

Students' Challenges to Speak EFL Skills: A Comparative Study Focused on Selected Private & State Elementary Schools of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Background: Mastering English speaking skills can not only bring people to be able to communicate with others but also it brings a positive impact on students' academic performance

Objective: Hence, the main purpose of this comparative study was to investigate into grade 8 students' challenges of academic performance in EFL speaking skills.

Methods: Each school of the targeted grades had three sections which encompassed 50 students. The informants, therefore, were sampled students and all EFL teachers. Thus, a systematic sampling technique was employed to select 24 informants among the whole population of 300 students. Whereas, the EFL teachers, which were 4 in the year 2019 G.C., comprehensibly taken as participants of the study due to their manageable number of the entire population. A mixed research approach was employed via the tools questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation. Then, quantitative data were analyzed in percentages, while qualitative were thematically organized and categorized in the form of a statement.

Findings: Finally, conclusion and recommendations were drawn based on the findings which were underpinned in particular and common challenges that drew back students' EFL oral skills in each school. Problems related to curriculum and stakeholders of the school to fulfill every facility were particular challenges that influenced state school students' EFL speaking skills. However, problems related to teachers and teaching aids challenged private school students' EFL speaking efficiencies. Meanwhile, Psychological and social factors commonly affected both of the institution students' EFL speaking skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Therefore, the curriculum should consider EFL programs at first levels (grades 1-4) in all state schools. Besides, stakeholders of state schools should fulfill audiovisual materials and consider infrastructure. Training should be given for teachers on how to maneuver audiovisual materials and EFL skills. Moreover, parents of the students should stay in touch with the schools' community, following up on every performance of their children. On the other hand, private schools' stakeholders should halt the flux of EFL teachers providing proportional incentives for their effort. Finally, teachers should encourage their students during practice and show a fraternal approach.

Keywords: EFL speaking skill; Challenges; Efficiency; State schools; Private schools; Practice.

Introduction

The English language is needed by so many people all over the world since it has gotten a great impact on the affairs of humanity. Some people need it to be successful in scientific enquires; whereas the others need it for the sake of their business purposes. Besides, the new technologies which zoom year after year still need EFL efficiencies. To make their purpose come true, people communicate with each other and one another personally or via the help of devices all over the mundane. Whereas, in the context of our country Ethiopia, English has gotten an increasing power over Amharic (National language of Ethiopia) in Education, since the introduction of modern education in 1955, nearly 15 years after the demise of Italian colonial trial and in business, since the enthronement of the incumbent political power.

In those days of the introduction of modern education into Ethiopia, the media of instruction used to be foreign languages (French, Italian, and English). In recent dates (the imperial and military regimes) too, English, was in use in education, particularly from grade seven upwards. Despite the linguistic and ethnic multiplicity of the country, EFL proficiency was essential and has continued to spread, getting more dominance in different aspects of man's life (Amlaku B., 2008).

The importance of EFL speaking skills hence is enormous for the learners of the language. It can enhance one's personal life and thereby bring about the well-rounded growth that we should all seek. Without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script (Ishrat A., n.d.). Besides, Nunan (1995) states that learning EFL speaking skills are the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured based on the ability to perform a conversation in the language.

However, EFL speaking is considered the most challenging skill in mastering a language because of its spontaneous nature and the implementation of conventional teaching approaches that emphasize memorization and students' passive roles (Shabani, 2013). It needs interpersonal skills to express what the students feel, think, and the judgment towards one aspect of life (Mahripah, 2014).

In the context of the targeted schools' level, most of the state school students take EFL as a main course and a medium of instruction starting from grades 5. They seem to face difficulty in using EFL speaking skills though they learned it for years at schools during class life, and the implementation varies from region to region. Contrary to the fact, all private school students start it as both media of instruction and main course from grade one synchronously with their mother's tongue and national languages. The above notion seems that most state school students hadn't been given the background knowledge of EFL speaking skills from the base and yet to be solved.

Meanwhile, based on the researcher's four years of inclusive observation, in each state and private elementary school consecutively, most state school students seem to face challenges to speak EFL skills. Their assessment in EFL speech is lower than that of most private counterparts. They also face

difficulty to express themselves in EFL, to do tasks like presenting a topic, making a debate, delivering a speech, and performing any other activities.

The reasons were assumed that exclusion of EFL subjects from grades 1-4, inaccessibility of teaching aids, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, background knowledge of both the students and the teachers, the influence of mother's tongue, lack of motivation, and anxiety. According to Bashir, A & Dogar (2011), anxiety may lead to despondence and a sense of failure in the practice of learners' EFL speaking skills. Besides, it hurts the oral performance of EFL speakers (Woodrow, 2006).

