UNDERSTANDING THE HINDRANCES OF ESL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL ORAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM OF SUANSUNANDHARAJABHAT UNIVERSITY, BANGKOK

ABIGAIL MELAD ESSIEN

Faculty of Education, SuanSunandhaRajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand
E-mail: simply_me_abie@yahoo.com

Abstract- The training of Thai English teachers to acquire a high level of English language competence has become a paramount agenda of every teacher training institutes. For Thai English language teachers to spearhead the teaching of English to Thai students, they have to demonstrate a good oral command of the language. This research aimed to identify the hindrances of ESL students' speaking skill development during their Bachelor of English Language Education Program at SuanSundandhaRajabaht University, Bangkok. The objectives of the study were 1) to get the views of the students on why their English speaking ability is low; 2) to get the views of the educators on why the English language speaking ability of the students is low. The study made use of semi-structured interview to gain a better understanding of the difficulties ESL students encountered in their oral English development during their Bachelor of English Language Education Program. The population of the study consists of 40 3rd year English major students and 2 English language lecturers of the Bachelor of English Language Education Program at SuanSundandhaRajabhat University, Bangkok. Data obtained from the interviews of both the students and the lecturers show that several vital challenges for lecturers and students exist such as lack of sufficient opportunity or no opportunities to speak English in and outside the school, lack of adequate focus on oral language development activities, lack of enough native English language teachers, and too much focus on grammar and correctness. The results of the study lead the researcher to propose an urgent need for a drastic inclusion of more speaking activities for the students and incorporate a suitably concentrated English language oral development to the current curriculum.

Index Terms- EFL Classroom, ESL Students, L2, Speaking Skill Development

I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of speaking ability of a language is becoming more bloated over the written ability. It is because the ability to speak a language echoes a person's personality, self-image, knowledge of the world, ability to reason, skill to express thoughts in real-time (Luoma, 2004: ix) [12].Thailand as a regional and global player cannot afford to overlook the importance of English language as the global language for both regional and international exchange. The ability to communicate in English is needed as an essential skill whenever the international exchange happens. However, it is not always an easy task for people who use English as a second language to be able to speak to the level of a native speaker. They have to perfectly understand the sound system of English, have almost instant access to proper vocabulary and be able to place words together intelligibly without hesitation. Moreover, they also have to perceive what is being said to them and need to be able to respond appropriately to acquire amiable relations or to accomplish their communicative goals (Luoma, 2004: ix) [12]. Therefore, non-native English speakers encounter these barriers and they are subject to make mistakes often. There are various educational institutions of higher learning providing degree programs for Thai nationals to become teachers of English language. The main goal of teachers' training institutions in Thailand is to train and equip pre-service English language teachers with various English language skills to an acceptable standard so that in turn, they may impact their knowledge to students in primary and secondary schools in Thailand.

As good as the vision was or is, as an ESL teacher in the English language department of the Faculty of Education SuanSunandhaRajabhat University Bangkok, I have observed with passion how low the level of the students' speaking ability is, and how they struggle with oral presentations and holding a simple conversation in English.
I embarked on this research to identify the students' problems with oral English skills during the Bachelor of Education (English Language) Program so that specific system of intervention could be incorporated in pre-service English language teacher preparation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Second Language Acquisition
Language acquisition is mainly referred to as the process by which both linguistic competence and communicative competence are acquired by learners. It can be conducted through direct exposure of the target language to learners and based on the formal language instruction (Ellis, 1999: 12) [7]. There are two concepts in second language acquisition: "nature" and "nurture". The former means that learners learn the language by the innate knowledge about language, whereas the latter assumes that language development

is inspired by the environment as learners are engaging in the interaction (Doughty & Long, 2003) [4]. Interaction is a key of second language acquisition and exists as the central feature. It describes the interpersonal activity taking place during face-to-face communication (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Ellis, 1999) [17]. The interaction influencing second language acquisition occurs among non-native speakers of second language or between non-native speakers and native speakers. According to Ellis (1985) [6], interaction is concerned as the discourse which is jointly constructed by learners and their interlocutors and output is the result of interaction. It facilitates language learning, engages students in participating language learning activities and makes more outputs of the language. According to Krashen (1981) [11], acquisition is considered an explicit process and implicit process. The former involves learners' attending consciously to language in order to understand and memorize rules. By contrast, the latter takes place when the language is used for communication. Acquisition occurs when learners focus on conveying meaning.

[12] Long (1990) asserts that language acquisition is the result of an interaction between the learners' mental abilities and the linguistic environment. This implies that interaction is necessary for second language acquisition. "Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill" (Stephen Krashen). "Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding" (Stephen Krashen). The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most important of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory, it is the most widely recognized and dominant among linguists and language practitioners. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses:
the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis,
the Monitor hypothesis,
the Input hypothesis,
the Natural Order hypothesis,
and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

According to Krashen, there are two independent systems of second language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act.

The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen, 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition'.

The Monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing, and correcting function when three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule.

