

Original Research Article

## Extemporaneous Speech Engagement among English Language Major Undergraduates at Al-Quds Open University in Palestine

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### ABSTRACT

Extemporaneous speech is one of the main natural forms of public speaking, exercising students to speak in public with little preparation. Many English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially those at Al-Quds Open University have difficulty to speak spontaneously in front of the public due to their inability to speak, rooting from their lack of speaking proficiency. Due to the students' lack of competence in extemporaneous speech, the researcher aimed to investigate the English language undergraduates' engagement in an extemporaneous speech at the English Language and Literature Department of the university. The researcher employed the qualitative approach to gain profound knowledge and understanding of the research problem. The researcher selected a purposive sampling to collect and analyze the required data for efficient usage of the resources. The observation was performed on a selected class of 'Language Use' course, consisted of 35 students, at the English language and Literature Department at Al-Quds Open University, Palestine, to explore students' engagement in extemporaneous speech. Then, five students of the same class were interviewed by the researcher to check and examine how much extent do extemporaneous speech develops students' abilities in speaking skills. The researcher utilized the Analytical Field Notes and Thematic Analysis to analyze the collected data. The findings of the study indicated that undergraduate English language major students engaged pleasantly and positively in extemporaneous speech. Also, they had positive views, perspectives and beliefs towards engaging in extemporaneous speech represented by their active participation and their willingness to share and participate in this activity. The findings also showed that students found their speaking abilities are improved and developed based on their experiences in extemporaneous speech. They indicated that they could speak more fluently, their utterances are increased and developed, and they could speak freely in front of their peers and instructor. Furthermore, students' self-confidence is reinforced according to their experiences and beliefs.

### Introduction

Undoubtedly, speaking is considered as one of the four primary skills that are of great importance for efficient communication in any language, especially when speakers do not use their native tongue. Of the four macro skills, speaking is the most prominent skill required for communication (Zaremba, 2006). Since English language is used as a means of universal communication, particularly in the era of technology and globalization, English speaking skills should be improved along with other skills in order that these incorporated skills will enhance communication performance with native speakers and other

users of the international community. In the Palestinian context, most undergraduate English language major students have studied English for 12 years before involving in tertiary education. Students were provided by a large number of vocabulary items, variant grammatical rules but minimal practice in English language. Therefore, students' abilities in communicating and interacting in English language are still under question. Few studies indicated that some English language major undergraduates face a critical problem while they are involving and sharing in a particular communicative context. Concerning several scholars and researchers, students' shortcomings and failure to communicate fluently are attributed to a variant, external and internal, elements. Fear of committing mistakes one of the main reasons of students shortcoming in communicating effectively, embarrassment, passive assessment, lack of self-confidence, improper grammar and insufficient teaching are other central factors as stated by Zyoud (2016); Nakhalah (2016); Al Hosni (2014); Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014); and Al-Qaderi (2017).

According to Beckett and Miller (2006), in order to be a highly competent speaker in any language, students should use and employ language in a meaningful manner in specific occasions and settings (p. 229). They should possess essential language components before the occurrence of the communication process. However, few of the Palestinian undergraduate English language major at Al-Quds Open University face and encounter the problem of inability to communicate and interact orally when they are engaging in a particular communicative situation. Additionally, students' face many problems while they involve in speaking activities inside the class, and even they avert to engage in such activities. According to Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, and Mannix-McNamara (2014), students find difficulty in reflecting themselves, and most of the time, neglect and avoid participating in such activities and tasks.

The current study is established on exploratory sequential mixed methods design, indicating that the present study is split into two stages in which start with a qualitative stage followed by a quantitative stage. As for the present paper, it was performed at the preliminary phase of the qualitative stage as a part of the continuous thesis in exploring undergraduate English language major students in extemporaneous speech.

### **Problem Statement**

Undergraduate English language major students at Al-Quds Open University (QOU), Palestine, learn English through a Bachelor of English language and literature program which extends for four years of study. They involve various courses associated with Linguistics, Literature and English Language Teaching. Some of the courses also connected with oral communication skills and conversation. They are learned under the direction and guidance of highly qualified and competent instructors; textbooks comprise valuable and sequentially harmonious information to assist students to comprehend and understand. However, some students still suffer from a lack of communication and difficulty in involving and taking part in communicative contexts.

