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Using Animated Films to Develop the Speaking Skills of Student Teachers of English in the Light of the Communicative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the effect of a designed program based on animated films to develop third-year English student teachers' speaking skills. The participants of the study were a group of thirty English student teachers at Faculty of Women for Arts, Science and Education, Ain Shams University. The required verbal and non-verbal speaking skills for the experimental group were identified and approved by a jury of EFL and linguistics specialists. The treatment lasted approximately for one semester and followed one group pre-posttest design in which the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Tools included, a pre-post speaking test, two rubrics for measuring the verbal and non-verbal speaking skills and finally a follow-up questionnaire. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the results of the pre and posttest in favor of the posttest, which indicates the effectiveness of the treatment. The designed program showed a large effect size of (0.91) and effectiveness ratio of (1.23) developing the verbal and non-verbal speaking skills of participants. The study has proven to have a positive effect on developing the verbal speaking skills of student teachers in general, as well as its sub-skills including; phonetic skills, lexical skills, grammatical skills, fluency and accuracy. In addition, the study showed a positive impact on developing the overall non-verbal speaking skills, as well as its sub-skills including; eye-contact, body language, facial expressions and gestures.

Keywords: verbal speaking skills, non-verbal speaking skills, communicative approach, and animated films.

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Chapter One

Background and Problem

Introduction:

Teaching English as a foreign language is a high-demand subject of instruction that continues to experience growth all over the world especially in our Egyptian schools. Mastering English and its skills are an important part of educational development. ESL/ EFL is afforded for all ages to learn English for communication basically, besides many other functions like information, immigration, business, news and diplomacy. English is known widely as the most spoken language, but not in terms of native speakers, but as a second or foreign language. There are more than 350,000,000 native speakers and more than 400,000,000 speakers of English as a second language, that's why teaching speaking skills is regarded as one of the important domains of foreign language teaching due to its importance as means of effective communication (Kitao 2012). Apparently, any person who lacks; either verbal or non-verbal speaking skills, suffers in this era of competition as speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Osborn, et al 2008).

Speaking as an essential means of communication is generally regarded as an important and difficult skill of the four language skills that learners have to master. However, globally, there is a debate that majority of EFL learners cannot speak English language properly (Alonzo, 2014; Sarwar, 2014; Alharbi, 2015). Even the achievers who get high scores in written examinations are unable to express themselves orally in English language (Sarwar et al, 2014). Indeed, EFL learners are deeply frustrated that they have spent years studying English, but still they cannot speak it. Within the Egyptian education programs, teachers usually do not have enough time to teach this skill as it is required because they only have a very limited time during sessions besides, considering the typical setbacks in the classroom and the great majority of the time is used to go into grammar because it is the base of the language (Bedawi, 2014; Abuzahra, 2016; Sharaf, 2018).

Similar observation was made by (Alharbi, 2015 and Gudu, 2015) that learners have low verbal speaking skills due to absence of authentic language learning situations inside and outside classrooms. According to the researcher, there are several factors that influence learning of speaking skills; for instance, the use of mother tongue inside and outside classrooms, low status of English in the country, learners' negative attitudes towards English

language, the use of mother tongue by teachers to explain difficult concepts, the use of teacher-centered methodology and the passiveness of learners in classroom. These factors influence successful speaking skills lessons. The educational system has interfered with teaching of English language because of loaded curriculum as it does not provide enough time for learners to practice using language in context due to large number of students in class, students' low proficiency and cultural related factors (Al-Hosni 2014; Alharbi, 2015). Consequently, it encourages the use of traditional teaching approaches by teachers because they enable them to cover the syllabus effectively without consuming a lot time. (Lumala, 2007; Ngagi et al, 2014). Krashen (2005) recommend that learners should be motivated so that they do not feel threatened. Al-Hosni (2014) observed that anxiety and unwillingness to learn by learners in speaking skills lesson, are the two main obstacles for learning English. These are caused when learners fear being negatively evaluated in error correction in front of their classmates. In addition, those learners with low proficiency and rate self as 'poor' become more anxious and are not willing to communicate.