Krashen also suggests that there is individual variation among language learners with regard to 'monitor' use. He distinguishes those learners that use the 'monitor' all the time (over-users); those learners who have not learned or who prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under-users); and those learners that use the 'monitor' appropriately (optimal users). An evaluation of the person's psychological profile can help to determine to what group they belong. Usually extroverts are under-users, while introverts and perfectionists are over-users. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the 'monitor'.

The Input hypothesis is Krashen's attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language – how second language acquisition takes place. The Input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to 'Comprehensible Input' that belongs to level 'i + 1'. We can then define 'Comprehensible Input' as the target language that the learner would not be able to produce but can still understand. It goes beyond the choice of words and involves presentation of context, explanation, rewording of unclear parts, the use of visual cues and meaning negotiation. The meaning successfully conveyed constitutes the learning experience.

The Natural Order hypothesis is based on research findings (Dulay& Burt, 1974; Fathman, 1975; Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987) [5] which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, conditions of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in

the studies, there were statistically significant similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition. Krashen however, points out that the implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language program syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis, embodies Krashen's view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive effect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

B. Experimental Studies of Language Problems that ESL Students Faced

Some studies have examined university ESL students' concerns and difficulties they faced while participating in oral classroom activities. [16] TeerapornPlailek (2015) in her research "Factors Affecting English Speaking Abilities of Second Year English Major Students in the Faculty of Education, Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok", revealed that habits in learning English language is the major factor affecting students' speaking ability.

[19]Wang, Y. and Martin, S (2002) studied English literacy problems for Asian graduate students by reviewing other studies and by interviewing a Chinese doctoral student. They identified common problems encountered by Asian students as the problems of understanding English due to a speaker's rate of speech, accent, and slangs.

[9] Gan, Z. (2012) in his research entitled "Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training Institution in Hong Kong". The study, by way of semi-structured interview, addresses the gap in our understanding of the difficulties ESL students encountered in their oral English development in the context of a Bachelor of Education (English Language) Program. The results of the study indicated that, insufficient opportunities to speak English in lectures and tutorials, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum were some of the problems faced by ESL students.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used a semi-structured interview, which is designed for "concrete and complex illustrations" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 364) [20] with the aim to provide the participants with opportunities to talk about their experiences in their own words.

A. Participants
Participants were 40 3rd year students in the Bachelor of English Language Education Program and 2 lecturers in the English Department of the Faculty of Education, SuanSunandhaRajabhat University Bangkok, Thailand.

B. Data Collection
Qualitative data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with all the participants (individually). Each interview was conducted in English. Students' interviewee was asked to describe their English speaking experiences and difficulties with speaking in English as English language learners during the Bachelor of English Language Program. To gain a fuller understanding of the issues under discussion, the researcher also collected data through the conduct of a semi-structured interview with 2 English language lecturers of the English Language Program. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed accordingly.

C. Data Analysis
The transcripts of the interviews were read, re-read, and marked with annotations. These annotations and specific descriptive phrases were afterwards grouped into broader ideological categories: 'thematic units' and 'core categories' respectively that captured recurring patterns in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998) [15].

IV. RESULTS

As agreed by the researcher and the subjects, the names of the students and the lecturers involved in this study are withheld. For clarity, the researcher will make use of "SS" to connote students, and "LT" to connote lecturers.

A. Over Focus on Grammar
All the subjects alerted that grammar was the main focus of most of their English lessons. "I am always overwhelmed by correctness whenever I open my mouth to speak English. I have to think about grammar before I speak, that is why I take a long time to respond to conversation questions" (SS). "When I am in a speaking situation, I get tensed and confused about grammar. I am always confused about the past tense and the present tense when I speak" (SS).

"In a speaking situation, the students do not have much time to think before they speak. They have to speak automatically and naturally by relying on their knowledge of grammar. If their grammar ability is wanting, then it is obvious for them to produce erroneous speech" (LT).

B. Insufficient Opportunities to Speak English in Classroom

Although the department of English education program is in no doubt made up of well qualified Thai teachers and one foreign teacher (The researcher), and theyalso employed to some extent more interactive approach than lectures, it seems that some practical limitations hindered the provision of opportunities for students to speak in class, as perceived by some students:

"We don't have enough chances for us to speak in class. It is only during the presentations. For me, this is not enough, and this cannot lead to our improvement in English oral skills. So I think more discussion time can be given for us in class." (SS).

C. Lack of Speaking Opportunities Outside the School

"There are really no opportunities for the students to practice speaking English after school. Their family is Thai, and most or all of their friends are Thai also. The amount of time students use English in a day is very limited compare to their native language" (LT).

D. Lack of Enough Native English Language Teachers

Almost all the participants mention that lack of enough native English language teachers is part of the factors that leads to students' inability to develop their English speaking skill. "We study almost all the courses with Thai teachers. Therefore, we always expect the Thai teachers to speak or explained things to us in Thai language, and in turn speak to them also in Thai language since the teachers areThais like us" (SS).

