

# OBSTRUCTIONS IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF 4th FORM PUPILS IN GOMA ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

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## **Summary**

*This research has intervened in the field of English Language Teaching. It aims at depicting various problems teachers of English face in the teaching of speaking skills. The result the researcher obtained on the ground was categorized and summed up under three main points which are: the teacher's problems in teaching speaking skills, the teachers' perceptions of the learners' problems in speaking English and the strategies that teachers use to overcome these problems. From this result, the researcher found out that teachers of English in the four Islamic schools of Goma do not fully apply Communicative Approach; something that obstructs the learners' progress in learning to speak English.*

## **Keywords:**

- *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*
- *Communicative Approach*
- *Speaking skills*
- *Interaction*
- *Obstructions*

## **OBSTACLES AU DÉVELOPPEMENT DES COMPÉTENCES ORALES EN ANGLAIS CHEZ LES ÈLÈVES DE QUATRIÈME ANNEE DANS LES ÉCOLES ISLAMIQUES DE GOMA**

### **Résumé**

*Cette recherche est intervenue dans le cadre de l'enseignement de la langue anglaise. Il vise à décrire les obstacles que les professeurs d'Anglais rencontrent dans l'enseignement des aptitudes orales. Le résultat obtenu sur terrain était catégorisé et résumé en trois points à savoir : les problèmes que les professeurs font face dans l'enseignement des aptitudes orales en anglais, les perceptions des professeurs en rapport avec les problèmes auxquels les élèves connaissent en parlant l'anglais, et les stratégies que les professeurs emploient pour surmonter ces problèmes. De ce résultat, le chercheur a trouvé que les professeurs d'Anglais dans les quatre écoles secondaires Islamiques de Goma n'appliquent pas convenablement l'approche*

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*communicationnelle ; chose qui freine la progression des élèves dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais parlé.*

**Mots clés :**

- *Enseignement Communicatif de la Langue*
- *Approche Communicationnelle*
- *Compétences à l'oral*
- *Interaction*
- *Obstructions*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is often seen as a talent that is inherent in a person. It is a fundamental skill that is widely used as a way to measure the capacity of a language learner. This skill is the most important indicator for learners' success in learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, speaking is usually considered as a difficult skill to learn. The main reason, here, is that speaking combines aspects of other language skills such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

Considering the impact of English in the current World, the Congolese Government through its Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education has incorporated this language in all secondary school classes. Like in other secondary schools operating in Goma town (private and public ones), English is also taught in Goma Islamic Schools in all the classes. No matter the number of hours in each class, which depends from a school to another school, teachers of English in these schools have the obligation to apply modern methodologies that would bring learners develop their four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As far as speaking is concerned, here, a big number of learners in these schools end their secondary school learning process with difficulties in expressing themselves in the English language. With survey instrument, class observation, lesson attendance, documents analysis, and series of interviews with teachers in Goma Islamic Secondary Schools, the researcher has succeeded to investigate different problems teachers face in their teaching process. From these problems, the researcher has proposed some factors that, in case they are taken into consideration, would help learners to develop their speaking skills.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 SPEAKING SKILLS

Speaking is one of the four major language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is the means through which learners communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints.

Very often, speaking is considered as the most frequently used language skill. As Rivers (1981) argues, speaking is twice as much as reading and writing in our communication. In his course of English Language Teaching Methodology, Useni K.(2022) states that *speaking has usually been compared to writing, both being productive skills; as opposed to the receptive skills of reading and listening. Speaking is also related to listening because both skills are interdependent to accomplish communication. Every speaker is generally a listener and every listener is at least a speaker.*

According to Nunan (1989), *speaking can be classified into two aspects: monologue and dialogue. The former focusses on giving an interrupted oral presentation and the latter on interacting with other speakers.* In the same perspective, Brown and Yule (1983) put it that *speaking can also serve one of the two functions: transactional (transfer of information) and interactional (maintenance of social relationship). Developing speaking skills is very important in the English learning program. Success is measured in terms of ability to carry out a conversation in the language.*

Nunan (1999). In our context, it is very important to create a positive environment to encourage the learners' interaction. As such, they can express their ideas, feelings, and opinions without feeling afraid of making mistakes. Wills (1996) argues that creating a low stress atmosphere and using the language for real ways to get meaningful communication and through interaction learners have the chance to acquire discourse skills.

Considering the current view of speaking as a complex skill and a multi-facets cognitive process, it is important then to consider more closely the features of effective instruction that can facilitate the acquisition of these skills and processes by second language learners.