One of the most difficult aspects of spoken English is that it is always accomplished via interaction with at least one other speaker and this is one reason why many learners were shocked and disappointed when they use the target language for the first time in real interaction. They had not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with all of its simultaneous demands. Rodríguez (2012) indicated that human communication is a complex process. People need communication when they want to say something, transmit information or need to speak. Speakers use communication when they want to express or inform someone about something. They use language according to their purpose and it is necessary for them to be a listener and a speaker for effective communication (Harmer, 2007). Harmer also explains that: During speaking, we construct words and phrases with individual sounds, and we also use pitch change, intonation, and stress to convey different meanings. This skill is the most complicated due to the fact that speakers have to interpret not only the message that other speakers try to express. Besides, in a face to face interaction the speaker can use a whole range of facial expressions, gestures and general body language to help to convey the message.

Native language speakers use some mechanisms to facilitate their speech. These mechanisms are not too easy for EFL speakers to maintain, and consist of simplifying the language making simple structures: they usually omit parts of a sentence and use idiomatic expressions to facilitate the oral fluency and fillers and hesitation devices are also frequent. In order to compensate their difficulties, Native speakers can correct themselves, reformulate or

rephrase sentences, a frequent kind of 23 alterations accepted by the community of speakers (Bueno, Madrid and McLaren, 2006). That's why EFL learners need more time and more practice in order to be able to develop these mechanisms.

According to English language scholars, the use of learner-centered classroom activities including group discussions, speeches, storytelling, drama, debates, poem recitation, songs, and tongue-twisters could alleviate the problem of low verbal speaking skills (Johnson, 2006; Villegas and Lukas, 2002; Gathumbi and Masembe, 2005; Okech, 2005). These classroom activities improve student's active participation, motivate and expose students to authentic use of English language in context. Many researchers have also proven that students are much more ready to interact with each other with more complex responses than with their teacher (Ahmad and Yusuf 2014). Students feel comfortable working, interacting and making mistakes with their partners rather than with their teachers and corrective feedback from peers are found to be less daunting than the correction by teachers (Gudu, 2015). The current research therefore sought to design communicative activities that require interaction during every single step to make students integrated in active participation and have to speak continuously, therefore their verbal speaking skills are enhanced.

Coming to the non-verbal speaking skills, they play an important role in the effectiveness of the occurred communication. In this regard, people speak with vocal organs, but they converse with their entire bodies. Every facial expression and every gesture contribute to the overall meaning of a statement. Our Body language thus accompanies every speech act people make, and even if they do not speak, their non-verbal behavior constantly transmits information that can be meaningful. Surkamp (2014) estimates that in a conversation, up to 65% of what is transmitted through the non-verbal norms like facial expressions and body language. This implies that a considerable part of any message that people are sending and receiving is encoded and decoded non-verbally. Consequently, non-verbal phenomena have become a focus of interest in various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, and one of the important disciplines is the foreign language teaching (Cf. Kendon 2004).

Several recent publications in the domain of foreign language teaching show that non-verbal speaking forms are very important not only for the teaching of language, but also for intercultural learning (Cf. Knabe 2007; Reimann 2008; Strasser 2008). In addition to this, a variety of methodological work has been published in practice-oriented journals, suggesting different approaches to include non-verbal speaking forms in foreign language classes (Cf. Reimann 2000; Bouchara 2009; Özkul 2012). It is not surprising that these suggestions

always include role-plays, mime and other action-oriented and holistic activities that consider the entire body with its different forms of perception and expression. Many of these exercises originate from drama pedagogy and have found their way into foreign language teaching: they stress the value of non-verbal elements for language learning, not only when it comes to creating authentic communicative situations in the classroom, but also as a compensation strategy for speaking in the context of intercultural learning (Culham 2002; Müller 2008; Elis 2015).

In this vein comes the communicative approach as a main product of educators and linguists who developed this approach because of the lack of realistic language teaching to enhance students' communicative interaction. That is why foreign language teaching and learning have the goal of focusing students to use English for communication and as a tool for furthering their studies. In the process of teaching and learning, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are simultaneously performed. Normally, learners in an EFL context do not use the language in authentic situations. They possess inability in communicating appropriately and correctly. This leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and avoidance when communicating with native English speakers. In foreign language teaching and learning, the ability to speak is the most essential skill since it is basic for communication and it is a difficult skill for EFL learners (Oradee, 2012).