"When I am speaking to a Thai teacher, I don't waste my time to try to speak with him/her in English. In the other hand, when I speak to a foreign teacher, I try as much as I can to use English because I know that is the only language I can use to communicate with him/her" (SS)."I think having more foreign teachers in the faculty will help the students to practice their speaking skill because they will have no choice of using Thai language when they speak to the foreign teachers" (LT).

The issue of students' preference of native English teachers over a non-native English speaker to teach them English is in no doubt a very contentious topic in the field of language teaching. It is not unusual to hear English students express that they prefer being taught by native English speakers, whether or not they are qualified in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). "To bring in more native speakers will not really help the students much in improving their oral skill. What we teach in this department are mostly academic courses and not just the listening and speaking subjects which native speakers are assumed to be good at" (LT).

Native speakers are considered to be ideal language teachers (Beardsmore 1993) [1]. Similarly, Cheung (2002) [2] and Mahboob (2004) [13] shows that students view the speaking ability, lexical and culture knowledge as the strengths of native speakers. However, in Walker's study (2001) [18], Native speakers' sees their responsibility of being cultural consultants to be less important as language teachers. Instead, they see their teaching role as improving student's oral skills.

4.4. Lack of Focus on Oral Language Improvement in the Curriculum

Currently, most of the courses in the English language education program seems to lay more emphasis on increasing the knowledge and awareness about the systems of the language rather than the ability to use this knowledge in real communication. Consequently, this has led to the failure of the program to fulfill the students' heart-most desire to improve their speaking abilities to an acceptable level so that they can speak it fluently or naturally in their future classrooms and daily lives. As most of them stated in the interview.

"Our university should understand that our speaking ability is very low. We have to know how to speak English before we can call ourselves English teachers. The designers of the curriculum should not only focus on developing our teaching methodologies, they should also consider our speaking level and thereby improve the curriculum to accommodate more oral development components" (SS).

V. RECOMMENDATION

This study was set out to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by the students concerning their English speaking development so that the English education department and the faculty will in turn make some adjustments to encounter those challenges revealed by this study.

Issues stated by the respondents of this study during the interviews as documented in this research cannot be overlooked. It is proposed by the researcher that; some kind of intervention is needed to address some of the issues.

Inadequate opportunities to speak English in classroom were pinpointed by the subjects of this study as one of the challenges they faced. "I don't have enough opportunity to speak English in the classroom because of the teaching style of the teacher and the number of students in the classroom" (SS). There is a need for the teachers to make effort to incorporate more speaking activities during their classes so that students can use such activities to practice and develop their speaking skills. [3] Cullen (1994) proposed that inadequate command of spoken English undermines pre-service teachers' confidence in the future classroom, affects his or her self-esteem and sense of professional status, and makes it difficult for him or her to follow even fairly straightforward teaching procedures such as asking questions on a text.

Lack of focus on oral language improvement in the curriculum as mentioned by the interviewees should not be seen as slap to the faces of the curriculum developers. Rather, it should be taken as a wakeup call for all the parties involved. More courses should be designed and aimed at the oral development of the students' English competency. [3] Cullen (1994) stated that problematic command of spoken English among the teaching force is not just a concern for teachers or pre-service teachers but should also be a concern for those involved in planning pre-service teacher training programs.

All the respondents assumed that their ability to speak English is always hindered by grammar and correctness factors. "I speak English very slowly because I am not sure if I will make mistakes in grammar" (SS). The desire of the students to speak English flawlessly has led to the buildup of anxiety whenever they try to speak. As a result, their speaking become very un-natural and still full of grammatical errors which they intended to avoid. [8] Fulcher's (2003) maintained that second language speaking is complex. This is largely because the sources of challenges for second language learners when engaged in a speaking task include not only demands of processing the task itself but also the demands of processing an imperfectly known language. [10] Hilton, (2007) stated that it is very hard for an individual to engage in the higher-level, strategic aspects of meaningful communication if his/her working memory is saturated by non-automated, lower-level L2 processes. Second language learners seem to be more vulnerable to making mistakes when speaking. This can be corrected by engaging the learners in more speaking activities which in turn exposes the learners to more grammar, vocabularies, correct pronunciation, and ultimately lead them to improve their speaking abilities.

CONCLUSION

The two main objectives of this research were, 1) to get the views of the students on why their English speaking ability is low; 2) to get the views of the educators on why the English language speaking ability of the students' is low. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews of both the students and the two lecturers involved in this study points to the fact that there are challenges faced by the students in regard to the students' speaking abilities. Taking into consideration the responses of the subjects of the study, the researcher concludes that, there is an urgent need for a holistic approach to address most of or all the factors mentioned by the respondents as the causes of their low level speaking ability. The educational system, as main context for learning and practicing L2 communication, shapes EFL learners' background and potential L2 communicator. EFL learners generally share a common mother tongue and have little or no

exposure to the foreign language outside the classroom. Therefore, the classroom constitutes the primary or the only target-language speech community for most of the language learners, the implication is thus: It is now the duty of the university to create programs and activities that will encourage the students to practice and improve their oral English language skills to an acceptable level so that after their graduation, the students can function effectively and confidently as English language teachers in their various classrooms.

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