However, there are barriers like high turn-over of EFL teachers and malfunction of audiovisual materials; the severity gets low in private schools when compared to that of state. This can be seen in different interactions that they perform inside and outside the classrooms. Therefore, this comparative manuscript investigates into grade 8 of both state and private schools students' challenges to speak EFL skills.

There were various researches that have been conducted on EFL speaking skills both at local and international levels. Among them, the following national researches have proximity to the purpose and theme of this manuscript, which focuses on students' challenges to speak EFL skills. Dawit T. and Demis G. (2015), conducted a general study on challenges of EFL classroom participation in all Ethiopian Universities. The results they obtained indicated that factors like learners related, teachers, teaching methods, physical environmental, and other limited students' participation in the classroom. Similarly, Bachore, M. & Satenaw, A. (2018), focused on both the extent and challenges of assessing students' speaking skills in selected secondary schools of Wolaita zone, Ethiopia. The study revealed that many EFL teachers assess their students always; however, there were teachers who assess their students speaking once in a month and even in a semester. It has also disclosed that lack of adequate time, lack of sufficient material, a large number of students per class, and teacher's inappropriate way of assessing speaking skills affect them. Meanwhile, Tadiwos Hombamo (2017) mainly focused on the opportunities of group work

implementation in EFL speaking classrooms in the case of the Kambata Tambaro zone. The results demonstrated that teachers had little understanding of group work in EFL speaking classrooms; they were not using group work in EFL speaking classrooms as a result of less attention & lack of awareness.

On the other hand, among international researchers, Benter OG. (2015) focused on teaching EFL speaking skills through classroom activities, especially in a secondary school in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. The results indicated that there was a variation in the use of classroom activities. Besides, during classroom discussions, students code switched to Kiswahili or Sheng due to low oral skills, and teachers did not integrate various classroom activities in one lesson. Eray Kara et al. (2017) also conducted general research on challenges in EFL speaking classes in the Turkish context, Ankara. Then, the findings showed that students have difficulty in speaking English due to educational and social reasons, while personal reasons are not influential.

Whereas, Lai-Mei L. & Seyedeh M. A. (2017), who researched analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skills, indicated as findings that learners with low self-esteem, higher anxiety, and low motivation have serious difficulties in speaking skills. The paper also showed that students who have higher motivation and lower anxiety could speak easily and effectively. Similarly, Nguyen H & Tran N. (2015), who conducted the research on the factors affecting students' speaking performance at Le Thanh Hien high school, extracted the factors that affecting students speaking performance such as: topical knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teachers' feedback during speaking activities, confidence, pressure to perform well and time for preparation. Finally, Dr. Ahmed M. (2016), who researched problems and difficulties of speaking that encounter English language students at Al Quds open university, indicated that there were some difficulties in the students' speech due to fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety and lack of confidence.

This study is not only different in setting, scope, and themes from the above mentioned local and international research works that have been conducted by different scholars, however, but it

also differs from the above-mentioned research works accordingly: this is a comparative study that encompasses neither universities nor vocational and high schools. It only focuses on a single variable: the students' challenges to speak EFL skills. It neither focuses on the perception nor performance and the extent of participation. This manuscript is not a general study that takes place on a national level or world-wide. No focus has been given to the teachers, but only to triangulate data. It is only on elementary students' challenges to speak EFL skills, but not on teaching or learning EFL skills.

Contrary to the above literature, this manuscript neither gives focus to the other languages' skills nor investigates the challenges of EFL speaking skills in terms of other native languages. But, it mainly focuses on and fills the research gap in terms of investigating into grade 8 students' challenges to speak EFL skills: a comparative study focused on private and state primary schools of Wolaita zone, Ethiopia. Thus, the above mentioned tangible barriers occurred research gaps, and the evidence researcher extracted out during eight years of inclusive observation motivated the researcher to conduct this comparative work.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

To describe the facts and characteristics of a given population systematically, factually, and accurately, the researcher used descriptive research design for the study. It helped the researcher to investigate students' challenges to speak EFL skills. Then, he employed detailed analyses of quantitative and qualitative approaches to gathering data using tools such as questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observation. Then, the researcher analyzed results using both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data analysis. A quantitative approach was employed for close-ended questionnaires and structured interviews. On the other hand, a qualitative approach was employed for classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. Thus, mixed approaches were preferred to interpret data.

