

## Improving English Language Speaking Skills of Ajloun National University Students

**Abdel-Rahman Al- Eiadeh<sup>1</sup>**

B.A Student, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Ajloun National University, Jordan

**Dr. Mahmoud A. AlSobh<sup>2</sup>**

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences,  
Ajloun National University, Jordan

**Dr. Samer M. Al-Zoubi<sup>3</sup>**

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences,  
Ajloun National University, Jordan

**Dr. Fadi Al-Khasawneh<sup>4</sup>**

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences,  
Ajloun National University, Jordan

**Abstract:** *This study aimed to enhance the oral communication skills (conversations) of ANU students. The sample of the study consisted of 20 students (12 female students and 8 male students) all of them are studying English language, the majority of the sample were the seniors and juniors students, while freshman were minority students. The researchers used random sample method. To achieve the objectives of the present study, the researchers used semi-structured interview as an instrument for data collection. The results of this study revealed that the students of ANU face many problems related to speaking skill, such as confusion and embarrassment; students did not learn speaking lessons correctly at school, and face difficulty in pronouncing some words. The results also showed that the most frequent problems were the limited amount of vocabulary among students, while the least frequent problems were the difficulty in understanding questions. This study also presented some of appropriate solutions to overcome the weakness in speaking skill, such as practicing speaking English inside and outside the classroom effectively, using the modern social media to communicate in English and to express the students feelings and needs.*

**Key Words:** *Speaking skill , EFL , communication skills , Ajloun National University students.*

## I . Introduction

English language is a universal language and one of the simplest and easiest languages in the world. It is the official language in a large number of countries, it is estimated that the number of people in the world that use English to communicate on a regular basis is two billion. English language is the dominant business language, and it has become almost necessity for people to spoken English, because there are many motivations to learn this language, such as: the modern world language of media, international economic, tourism, technology and scientific articles, and the Internet that demands a good knowledge of English especially of spoken English. English language is considered as foreign language of a lot of Arab countries, like Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Arab Gulf, and others. Jordan uses it in the government, some formal situations, in addition, of the Jordanian universities; they use it as a first language in lectures and debates. While reading and listening are considered to be the two receptive skills in language learning , and writing and speaking are the order two productive skills necessary to be integrated in the development of effective communication. Of all the four macro English skills, speaking seems to be the most important skill required for communication. Zaremba, (2006).

However ,speaking for special communication usually occurs in contexts where speaking performance is conducted for an audience in differing circumstances. The principles of public speaking are also intertwined with the development of speaking for special communication. When a speech involving an audience is taken into consideration, the act of speaking is considered to be more complicated than general everyday conversation and a number of other skills are therefore included in the speaking delivery process, e.g. choosing topics, organizing thoughts, tailoring the message, and adapting to listener feedback (Lucas, 2001).

Finally , speaking English language skill is one of the important of four language skills to be developed as a means of effective communication in both first and second language learning context in Jordan Universities, particularly at Ajloun National University. Effective communication by mean of speaking usually creates a number of benefits for both speakers and business organizations for example effective speaking skill results in achievements during ceremonial speaking activities, job training, activities, job interview, and other business purposes (Osborn, et al 2008). We can say any person without oral communication skills will suffer in this era of competition and may find it difficult to achieve a higher position. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997).

### - Statement of the Problem

The problem of teaching English to students, especially the problem of oral communication has not been solved yet, and one can find much to explore the significant role of speaking, many researchers like; Baily (2005) and Goh (2007) have proposed methods to enhance speaking skills by mean of syllabus design, teaching principles, and speaking assessment. One among the many reasons to take into considerations might be the lack of confidence and anxiety about making errors as stated by Trent (2009) and in other related studies. In Jordan, English language speaking skill seems to be unsatisfied. Jordanian students did not find a good environment to acquire enhance foreign language as family, school, and native speaker friends. These difficulties accompany the student to remind the low proficiency level in conversation. This study comes to

investigate the English language speaking skills used by Ajloun national university students when they make a conversation, dialogue, and discussion, in order to improve these skills and to help students them overcome these difficulties and suggest new strategies for teaching speaking that may help both students and teachers.

