The Role of Vocabulary Knowledge in Speaking Development of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract
Speaking in a foreign language is considered to be a challenging aspect of language learning that demands competence and mastery in learning any foreign language. Vocabulary learning verifies to play an important role in oral communication. However, literature lacks the studies where both English as a foreign language (EFL) students and teachers' views are obtained to provide analyses of the situations in which learners are not showing desired results in speaking. The current study explores the problems of lack of vocabulary that Saudi EFL students face with special focus on their speaking proficiency. It aims to seek EFL teachers' opinions on the extent to which lack of vocabulary has influence on EFL students' performance in listening, and conversation classes, and in expressing their ideas and feelings, and especially in speaking skill. A questionnaire was used for the responses from the students and an interview for the teachers to reveal their perceptions about the vocabulary hindrance in speaking skills. 20 EFL instructors and teachers of Preparatory Year Program (PYP) section of a public university and 110 EFL students participated in this study. The analysis of the data showed that both teachers and learners indicated that lack of vocabulary is one of the major factors in students' inability to speaking English. In the current study, among many other suggestions it is proposed that the inclusion of mobile assisted language learning could be useful way of developing vocabulary for spoken proficiency of Saudi EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL, speaking vocabulary, spoken proficiency

 Introduction
Vocabulary learning is an imperative part of learning foreign language (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Many researchers indicate that real communication is a result of suitable and adequate vocabulary learning as compared with learning grammar rules only (Cook, 2013). However, most EFL students claim that they understand the new vocabulary items during the lecture but they tend to forget newly learned words after a short period of time. Perhaps this is because of the lack of the opportunity to use these words in their conversation. (Coady & Huckin, 1997; McCarthy & O'dell, 2002) recommend the   realization for the training of strategy in EFL classes to boost the process of vocabulary learning for the development of oral communication in and out of the language classrooms. August, Carlo, Dressler, and Snow (2005) express that foreign language learners who have limited vocabulary take more time to learn new vocabulary items and are less able to involve in comprehending text and lack involvement in oral communication with their peers. As a result, such learners are more likely to get lower achievement in language learning assessments and are at the edge of the risk of being indicated as disabled in learning. More recently, (Chee, Yahaya, Ibrahim, & Hasan, 2017; Ishtiaq, Ali, & Salem, 2017; Shahbaz & Khan, 2017; Taj, Ali, Sipra, & Ahmad, 2017) has revealed that EFL vocabulary instruction is attracting the attention of many researchers nowadays.

Along with many other problems, Hamad (2013) agree that vocabulary is a key issue in speaking performance of Saudi EFL learners. The importance of vocabulary in oral development for EFL learners is the main focus of the current study at PYP section of a public university of Saudi Arabia. It pursues to identify the main causes of EFL learners' incompetence in spoken aspects of the language learning. The in-depth focus of study reveals that insufficient vocabulary is a main hindrance and affects greatly in lower performance in speaking skill which is one of the most important parts of language proficiency and development.

The present study tries to find the answers of the following research questions:
1. What are the teachers' perceptions about their students' speaking performance?
2. What are the main causes behind Saudi EFL learners' lower achievement in speaking performance?
3. How can Saudi EFL learners develop their spoken performance through vocabulary strategies?

The present research illustrates an exploratory investigation carried out at a public university of Saudi Arabia in the year 2016 with similar level of Saudi undergraduate learners, who learn English language skills for a period of one year before joining their majors and their teachers. The major focus of the study is to identify and examine the main causes of the poor performance in speaking skill. In the first part of the article, some findings of the previous related theories and studies on oral or spoken skill development are presented. Then, vocabulary learning strategy instruction model will be discussed to improve the current situation of spoken vocabulary development.

