

The Impact of Online Teaching Tools on Improving Speaking Skill Among ELF Adult Learners: An Intrinsic Case Study

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Abstract

The paper investigated the possible impacts of using online learning tools on a 57-year-old Iranian EFL learner's speaking ability to get the desired IELTS Speaking exam score. The qualified teacher held consecutive 90 online sessions to help the learner achieve his goal. The teacher used Skype as a communicative online tool, Longman Dictionary, Google Image Engine, learning websites, and YouTube IELTS speaking samples. The findings of the research may have useful implications for IELTS Speaking Courses in Iran.

Keywords: "Speaking Skill, IELTS Exam, EFL Learners, Online Teaching".

Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA), as a sub-discipline of applied, is still a very young study[1]. There are 4 main language skills, i.e. reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Among those, reading and listening are passive whereas writing and speaking are active or reproductive skills. It means that the learners have to produce sentences on their own and they need a lot of practice and learn many things related to grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and usage[2]. Online learning is a solution to continue to carry out teaching and learning activities even though it is not done face-to-face. The effectiveness of online learning will be achieved if the prerequisites have been met, namely the availability of online media, time management, and internet connection[2].

The Importance of Speaking Skills

Communication is vital in achieving success in all fields in the present global world. Language is used as a tool for communication. Perfect communication is not possible without using a language. Moreover, people cannot achieve their aims, objectives, and goals without using proper language to communicate. Therefore, there is a need for a language to communicate with others those who live all around the globe. As English is considered the international language and spoken all over the world, it serves the purpose of communicating with people who live in different regions, states, countries, and continents of the globe. Speaking skill is the most important skill to acquire foreign or second language learning. Speaking is the most important skill in learning a foreign or second language among the four key language skills. Brown and Yule (1983) say, "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations". Regardless of its importance, speaking skills have been undervalued. Most EFL/ESL teachers have been continuing their teaching of speaking skills, such as memorization of dialogues or repetition of drills. Nevertheless, the modern world demands the requirement of communication skills for learners, and English teachers have to teach the ELLs the needed skills so that they will improve their abilities in speaking and performing well in real-life situations. In the present EFL/ESL teaching environment, oral skills are completely neglected whereas employability depends more on communication than technology. As very little priority has been given to the important elements of language such as phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic aspects, it has become a major impediment for the ELLs to acquire speaking skills among the learners of English. So far, more concentration has been given to reading and writing skills. After realizing the importance of oral communication skills, more emphasis is now laid on developing the speaking skills of the learners to pursue their studies successfully and excel in their fields once they finish their education. Moreover, English is the language of getting opportunities for employment and getting success to achieve the desired goals in life.

According to Bueno, Madrid, and McLaren (2006), "Speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners have to face. Speaking is considered the most important of the four language skills of English. Even the learners learn the language for so many years; they find it difficult to speak in real-time situations when it is demanded. There are many reasons to overcome this. First of all, the ELLs should understand the importance of speaking skills and try to acquire them as they need them to compete in this competitive world [3].

IELTS Speaking Test

According to the British Council, the IELTS Speaking test is a face-to-face, informal discussion with an examiner in a room. It is divided into three parts, and the learner is assessed in four skill areas: fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Part one is the introduction and interview. The IELTS examiner will introduce themselves and ask the learner to do the same. The learner will also answer some general questions about himself, on topics like family, work, studies, and your interests. This part takes four to five minutes. Part two is a monologue. The learner will be handed a card with a topic written on it, with some points to talk about in your speech. The learner will be given around one minute to plan what he/she wants to say, before speaking for one to two minutes. Afterwards, the examiner will ask the examinee some questions. Part three is a two-way discussion. The examiner will ask further questions related to the monologue topic, and the interaction should flow like a conversation. This part takes four to five minutes. All skills including speaking are assessed based on a 0 to 9 scoring system. [4]

Methodology

Design and Participants

The current research is an Intrinsic Case Study. The researcher investigates the possible impacts of using online learning tools on a 57-year-old Iranian EFL learner's speaking ability

Instruments

The IELTS Speaking Test was used to assess the speaking ability of the participant. The tests were done by the official center of IELTS Irsafam in Tehran. Among speaking tests, 3 were mock tests and the final one was an official test. So the test was valid and reliable and the teacher did not intervene in the process of assessment of speaking ability.

Materials for Teaching IELTS Speaking

The researcher used online materials including, a simplified grammar website, an online dictionary, a video sharing website, an image search engine, and digital audio storybooks to teach English, he also used the android Skype, version 2024 to communicate with the learner.

Procedures

In the beginning, the researcher asked the learner to choose an audiobook story to listen to every day at least for 3 hours, and he made listening stories a compulsory task every day. He applied a combination of deductive and inductive methods to have the learner improve his speaking skills.