## **- Research Questions**

This study guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the tasks that students use in developing their speaking skill at ANU?
2. What are the influential factors that related to the students' weakness level at in speaking skill at ANU?
3. How can students overcome the weakness in speaking skill at ANU?

## **- Significance of the Study**

This study contributes in improving teaching and learning English language speaking skill. Therefore, this study comes to be as a reference in difficulties that face students in speaking skills and helps students, teachers, educators, and university instructors.

## **II. Review of Related Literature.**

Cotter (2007) argues that as students learn to use English in the classroom setting, they should also be involved in learning about how language works. They should be asked to reflect on various aspects of language, to develop a common language for talking about language, and to use this knowledge to evaluate texts critically in terms of effectiveness, meaning and accuracy. 'Someone who speaks well would similarly understand when to use different grammar points.

Backlund, (1990) assigns three areas of knowledge that influence oral communication effectiveness: social knowledge, self-knowledge, and content knowledge. If any one of these is weak oral communication will be somewhat impaired. Other problems that hinder oral communication are: dominating the conversation, using inappropriate volume and pitch, using excessive small talk ignoring someone and constantly interrupting people.

Bashiruddin, (2003) conducted a study to improve student's Oral Communication Skills (OCSs) in lower secondary public school in Karachi, Pakistan. The sample of the study consisted of two schools systems work side by side. One is the private English medium school and second is government Urdu-medium school. English is learnt as a second language in both cases. Both students' and teachers use Urdu language or the regional language to communicate inside the class, and practice traditional methods which focus on reading and writing skills, but productive skills such as: speaking is given on important. The results of the study discussed the reasons of weakness of students in communication were the English language teachers (ELTs) are not proficient in speaking English and this is the main obstacle in the way to teaching English in Pakistan.

Urrutia, & Vega (2006) conducted an action research project on the understanding and actions taken to improve speaking skills through games in a public school called "Federico García

Lorca" in Colombia. The sample in this study was twenty girls and twenty boys from 14 to 18 years old. Questionnaires, teacher's journals and video recordings were used as data collection instruments. The results of the study were the majority of students considered that speaking is the most complicated ability to work out; also, the researchers noticed that students sometimes spoke English, but the majority of them did not speak during the English class.

Rama, Ying, lee & Luei (2007) conducted an action research study on the hypothesis of using language games to improve speech skills during English classes in a primary school called "Jurong" in Singapore. The participants in this study were 78 students. The researchers used two different methods for two different groups; they divided students into experimental group in which was implemented a communicative method where were implemented language games to improve speaking skills, and a control group which was focused in a teacher centered method in which teachers used real- life activities including the essential vocabulary to perform a conversation. The results of the study organized in two tables. The first table shows the study of pre-tests and post-tests where 4 students did not were present in class during the pre-test and a total of 35 students were present in pre-test and post-test.

Hamzah & Ting, (2009) conducted a qualitative and action research study on success of using group work in teaching speaking in English classroom in a school called "SMK Damai Jaya" in Malaysia. The sample of the study was 33 students and 3 English teachers. The researchers conducted three oral activities where students were observed then they received questionnaires and three experienced teachers where observed as well. Questionnaires, observations and interviews were used as data collection instruments. The researchers carried out a series of questionnaires in Malay language where students could provide their opinions about the group work activities to improve speech skills and their consciousness of participation in those activities. The results of the study expressed enthusiasm in group work activities and proficiency in spoken language, because they were secure of expressing themselves in small groups which avoided anxiety to speak in another language.

### **III . Research Methodology**

#### **- Research Design**

The selected approach for this research project was the qualitative type of study; this type of the research is used to help the researcher to understand how people feel and why they feel as they do and as Merriam (1998) explains: "in qualitative studies the key concern understands the phenomenon of interest from the participant's perspective, not the researchers".