Setting of the Study

The research was comparatively conducted at

Abba Pascal and Ligaba Beyene primary schools of Wolaita zone, SNNPR state of Ethiopia. The former one is private, and the later one is a state school. The reasons behind selection were the researcher's familiarity with both of the institutions and awareness of the students' barriers during the work. Besides, grade 8 is the senior at the level (elementary), and the students are assumed able to communicate in EFL oral skills due to their stay in classes for more than three years.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were sampled students and all EFL teachers of both institutions. Thus, these participants were assumed to provide accurate data for the study due to their proximity to the area. The total number of participants was 304. Among them, 300 were students, and the rest 4 were EFL teachers who were teaching in both catchment areas of the study. Each of the schools consisted of 2 EFL teachers and 150 students. Besides, the targeted grades consisted of 3 sections each, and the sections were comprised of 50 students in the year 2019 G.C.

Sampling Technique

The researcher selected single private and state elementary schools from the catchment areas using a convenience sampling technique. It allowed the researcher to select the school proximally. On the other hand, all four EFL teachers were comprehensibly taken as informants of the study due to the manageable number of the entire population. Each school's grades consisted of 3 sections, and the sections consisted of 50 students. There was $50 \times 6 = 300$ student population in targeted areas. In terms of students, a systematic sampling technique was employed to select 24 (8%) from the total population. In this regard, one student represents 12 students in each section. Thus, every Nth informant was selected according to the attendance list of the class. To get the exact participants of each section, which is about 4, the researcher divided the population of each section

into the numbers of each student's representation. This becomes $50 \div 4 = 12.5$. Therefore, four students from each section and a totally of 24 students from 6 sections of two different schools were taken as participants of the study.

Instruments of Data Collection

To gather reliable data from the targeted population and achieve the intended objective of the study, the researcher used closed and open-ended types of questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation. The questionnaire was set for students, and an interview was set for EFL teachers of the targeted elementary schools. Finally, the observation was taken place with the prepared format. It mainly used to cross-check whether the problems from the questionnaire and interviews existed or not.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and interpreted the data using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the data analysis. Qualitative items of the interview, observation, and open-ended questionnaire were analyzed in words grouping similar responses together. Whereas, close-ended questions of the quantitative parts were analyzed in numbers and percentages.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered through the instruments, elicits the main findings of the study, and finally discusses the study. Thus, after collecting the data, the researcher organized and analyzed them using percentages and in a statement form based on the challenges of students to speak EFL skills.

Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

The response on students' challenges to speak EFL skills

Table 1 Challenges Drawback Students' EFL Speaking Skills

	Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Do you agree as you face challenges to speak EFL skills?	14	58.3	8	33.3	2	8.3	0	0	0	0	24	100
2	Which institution students do you think are more exposed to oral challenges of EFL?	State		Both of them		Undecided		None of them		Private		Total	
		15	62.5	9	37.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	100

In item 1, for the question of whether they face challenges to speak EFL skills or not, 14 (58.3 %) of respondents, the highest number of whom were from state schools, strongly agreed that there were challenges drawback their EFL speaking skills. Meanwhile, 8 (33.3%) of the respondents, among whom the highest number were from private schools, still agreed on the presence of drawbacks to speak EFL skills. However, except for 2 (8.3%) of the respondents who were unable to decide, none of them selected “disagree” and “strongly disagree.” Thus, the data indicated that state school students had more exposure to challenges than private counterparts to speak EFL skills. The respondents, who strongly agreed, enumerated their drawbacks word by word as follows:

The challenges drawback us during EFL speaking classes are the exclusion of EFL subjects from grades 1-4, unavailability of audiovisual materials, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, and lack of infrastructure.

On the other hand, the highest number of private school respondents who agreed on the presence of drawbacks in EFL speaking skills classes stated them out accordingly:

The challenges halt our EFL speech efficiencies back are high turn-over of EFL teachers, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, and malfunction of audio-visual materials.

Besides, in the same table, item 2, 15 (62.5 %) highest number of respondents replied that state institution students were highly exposed to EFL speech challenges than that of private ones. Whereas, only 9 (37.5) of the respondents had the position of “both of them.” However, none of them selected the rest of the options. Thus, the highest number of

respondents who assured so stated their reasons. The reasons they forwarded mainly concentrated on the challenges that have already been mentioned above. Therefore, as the data indicated, state school students were highly exposed to challenges to speak EFL skills than that of private schools.

Analysis of Teachers' Interview Teachers' Response to Challenges Drawback the Students' EFL Speaking Skills

The respondents replied that there were challenges that affect students' EFL speaking skills, though it varies from institution to institution. In terms of state schools, the responses that have been extracted word by word from the respondents have been put sequentially as follows:

The challenges drawback our students during EFL speaking classes are: exclusion of EFL subjects from grades 1-4, unavailability of audiovisual materials, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, and lack of infrastructure.

Regards private schools, the challenges students confronted to learn EFL speaking skills were not as severe as that of state school students did. Thus, the respondents stated them as follows:

Some of the challenges affected private school students' FFL speaking skills were high turn-over of EFL teachers, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, and malfunction of audio-visual materials.

