

AURAL-ORAL COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS AMONG YEMENI SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Many attempts are currently being made to develop Aural-Oral Communicative skills in English at school level, but it remains a difficult task for the teachers of English. There are a lot of readymade cassettes available in the market but they have hardly served the purpose. Admittedly, cassettes help and yield better results for learners, subject to teacher's competence to utilize them.

English is a foreign language for Yemeni students at all levels: preparatory, secondary and tertiary. It is considered as a difficult subject due to the mother tongue interference. But the optimum use of audio cassettes developed by the teachers will help to achieve the desired results.

In the present study, the basic skills were taken as tasks and simple tests were administered on the students, who start learning English at the age of eleven. Their mother tongue interference is deep-rooted and so they have difficulties in learning English.

Keywords: Aural-Oral Communicative Skills, Yemeni Students.

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language

English is a foreign language in the Arab world including Yemen. The Ministry of Education in Yemen prescribes the text books. These are the only material the students study. A section of teachers are not satisfied with the material, as they feel their students' "NEEDS" are not met with. So they have to teach these books out of compulsion.

With regard to the students, they use English only in classrooms and that too for a short duration. At university level the students continue to learn English in the Department of English.

Thus exposure to English, in practical terms, is very limited. But in reality the interest and motivation among the learners to learn English is unbelievably high and this is a phenomenon to be seen all over Yemen. In order to encourage the learners almost all the universities take the trouble to bring quality teachers (from foreign countries particularly from India) whose mother tongue is not Arabic. The students have become aware of the current global development, where in English is increasingly becoming the bread winning factor throughout the world. Thus it is the

need of the hour to tap the students' interest and make them highly efficient for the job. No doubt the country is also experiencing an all-round development. Globalization is the need of the hour, necessitating a thrust on international communication. It allows many companies to locate the activities and make the best use of their resources, which has been playing an increasingly important role now in economic sector, in providing access to the kind of global knowledge.

Lack of English is a threat for the countries and thus acquiring proficiency in English is the only remedy. It is therefore essential to catch the students at the school level for the country's growth and bring it in the map of developed countries as early as possible.

Review of Literature

Since effective research is based on the past knowledge a review of related literature helps us to eliminate the duplication of what has been done and provides a useful hypothesis and helpful suggestion for significant investigation. Many results which are described in technical reports of various Journals are reviewed in relevant places.

Paijaonkar. A (1978) in his study on the "use of mass media

for second language teaching in India with special reference to radio and television," has the following observation in the study.

- (i). To take a survey of the English and Hindi teaching programs through mass.
- (ii). To see how far the principles of linguistics and the principles of psychology of learning and the considerations about the socio-cultural conditions of the learners were used in preparing Hindi and English lessons for mass media.

The findings were the following,

- (i). Scriptwriters of radio and TV lessons for schools had the knowledge about the principles of linguistics and pedagogy but did not have the training to use the media potentials.
- (ii). Teachers were generally aware of the second language teaching programs over the mass media.

Indrani (1989) found in her study "a greater retention power in the experimental (audio-visual group) while significant amount of information is lost due to forgetting in the control group."

Molina Mercado (1984) conducted experimental study on video assisted instruction and found that the "test mean scores were higher than the conventional teaching."

Some experiments had been conducted in advanced countries in the assessment of the effect of TV in the classroom and they were not unanimous in their assessment in the effect of TV. Barrington (1955), Shah (1991), reported negative impact of television teaching. Whereas, and) suggested on the basis of their own research project that instructions by "TV could be effective in the wide range of subject fields."

From the review of the related literature survey the investigator has attempted to find out the impact of audio system in the classroom use.

English in Yemen: Present Scenario

English in Yemen is given its due importance in schools and colleges. All the educational Institutions are promoting the growth of English. It is sure to take the nation on the path of the global prosperity, directly or indirectly.

As far as schools are concerned, the government has adopted the syllabus based on the theoretical and pedagogical principles. All the lessons have varieties which focus on activities. The "Crescent English Course for Yemen," (CECFY), is graded well and the content is mixed with old and new resources without any compromise on culture. Despite these salient features there remains a vacuum. The students, though highly promising, stumble to learn English. After one month of careful observation it was concluded that they need extensive drill listening and speaking skill and this constitutes the basis of the experiment.

The study

Keeping this need in view and to bring the status of English up in Yemen, without, of course, any prejudice to the mother tongue the experiment was designed. A simple lesson was taken and an audio-cassette was recorded for students. And it was a challenging task.

An attempt was made for the development of an audio-cassette and trialing the same in the classroom. The students had a poor background. They were not exposed to educational technology like TV, computer, etc.

