Responsibility of the Teacher in the Poor Performance of Learners' English Speaking Skill
A case study of Rutshuru Secondary Schools

USENI KALUMBI RADJABU[*]

Abstract

This dissertation studies the responsibility of the teacher in developing learners' speaking skill, focus on a case study of Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools. The main question that this research rises is why do teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools fail to help their learners develop their speaking skill? Do they really play their roles effectively? My aim in this research is broaden teachers' knowledge of their responsibilities in conducting learners' oral skills. The results of this research will also serve as a new knowledge for researchers as a guide in their future research studies.

Keywords: Speaking skills, Performance, Learning process, Authentic materials, Interaction.

Résumé

La présente dissertation étudie la responsabilité de l'enseignant dans le développement des compétences orales des apprenants, dans le cadre d'une étude de cas des écoles secondaires du centre de Rutshuru. La principale question soulevée par cette recherche est de savoir pourquoi les professeurs d'anglais des écoles secondaires de Rutshuru Centre ne parviennent pas à amener leurs élèves à développer leurs compétences orales. Jouent-ils vraiment leur rôle de manière efficace ? Mon objectif en traitant cette recherche est d'élargir les connaissances des enseignants sur leur responsabilité dans le développement des compétences orales des apprenants. Les résultats de cette recherche serviront également de nouvelles connaissances aux chercheurs, qui s'en inspireront pour leurs futures recherches.

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[*] **Rutshuru** *Teachers Training College/DR Congo (Chef de travaux, Enseignant à l'Institut Supérieur Pédagogique – ISP – de Rutshuru, E-mail: useniradjabu@gmail.com, Phone number: +243 9 93 32 78 38.*

1. Introduction

This research attempts to investigate the responsibility of teachers of English language in the poor performance of learners' English speaking skills. In this context, language is considered an important tool that helps to create cultural ties, friendships, and relationships. It is a medium used to offer shape to thoughts, ideas and emotions, depending on the perception of reality and to portray these to others in a manner that listeners can understand and relate to. A common language is a symbol of social solidarity and gives a sense of cultural kinship.

Using language successfully is very important in the global world as it allows to make others understand what you want to convey. It is one of the skills that can be easily acquired with a little effort and hard work. The importance of language has in the fact that it is one of the primary means of interaction and communication. Language is knowledge, and knowledge is indispensable. It helps to facilitate social contacts, preserve our culture and convey our thoughts, effectively to individuals and groups. Language is a key factor for viable communication and interaction processes because now it enables us to share and exchange ideas with people and from any part of the World.

In today's world, multilingualism is becoming more and more important. In addition to opening up employment opportunities, the ability to speak a foreign language helps to make a real connection with people and announces understanding of cultures, places and lifestyles. The more proficient one becomes in a language, the better they can express themselves. Foreign languages also enable learners to be aware of the diversity of cultures and viewpoints in the world community. Languages bring about better understanding among different nations. The learners are thus able to learn and understand differences of languages and cultures, customs and traditions, thinking, society, economy, politics and administration. They should be able to use foreign languages for communication as well as gain easier and wider access to bodies of knowledge.

There are more than thousands of languages spoken around the World, but only a few have gained wide prominence over the years. This is the case of English. It has become, over the last four decades, the most important foreign language in the world. Today, English is the language for international communication, science, commerce, advertising, diplomacy and technology. It has also become a ''lingua franca'' among speakers of languages that are mutually unintelligible. Furthermore, in the age of globalization, no language qualifies better than English to meet the needs of a World characterized by the interdependence of nations and countries.

As pointed out by Roux (2014), the English language has been the most commonly used and indeed dominant language for international business, technology, science and academia. In most countries, English is treated as a second language to be learned. Not only in classroom settings, English also is used in news, advertisement, technology, social media, and many other domains. Sayuri (2016) also states that English is an international language and plays an important role in our lives because it is not only used for communication with people in the World but it is also used for getting better jobs or work in the future.