Literature Review
Vocabulary Learning
Learning vocabulary is one of the major most important concerns of the foreign language learning. Researching vocabulary was neglected by the researchers up to 1960s; however, recently

it has gained the attention of a lot of researchers (Muliawati & Ismail, 2017). Vocabulary learning demands the learners' competence in both theory and practice. Schmitt (2008) has explained that vocabulary learning is essential as it is a vital indication of language proficiency. Similarly, learning any foreign language is fundamentally associated with vocabulary knowledge, the shortage of vocabulary items obstructs the process of second language learning. In EFL learning without having adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners may not show the desired results in language learning process and its competence (Macis & Schmitt, 2017). In the view of Adam (2016) lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders the real communication of EFL learners to a great extent. Hence, it is predictable that undergraduate EFL learners should have the appropriate vocabulary knowledge.

For the betterment of developing vocabulary learning, researchers have been making enormous efforts to locate the different aspects of learning vocabulary to aid EFL learners. Nunan (2017), a leading researcher in the field of L2 vocabulary, asserts that learners have to use certain techniques and strategies for achieving certain proficiency of vocabulary knowledge. In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) vocabulary development has fascinated the scholars to play their part where vocabulary growth is comparatively low (Hughes & Reed, 2016). Saudi Arabia is a country where English is taught as a Foreign Language and where learners' language competence is not at the desired standard of the language learning, therefore, vocabulary development requires a particular attention in Saudi Arabian context. Cohen, (2014) argues that learners, language instructors and teachers, curriculum developers and language researchers all agree on the view that vocabulary learning is indispensable part of L2 learning. However, learners and teachers are uncertain about the best practices of learning vocabulary (Schmitt, 2008).

Speaking Skill
The intervening aspect and the illustration of speaking itself (perpetual and moderate flux of production) makes the process of learning and teaching a complicated understanding of speaking skills**.** In the view of psycholinguist Pawlak (2011), speaking involves the collaboration of many different processing mechanisms, components and exertion to arrange the words in motion to speak language fluently. In language pedagogy, the management of the handling mutuality aspect (the role and relation among the speakers and the listeners in speaking element) is another key factor that affects the quality of speech production with extra constraints of time limit while trying to produce words (Hulstijn, 2000). Therefore, learners preferably need to be involved in the production of lengthy and structured part of language without inclusion of extended hesitation and excessive pauses. So, it is vital that learners need to get awareness of all four components of speaking skill of which vocabulary learning has key role in this process (Bailey, 2006; Cazden, 2001). Likewise, learners have to display a good command on; the pragmatic awareness of the word (the capability of the usage of language in social background keeping in view the cultural restraints), the competence of strategy, grammatical aspect and competence of interconnecting the words to make a conversation meaningful. Learners feel problems in creating balance in this regard that further creates complexity in lexicon and cognition (Bulté, Housen, Pierrard, & Van Daele, 2008).

Saudi EFL learners like many other L2 learners face problems of fluency and undue pauses in the course of speaking as stated by the EFL instructors during the interviews. This assertion is

also confirmed by Hamad (2013) who has disclosed that Saudi female EFL learners are not proficient in oral skill as compared to their performance in other skills of the language learning. The purpose of his study has been to determine the hurdles of EFL university learners' reluctance in classroom participations and poor performance in speaking skill. Results of survey study highlight that learners come across with difficulties to speak even in formal class and they regard it a challenging skills.

