, Pakistan, which employs highly skilled English instructors. The study examined the roles of instructors and students and how these roles influence their actions and behaviors.

Universities create their syllabi after HEC approval based on the undergraduate educational policy provided by HEC. The materials under examination consisted of a curriculum created by four university instructors (two from public institutions and two from private institutions) in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Data was also gathered through classroom observation using observation sheets. Twelve observations were carried out in universities in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. Moreover, data was also collected from ten individuals, comprising five English professors and five students, who were selected for interviews. All teachers had over a decade of experience teaching English at the university level. The students provided data to verify the accuracy of the teachers' data. As McMillan & Schumacher (2001) and Creswell (2008) recommended, the researchers selected teachers with significant expertise as study participants.

Additionally, one participant was chosen to help the researcher focus solely on the teachers' beliefs, thus optimizing the interview data quality (John, 2008; Effendi *et al.*, 2020). The interview was conducted with the participants for around 25 to 30 minutes immediately after the lesson. The objective was to get comprehensive insights into how teachers' beliefs influence their decision-making when addressing common challenges during the teaching and learning process. The interviews were conducted using verbal questioning in both (Urdu and English) languages, with the teacher being informed beforehand to prepare before the recording. The data gathered from these sources was divided into codes for analysis using pre-established criteria in the language instruction model proposed by Richards and Roger (2001). The codes for teachers (Director/Instructor) and for students (Catalyst/Facilitator) were applied to the data gathered from lectures, interviews, and observations for analysis.

Results

The taxonomy used by Richards and Rodgers (2001) was employed to classify the roles of the learners. The analysis provided valuable insights into the various roles of learners and the classification of tasks associated with these roles. The items in question were:

1. individual
2. pair or group.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggested the roles that teachers can assume are as follows:

1. Director/Instructor
2. Catalyst/Facilitator.

Research Question 1

The data collected from teachers (table 1) shows that in public universities, 61.5% of students learn in pairs/groups, and 38.5 % of students learn individually while learning speaking skills. The data collected from classroom observation shows that in public universities, 15.8% of results show learners learn in pairs/groups, and 84.2% show learners learn individually while learning speaking skills in the classroom. The data collected from students shows that in public universities, 11.7% students learn in pairs/groups, and 89.3 % of students learn individually while studying speaking skills in the classroom. Content analysis shows that 72.8% of students learn in pairs/groups, and 27.2% learn individually.

The above table (1) shows that data collected from teachers shows that in private universities, 78.3% of students learn in pairs/groups, and 21.7 % of students learn individually while learning speaking skills in the classroom. The data collected from classroom observation shows that in private universities, 53.7% of results show learners learn in pairs/groups, and 46.3% show learners learn individually while learning speaking skills in the classroom. The data collected from students shows that 59.3% of students learn in pairs/groups in private universities, and 41.7 % learn individually while studying speaking skills in the classroom. Content analysis shows that 49.7% of students learn in pairs/groups, and 50.5% learn individually.

Table 1: Research Question 1: Students Roles Role in Public & Private Universities

Student roles	Pair/ group		Individual	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Interview(teachers)	61.5	78.3	38.5	21.7
Classroom Observation	15.8	53.7	84.2	46.3
Interview (students)	11.7	59.3	89.3	41.7
Content analysis	72.8	49.7	27.2	50.5