First, the teacher taught him the overall concept of sentence structure and the differences between two languages based on the Ziahosseiny models [5] of contrastive analysis. (Table 1, shows one of the derived models for third person subjective pronoun in English and its counterpart in Persian). Then all grammar materials as simplified models [6] were taught. Because of the learner's age, the teacher used simplified English for training at a low speaking pace. And finally, some speaking model tests were practiced as mocks and role-plays. The teacher used a combination of L1 and L2, he also used positive reinforcement to encourage the learner to speak naturally. 90 online sessions were held consecutively; each session was 90 minutes, and the total teaching time was 135 hours. Initially, the teacher taught the learner how to properly use the Online Longman Dictionary. The teacher used the online Longman Dictionary and online diagrams, images, and videos to teach fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation which are the four main parts of the speaking test in the IELTS exam. Moreover, subjects including collections, intonation, stress, word families, regular and irregular kinds of verbs, and spelling were taught by using online learning tools. Table 2 shows the number of sessions of using online educational tools.

The teacher constantly corrected the learner's mistakes and at the same time, he did his best to increase his self-confidence. He always encouraged the language learner to produce words naturally by using prefabricated models derived from authentic native context [6]. Because of the importance of time in the IELTS speaking test, the teacher tried to find the easiest words and structures for the learner by interacting with him. Whenever the learner had a question, he would ask the teacher through online applications as an instant communication tool during the day and the teacher would answer it, that is, online support was always available.

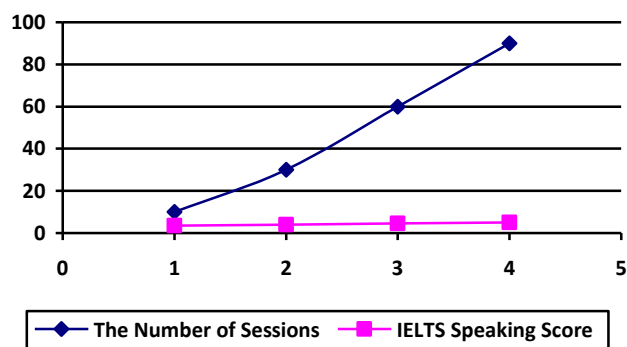
Table (1) Contrastive Analysis of Third Person Subjective Pronoun in English Vs. Persian, Based on Ziahosseiny Models[4]

Third-Person Subjective Pronoun in English	Third-Person Subjective Pronoun in Persian
He	او
She	

Table 2, The Type of Online Educational Tools and The Duration of Using Each of Them Per Session.

No.	Kind of Online Educational Tool	The number of Sessions	Purpose	Details
1	Skype	90	Communication	Android Skype 2024
2	Website	90	Grammar – Sentence Sampling	WWW.Englishpage.Com
3	Website, Online Dictionary	90	Pronunciation, Conjugating Verbs, Spelling, Collection, Sample Sentences, Correcting Errors, Intonation, Stress, Transitive Vs. Intransitive, Preposition, Word Families, etc.	WWW.Idoceanline.Com
4	Website, Video Sharing	30 (from session 60 to 90)	Practicing IELTS Speaking	WWW.YouTube.Com
5	Website, Online Education Images	60 (from session 1 to 60)	Helping the Learner Cognition of Grammar, Vocabulary and Unfamiliar Materials	Images.Google.Com
6	Digital Audio Story Books	Everyday Outside of Online Classes (At least 3 hour a day)	Improving Listening Comprehension to Boost Speaking Skills	WWW.Irlanguage.Com

Figure (1) The Number of Online Speaking Sessions and IELTS Speaking Scores



Results Discussion

After completing 10 online sessions, the language learner participated in the official mock test and scored 3.5. This result showed the level of his speaking skill at the beginning of the training period. However, after completing 30 online sessions, he scored 4 in mock IELTS. After 60 online sessions, his score in Mock IELTS was 4.5, and finally, he got 5 on the speaking test in the formal IELTS exam which was his desired score to get his immigration visa. Figure 1 shows the correlation between the number of online speaking sessions using online learning tools and the speaking score in the IELTS exam.

Limitations of the Study

This study has its limitations like all case studies. First, the study was conducted only on a male language learner and not on women. Secondly, it was done on a middle-aged person, that is, 57 years old. And the effect of using Internet educational tools on improving speaking skills among other ages needs more studies. Thirdly, this study was conducted by a 44 male instructor with about 10 years of experience teaching adults. Therefore, the way of teaching and interaction of a 44-year-old teacher with a 57-year-old language learner is different from the way of teaching of a younger and less experienced teacher. Moreover, this study only focused on speaking skills for the IELTS test, and other skills were ignored. To clarify various aspects of the impact of online speaking training on language learners, more studies should be done.

Conclusions

The research found that teaching IELTS speaking skills with the help of Internet technology had a positive effect on the learning of speaking skills, even though the age of the learner was high. This finding confirms the findings of other researchers who believed that technology improves the performance of education. [7] This research can have many implications for teaching English online, especially teaching IELTS speaking for adults.

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