The international status of English contributes to using in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As an expanding circle context, English is mainly taught as a foreign language and used for special-purposes. However, driven by the force of globalization and the influx of foreign multinationals and fortune-seekers, its notoriety has grown significantly in the country. The result is that too many centers where English is learnt are visible here and there in big towns of DRC. These centers are full of Congolese who intend to use English in different domains. There is, thus, the great need of developing learners' speaking skills.

Speaking is often perceived as an inherent talent but. It is actually a fundamental skill that serves as a key measure of language proficiency. This skill is one of the most important indicator of success in learning a foreign language. Rivers (1981) argues that speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing in our communication. Speaking has usually been compared to writing, both being considered productive skills, as opposed to the receptive skills of reading and listening. Speaking is also closely related to listening as

both intervene in accomplishing communication. Every speaker is simultaneously a listener and every listener is at least potentially a speaker.

Developing speaking skills is of vital importance in EFL programs. Nunan (1999) states that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. In the same way Florez (1999) puts it that speaking is probably a priority for most learners of English. Speaking instruction is important because it helps learners acquire EFL speaking skills thus converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers. Furthermore, if the right speaking activities are taught in the classroom, speaking can raise general learners' motivation and make the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be (Nunan, 1999). In addition, speaking can support other language skills. Recent research has considered oral interaction as an important factor in the shaping of the learners' developing language (Gass & Varionis, 1994). For instance, it was proved that learning speaking can help the development of reading competence (Hilferty, 2005), the development of writing (Trachsel & Severino, 2004) as well as the development of listening skills (Regina, 1997).

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. In both public and private schools operating in the DRC, English is also taught in all Rutshuru secondary Schools in all the classes. Regardless of the number of hours allocated to each class, which varies by school, teachers of English in these schools are required to apply modern methodologies that help learners develop their four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Harmer (2007) puts it that almost any speaking activity is bound to involve listening, of course, but sometimes when students are involved in some kind of cooperative writing they will be speaking, listening writing and reading almost simultaneously.

Despite the importance of developing speaking skills, many learners face difficulties in expressing themselves in the English during their learning. The question arises of who is responsible of the poor performance of the learners' speaking abilities. Here, no one takes responsibility. Learners blame their teachers to be responsible for their poor performance in developing their speaking skill while teachers, in turn, point to the DRC government as contributing factor. They argue that if teachers of English were well compensated, they

could help their learners communicate more effectively in English. Learners' environment, family, church and learners themselves are not left unscathed. Indeed, teachers of English in these schools are partly responsible for learners' difficulties in developing their speaking skills. They do not provide sufficient opportunities for practice and many are not effective motivators, which prevents learners from recognizing the importance and value of studying English. The methods used to teach speaking are also questionable. These methods rarely offer learners clear explanations or instruction of what constitutes speaking.

Teaching speaking skill is one of the main goals of English instruction in secondary schools in the DRC. The DRC Government through the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education emphasized on the importance of teaching English at this level.

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, English courses in the upper classes are mandatory for all learners. In the classroom teachers of English adhere to their scheme of works, striving to cover what has been planned for the school year.

The assessment of learners' progress in learning English is based on how far learners have mastered notions about English. Consequently, teachers of English spend much of their time assessing learners' progress in grammar and vocabulary. As a result, the speaking skill remains an ambiguous area that learners of English in the Democratic Republic of the Congo often find challenging. These negative attitudes towards studying English are the most important causes of the learners' neglect in attending English classes.

As stated in the preceding lines, teachers of English are partly responsible for learners' poor performance of their speaking skills. They do not effectively fulfil their sides in encouraging learners to take responsibility for developing their English speaking abilities. The current study aims to highlight the level of teachers' responsibility and thus elaborate different strategies that the teachers of English have to apply to develop their learners' speaking skills. In other words, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- Why do teachers of English in Rutshuru Secondary Schools fail to help their learners develop their speaking skills? Do they fulfil their roles effectively?
- Do teachers of English diversify speaking activities to foster a successful communication in the classroom?
- Does the exclusive use of the only and unique language, the English language have positive or negative impacts on the development of learners' speaking skills?
- What kind of language is encouraged for use by both teachers and learners? Is this language real or imaginary? Is it authentic or unauthentic? What about the language used in textbooks?