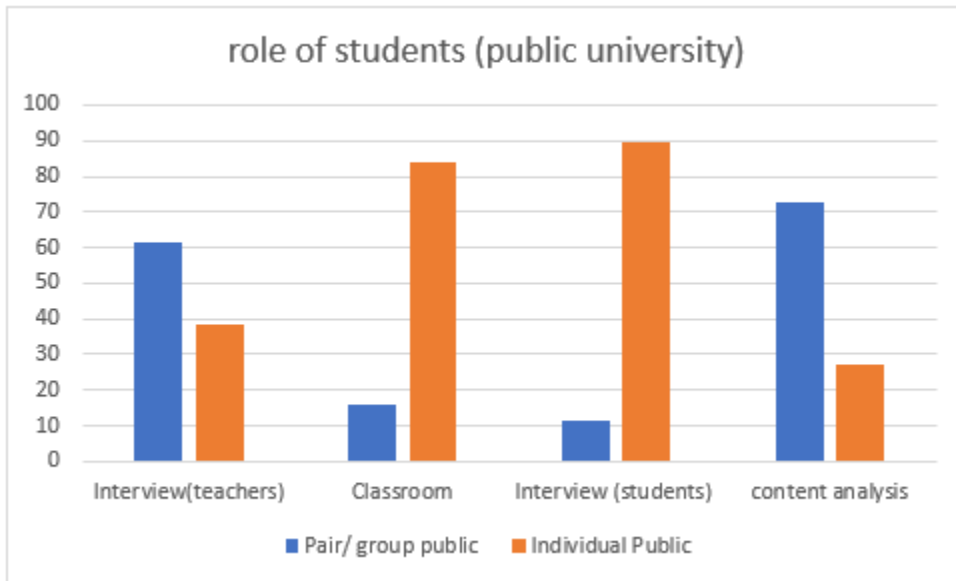


Figure 1: Students Roles in Public University

The above graph (1) shows the pair/group and individual roles of students in public universities in learning English speaking skills.

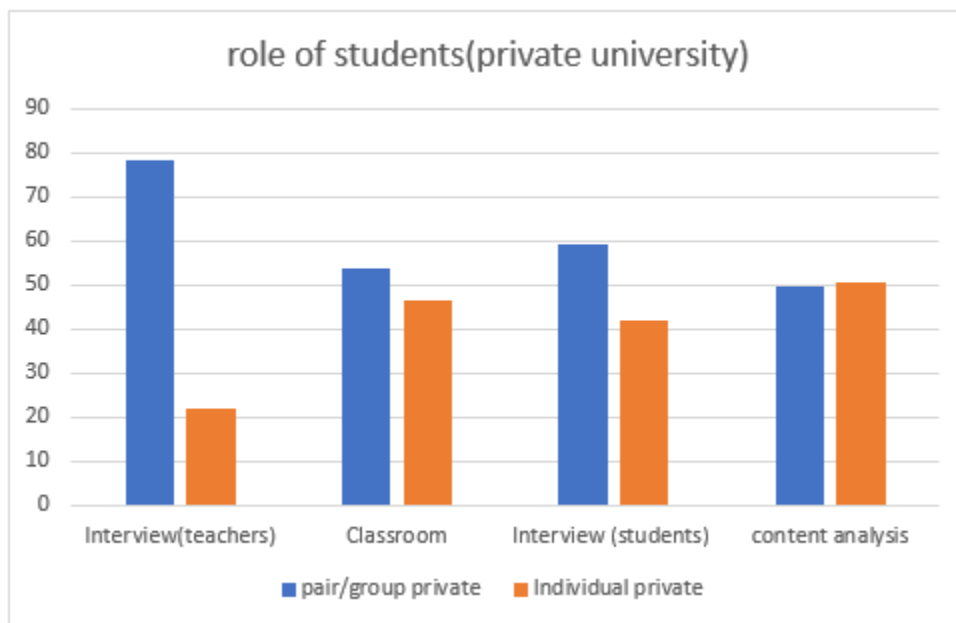


Figure 2: Students Roles in Private University

The above graph (2) shows the pair/group and individual roles of students in private universities in learning English speaking skills.

Research Question 2

Table (2) shows that data collected from teachers shows that in public universities, 69.8% act as catalysts, and 30.2 % act as directors while teaching speaking skills. The data collected from classroom observation shows that in public universities, 21.3% act as catalysts, and 78.7 % serve as directors while teaching speaking skills. The data collected from students shows that in public universities, 5.5% of teachers act as catalysts, and 94.5 % act as directors while teaching speaking skills in the classroom. Content analysis shows 39.7% of the role as a catalyst and 60.3 as a director.

Table (2) shows that data collected from teachers shows that in private universities, 86.9% of teachers act as catalysts, and 13.1 % act as directors while teaching speaking skills. The data collected from classroom observation shows that in private universities, 55.8% of teachers act as catalysts and 44.2 % serve as directors while teaching speaking skills. The data collected from students shows that in private universities, 45% of teachers act as catalysts, and 55% act as directors while teaching speaking skills. Content analysis shows 53.7% of the role as a catalyst and 46.3 as a director.

Table 2: Research Question 2: Teacher Role in Public & Private Universities

Teacher roles	Catalyst (%)		Director (%)	
	public	private	Public	private
Interview(teachers)	69.8	86.9	30.2	13.1
Classroom Observation	21.3	55.8	78.7	44.2
Interview(students)	5.5	45	94.5	55
Content analysis	39.7	53.7	60.3	46.3