Oprandy (1994) proposes that effective instruction should be characterized by the following:

- *The whole should be more important than the part. This means that both synthetic and analytical procedures used to teach speaking should share a common concern with the whole rather than the parts.*
- *Instruction should enable learners to reflect on their own as well as on other processes and strategies in an active way.*
- *There should be ample opportunities for interacting to expand the repertoire of experiences with the target language with its various ideational, interpersonal and textual functions for which speech is used.*
- *There should be opportunities for learners to practice both linguistic and communicative competences.*

According to Hammer (2007), there are *three main reasons for getting students speak in the classroom. First, it is because speaking activities can provide the opportunities to*

*practice real life speaking in the safety of the classroom. Second, speaking tasks in which students try to use any or all of the language they know provide feedback for both teacher and students. Everyone can see how well he or she is doing, how successful is he or she and what language problems they are experiencing. Third, through speaking, students have the opportunities to be active in the various elements of language, which they have stored in their brains.*

Thus, speaking requires that learners understand when, why and in what ways to produce a language. Florez (1999) highlights the following skills as far as speaking is concerned:

- *Using grammar structures accurately,*
- *Assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge, status and power relations, or differences in perspectives,*
- *Selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs,*
- *Applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener's comprehension*
- *Paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener's comprehension and involvement.*

## **2.2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

English is a foreign language in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the country relies on it in different domains. In job markets, for example, with different international non-governmental organizations operating in DRC, the mastery of the English language has become one of the main conditions of obtaining a job. In business, industry and even in the government, workers are increasingly expected to develop proficiency in English.

The DRC Government through the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education has placed an emphasis on the teaching of English at secondary schools. In the English national program (2007), Nzege A. puts it that *l'étude de l'anglais est d'une importance croissante pour les élèves de l'enseignement secondaire au Congo à une époque où le pays multiplie ses contacts avec les pays d'expression anglaise et en particulier avec ceux de l'Afrique.* (The studying of English is of growing importance for secondary school pupils in Congo for the period where the country multiplies its contacts with English speaking countries and particularly with those from Africa). He goes on, *l'enseignement de l'anglais vise en premier lieu à rendre les élèves capables de comprendre, parler, lire et écrire correctement cette langue pour les sensibiliser ensuite à la culture et à la civilisation des pays d'expression anglaise.* (The teaching of English firstly targets to make pupils able to understand, speak, read and write

*correctly this language and then to sensitize them to English speaking countries culture and civilization*). In this context, DRC learners take English language courses from the first to fourth forms. Unlike the seventh and eighth classes in secondary schools where English is optional, in the upper classes mentioned above English courses are mandatory for all learners. Concerning the number of hours to teach per week, this depends on the category of teaching: General and specialized teaching. By general teaching, the researcher means all the sections in which English covers five hours per week. They are sections like general and normal pedagogy, bio-chemistry, mathematics-physics... Specialized teaching, on the other hand, covers all the sections in which the English course has only two hours per week. They are sections like social technique, agricultural technique, industrial technique...

The profile of Goma Islamic schools is given in appendix 3.

At the end of the secondary school studies, Congolese learners should be able to manipulate the English language in different aspects; that is, comprehend, hold a normal conversation, read an easy text and write a letter or an easy text.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The present study centres on two aspects of Goma Islamic Secondary Schools: the conditions that affect how teaching-learning is conducted and the way English language teachers conceive the notion of effective teaching. Data collection started in December 2021 and ended in March 2022. The researcher is quite familiar with Islamic school settings since he has experience for having worked in the system since 2004. He conducted interviews with five teachers from four different Islamic secondary schools of Goma namely: Mavuno Institute, Azuhuri Institute, Mikeno Institute and Bihira Institute. The names, ages, genders, and teaching experience of participants are provided in the appendix 1. These teachers of English were selected simply because they teach English in the fourth forms secondary schools in Islamic schools of Goma town. The purpose of the interview was explained to the participants and the confidentiality of the personal information was guaranteed. While most questions focused on the strategies that teachers use to teach English in their secondary schools, there were a number of questions that were asked about the learners' level, grammar and textbooks used, school policies and anything thought to be important for this research to find the reasons behind using various strategies by the teachers. The interview questions are in appendix 2.

The researcher also resorted to qualitative method in the form of case study. Nunan (1992), states that *the qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit*. Based on the quotation above, the researcher concluded that case study with the aim of providing a holistic description of different problems that English language teachers face when teaching speaking skills.