Anthony et al. (2009) also carried out a study with a purpose to identify the prospective involvements of early childhood learners' vocabulary and its progression about creating phonological understandings of Spanish 92 pre-school learners. The results of vocabulary test and oral awareness test indicate a moderate correlation between vocabulary and oral skills developments (rs = .42–.75, ps < .001). Similarly, Lee (2009) has carried out a research study to highlight the influences that affect the spoken contribution of 6 Korean EFL learners enrolled at graduate institution in America with their implication on developing speaking skills in classroom participation over a period of four months. Data analysis from classroom observations and informal interviews indicate that English language competency is influenced by vocabulary insufficiency along with other factors of language learning. Saudi EFL learners also face such problems in developing their spoken proficiency. Some central grounds have been cited in table (3) in the section of methodology. Based on the exploration conducted to locate the main reasons in developing speaking skill participants exhibit many factors however, both instructors and learners indicated that inadequate vocabulary is one of the most repeated hurdles hindering to learners' spoken fluency. Consequently, it is required to establish an appeal to highlight vocabulary learning strategies that may play a great role here. The following segment will rationalize the importance of this issue.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)
VLS is a loom which expedites and facilitates the vocabulary development and it has fascinated a substantial attention of researchers. VLS comprises a subfield of language learning, which as a result are underpinned in learning strategies (Nation, 2001; Takač, 2008). A learning strategy is considered as the progression of activities a learner adapts to ease in accomplishing the given task in learning. In the same way language learning strategies develop the self-directed learning for EFL learners. In the light of the interpretation of Brewer (2016), self-directed learners are self-regulating learners who have the ability to accept the responsibility of learning outcomes on their selves and, hereafter develop the participation, motivation, proficiency and above all the self-reliance. So, VLSs create the atmosphere of self-learning and practicing the target words on their own, which in turn learners appear as "better learners". Keeping this into attention, foreign and second language learners have made numerous efforts to identify the different kinds of VLS and most of them agree there is no best strategy that can be viewed as model. Consequently, enormous vocabulary learning classifications and taxonomies have been appeared comprising; (Ahmed, 1989; Catalan, 2003; Cohen, 2007; Gu, 2002; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Lawson & Hogben, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 1997) and more significantly (Nation, 2001). Even though many of the above mentioned taxonomies exhibit the somehow same classifications and categories (Nassaji, 2003), the scheme of Oxford (1990) is mostly adopted by many vocabulary learning/teaching researchers. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) have checked the validity and reliability in many different ways. In addition, they have also tested that these six categories gauge

the identical paradigm and strategies by factor analysis from many different backgrounds including; USA, Canada, Taiwan, Egypt and many others.

Instruction framework for vocabulary learning

The use and availability of operative function of vocabulary in different backgrounds and situations, EFL instructors face challenges to identify the most relevant, effective and suitable strategies that can be utilized to facilitate EFL learners for developing the numbers of their vocabulary items. Literature is abundant with huge number of various methodologies, strategies, approaches and techniques in the field of second language vocabulary acquisition or instruction for both learners and instructors. So, following section depicts the most distinctive frameworks of EFL vocabulary instruction that can be usefully employed at Majma'ah University PYP section within EFL syllabus. Many researchers (Chamot, 2004; Macaro, 2006; Nunan, 1995; Oxford, 1996, 2003; Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmitt, 2006) in the arena of oral skills claim that explicit strategy instruction exhibit better results as compared to presenting isolated learning strategies. It is notable that teachers need to decide which strategies (keyword method, highlighting, semantic mapping etc.) to put in focus and how much time required for training in explicit learning strategy instruction. For knowing the best usage of implicit strategies, the learners are required to find out which strategies they are currently employing and they are also asked to make list for learning new words individually or in small groups. The instructors and learners can further collectively develop a list of strategies to be used in the class or in informal conversation. Instructors can decide which strategy can be useful for learners after brainstorming session. Instructors are required to present a model for drill to their learners. The next step is to practice. Learners, then, can be asked to discuss these words with their group members until the involvement of each participant in the group. The next step is application and reporting of the learned words. The role of instructors changes to monitor the activities and providing feedback of the vocabulary learning session. Finally, for vocabulary retention, learners can be asked to use these words to create new sentences. By and large all updated models of VLS instruction ultimately focus on encouraging and the development of learners' vocabulary knowledge by stimulating strategic ways to adopt different techniques on the basis of context; that will result in fostering their knowledge of vocabulary.