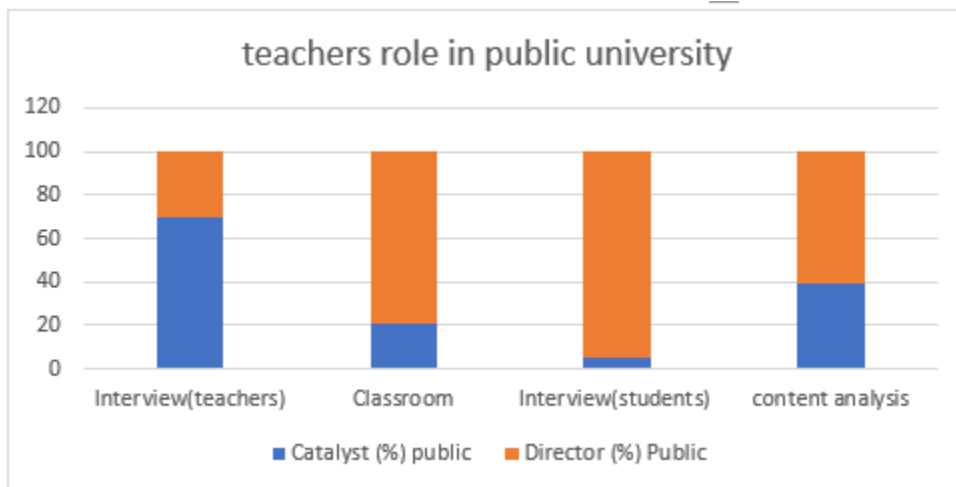


Figure 3: Teacher Roles in Public University

The above graph (3) shows the role of teachers in public universities as directors and catalysts in teaching English speaking skills.

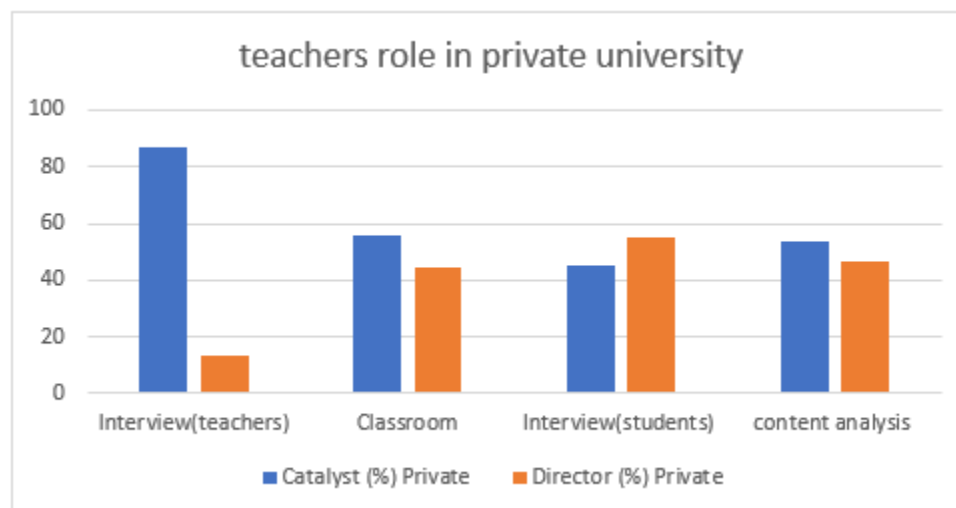


Figure 4: Teacher Roles in Private University

The above graph (4) shows the role of teachers in private universities as directors and catalysts in teaching English speaking skills.

Discussion

Research Question 1

HEC revised its undergraduate educational policy in 2023, perfectly designed to prepare graduates for their careers. Meanwhile, HEC also gave universities the right to design and implement their curricula prepared by university teachers. Kamal (2019) also stated that classroom activities are crucial in developing students' ability to articulate their thoughts and voices while learning to speak. To establish successful speaking activities, it is essential to organize classroom activities. Teachers of universities need to fully encourage students to engage actively in their English language learning, which boosts motivation, language acquisition, and competency. The study represents students' roles as individuals and pairs/groups at the BS level. Private universities focus more on pair/group roles than individual ones. There are at least four critical elements of suitable speaking activities: learners engage in extensive conversation, the teachers are given ample opportunity to speak and practice English, participation is equitable, and a minority of those actively talking does not monopolize classroom debate. Everyone can articulate their thoughts and communicate verbally to participate in school activities. Language proficiency should be acceptable: Language learning activities should enable students to express themselves in a relevant, adequate, and easily understandable way at any proficiency level Kamal (2019). Public universities need to focus more on students' roles while learning English. Students' roles in English learning classrooms are crucial as practical communication abilities can significantly improve an individual's personal life, leading to a more comprehensive and balanced development that is desirable for everyone (Gillis, 2013). although the whole education system revolves around the knowledge giver and knowledge receivers, even then, the role of teachers and students is a more neglectable part of HEC and universities.