Accordingly, the researcher is going to explore students' engagement in extemporaneous speech as well as to examine to what extent extemporaneous speech can help in developing students' abilities in speaking skills. The researcher adopted this type of speech delivery that hopefully helps improve students' abilities in speaking skill. It is defined by Grice and Skinner (1998) as the process of delivering a speech by recognizing the primary notions and ideas that are outlined, but not memorizing the same words. Teaching English language in tertiary education presents a chance to create new strategies and techniques to stimulate students to employ and utilize the foreign language freely in both written and significantly in extemporaneous oral discourse. Several researchers have recommended conducting similar studies to investigate students' engagement in public speaking types especially extemporaneous speech to assist students' to develop their abilities in speaking skill (Al-Tamimi, 2014; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2016; El Mortaji, 2018; Raed, Nur, & Mohamad, 2013; Uenishi, 2015). Accordingly, the following two questions are employed to gain a better understanding of students' experiences and perspectives in engagement in extemporaneous speech:

### **Research Questions**

The current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the English language major students of Al-Quds Open University engage in extemporaneous speech?
2. To what extent does extemporaneous speech enhance and improve students' abilities in speaking skills?

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of conducting this study emerges from the fact that it presents a new kind of speech delivery, namely extemporaneous speech, which will hopefully develop students' ability in speaking skill. Accordingly, the current study is

expected to develop students' capacity in speaking skills by evoking them to totally involve in the subject under discussion. Besides, it is expected to be able to increase students' interest in delivering speeches and presentations through extemporaneous speech.

### **Literature review**

The current literature indicates that extemporaneous speech is one of the various basic techniques for delivering a particular speech by speakers. Lucas (2009) indicated that the four fundamental techniques and ways of presenting or delivering a speech are memorized, manuscript, impromptu and extemporaneous speech. According to Schwartzman (2007), extemporaneous speeches are "types of speeches prepared and organized carefully and practiced by the speaker before the real-time of delivering the speech". A speaker may use a notecard to lead and direct him while presenting his speech. In the previous related literature, the usage of extemporaneous speech is little and to somehow is scare, and there are very few studies investigated its impact in developing students' abilities in communicative situations. However, Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2010) indicated that a large number of U.S universities have involved and introduced a course of public-speaking in their undergraduate program schedule. Lucas (2013) mentioned that public speaking is utilized to enhance students' confidence in extending and presenting their thoughts and to construct their thinking skills. The extemporaneous speech, which is a kind of speech delivery with little preparation, is one of the practices presented through these courses (p. 246). Moreover, Baccarani and Bonfanti (2015) shed light on the significance of extemporaneous speech as an essential means to develop learners' capacity to communicate efficiently, particularly in the institutional contexts. Other scholars demonstrated the positive impact of extemporaneous speech on students' performance in communicative situations. Moreover, Nikitina (2011) confirmed that students' could obtain many benefits while they are engaging in extemporaneous speeches. It constructs their self-confidence, develop their oral skills, minimize fear and anxiety, and stimulate their memory.

### **Research Methodology**

#### ***Research Design***

This is a descriptive qualitative case study. The employed path or approach for the current research study was the qualitative strategy; such a kind of research is utilized to assist the researcher to comprehend and realize profoundly how students feel and react and extract meaning from their experiences. According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh (2010), in qualitative research, the fundamental concern comprehends and understands the case of interest from the participants' point of view in real situations. To answer the research questions, the researcher would use observation and semi-structured interview as techniques for collecting the required data.

#### ***Setting, Participants and Sampling***

The population of the study involves the entire number of the undergraduate English language majors' students at Al-Quds Open University, in Palestine, in the academic year (2018-2019). The number of the whole population is (279) students, (36) males and (243) females. All the participants are undergraduate students of English language and literature department, and their ages between 18- 20. In this current study, the researcher is trying to solve the research problem and answer research questions by investigating students' engagement in an extemporaneous speech in its real context to utilize and gain a better understanding by their experiences, perceptions and evaluations of the phenomenon under study, as well as to examine to what extent extemporaneous speech assist in developing undergraduate students' abilities in speaking skills.

