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## The Role of Reading in Improving Speaking Skill in the Context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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### ABSTRACT

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Teaching foreign language is a challenging task; in language learning, speaking skill is considered a core productive part of learning. With this in mind, this article investigates how speaking can be made articulate and smooth. Furthermore, this article also determines the relationship between reading and speaking proficiency and extent to which teachers-led reading can affect students' speaking performance. It is a known fact that lack of vocabulary makes learners stumbling and hesitant in speaking, because words precede communication ahead. In language learning hesitations/weakness in speaking can be overcome by encouraging learners to read a specific text. If teachers engage their students in worthwhile activities, such as providing appropriate and interesting reading texts in order to enable them to communicate what they have read. This article aims to reveal how reading gears speaking and reduces time in learning foreign language.

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## 1. Introduction

It is widely accepted argument that reading and listening go hand-in-hand in any language learning, because reading provides a wide span of vocabulary and listening helps to form exact utterance of words. This can be helpful for foreign language learners who encounter hurdles in finding suitable words to describe the situation. This problem is more acute with the infrequent readers. According to Bright and McGregor (1970, p52), 'where there is a little reading, there will be little language learning. The students, who want to learn English, will have to read unless they move onto speaking track'. Thus, it is clear that reading not only develops writing skill but also helps in improving speaking with speech fluency and sentence accuracy. It creates a sound understanding of semantic and grammatical structure of the language. It is also believed that the students who read a lot are likely to speak well. This is because 'A text is usually regarded as authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes but for a real-life communicative purpose, where the writer has a certain message to pass on to the reader. 'An authentic text is one that possesses an intrinsically communicative quality' (Lee, 1995:324). With such advantages of reading in improving and developing language skills, particularly speaking skills, this paper investigates the relationship between reading habit and improving speaking proficiency as reading enriches much needed vocabulary in EFL context and also offers practical language in use with interesting examples from various genres.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Speaking

Speaking ability by modern prospective is known as a communicative competence. It involves a syntactic, semantic, and

morphological structure of the language. Davies and Pearse (2000, p424) describe the significance of communication as, 'Real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom'. With reference to Wikipedia, the term communicative competence was coined by Dell Hymes (1966) and is often replaced with speaking ability. Furthermore, to state more briefly about language learning, Hymes (1972) and Canale (1983) asserted that speaking consists of four components. Explaining these four components, Canale and Swain (1980, p1) pinpointed that 'the strategic competence, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence are four key capabilities of speaking'. By unraveling all these, they enlighten for language learner, strategic competence stating that communication should be according to linguistics limitations. Grammatical competence involves morphological, syntactic, and semantic structure of word and sentence. Sociolinguistics competences are abilities to communicate in society according to norms, culture, gender, professions, and needs. Discourse competence means articulate fluency with accuracy. Harmer (2001) also points out that 'speaking has many different aspects including two major categories: accuracy, which involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation while fluency is considered spontaneity and flow to utter words with sequence'. Anne Lazaraton (2001:104), too, suggests that oral communication is based on four dimensions or competences: grammatical competence (phonology, vocabulary, word and sentence formation); sociolinguistic competence (rules for interaction, social meanings); discourse competence (cohesion and how



sentences are linked together); and strategic competence (compensatory strategies to use in difficult strategies).

## 2.2 Reading

Walter R. Hill (1979:4) briefly defines reading as 'what the reader does to get the meaning he needs from contextual resources'. Hedge (1985: 77) says that 'through extensive reading learners advance their ability to guess the meanings of unknown words and phrases from clues in the context'. Alderson J.C. (2000, p12) states that 'reading is built from two components: word recognition and comprehension' Krashen and Terrell (1989, p88) point out that 'reading enables the learners to comprehend better which is an important factor that can develop language competence they need for conversations'. Through reading, language learners can learn vocabulary knowledge which may facilitate their speaking performance and their usage of structure in the target language. Grabe (1991: 379) suggested reading skill strategy which comprises six components which can have an effect on learner's speaking performance. These include:

- 1) Automatic recognition skills
- 2) Vocabulary and structural knowledge
- 3) Formal discourse structure knowledge
- 4) Content/world background knowledge
- 5) Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies
- 6) Meta-cognitive knowledge and skills monitoring

Thus, it is accepted fact that reading helps learners to acquire suitable vocabulary and grammatical structure of the sentence. By reading learners understand how words fit together. 'Reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning and the goal of reading in comprehension' (Nunan, 2003:68).

## 2.3 Vocabulary

Vocabulary skills involve recognizing, guessing, and predicting meaning of words using index, headings, subheadings, and non-verbal context. In this regard, Levelt (1989, p455), 'vocabulary has a central position in forming an utterance with appropriate meanings and with syntactic, morphological, and phonological structures'. With close understanding of Levelt's statement he seems to suggest two points. First, vocabulary is always required in the formulation stage. In other words, no speech can be produced without vocabulary, and vocabulary is indispensable to speaking performance. Second, the lexicon consisting of lemmas and lexemes includes not only vocabulary size but also depth which suggests that both size and depth are related to speaking. Harmer (2001, p402) believes that 'If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh'. It is accepted fact that, 'good vocabulary knowledge enhances learners' confidence in speaking performance'. (Rie Koizumi, 2005: 53). Wrapping the argument, without grammar, very little can be conveyed and without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.