Accordingly, Frankle and Wallen (2012) put it that *research can mean any sort of careful, systematic, patient study and investigation in some field of knowledge, undertaken to discover or establish facts and principles*. From this explanation, the researcher concludes that this method of research can properly refer to theoretical analysis of the method appropriate to a field of study and principles particular to a branch of knowledge.

A total of eight classroom observations offered evidence about strategies that the teachers of English actually use to develop the speaking skills of their learners. The field notes that were taken while conducting observations in the classrooms were descriptive. Robert (1982), argues that *descriptive research is used in the literal sense of describing situations or events. It is the accumulation of a data base that is solely descriptive. It does not necessarily seek or explain relationship, test hypotheses, make prediction, or get at meanings and implications, although research aimed at these more powerful purposes may incorporate descriptive methods*. The description of the situation and the events were jotted down as they occurred. The notes were written as narratives but later were summarized immediately after each observation. Documents such as selected texts, scheme of work, questionnaire notebook and preparation sheets were also studied.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

With the information collected in the four Islamic secondary schools of Goma regarding the teaching of speaking skills of the English language, the researcher analysed the data to highlight the relevant information relative to his concern. These data are categorized and summed up under three main points namely: the teachers' problems in teaching speaking skills, the teachers' perceptions of learners' problems in speaking English, and the strategies that teachers use to overcome these problems.

##### **4.1. TEACHERS' PROBLEMS IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS**

Different problems were identified by the participants regarding the teaching of speaking skills. The main problem that the researcher identified, here, is to be found in the way the participants teach speaking skills. Their answers to the question "How do you teach speaking skills?" match perfectly with what the researcher observed in the classroom during investigation. Omari, one of the participants stated: *"I can put a sentence on the blackboard, I read the model sentence then I invite pupils to repeat it individually then in chorus. I can also give them some drills."*

This answer to the question above is a clear evidence that the participant has little knowledge on the way speaking skills are taught. How can someone expect their learners to speak English with this methodology? Where is the learner centered approach in this way of teaching? Where is the place of interaction in this way of teaching speaking skills?

Of course, many teachers of English confuse mechanical, meaningful and communicative practice. Jack, C. (2006), clarifies these three terms by stating the following:

- *Mechanical practice refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice the use of particular grammatical or other items.*
- *Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practice the use of prepositions to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as across from, on the corner of, near on, next to. They then have to answer questions such as “where is the book shop?” “Where is the café?” etc. The practice is now meaningful because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map.*
- *Communicative practice refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communication context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example, students might have to draw a map of their neighbourhood and answer questions about the locations of different places such as the nearest bus stop, the nearest café, etc.*

The other participants' answers to the question above runs as follows:

**Isangi:** *I ask questions and pupils answer. Pupils have time to answer questions from the teacher, and this is the way I teach speaking skills.*

**Kamate:** *You know our pupils are weak. We sometimes are obliged to come back on elementary notions. There are even pupils who are not able to read even a single sentence. We can think being in front of a fourth form pupil but in reality the level is very low.*

**Ngabonzinza:** *When I teach speaking skills, I interest pupils to speak freely. I also motivate everybody to give answers so that I may be sure that everybody speaks.*

**Mbokani:** *I always ask questions to pupils; which may allow them to speak freely. Secondly, I always teach them reading for pronunciation to all of them. They speak freely when exploiting the text.*

From the above answers regarding the way participants teach speaking skills, the researcher finds out that, beyond the confusion with the three different kinds of language practice, aspects of speaking are not scrutinized and put into consideration by

the participants. To communicate effectively in real life situations, the participants should consider the following aspects of speaking:

#### **4.1.1 SPEAKING IS FACE TO FACE**

Most conversations take place face to face as it is the case of classroom conversations. In this situation, communication through speaking has many assets such as facial expressions, gestures and even body movements. Widows on (1998), states that speaking also occurs, most of the time, in situations where participants or interlocutors are present. Such factors facilitate communication.

#### **4.1.2 Speaking is interaction**

For communication to be effective, speaking should involve interaction. Turn taking, which is the main feature in interaction, is an unconscious part of normal conversation. As far as interaction is concerned, Cornble et and Carter (2001), argue that *whether we are speaking face-to-face or over the telephone, to one person or a small group, the wheels of conversation usually turns smoothly, with participants offering contributions at appropriate moments, with no undue gaps or everyone talking over each other.*

#### **4.1.3 Speaking happens in real time**

Another aspect of speaking is that it happens in real time. During conversations, responses are unplanned and spontaneous. These constraints affect the speaker's ability to plan, to organize the message, and to control the language being used. That is why there are false starts, hesitations and changes of words when communicating.