#### **- Population and Sample of the Study**

This study was conducted at Ajloun National University which is located to north of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan at city of Ajloun which is about sixty kilometers away from Amman (the capital city). The sample was twenty students from Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences, in English language major, the participants who are studying in the fall semester. The number of participant was, (8males, 12 females) and their ages among 21 to 36 years old.

## **- Research Instrument**

In order to examine the detected English speaking problems among students whose major is English language and literature, interviews were mainly used in this study. Thus this study provided opportunities for students to talk about their experiences in their simple own words. These interviews were conducted on 20 students who are studying English language at ANU.

## **- Data Collection**

All interviews were recorded and taped among the study by using different mass media, such as recording devices or smart phones provided with recording application. Then all questions in the interviews and students responses have been written on hard copy for further records and statistic analysis.

## **- Data analysis**

The interviews were conducted with all the participants. All interviews conducted in Arabic language then translated to English, depending on the interviewee's preference, the length of interview ranged from approximately 4 to 7 minutes. Each interviewee was asked to describe their English speaking experience as English language learners during their study program. Each interview centered on the difficulties and weaknesses that facing speaking English skill of the participant during the study program. Common statistic applications computer programs used to analyze the data. Although following a pre-determined structure, the interviewer was able to ask probing questions to gain a fuller understanding of the issues under discussion (Gillham, 2005) method. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. If an interview was conducted in Arabic, it was later further translated into English in its entirety. In keeping with a tradition in qualitative research, the transcripts of the interviews were read, re-read and annotated with comments and specific descriptive phrases.

## **IV. Results and Findings**

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the present study. This chapter showed and discussed the results according to the research questions of this study as follow:

- 1- What are the tasks that require speaking skill inside the classroom at ANU?
- 2- What are the problems and causes of weakness in English speaking among ANU students?
- 3- How can students overcome the weakness in speaking skill?

### **1. Results Related to the First Question**

This section gives answers related to the first research question, which is "*What are the tasks that students use in developing their speaking skill at ANU*"?

There are many kinds of speaking tasks which are required from students inside the classroom at ANU (See Table 1).

Table : 1

The Tasks that Affect to the Development the Students' Levels in Speaking Skill

	Task	Frequency	Percentage
1	Conversation	11	39.28%
2	Questioning	3	10.71%
3	Explaining	3	10.71%
4	Discussion	3	10.71%
5	Presentation	2	7.14%
6	Make interview	2	7.14%
7	Dialogue	2	7.14%
8	Giving Example	1	3.57%
9	Submitting Application and C. V.	1	3.57%

Table 1 shows the tasks that required from the students inside the classroom at ANU are: conversation, questioning, explaining discussion, presentation, make interview, dialogue, giving example, and submitting application and C. V.

### - Conversation

The results of this study showed that conversation skill was the most frequent speaking task that is required from students inside the classroom, 11 out of 20 students (39.28%), mentioned that they have to make conversation inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Participant number thirteen said, "Conversation was required from student by the lecturer inside the classroom"*.

### - Questioning

The results showed that questioning task was less than the conversation task, 3 students out of 20 students (10.71%), mentioned that they have to make questioning inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number six said, "The teacher request answers on the questions from students"*.

### - Explaining

The results presented that this task is exactly as questioning task, 3 out of 20 students (10.71%), mentioned that they have to make Explaining inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Student number fifteen said, " The teacher wants from the student to explain a topic, or matter"*.

### **- Discussion**

This section presents medium results as previous task, 3 out of 20 students (10.71%), mentioned that they have to make a discussion inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number twelve said, "The lecturer makes a discussion among students about certain topic"*.

### **- Presentation**

This part showed medium results between these tasks, thus 2 students out of 20 students (7.14%), mentioned that they have to make presentation inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number nine said, "The teacher divided the students into group to present presentation"*.

### **- Making Interview**

Making interview task presented result exactly as presentation task, 2 out of 20 students (7.14%), mentioned that they have to make an interview inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Student number one said, "The lecturer focused on how to make an interview among students"*.