This research is based on the following hypotheses

- Teachers of English in Rutshuru Secondary Schools do not effectively play their roles in bringing their learners develop their speaking skill. This might be due to ignorance of what they should do as teachers of English or simply due to the lack of will or motivation to do so.
- The failure to develop learners' speaking skill might also be due to monotonous speaking activities. The same speaking activities used every time when inviting learners to communicate could be one of demotivated factors. Learners, like other category of human creatures, are fed up with the same thing occurring over the time.
- The English language, as the only and unique language to be used in the classroom might create a sort of language conflict in learners' minds and this might have a negative impact in the development of learners' speaking skill.
- The language used in the classroom, whether real or imaginary, authentic or unauthentic could impact on the development of learners' speaking skill.

As mentioned previously, this research investigates the responsibility of teachers of English in poor performance of learners' speaking skills in Rutshuru secondary schools. I resorted to quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to analyze the information gathered. Therefore A questionnaire was submitted to teachers of English to identify their opinions and views on useful strategies for developing learners' speaking skills. Additionally, I resorted to the interpretative analysis to verify the data gathered. Information obtained from questionnaires was cross-checked, reinforced and verified

through face-to-face interviews. This information was further used to interpret and explain data obtained through discussions and observations. Thus, one source of data was used to reinforce another to establish consistency.

2. Findings

Based on the analysis of the collected data relative to the responsibility of the teacher in developing learners' speaking skills in some Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools, I came up with the following findings:

- Teachers' limited involvement in acting as organizers, participants and as resources;
- The use of monotonous speaking activities that learners find no longer interesting;
- Teachers' of English as contributors to the conflict of language in learners' minds:
- Lack of authentic language that reflects learners' real needs.

A. *Teachers' limited involvement in acting as organizers, participants and as resources*

Data collected through teachers and learners' questionnaires confirm that teachers in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools act as organizers, participants and resources but their involvement remains very limited. As for acting as organizers, very few teachers and generally those from low grades (grades 1 and 2) sometimes organize speaking activities in their classes. They do so when some minutes remain before the end of the lesson. These teachers, and along with majority of those teaching in high grades (grades 3and 4) are more focused on other stages of the lesson and often neglect the communicative stage. In a vocabulary or a grammar lesson, they often end their lessons before integrating communicative activities. Therefore, their level of involvement in organizing degree speaking activity needs improved. As for their roles as participants in speaking activities, the analysis reveals that the majority of teachers in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools stand back from these activities and observe what is going on with the learners. They tend to participate in speaking activity not as teachers, but as equal participants alongside the learners. Their involvement as participants in a speaking activities is demonstrated to be very poor which negatively impacts the development of learners' speaking skills.

Talking about teachers' roles as resources, the analysis of collected data reveals that most of teachers of English in Rutshuru Center Secondary Schools often help their learners with words and other orientations. However their ability to fully act as a resource hindered the fear to transform their lessons into 'what is the meaning of…' lessons. Learners need teachers who are always helpful and available. While acting as a resource, we should be helpful and available, but we also need to resist the urge to spoonfeed our students, so that they do not become overly-reliant on us.

B. Use of monotonous speaking activities that learners find no longer interesting

Teachers in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools rely on the same speaking activity, which is a role play, when encouraging their learners to communicate. However, learners have become so familiar with this activity that it does no longer interest them. Whenever they are asked to stand up and communicate, they often develop affective filter attitude; that is the negative feeling due to the use of monotonous speaking activities. They communicate not because they want to but because they are forced to do so. This feeling creates a kind of filter which keeps the input out particularly in such a stressful language class where learners feel pressured.

C. The teacher of English responsible for languages conflicts in learners' minds

The results from the collected data reveal that by imposing English as the only and unique language to use in the classroom, teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools created a kind of conflict of languages in their learners' minds. 98.4% of investigated learners mentioned that they use English with their teachers in the classroom, not act of their choice but because they are forced to do so. Teachers themselves recognize this problem. Their responses where they were asked to give their point of views on the main problems their learners face when participating in speaking activities, make it clear. 81.8% of investigated teachers mentioned that the main problem their learners face is the lack of some words to be used in English. So, instead of working to solve this problem, teachers strengthen their imposition of speaking only English once in the classroom. By insisting on English in whatever actions and interactions in the classroom to multilingual learners, teachers create a conflict of languages in learners' minds. Other languages feel

undermined in favor of English and thus do not serve as bridges between the learners and the target language.

