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An EFL Classroom Oral Language and Group Work Observation: A Pilot Study

Ishfaque Ahmed Abbasi

(Corresponding author)

PhD Scholar, Center for Language Studies (CLS), Universiti Tun Hussein Onn
Malaysia & Lecturer, Maths & Social Science Department, Sukkur IBA
University.

Email: gw180070@siswa.uthm.edu.my

Dr Elizabeth M Anthony

Associate Professor, Center for Language Studies (CLS), Universiti Tun
Hussein Onn Malaysia

Email: eliz@uthm.edu.my

Abstract

In Pakistani EFL context where speaking skill is hardly assessed, it becomes a challenging task for a researcher to find an appropriate and valid instrument to observe and analyse the speaking activities and the learning on the basis of these activities. This study is to validate the adapted versions of instruments of Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) and the Group Participation Observation Checklist. From SOLOM only fluency measurement scale was adapted and used for this study. These instruments were piloted and the data was collected through video recording of a class and audio recordings of interviews of two participants. For validity check the data was shared with three inter-raters for Inter-Rater reliability. The data was analysed using the Percentage agreement of raters and Cohen Kappa coefficient. The results validated the instruments and the instruments were found appropriate to be used in the main study with slight changes.

Keywords: EFL Classroom, Group Work, SOLOM, Group Observation Checklist, Oral Fluency.

Introduction:

A pilot study is a preparation for main study by doing a feasibility study that includes small scale methodological test to validate intended research instruments. In fact, it is through the pilot study the researchers arrive at a decision whether or not to continue with the actual study as planned. The most important benefit of the pilot study is to provide researchers with options to make adjustments and revisions in main study (Kim, 2010).

Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) explain two different ways in which pilot study are used in social science research. Firstly, as a trial run to prepare for the actual study and secondly, to try out or pre-test a research instrument. In fact, the current pilot study was done to pre-test two adapted research instruments: the student oral language observation matrix (SOLOM) and the group participation observation checklist for the main study ‘Group work in English as a Foreign Language classrooms Oral language Use and Fluency’.

The two main objectives of this pilot study are:

1. To check the validity and reliability of the student oral language observation matrix.
2. To check the validity and reliability of the group participation observation checklist.

Setting:

In order to meet the main objectives of this pilot study, the researcher considered a public sector university in Sukkur Sindh Pakistan as the research field. The reason for choosing this university is that it has been in the top five best business schools of Pakistan as per the ranking of Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The students of a national level program of the university were the population to get the sample from. The target batch is a batch which represents all four provinces of Pakistan. The batch (2019-20) consisted of 300 students who were all from public sector schools and colleges. These all students were selected throughout Pakistan on the same criteria of poverty and merit. A general aptitude test was conducted at every regional headquarter of all four provinces. Then on the basis of merit some 1000 students were short listed and then a poverty filter was applied. After that filter some 350 students were selected for the program. Out of these 300 joined the program.

So, it seemed helpful, in this study context, to get a good representation of the whole country. In this way, the results can also go generalized as far as the population is considered. In addition, it provided the researcher with a valid basis to carry out the research study and the collection of rich data as the research population directly linked with the objectives of the study. Furthermore, a study in the researcher’s own context may help him in his future practice as a teacher and teacher educator.

Sampling:

The very basic purpose of sampling is to select suitable population so that the focus of the study may be researched appropriately (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). So, for this pilot study the sampling was done by using the purposive sampling method. As per Patton (1990, p.169) “the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth”. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the

purpose of the research...”. The sample size was decided as per the guidelines provided by different qualitative methodologists. Lopez & Whitehead (2013) prefer to have small samples. Creswell (2013) suggests having 3-5 participants for a case study. For this pilot study one video of classroom observation focusing on targeted participants and two interview audio recordings of participants were used. This student was from the ten students of main study selected by the method of homogenous sampling. (Brown, 2006 p. 21 – 24). The students were chosen on four main criteria points:

1. They schooling was from government schools
2. They have rarely or never been exposed to group work activities
3. They were taught in a teacher-centered classroom
4. They got least participation for practicing speaking

Instruments

The instruments to be used in the main study and for piloting are adapted. For observing students’ oral fluency in the classroom during group work activities Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) is adapted from by San Jose Area Bilingual Consortium. For observing students’ group work participation, a Group Participation Observation Checklist is adapted from the resource unit of Community and Diversity, Interdisciplinary Early Years Multimedia (IEYM).

1. Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM)

The student oral language observation matrix (SOLOM) was used to measure students’ oral fluency. This matrix was developed by San Jose Area Bilingual Consortium and later revised by leadership of Bilingual Education office of the California Education department. Originally, it observes a student’s oral language in five domains; listening comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, grammar and pronunciation. However, for the purpose of this study only the fluency part was used with some changes. Since this matrix was to be used to observe students’ classroom speaking activities during group work, the ‘everyday conversation’ was dropped (See Appendix A).

2. Group Participation Observation Checklist

The group participation observation checklist was used to observe students’ class participation during speaking activities. This checklist is from the Community and Diversity, Interdisciplinary Early Years Multimedia (IEYM), a teacher resource unit. The checklist was adapted with a few changes in terms of sequence and components. The original checklist components were presented as ‘stays on task’, ‘listens to the group’s ideas’, ‘participates in group activities’, ‘encourages group members’ and ‘uses other language for conversation’. On the other hand, the adapted version had ‘uses English for conversation’, ‘uses native language for conversation’, ‘listens & responds to

Group Participation Observation Checklist

The results from all three raters were analysed by using the percentage scale by Kappa coefficient

Table 2: Raters Data

Participants:	Uses English Language for conversation			Uses Native Language for conversation			Listens & responds to Ideas			Participates in Tasks			Stays on Task			Makes task-relevant comments		
	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
1	3	2	2	2	3	2	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4
2	4	4	4	1	1	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
3	3	3	3	1	1	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	2
4	3	4	3	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
6	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
7	4	4	4	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
8	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	4	2	2	4	2	2
9	4	4	4	1	1	1	2	2	2	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4
10	3	3	3	2	2	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Table 3: Cohen kappa's statistics (McHugh, 2012)

	R1	R2	R3		R1	R2	R3		R1	R2	R3		R1	R2	R3		R1	R2	R3
R1	1			R1	1			R1	1			R1	1			R1	1		
R2	0.715	1		R2	0.904	1		R2	0.866	1		R2	0.677	1		R2	0.468	1	
R3	0.872	0.884	1	R3	0.816	0.800	1	R3	1	0.866	1	R3	0.677	1	1	R3	0.468	1	1

The raters' scores clearly indicate strong agreement in results as per kappa coefficient. As per Cohen's suggestion, kappa results in between 0.61-0.80 are to be interpreted as substantial and the scores in between 0.81-1 are to be interpreted as a perfect agreement among the inter-raters (McHugh, 2012). This suggested that the group work observation checklist seemed very valid for the current study and convenient for its use.

Reliability and Validity:

Reliability and validity are the two important factors to be kept in consideration in all types of research particularly in qualitative data where researchers' subjectivity could affect the data interpretation (Noble & Smith, 2015).

As per Rose and Johnson (2020) the term reliability deals with the soundness of the research in terms of research methods and the way these are applied and implemented in qualitative research and validity is the process of determining accuracy of findings. With reliability and validity there comes transparency in the research and chances of researcher's bias also decrease (Singh, 2014).

There are different types of reliability discussed in the literature. For the current pilot study the researcher used the Inter-Rater reliability. As per Creswell (2012) inter-rater reliability can be used to check whether the instruments designed are reliable. In this reliability check, the instrument is to be administered once and more than one observers (raters) can verify the process.

Three experienced teachers were requested to be the raters for this reliability check. All three raters have seven years plus experience and have been teaching the same program since its starting. Then the interview recording and the class observation video recording both were shared with three experts of EFL, taken as raters.