### **- Dialogue**

This task presented the same results exactly as "making interview" and presentation task, 2 out of 20 participants (7.14%), mentioned that they have to make a dialogue inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number nine said, "The lecturer forms many of groups to make a dialogue among students"*.

### **- Give an Example**

The results of this task "give an example" were the least of other task, one participant out of 20; (3.57%) mentioned that he/she has to give an example inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number five said, "The lecturer required from student to give an example about something inside the classroom"*.

### **- Submitting Application and C.V**

The last task showed outcomes equal as previous task "giving an example" it takes the least share, 1 out of 20 participant; (3.57%) mentioned that he/she has submit application and C.V inside the classroom. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number four said, "How can student submit application for working manager"*.

## **2. Results Related to the Second Question**

This section gives answers related to the second question, which is "What are the influential factors that could cause the students' weakness level at ANU in speaking skill?"



This part shows the difficulties and problems that students are suffering through English oral communications inside the classroom at ANU, (See Table 2).

Table: 2

The factors that cause problems and weakness for A.N.U students in speaking skill

Number	Weakness	Frequency	Percentage
1	Limited Amount of Vocabulary.	13	27.08%
2	Confusion, Worry, Embarrassment, Shyness and Non-Confidence.	8	16.66%
3	Problems of Using Incorrect Grammar	7	14.58%
4	Students don't Follow their Study in a Good Way.	6	12.50%
5	Students don't Practice Speaking Skill Daily.	5	10.41%
6	Pronunciation Difficulties.	3	6.25%
7	Less Opportunity to Interact with Native Speakers.	2	4.16%
8	Weak background in English.	2	4.16%
9	Misunderstanding the Questions.	1	2.08%
10	Mixing Classes (males and females).	1	2.08%

Table 2 shows the factors that cause problems and weakness for ANU students.

The frequency of these factors ranges from 1 to 13 and the percentage also range (2.08%) to (27.08%), as follow:

### - Limited Amount of Vocabulary

This problem occupied top of the results according students' answers. Students have difficulties in memorizing vocabularies and English terms. On the other hands, most of the students also have problems in applying derivation rules. 13 out of 20 students (27.08%), mentioned that they have suffered of limited amount of vocabulary inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number one said, " When I try to make a conversation with another, problem of a limited vocabulary faces me".*



### **- Confusion, Worry, Embarrassment, Shyness and Non-Confidence.**

This difficulty presented results less than the first one, as these problems led the students to unsatisfied performance through the oral communication. 8 out of 20 participants (16.66%), mentioned that they have suffered of confusion, worry, embarrassment, shyness and non-confidence inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number three said, "Sometimes, I feel confused, because I feel afraid of using wrong words".*

### **- Problems of Using Incorrect Grammar**

Many students have erroneous usage of English grammar and incorrectly utilizing structures of sentence during the conversation, for example using verb forms doesn't match either the subjects or tense, or using the sentence missing verbs. 7 out of 20 students (14.58%), mentioned that they have suffered from problems of using incorrect grammar inside the classroom. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number four said, "I suffered from weakness of using English language rules".*

### **- Students do not follow their Study in a Good Way.**

This point obviously was noticed among students. Many of the sample individuals don't give attention to their study and follow a correct way, hence, this neglect makes them unable to perform English speaking skills effectively inside the classroom, 6 out of 20 participants (12.50%), mentioned that they have suffered of limitation of following their study. An example of that is as follows: *Student number thirteen said, "I do not follow my study, if I don't have examinations".*

### **- Students don't Practice Speaking Skill Daily.**

This factor showed results that same as the previous ones. Less frequent of students' practice short conversations among themselves and this leads them to be in low level of speaking skill, 5 participants out of 20 participants (14.41%), mentioned that they have suffered of limitation of the daily practice of conversation. An example of that is as follows: *Student number eight said, "I have a weakness because I don't practice English daily".*

### **- Pronunciation Difficulties.**

The results of pronunciation difficulties seemed to be less than all previously mentioned problems, 3 students out of 20 students (6.25%) mentioned that they have suffered of pronunciation problems. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number fifteen said, "I have a problem in pronunciation of some words".*