D. The lack of authentic language that reflects learners' real needs

From the analysis of the collected data, it is clear that teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools do not take into account the use of authentic language. Many of the texts they teach do not meet their learners' real needs and contribute very little to the development of learners' speaking skills. Teachers, here, ignore that authentic materials provide real-life examples of language used in everyday situations. They are meant to add more interest for learners. And thus serve as a reminders for them.

Authentic materials also help prepare learners for 'real- world communication; guiding them toward the language they need for their particular context. They motivate learners to communicate because they make communication feel real. Using authentic materials increases learners' motivation and has a positive impact on the learning process. In other words, learners learn the language better when teachers use authentic materials as teaching aids.

3. Discussions of results

Throughout this section of the present dissertation, I investigated the results with regards to the hypotheses. The discussion turns around teachers of English as responsible for the poor performance in the development of their learners' speaking skills.

In view of the above points presented in results, it is logical to assert that teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools contribute to the poor performance in developing the learners' speaking skills.

As for different roles they play, I demonstrated that teachers' performance remains very poor. They view teaching as the transmission of knowledge from teacher to learner and ignore the important aspects of creating conditions for learners learn independently. This is here where teachers of English have to adopt various roles with the objective of bringing learners achieve their goals in learning English. However, in the three investigated roles -teachers as organizers, participants and resources- this research

demonstrates that teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools receive low scores in these areas. They do not know when and how to act as organizer, when it would be more appropriate to participate as such and when to serve as resources. A lot should depend, here, on specific class the teachers are teaching, as their leadership style may well depend on the particular learners they are working with. Some learners might be more comfortable with their teacher as an organizer and participant, while others may prefer their teacher to adopt a more resource role. Harmer (2007) puts it that what we can say with certainty is that we need to switch between the various roles we have described here, assessing when it is appropriate to use one or the other. Once we have made that decision, however consciously or subconsciously it is done, we need to be aware of how to carry out that role and how we perform it.

Concerning speaking activities, it was also demonstrated that by setting monotonous speaking activities, teachers of English become demotivated from learners in communicating. And without motivation, learners cannot achieve their learning goals. Tembue (2022) distinguishes between:

- **Integrative motivation: a learner has an interest in learning an L2 because of a' sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language group.**
- **Instrumental motivation: here the learner has an interest in learning an L2 because of the practical advantages that will accrue to someone who speaks it.**

Consequently, by losing motivation to be involved in speaking activities, learners decrease their opportunities to develop their speaking skills.

Another issue where teachers of English are held as responsible for learners' failure to develop speaking skills is the level of understanding the target language, due to its imposition in the classroom on multilingual learners. It is difficult to get learners involved in speaking activities when they do not understand what to do. Harmer (2007) argues that a crucial part of the teacher's job when organizing speaking activities is to make sure that the students understand exactly what they are supposed to do. This involves giving clear

instructions and, where appropriate, demonstrating the activity with a student or students so that no one is in any doubt about what they should be doing.

Teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools are also responsible for their learners' failure to develop speaking skills because of using unauthentic language. It has been demonstrated that teachers in this area rely on *Go for English* as a textbook, from which all their teaching lessons are derived. The analysis of some texts proved that the language used in this textbook does not match with learners' real world context. I demonstrated that the search for authentic language should lead teachers of English in this part of Rutshuru Territory to either deeply adapt their texts in this book to the learners setting, by strictly respecting the criteria for selecting a text to teach ,or simply look for another textbook that responds to their learners' real environment.

4. Suggestions

Now that I have identified and described the teachers' responsibility in developing their learners' speaking skills, it is important to suggest different strategies and attitudes they should adopt to address this problem.