Methodology

Study Design

Design is required to facilitate the persuasive completion of many research processes, thereby presenting research as proficient to its potential by the means of producing utmost results with minimum effort (Kothari, 2004). For this study, mixed method approach is applied. It includes both qualitative and quantitative data collection and interpretation for the present study. The selection of mixed method setting is governed by the characteristic of the study itself which is directly relying on the data gathered from the instructors and learners' interviews and questionnaires to pinpoint the major problems or obstructions to speak fluently in and out of the formal classroom setting. Likert-scale, structured questionnaires for both instructors and learners and interviews were administered to lead study to achieve the goals of current study. Hence, several hypotheses are progressed to predict the reasons of learners' fluency in spoken skills. In addition to data gathered from interviews, researcher has included his own experience of teaching language skills to Saudi EFL learners in the due course of time.

Participants of the study

A total number of 100 EFL elementary level students of a public university of Saudi Arabia from PYP section were selected to investigate and locate the problems in speaking skills. All the participants were chosen from the same campus of the university having similar level of English which is determined by the placement of university at the time of enrollment. All of them were enrolled in second semester of the academic year 2016. In addition, 20 EFL instructors from same campus were selected who have presented a comprehensive view of their EFL teaching experience about the learners' state of vocabulary. Moreover, 10 EFL instructors were chosen randomly for interview to get more perceptive and insightful data concerning the vocabulary learning and teaching at undergraduate level in Saudi Arabia.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data for the current study. A questionnaire was adopted from previous studies for learners' perceptions to indicate speaking hindrances in learning English, and a questionnaire for teachers to locate the problems in spoken skills. Finally, teachers' interview questionnaire containing "Yes"/ "No" and open ended questions on the problems of speaking insufficiency was also administered

Data Analysis

For statistical measures, SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data gathered from questionnaires and interviews. As chi-square is a most frequently used statistical test to associate the expected and observed data, chi-square tests have been employed here to check the manifold hypotheses suggested by the questionnaire to the null hypothesis (as of having no significant differences). The chi-square will also present the likelihood ratio, the extent of freedom and the p (probability) in addition to Chi-squared (q) values of the data. Moreover, cross-tabulation has been complied and comprises of the frequencies ratios registered, to sort out the p and q values. Following section will present the description of collected data.

Results

Tables below have been categorized to analyze the data gathered from EFL learners. Table 1 and 2 chi-squared findings have been presented for the reason of their "high significance" in this model. Conveying meaning and vocabulary insufficiency aspect of spoken skills are highlighted. Additionally, crosstab of speaking hindrances were analyzed in table 3 which includes different hitches in speaking skills.

Table 1. *Leaners' Problem of conveying meaning.*

	Value	df	Asymp.sig(2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	781,000[a]	17	.0000
Likelihood Ratio	609638	17	.0000
No of valid Cases	193		

a. 6 cells (27%) have expected countless than 4.5. The minimum expected count is 1,62.

Table 2. *Learners' vocabulary insufficiency.*

	Value	df	Asymp.sig(2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	791,000ᵃ	17	.0000
Likelihood Ratio	589638	17	.0000
No of valid Cases	196		

a. 9 cells (39%) have expected countless that 4.5. Minimum expected count is 1.33

Table 3 *Crosstab: Speaking hinders indicated by leaners.*

LLs inability in speaking: because	A	U	S	R	N	M	T	Q	P
Afraid of committing mistakes	27 24.6%	18 16%	31 28%	16 14.6%	15 14.5%	3 2.7%	110 100%	789	.0000
Fear of laughter from classmates	31 28%	16 14.6%	27 24.6%	15 14.5%	18 17%	2 1.8%	110 100%	587	.0000
Difficulty in finding suitable words	29 26%	17 15.5%	30 27.2%	17 15.5%	14 13%	3 2.7%	110 100%	794	.0000
Don't know the how to express words	24 22.5%	16 14.6%	32 29%	18 16%	16 14.6%	4 3.6%	110 100%	783	.0000
Problem is speaking other foreign languages	25 23%	15 13.4%	33 30%	19 17%	17 15.5%	3 2.7%	110 100%	778	.0000

*p<.05(in all case); *q= 789; 587; 794; 783; 778 respectively.