### **- Less Opportunity to Interact with Native Speakers.**

This issue was different of others problem due to difficulties in meeting with native speakers, 2 out of 20 students (4.16%), mentioned that they face a problem with less interaction with native speakers. An evidence of that is as follows: *Student number five said, "I face weakness in speaking skill, because I don't have another English speaker to communicate with him".*

### - Students didn't Learn Correctly at School.

The results of this point was equal to last previous points, the student didn't focus their attention on speaking skill in primary stages at school. This negligence and weakness companied them to university period, when they make conversation inside the classroom, 2 out of 20 students (4.16%) mentioned that they have suffered from weak background in English. An example of that is as follows: *Student number four said, "I expect that weakness returned to school"*.

### - Misunderstanding the Questions.

This results of this matter showed that students were facing difficulties in their understanding the questions from the lecture, such trouble makes students confused and put them in the wrong track, and then their answers will be wrong, so their level of fluency in oral communication skills will be low. 1 out of 20 participants (2.08%) mentioned that he/she has a problem in misunderstanding the questions. an example of that as is follows: *Participant number five said, " student did not understand the question in whole meaning"*.

### - Mixed Classes (Males and Females).

This problem was unique among other problems. Females sometimes have different feelings than males, these reasons cause of confusion, and shyness for them, certainly, affect their performance in speaking skills, 1 out of 20 students (2.08%) mentioned that he/she faces a problem of mixed classes(males and females).an evidence of that is as follows: *Student number ten said, " I noticed that my low level results from mixing between males and females inside the classroom"*.

## 3. Results Related to the Third Question

This section gives answers related to question number three, which is " How can students at ANU overcome the weakness in speaking skill?

This part presented the solution for problems that students are suffering from English oral communications inside the classroom at ANU, (See Table 3).

Table :3

Steps to Overcome the Weakness in Speaking Skill According to ANU Students?

N	Kinds of Overcomes the Weakness	Frequency	Percentage
1	Practice.	11	30.55%
2	Listening to English, Songs, News, Films and, Conversations.	10	27.77%
3	Speaking with Native Speakers.	4	11.11%

4	Conversation among Students.	4	11.11%
5	Make the Short Drills at Home.	4	11.11%
6	Focusing on Pronunciation.	1	2.77%
7	Speaking English only inside the Classroom.	1	2.77%
8	Development of Grammar.	1	2.77%

Table 3 shows the ways to overcome weakness in speaking skills.

The frequency of these ways ranges from 1 (development of grammar) to 11 (practice). The percentages were range from 2.77% to 30.55%, as follows:

### - Practice

The results showed that practice was the perfect approach that students must follow, to overcome their problems regarding speaking skill, this way took the top frequency, 11 students out of 20, (30.55%) mentioned that they have solutions through practice to overcome these problems. An evidence of that is as follow: *Participant number eleven said, "When we practice more conversations, we will exceed this weakness."*

### - Listening to English, Songs, News, Films and, Conversations.

Listening to English native speakers in a different ways is very essential for persons to strengthen correct pronunciation of words. 10 out of 20 participants (27.77%) mentioned that they have solutions through listening to English, songs, news, films and, conversations. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number two said, "We must have listening to English talks, such as English news to develop our English"*.

### - Speaking with Native Speakers.

This issue was been discussed in the results that are related to the third question. Students indicated that necessary meeting and talking with English native speakers decrease these problems, 4 students out of 20 students, (11.11%) mentioned that they have strategies to overcome the weakness through communication with native speakers. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number eight said, "We should try to speak with native people at the least in Internet programs"*.

### - Conversation among Students.

The findings showed that conversation among students exceed many troubles respectively, as shyness, being worried, and confusion, as students' responses to overcome this problem. 4 out of 20 students (11.11%) mentioned that they have ways to overcome the weakness through the conversations among students. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number one said, "We must develop the conversation skills among ourselves"*.