Conclusion

With a few changes suggested by raters in the SOLOM fluency measurement scale and a go ahead for the observation checklist the instruments seem to be ready to be used in the actual study.

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Appendix A

Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) (Only Fluency) (Adapted)					
Class:				Subject:	Date:
Administered By (signature):					
	1	2	3	4	5
Participants	Speech so halting and fragmentary as to make conversation virtually impossible.	Usually hesitant: often forced into silence by language limitations.	Speech frequently disrupted by the student's search for the correct manner of expression	Speech generally fluent, with occasional lapses while the student searches for the correct manner of expression.	Speech in classroom discussions fluent and effortless; approximating that of a native speaker.
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Appendix C**Sample excerpt from Interview Transcription of 1st Student**

Inter:

Okay, so student 4, you have learnt your education from government school and government colleges, **what is your opinion about your English classes in 1st year and inter?**

S4:

Hmmm there we haaa teachers are teach teach us English in English Language but haa we do not use English in classes we haaa haa, (aksar hum use karte Balti use karte , hum apni maadri zubaan use karte thay) and.....hmMMM haaa.....c.....teacher use nahe kartay thay English, khud Parhaane ke liye use karte thay but .. haa.. force nahe karte thay ke student that use English in English class so we don't use English therefore our English is so weak.

Inter:

HmMMM! Okay, so **how many students were there in your English in your classes in 1st year inter?**

S4:

In 1st year there are Heaaen... out of.... Sixty students in our class.

Inter:

Sixty students in your class and in inter?

S4:

In inter there are fifty to fifty some... near about.

Inter:

Okay so haa your teachers used to use English but you people compelled them to speak local language, okaay. So, **how did your teacher start classes conduct classes, for example when she entered in class and she started how was the class?**

S4:

hmm when teacher come and *bus book parahaatay thay*.

Inter:

Okay

S4:

And nothing more *bus book parhaaa kay wo chalee jaatee thee* and there is no activity.....

Inter:

There was no activity.....

S4:

There was no activity...and ...haa nothing.

Inter:

Okay, **how did you learn speaking skill? Did you learn speaking skill or not?**

S4:

No,...haa....when I...haa.. when I.. when I was doing matric and Fsc there was...there...there was no..hen...then I was not use English andddd..heen nothing...bus...in ...after doing my Fsc I joined university..... of Baltistan then haaaaa.. our teacher force us to tea. Ha..ler to talk English with er..with her..with his aaand the nothing.....bus ye hee hay sir.

Inter:

Okay, so um ha..., **means you did not learn any speaking skills in your college years?**

S4:

No

Inter:

Okay so it means when you did not learn any speaking skill so you did not have any speaking activity there?

S4:

No there was no activity.....

Sample excerpt from Interview Transcription of 2nd Student

Inter: Okay, that's good okay. If I ask you about your first year inter English class, what is your opinion about your previous English class?

S10

Sir, actually, in previous classes (.ha) we attended the class (ha) just to the limit we prepare ourselves for the paper nothing else is, so we were reading most reading for (ha) a lot of times just for preparation as for the examination and we didn't take any part in any competition not any

Inter:

Okay. As you know the English language has four skills listening speaking reading writing, yes. So, you are saying that in your first year into English classes only reading and writing was there

S10

Yes sir. Actually there was reading and writing.

Inter:

Okay. Okay. So, how did your teacher conduct English classes? What was their method in first year and inter? How did they teach you English?

S10

Sir (...) in previous classes when teacher (ha) came and our classes (...) they teach us the English just first day read out the whole topic the lesson and then they told me the meanings into URDU (ha) then they tell us to repeat it and (ha) remember the translation of that lesson in your mind for the preparation of exams. There's one method.

Inter:

so only preparation of exam has in mind.

S10:

Yes sir.

Inter:

Okay. So, you know that English is a language

S10:

Yes sir.

Inter:

And the way you are saying that was it focused is a language or is a subject only?

S10

Sir (ha....) in my it is not only in my opinion, but it is "*yeah haqiat he ke wahan*" the teacher (ha....) focused only us for the preparation of exam not as a language