The result obtained endorsed the use of the basic skills of the language, viz. Listening, speaking, reading and writing. The study was based on action research procedures and this paper was prepared and presented by a teacher who had no knowledge of Arabic with full support from the Head of the English Department, at the Faculty of Education - Hodeidah University, who is a Yemeni.

The Observation

Observation was carried on for one month. Each day was spent in the class along with the teacher and the students. The observer was friendly with all. Small words in English related to travel in day to day activities were used to make them speak. The purpose was to note their pronunciation. After finding that their pronunciation was "near acceptable", it was realized that it was worth giving them an audio-cassette lesson. Another very interesting observation was that the students who were few in number at the beginning, came in large numbers out of their own interest. The researcher wanted to capitalize on their enthusiasm and make the students realize that learning

English is not difficult.

Content Analysis

Before developing the support learning material the content was analyzed. The Crescent English Course Book 4 has a lesson titled "Travellers and Purposes". This was divided into four segments with a view to test the basic skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

The lesson contains basic life oriented vocabularies that are in common use. The reading was made meaningful by citing examples from their visits to places like hospitals, schools and other common places. The students were made to realize a "feel-at-home" climate that the class lessons are similar to what the students hear in English.

Here one has to make a comparative study of English course book in general, which mainly focuses on basic skill enhancement among the learners.

Audio-cassettes are available in market from many publishers at different prices and also at different levels .viz primary, secondary, higher secondary levels. These cassettes when played in class rooms may not get the desired outcome in many ways due to many variables, in terms of effective comprehension. To cite an example the cassettes from native speakers may form as a "threat" due to language anxiety (as it may be called).

On the other hand, cassettes developed by the teacher who have direct access and have face-to-face interaction would prove to be effective. It is because of the voice of the teacher besides accent, stress, intonation and more amount of familiarity in delivery of content in the class-rooms. The climate would be healthy for a joyful learning. Further the teacher's professional expertise is strengthened. Thus the cassettes from market and the cassettes developed by the teachers find a significant difference.

The Null Hypotheses

There is no significant difference between the impact of teacher-made audio cassettes use in classroom and the ready-made (market) cassettes use in class-room

Development of the audio-cassette

The audio script was developed for skills attainment among the students and the researcher himself lent the voice. This enabled the students to realize that the voice was familiar

to them. This is a key factor that the teacher as developer could emulate interest in teaching/learning of the material. The recording was done in a professional studio to make it perfect. It gives positive impact during the teaching in the class room. Care was taken that the pronunciation, tone and intonation were all free from any shortcomings.

In order to make the teaching effective, visuals were also provided just by simple drawing of the pictures on a big chart, which contained the entire lesson.

After experimenting the two cassettes, namely the one from market and the teacher made with visuals the test was conducted and scores were taken.

Validation and Evaluation

The treatment was given on a single day. The students were made to listen to the cassette one time and they were made to think what could be the content. It might look like a brain-storming exercise, but actually it was to motivate them and in the next stage the visuals (chart) were present and their interest was aroused.

Then audio and visuals were simultaneously provided which reinforced their learning automatically. It was a natural experience and there was no compulsion anywhere anytime during their learning. After three times, a question was asked to make them speak. When they volunteered, it was felt that it was time to test the outcome of their learning.

The trainee teachers (about 10) were involved in the experimental study. They were asked to administer a simple test on the students. The test aimed to test the aural-oral communicative skills in English: Listening, Speaking then Reading and Writing. Each test carried 10 marks totaling to 40 marks. The score was taken and converted into percentage.

Analysis and Findings

The score was analysed and the findings were as follows.

- 6 students (24%) failed in the listening skill test as they obtained score less than 5 whereas 8 students (32%) failed in the speaking test as they obtained less than half of the total score.
- 9 students (36%) failed in the reading test as they got very less score whereas 19 students (76%) failed in the

writing test as they got very low scores out of ten.

It is clear that none of the students obtained the full score (viz. 40) except 1 student who obtained 29 out of 40 (i.e. 75% out of 100%). As far as Listening skill of Yemeni school students is concerned, 4 students obtained 9 out of ten, 3 students got 8 out of ten and 2 students obtained 7 out of ten. Only 6 students failed (got less than 5) and 4 students got the lowest score (viz.2) in the listening test. Next 1 student got the highest score in speaking (i.e) 9 out of 10. However, 3 students got 8, and other 3 students obtained 7 and 3 secured 6 out of 10. Students' responses to the oral-aural skills, namely speaking and listening skills, were quite good and this suggests that teachers can do a lot. Although those skills are mostly neglected in the Yemeni schools, much help can be offered by the teachers, by developing audio cassettes and using it in the classrooms (Table 1).

Statistics suggest that reading and writing skills need much care and remedial work. They should be developed in the classrooms as 9 students got less than 5 out of ten and two of those students (8%) obtained nothing in the reading test while 16 students got less than 5 and one of those students got the lowest score viz. 1. Students' performance in writing test was very low.