Firstly, teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools should adopt new attitudes in their teaching roles. It is their responsibility to provide effective plans/ strategies in accomplishing their learners' educational needs, with the general purpose of enabling them to communicate in the language being learnt. These means that teachers must encourage students to speak English by employing suitable teaching strategies of speaking. Given this, teachers' strategies are important for achieving objectives, which affect the teaching learning environment as, speaking skills are typically a sign of successful language learning (Brown and Yule, 1999).

Secondly, as organizers, teachers should manage the classroom to ensure that activities are well structured and engaging for learners.

Thirdly, as participants, teachers should participate in the discussion by introducing new information and ensuring the continuation of learners' engagement. The main point is the teacher should not monopolize the conversation. Additionally, as resources, teachers have to provide tools to improve their learners' oral competence.

Fourthly, teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools should vary speaking activities. Varying these activities would motivate learners to participate and, as a result, to improve the speaking skills.

Fifthly, teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools should be aware that their learners are multilingual and that they always refer to their first languages in many situations. So, instead of imposing English as the only and unique language in the classroom, teachers may as well help their learners affectively resort to their first languages effectively. This type of translation activity can be an excellent way to renew how well learners understood what is taught to them.

Finally, teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools should push for authentic language in their teaching. The textbooks used, the teachers' and learners' sentences, materials, teaching aids, the speaking activities, and everything that happens in the classroom should reflect learners' real environment. In doing so, teaching and learning will mirror the learners' real world and the development of their speaking skills will be facilitated.

Conclusion

The present research study aimed at investigating Teachers' Responsibilities in Improving Learners' Speaking Skill in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools in Rutshuru Territory. Different techniques were used to carry out the investigation. Collection of data was achieved through survey questionnaires submitted to targeted teachers and learners; individual and group interviews with teachers and learners and class observation. For the presentation and analysis of the collected data, statistical techniques were resorted to.

Analysis of data collected through the above mentioned techniques revealed that teachers of English in Rutshuru centre secondary schools are responsible for their learners' low performance in improving their speaking skill in the following ways:

- Assuming their roles as organizers, participants and as a resources;
- Using monotonous speaking activities that learners find no longer interesting;

- Creating a conflict of languages in learners' minds by imposing English as only and unique language for teaching and learning:
- Teaching with reference to materials that are not authentic.

The outcome of what precedes is that learners end their secondary school studies without being able to communicate in English language. Another consequence, in addition to the failure to communicate is that learners develop a negative attitude towards the learning of English. They consider English as the language of other people, not their language.

To overcome the above teachers' insufficiencies in improving learners' speaking skills, I provided some suggestions and recommendations. In case teachers consider these suggestions and recommendations I am certain that learners will like learning English, and thus the speaking skill will be improved.

Recommendations

Throughout data analysis and findings, I demonstrated the teachers' responsibility in the low performance of their learners' speaking skill. To sort out this problem, I recommended the following to teachers of English in Rutshuru Centre Secondary Schools:

- Teachers are advised to move away from the old mindset that presents English as a very difficult language to learn by mystifying it. Simplifying its teaching and learning will have a positive impact on mastering speaking skills;
- Throughout the teaching process, teachers are advised not to demand their learners to use pure and perfect English while they are still learning. To support their journey towards proficiency, teachers should accept and tolerate any language used by their learners, and orient/correct their mistakes if need be;
- Teachers are advised to consider learners' first languages and allow them to use these languages whenever necessary. Learners should have opportunities to notice by themselves the differences between their L1 and the target language. Teachers should understand that when learners in their L1 with each other and with the teacher, it positively effect communication in group dynamics. This approach also

enables learners to provide ongoing feedback about their learning experiences than were restricted to using only English.

- Considering the form of language used the classroom, teachers of English are recommended to focus on authentic language that aligns with learners' environment. Therefore, teachers should ensure that modeled sentences, learners' examples, selected texts, teaching aids, speaking activities reflect learners' real life contexts.

- To improve learners' speaking skills, teachers are recommended to diversify and simplify speaking activity, taking into account not only the lesson being taught but also the classroom atmosphere.

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