Research Question 2

It is important to note that within educational institutions, professors play a crucial role as facilitators, rather than directors, in creating a student-centered learning environment. When teachers act as facilitators, they assist and encourage students in their learning process rather than simply imparting knowledge to them. This method promotes critical thinking, active engagement, and self-directed learning among students. Research has shown that in private universities, teachers enhance students' speaking skills more effectively by acting as facilitators rather than as directors, especially when teaching English. Effendi *et al.*, (2020) also stated that teachers must fulfill seven tasks to instruct students on appropriate classroom behavior effectively. These seven tasks are connected to the 5E teaching paradigm formulated by the Biological Science Curriculum Study (BSCS) in 1987. The 5E teaching paradigm consists of five stages: Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend/Elaborate, and Evaluate. Additionally, the seven roles of teachers are as follows: motivator (inspires students to engage in learning), authority (provides students with established concepts), controller (ensures that students are making progress), trainer (guides students in applying their acquired knowledge and skills), moderator (facilitates students' learning process), facilitator (supports the application of previously acquired knowledge and skills in new situations), and leader (encourages students to reflect on their progress).

In public universities, teachers need to be more facilitators than directors. Many teachers, particularly those who are more experienced, believe that they will experience a greater sense of authority when they are the focal point of the classroom. A teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning is general in Pakistan. That is why, in Pakistan, the emphasis on using English in the education system makes students feel pressured to speak the language. However, some students experience anxiety during oral communication due to the attitudes of their instructors. They address second language learning anxiety stemming from teachers' behavior (Ayub & Lodhi, 2016). Teachers in private institutions are under

pressure to enhance students' speaking skills, particularly in learning the English language. Taking a facilitative approach rather than a directive one can be beneficial in this context. This approach empowers students to actively engage in conversations, discussions, and language practice. Instructors can use various strategies to assess their students, including delivering homework assignments, class assignments, presentations, quizzes, contests, tests, exams, and student engagement in other academic activities. After every lesson plan is finished, the instructors typically put the evaluation techniques into practice. Consequently, it is crucial to put the evaluation techniques into practice (Kapur, 2021).

Extract (1) from Teacher's Interview

Question: What are students' responsibilities per the Higher Education Commission's BS-level speaking curriculum during a speaking skills lesson?

Answer: "I don't know about HEC"; in the speaking curriculum at my university at the BS level, students are expected to engage actively in various speaking activities. This includes participating in class discussions to exchange ideas, delivering presentations to showcase their knowledge, and engaging in role-play activities to practice real-life communication scenarios. Moreover, students are responsible for preparing and delivering speeches on diverse topics, collaborating in group activities to enhance teamwork and communication skills, and actively seeking constructive feedback to improve their speaking abilities continuously.

Question: What specific roles, according to the syllabus you use, do students have to play during a semester to develop their speaking skills?

Answer: Students engage in various activities throughout the semester to enhance their speaking skills. This will involve active participation as speakers in debates and presentations, where they will learn to articulate their thoughts effectively and persuasively. Additionally, students will collaborate in group discussions, honing their ability to engage in constructive dialogue and work collectively towards a common goal. As listeners, they will provide valuable peer feedback, developing their speaking skills and ability to critically evaluate and support their peers.

Question: What are some of the students' roles given in the HEC curriculum and practiced by teachers?

Answer: "I'm not sure about HEC again, but as per my university, students are expected to engage in interactive activities like group discussions, role-plays, and presentations."

Question: According to the HEC syllabus, what actions should students take in class to develop the speaking skills required in the job market?

Answer: In the academic framework of my university, the syllabus highlights the significance of experiential knowledge by encouraging students to participate in different activities that closely mirror real-world scenarios. These activities contain simulating mock interviews to allow students to rehearse their interview skills in a controlled setting. Additionally, students are tasked with delivering presentations on topics relevant to their chosen industry, enabling them to sharpen their public speaking and research abilities. Furthermore, engaging in discussions on current affairs allows students to develop the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary for professional success in today's dynamic job market. Through many different activities, the syllabus aims to equip students with the communication skills and spirit required for future careers.

Question: Does the HEC curriculum clearly say how teachers should balance the active engagement of students in communicating with one another in English in class?

In our university's implementation of the speaking curriculum, my duty as an instructor is to facilitate environments where students can actively practice and improve their speaking skills.

Question: What instructions or training do you get from the HEC regarding how to teach speaking skills?