It is clear that more than half of the subjects (13 students - 52%) got scores more than 20 whereas only 9 students (48%) obtained less than 20.

St/No.	Listening Score	Speaking Score	Reading Score	Writing Score	Total Score	Percentage
1.	7	5	4	4	20	50%
2.	6	3	4	4	18	45%
3.	6	4	6	4	20	50%
4.	5	4	5	3	17	42.5%
5.	6	4	6	4	20	50%
6.	9	5	6	2	22	55%
7.	9	8	4	2	23	57.5%
8.	8	7	4	4	23	57.5%
9.	9	5	0	3	17	42.5%
10.	5	5	0	1	11	27.5%
11.	8	5	4	7	24	60%
12.	7	8	6	6	27	67.5%
13.	5	5	6	6	22	55%
14.	10	9	8	2	29	72.5%
15.	9	8	7	4	28	70%
16.	4	4	7	10	25	62.5%
17.	4	4	10	7	25	62.5%
18.	8	7	7	4	26	65%
19.	5	6	4	7	24	60%
20.	6	7	4	4	21	52.5%
21.	2	6	6	3	17	42.5%
22.	2	8	6	2	18	45%
23.	2	2	10	1	15	37.5%
24.	2	6	6	2	16	40%
25.	6	2	8	3	19	47.5%

Table 1. The scores of the tests for the four basic skills and the percentage for each test

According to the frequency distribution, the central tendency is computed through the different indicators that are used to look at central tendency: the mean and Standard Deviation taken from two different experiments conducted have given the following results. The first one is for the Teacher made audio cassette and second is the other ordinary market cassettes. The 't' value is arrived by applying the formula and it is given below. Thus mean, mode and median converge on exactly the same score value that is 21.08, whereas, the mean score for market cassette is 15.16. The author asks how far each student's performance varies from the typical performance viz. the mean (Table 2 & 3).

Depending upon the statistics above, we can say that there are big differences among the students' scores and accordingly in their language skills, especially their reading and writing skills. Also, we can say that the students performed heterogeneously on the different tests. A sample of 25 students of both experimental groups were analyzed.

Level of Significance

The rejection or acceptance of a null hypothesis is based on some level of significance as a criterion. In psychological and educational circles rejecting a null

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
15	1	4%
18	2	8%
19	2	8%
25	7	28%
29	8	32%
30	2	8%
32	2	8%
35	1	4%
Total	25	100

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the students' scores of the whole test and the percentages based on the performance from teacher made audio cassettes used in the classroom

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
15	6	24%
18	8	32%
19	4	16%
25	2	8%
29	3	12%
30	1	4%
35	1	4%
Total	25	100

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the students' scores of the whole test and the percentages based on the performance from Market made cassettes used in the classroom

hypothesis at the .05 level indicates that a difference in means as large as that found between experimental and control groups would have resulted from sampling error in less than five out of hundred replications of the experiment. This suggests a 95% probability that the difference was due to the experimental treatment rather than sampling errors.

Using the example of the reading experiment described here, the null hypothesis was put to analysis and the difference between the mean score of the two groups are as follows.

Where,

N = Number of students

X = Mean

S = Standard Deviation

Impact of Audio cassette developed by the teacher	Impact of Audio cassette from the market
N ₁ = 25	N ₂ = 25
X ₁ = 21.08	X ₂ = 15.16
S ₁ = 17.08	S ₂ = 12.06

$$t\text{-test} \quad t = \frac{5.72}{\sqrt{(1.01)+(1.32)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.72}{\sqrt{2.33}}$$

$$t = 3.76$$

$$t = 3.76$$

Because of t-value of 3.76 exceed 2.58 the null hypothesis may be rejected at the .01 level of significance. If this experiment were replicated with random samples from the same population, the probability is that a difference between performance as grades as that observed would result from sampling error in fewer than one out of hundred replications. This test would indicate rather strong evidence that the experiment would probably make a difference in teaching of Aural Oral Skills. (John W. Best, 1986, Research in Education, P408)

Conclusion

This project aimed at finding out how far the students from the Arabic world could become proficient in their Aural-

Oral Communicative skills in English.

The inference is that the students would be strong if they are made to listen to the cassette developed by the teachers with fair competences in English. There are a good number of them.

- The mother tongue is not a deterrent factor to learn English.
- Writing is so less attractive so it needs much focus and serious remedial work to teach the students the proper use of grammar spelling.
- Using audio-cassettes with charts enhanced the learning activity to a remarkable degree.
- Incidentally the teacher trainees who were observers in the study substantially contributed in the organization of the project.

So through this type of experiment, if done by the teacher with real concern for the learners, the communication strategies would definitely lead to qualitative improvement in oral-aural communicative skills.

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