To strengthen what is stated here, Miller (2001) puts it that *speakers often start to say something and change their mind midway; which is termed a false starts. The speaker's sentences also cannot be as long as in writing. Similarly, speakers occasionally forget things they intend to say; or they may even forget what they have already said, and so they repeat themselves.*

The other problem that teachers of English face when teaching speaking skills is the lack of resources. Three out of the five participants argue that their schools do not make English books available to them. To teach English and particularly speaking, they resort to their personal experiences, university notes or previous notebooks from other schools. This fact makes the teaching of speaking very difficult. Isangi painfully expresses this concern. She says: *"First, there is no documentation. Even when making research, we find almost nothing. When having a look at neighboring schools, they also experience the same problems."* The wish of the participants towards their schools authorities is to make grammar books, textbooks, and methodology books available to them. This may sound very complicated for a school which has nothing in its library; but it is simply a matter of will. If every year, the school can buy a book, teachers of English would detain the required books within a few years.



## 4.2. THE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEARNERS' PROBLEMS IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

The participants identified different problems regarding the learners' speaking skills in English. All the five participants mentioned the learners' level as one of the main problems they face in developing learners' speaking skills. One participant stated: *"I can say that the task is very heavy. Pupils are not used to speaking English. They want me to translate for them everything I say or what I write on the blackboard. And this affects our methodology."* This is, indeed, what the researcher witnessed on the ground during class observations. The learners' low level in English vocabulary bring them feel shy. They do not want to speak English aloud in the classroom. Instead, they want their teachers to translate everything they teach in French. When their teachers push them to speak, they only pronounce isolated words and disconnected sentences making their production poor and meaningless. One will, for example hear learner's say something like: "Teacher toilet" accompanied with gestures when asking for the permission to go to the toilet. To be more precise and specific, when teaching sortsof prepositions in fourth form social technique at Azuhuri Institute, the researcher, heard a learner saying "I need of classroom" when formulating a sentence with the double preposition "in need of". A disconnected sentence like this one is very difficult to understand and does not facilitate teachersto develops their learners' speaking skills.

The other problem the participants have identified regarding the learners' skills in speaking English is the consideration of English in the educational system. Most of participants blamed the Congolese educational system for the learners' lack of courage to speak English at school. They argue that the system puts much emphasis on the learning of French language and very little emphasis is placed on English. With this Congolese educational system, learners do not have the chance to interact in English at school; which is, unfortunately, the main objective of inserting English at secondary schools by the Congolese Government. As a simple demonstration to justify this little emphasis on speaking skills, the participants have attested that speaking skills are not officially to be tested both with local and official or national examinations.

School authorities, on their side, do not facilitate the teaching of the English speaking skills as well. Kamate, one of the participants puts it that: *"They have to emphasize on having pupils speaking English as it happens with French."* Kamate goes on: *"School authorities should provide punishments for those pupils who speak other languages than French and English inside and outside the classroom."*

Rewards and punishments are the two learning techniques that are always used in many environments including education, work, and life. Many learning activities in ourlives are impacted by these techniques. As far as punishment is concerned, school authorities have to vulgarize learners sorts of punishments they are to receive in case they violate some instructions related to the learning of English in general and speaking skills in

particular. The punishment can be preventive or repressive depending on the violation a learner has committed.

Sticking on school authorities, Mbokani suggested that: *“The school authorities can show learners the importance of the English language. Second, they can help learners to hold the hand out for texts. Third, they can support the organisation of an English club at school and make it compulsory because it is the only place where learners can practice their speaking skills.”*

The participants’ declarations, here above confirm that there is very little facility that the educational system together with the schools provides to the teachers of English to help their learners communicate. They neither think of organizing a language laboratory nor an English club in any of the targeted schools the researcher investigated. Surprisingly, three of the five participants stated that they do not hold even any English book from their schools. They either use previous English notebooks from their schools or borrow notebooks from other schools.

#### **4.3. STRATEGIES USED BY THE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO IMPROVE LEARNERS’ SPEAKING SKILLS**

Despite difficulties teachers of English face when teaching speaking skills, they apply some strategies to overcome these problems. All the participants mentioned the low level of their learners as one of the main difficulties they face to teach speaking skills. To come up with this insufficient proficiency, the participants encourage learners to speak, no matter the mistakes they will be committing. Isangi mentioned: *“I always sensitize to kill their fears and to talk even when making mistakes.”* This sensitization is very important in the language learning process. It helps to reduce learners’ overall shyness, nervousness and inhibition in speaking.