### **- Making the Short Drills at Home.**

The results appear that drills are required to any work to succeed; students' answers about overcome ways were focusing on daily drills on speaking skill at home. 4 out of 20 students (11.11%) mentioned that they have behaviors to overcome the problems. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number tow said, "I expect work drills a home, it helps us to overcome this weakness"*.

### **- Focusing on Pronunciation.**

Correct pronunciation of words or structure was some of students' responses to facilitate making a conversation in a good way; the results presented, 1 out of 20 students (2.77%) mentioned that he/she has many ways to overcome the problems. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number eight said, "We must focus on right ways to pronounce words"*.

### **- Speaking English only inside the Classroom.**

The results confirmed that English Department lecturers must teach in English language without Arabic to give the chance for students to develop themselves in speaking skills through the university period. 1 out of 20 students, (2.77%) mentioned that he/she has solution to overcome the weakness. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number thirteen said, "We must use English only in all lessons inside the classroom"*.

### **- Development of Grammar.**

The results showed that students must have ability to correct language mistakes to overcome the problems through the speaking skills, as students' responses, 1 out of 20 students, (2.77%) mentioned that he/she has solution to overcome the weakness.. An example of that is as follows: *Participant number six said, "Students should develop grammatical rules"*.

## **V. Discussions**

### **- Discussion the Results of the First Question**

The previous chapter showed the discussion and analysis of the results, according to the first question which dealt with tasks that are required from the students inside the classroom at ANU, such as interview, dialogue, discussion, conversation, etc. the conversation task had the high ratio that students presented inside the classroom among them, while giving an example task had a low percentage. These results were different from the results of Bashiruddin, (2003). Through the analyzing of the results, the researcher believes that these tasks are very essential for the students to develop themselves in oral communications their studying program.

### **- Discussion the Results of the second Question**

The results showed that the communication difficulties faced students at ANU according to second question which dealt with the factors that cause problems and weakness of ANU in speaking skill were; limited amount of vocabulary, problems of using incorrect grammar, misunderstanding the questions, etc. the results also discovered that the reasons why learners

faced the oral communication difficulties, because they have lacked English vocabulary. This study was similar to the other studies of communication difficulties confirmed by Liu and Jackson (2008), but dissimilar with (Suleiman, 1983; Mukattash, 1983; Ibrahim, 1983). The researcher thinks that the reasons of students' weakness during oral conversations were limited participations with other universities, limited speaking with each others, and using Arabic language inside the classroom also was a key reason that caused such problems.

### **- Discussion the Results of the Third Question**

The results showed there are many of solutions for speaking skills problems. According to the third question which is "How can students overcome the weakness of speaking skill at ANU?", the majority of participants' responses focused on practice and listening to English conversations; such as news, films and songs, with high percentages (30.55 - 27.77%). While speaking English only inside the classroom, focusing on pronunciation, and development of grammar, were the low percentages (2.77%). These results were similar with Songsiri, M (2007), and Noon-ura, S (2008). But the results dissimilar with Baily, (2005) and Goh,(2007).

### **VI - Conclusion**

To shortcut the findings of this study, new strategies should be involved to improve students' English language speaking skill at ANU. It is suggested that English lecturers create situations that can encourage learners to produce English oral interactions because such interactions can provide learners with opportunities to explain concepts and help them to vocalize concrete meaning, by vocalizing concrete meaning, learners can lean their tendency towards English oral communication activities. In addition, the current methods to get the learners to approach oral communication activities are by producing a task-based learning style of teaching. Traditional learning methods (by posting comprehension check questions) limit the learners' opportunity to have two-way communication between learners and the instructor. Task-based learning is the ideal approach that can enhance learner' communication ability and through problem solving activities, teachers get the chance to observe how learners construct and reconstruct their Interlingua.

### **VII - Recommendations**

The researchers recommend that other researchers conduct studies at other universities to contrast the differences and similarities points for teaching speaking skill by incorporating speaking strategies into their teaching methods and approaches, teach the students to use the appropriate strategy for a specific purpose or a specific skill area, and encourage them to use the strategies as much as possible. The researchers also recommend that students should use modern mass media such as Face book, Twitter. Whats App to develop their speaking skill.

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