## 2.4 Lexical and grammatical knowledge

Vocabulary and grammar knowledge are two key factors of foreign language learning and they both have influence on learner's speaking performance. Grammar is important to learn for language accuracy and helps learners to build comprehensible sentences in speaking. In order to understand how language works, learners must give attention to grammar. 'If we only understand what others say partially and superficially, the communication of ideas can't be properly realized' (Zhong-guo, Min-yan, 2007: 63). Learners can achieve



better reading comprehension through grammar practice. Reading is a fundamental factor in learning foreign language, those students who read a lot are good at reading, intelligibly expressive and precise in writing – have befitted vocabulary, and understand grammar and lexicon knowledge. Each time learners acquire structure of a sentence retrospectively good and this practice enables them to build their own language when they need. Hence, reading contributes significantly in second language acquisition. There is a good reason to hypothesize that reading makes a contribution to overall competence, to all four skills (Krashen & Terrel, 1983: 131).

### 3. Reading and speaking association

Vocabulary knowledge is indispensable and overriding factor for effective communication. Lewis (1993: 23) states that learning vocabulary is the core task in second language learning and any language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating cannot exist without vocabulary. Vocabulary can be tersely defined as to be the understanding of the meaning of a word, so communication does not occur if there are no words. Therefore, reading is probably the best way to learn new words. Nation (1995: 7) supports this idea and says that “reading has long been seen as a major source of vocabulary growth”. Most people recognize the important relationship between knowing words and reading well. Eskey (2005: 567), cementing this notion, states that ‘the relationship between reading and vocabulary is well documented and reciprocal’. Students who read a lot outside the classroom are better both their grasping the context and building their vocabulary which are basic elements to advance speaking skills. A broad span of vocabulary knowledge makes learners precise and articulate in

communication. ‘The more reading you will do, the more you will increase your exposure to vocabulary that doesn’t usually make its way into the spoken language’ (Cunningham, 1998:5) An improved vocabulary will help learners develop their speaking skills. ‘Speech without vocabulary cannot be produced as vocabulary is one of the essential and fundamental components of communication’ (Levelt, 1993). Laufer (1997), too, stresses that ‘without words to express a wide range of meaning, communication in a second language cannot happen in a meaningful way. Learners will improve their speaking competence if they have better vocabulary knowledge which they can get through reading’. Sanacore (1994: 604) opines that ‘encouraging learners to read will lead them guessing the meanings of words, phrases from the context, and the more they read the more they will understand the meanings of sentences and concepts’. Reading habit enables learners to understand a context effortlessly; even they do not know meanings of some words in the text. Learners comprehend the foreign language if they advance their ability of guessing the meanings of words from context which will promote their speaking performance.

Dubin and Olshtain (1977: 97) assert that ‘through extensive reading, learners learn much vocabulary. They emphasize the benefits of extensive reading as students develop an ability to gain pleasure and also satisfaction from reading on their own in the language they are learning’. They expose language in more natural and well-structured way. In other words, they get different unpressured feeling on the structure of the language when they read for pleasure, and not for a grade or a test. Extensive reading has also an effect on other language skills such as writing and speaking. Extensive



reading, or reading for pleasure, will help the students to comprehend more and as well as continue using the language after the instruction. Oya, Manalo, and Greenwood (2009: 11) suggest that 'better vocabulary knowledge produces better oral performance'. Accuracy and fluency of learners will get better through reading. They also claim that having good vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential components to gain fluency in speaking performance (Oya, Manalo, Greenwood, 2009: 19). 'Learners have the opportunity to find sentences and phrases used in our daily conversation in dramas, plays and dialogues because they are all based on one person talking to another. Some studies have shown that using authentic texts has a positive effect on learning the target language by developing communicative competence' (Peacock, 1997:45).

All these above cited arguments support the belief that integrating speaking and reading skills strengthen students' understanding of the reading material, reveals any problem they have understanding a text, and, most importantly, lets them apply the information they have read into authentic speaking practice that improves their fluency.

One of the most practical and fruitful ways to improve speaking skill is to be pleasure reader. Extensive reading helps foreign language learners to develop their ability to understand implied meaning of words and its make learners capable of expressing their ideas, feelings, and emotions. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the overriding factors that have influence on fluency in speaking. Reading not only introduces learners to a greater extent of language and contexts, but also helps learners in building up grammar skills. Teachers can help beginners in selecting material by citing to read simple short stories and the books which are meant

for native secondary school level children. Students can also select reading material on their own – beginners can read picture dictionaries, grammar books with examples, and especially short phrases (discourse markers) which are used to continue communication. Advanced learners directly can take material what they need of specific vocabulary whether social or professional.

#### 4. Conclusion

Listening naturally generates speaking ability whether in native language or in foreign, but at some points only listening cannot make a person able to use language efficiently. In the context of foreign language, reading not only saves time but also provides suitable vocabulary to convey a message. If a person lives in a target language environment, and learns some words within few years; they can learn wide span of vocabulary and specific use of language by reading. Listening gives words in a year or more than, reading specific text will provide within days or maximum month. To conclude in the words of Al-Dersi (2013:61), the use of stories to read in EFL classrooms for developing vocabulary, and thereby speaking skill, of EFL learners is a naturalistic, enjoyable, low-cost and highly effective method. And it should be recommended for all EFL teachers and learners.

#### About the Author

Faheem Akbar did M.A. in English Literature from University of Sargodha, Pakistan and B. Ed & M. Ed (research-based) from University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan. He is presently pursuing M.A TEFL from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan and also works as a Lecturer in English at Chenab group of Colleges, Gujrat, Pakistan. He has worked for two years with University of Gujrat, in Pakistan as well. His major areas of research interest include- sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and business communication.



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