The other strategy I investigated that teachers apply to develop their learners’ speaking skills is to focus more on weak learners. Participants concentrate much of their efforts on those learners who difficultly express themselves in the classroom because of their low levels. Kamate said: *“Normally when teaching, we are not interested on strong pupils. We pay much attention on weak pupils. Some weak pupils respond well to questions and orientations; but unfortunately, some others need enough attention and extra time to deal with their speaking.”*

Four participants out of five mentioned that they motivate weak learners to speak English despite their weaknesses. In the field of second language learning, motivation has been acknowledged as a remarkable factor in language learning success. Hammer, (2002) states that *motivation is a type of initiative that encourages someone to do things to reach a goal. Furthermore, this is fundamental to succeed in most of fields of learning; without such motivation, we will not be able to make the effort to learn.* In the same respect, Gardner (1985), claims that *motivation is perceived as a goal-directed*

*factor since it involves four aspects: a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to reach the goal, and favorable attitudes toward an activity.*

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although there are strategies that participants continue to apply, the speaking skills ability of learners in Goma Islamic schools are showing unsatisfactory result. Teachers in Goma Islamic schools, their school authorities and the DRC Government have to change their attitudes toward the teaching of English in general and of the speaking skills in particular.

Teachers, on the one hand, should keep the idea of communicative language teaching in their minds. With this approach, teachers assume the role of facilitators and monitors placing the learners at the centre of their learning.

The maximum of time in the learning process should be devoted to learners' interactions through various sorts of well-set communicative activities. They should also put out of their minds that their learners can do what they want them to do immediately. It takes, of course; time to have learners achieve their goals.

Communicative activities should bring a great positive impact here. The Government through its Ministry of primary, secondary and technical Education in DRC, together with school leaders, on the other hand, should take the initiative of testing speaking skills in both local and national examinations. This should force learners to practise speaking in English in their schools. They should also put teachers of English in conditions that would allow them to teach English effectively and consciously. In doing so, the researcher is certain that the learners will improve their English speaking skills.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This research has developed a topic around difficulties teachers of English in Goma Islamic schools face when teaching speaking skills. Thanks to different methods used, the researcher has succeeded to point out different obstructions that participants meet in developing their learners' speaking skills. These difficulties were categorized into two groups which are: difficulties teachers of English personally face when teaching speaking skills and these teachers' perceptions of learners' problems in speaking English.

In addition to this, the researcher also pointed out different strategies participants apply to improve their learners' speaking skills. From difficulties to strategies, the researcher has come to the conclusion that the speaking skills ability of learners in Goma Islamic schools are showing unsatisfactory result. Thus, he has suggested some recommendations not only to teachers of English but also to school authorities and the government. In case these recommendations are put into action, the researcher is certain that there will be positive impact in the learners' speaking skills in English.

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### Appendix 1: Profile of the participants

Name	Age	Gender	Academic qualification	Teaching experience
Mbokani	30-35	M	Graduate	4 years
Omari	45-50	M	Undergraduate	21 years
Ngabonziza	25-30	M	Undergraduate	2 years
Isangi	35-40	F	Graduate	9 years
Kamate	40-45	M	Undergraduate	12 years

**Appendix 2: Interview questions**

- Which skills do you focus on when teaching English?
- How do you teach speaking skills?
- How do learners respond?
- What are their levels in language learning?
- Have you found any improvement in your learners’ speaking skills?
- What problems do learners face when they are asked to communicate in English?
- What problems do you personally face when teaching speaking skills?
- What do you do with passive learners in the classroom?
- What do you think are the reasons for their passivity?
- Do learners have any speaking tests?
- If yes, how do you organize it?
- Which facility does the school provide you to make learners communicate? (English books, language club, language laboratory,...)
- What do you think the school authorities can do to promote learners’ speaking skills?

**Appendix 3 : Profile of Goma Islamic schools**

School	Registration number	Organized sections	Number of hours/week	Number of teachers of English
AZUHURI INSTITUTE	6152092	General Pedagogy	3 hours	2
		Social	2 hours	
BIHIRA INSTITUTE	6129359	General pedagogy	3 hours	2
		Social	2 hours	
MAVUNO INSTITUTE	6129151	General Pedagogy	4 hours	3

		Social	2hours	
MIKENO INSTITUTE	6101643	Nutrition	3 hours	3
		Commercial	3 hours	
		Hostess	3 hours	
		Social	3 hours	