On the other hand, as the respondents indicated, there were common challenges that affected both state and private school students' EFL speaking skills. Such as:

Teachers' minimum focus on EFL speaking skills, the influence of mothers' tongue, motivation,

anxiety, family factors, and negative feed-back.

The above-mentioned challenges directly affected students' EFL speaking skills due to their relation to the teaching-learning process. Thus, as the extracted data indicated, state school students were more exposed to challenges than that of private ones to speak EFL skills. This can be supported by Berhanu S. (2003), that private schools are better serving the educational needs of the population than government-led schools.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

The researcher observed the targeted classrooms to gather data guided by the observation checklist.

Challenges Drawback Students' EFL Speaking Skills

When the researcher observed, depending on the set checklist, there were lots of challenges available that drawback the students' performance of EFL speaking skills. When the factors compared to two institutions, the challenges at state school, exceeded that of the private counterpart. As observed data indicated, at the state school, there was the exclusion of EFL subject from grades 1-4, unavailability of audiovisual materials, huge class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice and lack of infrastructure. On the other hand, the above-listed factors were rare in private schools. However, the specific challenges that occurred at private schools were not as severe as state schools; there were observed challenges. Such as high turn-over of EFL teachers, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, and malfunction of audio-visual materials are some of the particular barriers that affect private school students' EFL speaking skills. Besides, there were some challenges common to both state and private schools. Such as teachers' minimum focus on EFL speaking skills, the influence of mothers' tongue, negative feed-back, motivation, anxiety, and family factors are the common barriers affect both state and private schools students' EFL speaking skills. As Grace C. (2019) stated, what is going on at home will impact a student's propensity to learn.

Therefore, as the results of whole data indicated, the barriers that halt state school students to speak

EFL skills are more severe than that of the private counterparts. According to Teshome N. (2017), public or governmental schools are more affected by challenges than private schools. Besides, the above thematic result of data indicated that both state and private school students similarly confront common challenges that drawback them to speak EFL skills.

Main Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis and discussion of the data presented in this chapter, the following findings were thematically obtained.

- Private schools create more opportunities for students to learn EFL speaking skills than state schools.
- Challenges drawback students' EFL speaking skills in terms of state schools were the exclusion of EFL subjects from grades 1-4, unavailability of audiovisual materials, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, and lack of infrastructure.
- High turn-over of EFL teachers, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, and malfunction of audio-visual materials are some of the particular barriers that affect private school students' EFL speaking skills.
- There were some challenges commonly affect state and private school students' EFL speaking skills: teachers' minimum focus to EFL speaking skills, the influence of mothers' tongue, motivation, anxiety, family factors, and negative feed-back.

Discussion

According to the results of triangulated data from the tools, there were challenges that drawback both state and private school students' EFL speaking skills though it is severed in-state institutions. The following are specific challenges that state school students face to speak EFL skills. Such as exclusion of EFL subject from grades 1-4, unavailability of audiovisual materials, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, and lack of infrastructure. Contrarily, high turn-over of EFL teachers, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, and malfunction of audio-visual materials are the typical challenges that affect private school students' EFL

speaking efficiency. This suggests that state school students face many challenges when compared to private schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

From the overall results and discussions made above, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- There were challenges that affect the targeted institution informants' EFL speaking skills, which vary from institution to institution.
- Unavailability of audiovisual materials, class-size, lack of conducive environment for practice, and lack of infrastructure are the particular drawbacks that affect state school students' EFL speaking skills.
- Teachers' minimum focus on EFL speaking skills, the influence of mothers' tongue, motivation, anxiety, family factors, and negative feed-back are the common barriers affect both state and private school students' EFL speaking skills.
- Whereas, High turn-over of EFL teachers, and malfunction of audio-visual materials, teachers' incapability to maneuver audiovisual materials, are some of the particular barriers that affect private school students' EFL speaking skills.
- State school students face more challenges to speak EFL skills than their private counterparts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations have been forwarded:

- EFL programs should be included in the curriculum at first levels (grades 1-4) of all state schools.
- State schools should consider audiovisual materials and should limit the number of students to create a conducive environment for EFL speaking practice.
- Training should be given to teachers on how to maneuver audio visual materials.
- Parents of the students should proximally stay in touch with the schools to follow up on their children's performance.
- Sufficient training in EFL speaking skills should

be arranged for teachers to make them whole.

- Private schools' stakeholders should alleviate the flow of EFL teachers with different incentives.
- Teachers should encourage their students during practice.
- Stakeholders of state schools should consider the facility of furniture and audiovisual materials that assist in EFL speaking sessions.
- Students themselves should pay much effort to be successful in EFL speaking skills.

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