Lawrence (2007) defines the communicative approach as a method of teaching that focuses on helping students to communicate meaningfully in the target language. With this approach there is a tendency to place more emphasis on speaking tasks. The communicative approach is designed to give students meaningful activities. The aim is to teach students to use "real-world language". Students' attitude towards teaching English speaking using communicative activities was rated as good effective mediums by many methodologists like (Oradee, 2012) who stated that employing communicative activities; such as, discussions, problem-solving, and role-playing, contribute to develop the communicative competence of EFL learners enabling them to use language in real life situations or at least in life-like situations that occur inside classrooms. Characteristics of these activities may encourage interaction among the students in language classrooms. This could offer opportunity for language practice. The teacher may arrange for language functions such as asking for directions, ordering food and beverages, talking on the telephone, and making an appointment with doctors. These types of activities can afford students experience using the language for real communication. Teaching English speaking skills using communicative activities is a learning method focusing on the learner-centeredness. Students work in small groups divided by

their language proficiency, i.e., high, medium, and low levels. Using this technique, students can have an opportunity to work collaboratively together providing help to others while performing the activity. The atmosphere in working in groups can lessen their fear in making mistakes when speaking English. Students in the group can support others in the team needing help. They can express themselves successfully while working in groups. This can lead to self-monitoring, more confidence in speaking, and enjoyment can encourage them to participate more in learning.

Since the communicative approach depends on the effectiveness of interaction and the ability of every learner to express himself and his ideas as well as his feelings and trends, so all of this cannot be achieved unless their verbal and non-verbal skills are highly promoted. Elshahat (2012) states that the communicative approach adopts many exercises and task, depending on the requirements of each task, Hyun (2004) presents four categories of communicative techniques as; experience tasks, shared tasks, guided tasks, and independent tasks, but the current research will focus only on the tasks and exercises that serves the content of the animated films and employs them to improve the verbal and non-verbal speaking skills of the English student teachers. For instance, guided tasks depend on exercising language in groups or pairs and give them a guidance to follow whereas the teacher supports learners while accomplishing the tasks (Garber, 2008).

Therefore, Classroom activities should parallel to the “real world” as closely as possible. The purpose of speaking should be the same in class as they are in real life. Thus, and the process of learning should shift from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction.

Unfortunately, the situation is not dissimilar in Egypt. Despite the significance of acquiring and developing a communicative competence, hence EFL learners could communicate meaningfully and purposefully in the target language, the majority of Egyptian learners, especially student teachers, fail to communicate effectively in the target language which is a prerequisite for succeeding in their career and passing many courses during their training (McIlwraith, 2016).

Here comes the need to use authentic visual materials to teach speaking skills as recommended by the communicative approach of foreign language teaching like animated films which are classified as one of the modern and effective trends of teaching English as a foreign language. Every learner of English has a list of favorite animated films or Cartoons he likes to watch from time to time. Everyone even memorizes some lines of these films, in the original voices of the film’s character. During watching those films, the learner is

interacting both verbally and non-verbally, imitating the voices and body language of the heroes of the film their accent, as well as their facial expressions. Consequently, both of their verbal and non-verbal skills are illuminated (Frummusleu, et al, 2015).

Using animated films as an educational tool in language classrooms, not only has an influence on EFL learners' performance, but most importantly the methodology of utilizing animated films in classroom also has an effective impact. However, innovative learning tools must not be separated from creative teaching strategy. Clark (2000) concludes that, unlike other audiovisual materials, watching animated film as source of authentic language, enables teachers to involve students, attract their attention, create a non-threatening atmosphere to present information, and it has the potential to enhance critical thinking processes and discussion skills. Animated films as an authentic language input would facilitate language practice in the classroom. Sarko (2008) states that exposure to authentic language would serve learners to practice language not only in the classroom, but also outside where they can utilize language (Abuzahra, 2016).

Doring (2002) concluded in his study that aimed to investigate the impact of using animated films in language classroom on foreign learners that students who were exposed to animated films can produce oral answers more than those who were not. Students became more confident to practice English language in the classroom; as a result of low affective learning atmosphere that watching animated films creates. Animated films can open doors for valuable contribution of interactive conversation, if it not accompanied by good teaching technique like the communicative approach of language teaching. Employment of animated films in language classroom enhances students to discuss or argue regardless of student's level of proficiency. Bahrani and Sim (2012) emphasize the importance of being exposed to animated films as a source of authentic language. They also concluded that using animation in classroom makes learning faster, because the speech is attached by a movement or sound effect which requires less cognitive process for comprehension.

Utilization of animated films encourages teachers to improve pedagogical practices by constructing communicative activities that allow students to interact within dialogic exercises in classroom. Because animated films represent everyday life experiences, so students can easily evaluate their skill of recalling previous knowledge and that they share with their peers. They enable students to employ vocabulary they gain from films in collaborative discussions and accomplish learning task based on that film (Abuzahra, 2016).