Answer: "I have yet to undergo specialized training in teaching speaking skills provided by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). However, my teaching methods are influenced by the training and resources offered by my university. These resources emphasize using effective communication techniques and integrating interactive teaching methods, which I incorporate into my teaching practices."

Question: To what extent have you used the acquired knowledge of speaking English from the HEC training in your instructional practices?

Answer: The foundation of my expertise in teaching English speaking skills is built upon the knowledge and training I have gained from university-provided resources and my practical experiences. I adeptly incorporate these valuable insights into my teaching approach, leveraging diverse interactive and student-centered methods to enhance my students' speaking capabilities."

Question: What does the HEC speaking curriculum for BS-level students say regarding how teachers should collaborate with their peers to help students develop their speaking skills and prepare for jobs?

Answer: "The HEC curriculum should provide specific and comprehensive guidelines on how teachers are expected to collaborate with their peers. In my practice, I collaborate informally with colleagues to share teaching strategies and resources, enhancing the overall effectiveness of our teaching in developing students' speaking skills."

Extract (2) from Student's Interview

Question: How much do you practice speaking English in your English class?

Answer: The amount of practice varies depending on the lesson, but we engage in speaking activities independently. On average, a significant portion of the class is dedicated to speaking practice individually to enhance our oral communication abilities.

Question: Are group activities conducted in English class? If yes, to what extent?

Answer: Yes, group activities are the norm in English classes. These activities include group discussions and debates on group projects. Students are given many opportunities to practice speaking independently, sometimes in groups.

Question: How do your teachers make you play specific roles in learning speaking skills, and what are those roles?

Answer: The teachers assign various roles during discussions, debates, and group work, including speaker, listener, mediator, or participant. Such roles facilitate the development of speaking skills like presenting, persuasive communication, facilitation, and active listening during conversation.

Question: Does the teacher motivate students to participate in teamwork to practice speaking skills? Why and how?

Answer: Yes, in our class, teamwork is encouraged through Group task work, emphasizing peer feedback. Teamwork is important in improving students' speaking skills, which teachers drive.

Question: How do teachers focus on speaking practice in the classroom, and which strategy do you like best for you?

Answer: Teachers often focus on speaking practice through role-plays, individual debates, and group discussions. Role-plays are the most effective.

Question: Highlight some faults of the classroom that create problems in developing oral competency for you.

Answer: Such errors occur in crowded classes, sometimes with no interactions between teachers and students, insufficient practice in spoken speech, and rare natural conditions for developing speech. These problems reduce speaking training.

Question: How does your instructor play the role of a facilitator in your English classroom by allowing you to improve your English speaking?

Answer: In our university, teachers create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment, offer constructive feedback, and guide language use. They encourage students to take the initiative and actively practice their English-speaking skills. While teachers may use moments of silence strategically to motivate students to initiate conversations and express themselves, they also use prompts, questions, and visual aids to guide and facilitate speaking, ensuring a balanced approach.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The study found that the roles of both students and teachers in the classroom are critical for developing language skills, mainly speaking. Language teachers should, therefore, design and implement meaningful activities that encourage student participation and engagement to enhance their speaking skills in the classroom. This can include group discussions, debates, presentations, and role-playing exercises. However, it is recommended that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) should provide detailed guidelines in undergraduate educational policies that specify the appropriate roles of both teachers and students in the content list. Additionally, universities should specify the roles of students and teachers in their English syllabi, considering the level of language proficiency and the course's learning outcomes. In a nation such as Pakistan, where English is frequently encountered as a secondary language, the cooperation between educators and learners is the most neglectable part of the curriculum. That is crucial for effectively cultivating proficient English-speaking abilities, which can facilitate access to education, employment, and international communication. By appropriately implementing HEC's undergraduate education policy 2023, students can gain a deeper understanding of their subjects and acquire the information and skills necessary to succeed in highly competitive job markets. Integrating speaking skills relevant to the job can enhance students' communication ability and empower them to express their ideas and opinions proficiently in a professional setting (Ayub & Mohammed, 2024). Students' ability to improve their English language skills largely depends on the support they receive from their universities. The instructor performs multiple roles during teaching and learning, such as acting as a facilitator, demonstration, and knowledge supplier. Language teachers and institutions must prioritize developing speaking skills among language learners. By providing clear guidelines and incorporating appropriate activities in the classroom, students will be able to improve their speaking skills and become confident and proficient communicators in their professional and personal lives. Subsequently, it would be beneficial to replicate these studies on a broader scale to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs.

Declarations

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate: This study was conducted with the institution's formal approval to gather data. Consent was obtained, and privacy was ensured.

Conflict of Interests: Not applicable.

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