From the table 3 an obvious high significant *p* value is identified. However, in all recognized values the focus of attention and consideration should be on difficulty in finding suitable words where p value is .000 and q value is 794, and (don't know how to express words) where p value is. 000 and q value is 783. It is vital form these corresponding values have significant relationship as both of these entities are measuring and surrounding around the almost same problem. Likewise, the ultimate corresponding q value has been recognized to have a direct relation and link to vocabulary where q value is 794. The following section of the result will explain the instructors' perception to check whether above mentioned entities are persistent with the responses of learners.

Teachers' Perception
To know the current situation of learners' speaking inability, the responses and experiences of teachers are analyzed first with help of following chart. Table below summarizes the responses of EFL teachers to the interview questions. It is obvious from the analysis that most of teachers indicated that their EFL learners do not speak English fluently as 53% EFL instructors feel that their learner are not proficient in speaking English, which is considerably high proposition as

indicated in the table. This explicatory valuation of EFL instructors' relating to speaking fluency shows that more than half of EFL learners don't speak as it is expected and their level demands. Moreover, a good percentage of teachers have also stated that very are few (31%) which suggests that 84 % of instructors agree that on the general inclination of not being capable of the production of fluent conversation.

Table 4. *Interview Chart on instructors' perceptions of EFL Learners' spoken* proficiency.

Thematic Consideration	Targeted population	Investigation question (Opinion)	Responses % and percieved causes
EFL instructors' perceptions	EFL Instructors	Do your students speak Englsih fluently?	1. No, not all: 53% 2. No, very few do : 31% 3. Yes, they do: 16% Sum: 100% Most indicated reasons: • Vocabualry defeciency • Speech anxiety • Meaning conveying problems • Environmental interference.

Responses of teachers also highlighted the fact that vocabulary knowledge, fear of classmates laughter, speech anxiety, role of environmental interference (mother tongue mainly) and meaning conveying are main hurdles in speaking English fluently. Vocabulary is a key element that hinders the proficiency of EFL learners, as reported by the instructors.

Table 5. *Vocabulary problem indicated by the Instructors.*

	Value	df	Asymp.sig(2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	113,000 [a]	13	.0000
Likelihood Ratio	88,179	13	.0000
No of valid Cases	41		

a.19 cells (91%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is.05.

Table 6. *Speech Anxiety*

	Value	df	Asymp.sig(2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	116,000 [a]	10	.0000
Likelihood Ratio	78,1012	10	.0000
No of valid Cases	39		

a.12 cells (79%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is.03.

Table 7. *Crosstab: difficulties in speaking identified by EFL instructors.*

What are the components that obstruct EFL learners' spoken ability	A	U	S	R	N	M	T	Q	P
Vocabulary insufficiency	9 45%	4 20%	4 20%	1 5%	1 5%	1 5%	20 100%	113	.0000
Speech Anxiety	8 40%	5 25%	3 15%	2 10%	0 0%	1 10%	20 100%	116	.0000

*p<.05(in all case); *q= 113&116 respectively.

Vocabulary development is key indicator of the progression of all four skills of language learning. The role of vocabulary as in current study develops a strong correlation between speaking proficiency and vocabulary knowledge. It is viable from the table that EFL instructors also highlighted the vocabulary problem and it is clear from their assertions mentioned in tables. So, their responses develop an understanding of the persistent identification of vocabulary as a great obstruction to EFL learners' fluency in speaking skill in Saudi undergraduate classes. Both learners and instructors acknowledge vocabulary insufficiency as main hurdle in speaking inability. In both cases high p value is identified with correspondence value of q with vocabulary problems in speaking inability.

Discussion

Vocabulary knowledge is reelected as an essential consideration in teaching and learning any foreign language. The importance of vocabulary in learning foreign language has been identified by many EFL teachers and researchers. The fundamental purpose of a majority of EFL learners is to develop proficiency in communication in learning foreign language. Grasping vocabulary knowledge is not merely essential but it's a central area in learning and developing foreign language. Nation (1990) explains the importance of vocabulary language as "Vocabulary is not an end itself. A rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing easier to perform." So, by mastering vocabulary learning one can concentrate fully on other advanced levels and features of developing foreign language learning more efficiently. The present study intended to examine the EFL instructors and learners perception about their speaking proficiency. In connection with the result of the data gathered, it was identified that most of EFL learners indicated speech anxiety, in particular, vocabulary insufficiency in speaking English language.

In the line of above mentioned data analysis and discussion, the role of vocabulary in speaking particularly attains the considerable attention of EFL learners and instructors. It is viable from the results that deficiency of vocabulary knowledge and the problems in enunciating or communicating what EFL learners already have learnt or in their mind are the main indicated reason for speaking inability. The results establish a high significant value of p where P is less than .05 and q (794; 783) as in the view of EFL learners. Correspondingly, most of EFL instructors also classified vocabulary insufficiency as a fundamental issue in speaking English as of their current level. The statistical interpretation of data displays a high significant value of p(p<.05) from their

responses. Likewise the state of having null hypotheses with significant differences in comparison presents that besides vocabulary learning, speech anxiety is another factor which creates delaying effect in speaking in the view of many EFL learners.

Moreover, the analyses of instructors' interview data also indicate that a large number of Saudi EFL learners are unable to speak English proficiently with their classmates as well as in classroom interaction. However, some instructors also admitted that some EFL learners take part in speaking activities but this proportion is marginal as compared to others who are influent in speaking English language. The main causes of speaking hindrance as of EFL instructors have categorized are vocabulary deficiency, speech anxiety; meaning conveying problem and environmental interference. These listed problems are interconnected with the findings of leaners' identification of locating their speaking problems.

The findings of present study are with line of Anthony et al. (2009) who have examined the role of vocabulary in early childhood oral skills with significant correlation between oral skills and vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, current findings also match the result of the study Hamad (2013) on female Saudi EFL learners by indicating lack of vocabulary knowledge resulting in poor performance of speaking. These outcomes originate only to verify and authenticate the crucial demand and need on concentrating on vocabulary learning strategy instruction pedagogy and framework and importance of vocabulary instruction to improve current state of Saudi EFL learners' oral skills development.

Conclusion and Methodological Implications

In the light of available literature, even though vocabulary is marked significantly important to understanding and learners fall back in speaking in the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, there has been little done with the vocabulary knowledge to develop oral proficiencies of EFL learners. The current investigation came up with many suggestions for the betterment of Saudi EFL learners' spoken ability. On the onset, it is essential to integrate vocabulary learning strategy instruction with current curriculum that is being taught in Saudi EFL institutions. The impact of different strategies will lead learners to know the meaning by themselves and its retention. In addition, there is also need for testing reliability of vocabulary instructional methodology and its effectiveness in EFL classrooms to develop the vocabulary learning process for language skills. Likewise, EFL instructors should realize their learners to be more self-governing learners by identifying the learning strategies they have and those they need to adopt. Additionally, the learners should motivate their learners to participate in classroom activities by using extensive range of vocabulary to acquire mastery in spoken proficiency. More essentially the involvement of available technology in teaching vocabulary may present better result in Saudi Arabian context as most of EFL learners are addicted to use the smartphone technologies. Speaking English fluently is always a difficult task for EFL learners but it can be oppressed by learning variety of strategies in the course of developing vocabulary. We expect that present attempt will benefit, guide and stimulate research on developing vocabulary knowledge that can facilitate EFL oral skill development.

The present study has some constraints related to number of participants participated to make the understanding of vocabulary knowledge for spoken proficiency. Extensive investigations

with large scale of population from different campuses may indicate better outcomes and implications of this important aspect language learning and teaching. Similarly, more experimental studies are required to support, develop and affirm the vocabulary knowledge development with spoken proficiency of EFL learners.

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