The present study is a descriptive qualitative case study since the primary gathered data is qualitative. The researcher selected a class of 'Language Use' course purposefully as a sample of the study to observe and monitor students' engagement in extemporaneous speech. Accordingly, the researcher purposefully has chosen five participants to respond to the semi-structured interview questions to investigate in-depth to how much extent extemporaneous speech enhances and improves students' ability in speaking skills. Kajornboon (2005) indicates that the researchers employed open-ended interviews to explore and investigate topics in depth. The main aim of using an interview as an instrument of data collection is that it may attract attention to things that cannot be seen by the researcher like intentions, ideas, feelings, or attitudes (Ohata, 2005). Therefore, the researcher employed this technique to reveal participants' impressions, experiences, and beliefs. Therefore, interviews will be employed in this study to examine the participants' perceptions of engagement in extemporaneous speech as a strategy to enhance and improve their speaking abilities.

### Research Instruments

In this current study, the researcher utilized an observation to detect and explore students' engagement in extemporaneous speech. Also, he used a semi-structured interview to investigate how much extent extemporaneous speech help in improving students' abilities in speaking. Accordingly, the study offered chances for students to reflect their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives by using their words. The observation was conducted during one lecture, which was lasted for 90 minutes. In the same context, the interviews were conducted on five students of English language major at Al-Quds Open University.

### Procedure

The prior lines have concentrated on the theoretical aspects of the study entirely. That part of the study described the research design, participants, and procedures of data collection. The theme of the present study was to explore undergraduate English language majors' engagement in extemporaneous speech as well as to examine to what extent engagement in extemporaneous speech develops students' abilities in speaking skills among students of Al-Quds Open University, Palestine. A case study is a research strategy that includes exploration and investigation of a specific complicated case using several methods to collect and analyze the required data within its real situation (Yin, 2009). For this reason, the researcher will employ the qualitative approach for deep and better understanding of the research problem. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural contexts, trying to make sense of, or interpret, a case in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (p. 13). The researcher will observe students' speech delivery and employ unstructured interviews with open ended questions as instruments of the study to investigate students' engagement in order to gain a clear image of the problem and a better understanding of students' perceptions and beliefs of their experiences in extemporaneous speech. The sample used in this study will be selected using purposive sampling, a class of 'Language Use' course. Accordingly, the participants of the interview will be selected based on their sharing and participating in extemporaneous speech classes.

**Table 1: Research Procedures and Methods of the Study**

Ques. No.	Types of Data	Research Instruments	Source of Data	No of Participants	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1.	Qualitative	1. Observation Field notes	1 <sup>st</sup> Year Undergraduate Students at QOU / Palestine	35 participants (1 Observation)	9 <sup>th</sup> / Feb / 2020	Analytical Field Notes
2.	Qualitative	2. Semi-Structured Interview	1 <sup>st</sup> Year Undergraduate Students at QOU / Palestine	5 EFL (3 females & 2 males) (5 Interviews)	9 <sup>th</sup> / Feb/ 2020	Thematic Analysis (ATLAS.TI Software Tool Version8)

### Data Collection

The observation was conducted in the English language Department at Al-Quds Open University, where the researcher used checklist field notes to uncover and explore students' experiences, actions, reactions, behaviors' and participation in extemporaneous speech. The idea here is to reveal and explore students' engagement to obtain a better understanding of their experiences, beliefs, views regarding extemporaneous speech. The unstructured interviews were employed after the researcher had finished the observation technique. Each interview took between 15 to 25 minutes, and all were recorded by audio and visual aids. All the interviewees filled a consent letter for participation in the study with the right to pull out at any time. Due to ethical reasons, the researcher had taken permission from the university administration to conduct the study. Moreover, students have signed consent that they agree to participate in the study, including using audio-visual aids while students present their speeches. Their names would not be mentioned for confidentiality purposes; instead, the researcher used codes consist of numbers and letters.

In the first session on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the instructor started his lecture by informing students to prepare themselves to present their speeches. Then, students began to present the speeches each by his own way. Some of them were hesitant and worried about initiating their presentation as that was the first experience that delivering a speech before the audiences'. However, some were pleasant and happy to present. They were full of enthusiasm. Though, the researcher observed and described students' engagement in an extemporaneous speech in its natural setting. Moreover, the researcher recorded and pictured students' in order to gain an overall understanding and clear idea about students' participation and engagement in extemporaneous speech, as well as the researcher has transcribed and written the events and details that occurred in the class. In the same context, every detail that had happened inside the class during the 90 minutes are documented and transcribed by the researcher. At the end of the lecture, the instructor provided some suggestions and feedback.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Methods and techniques of data analysis are varied and different. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) confirm that qualitative data analysis is the operation a researcher utilizes to reduce information to like a story and its explanation. Therefore, data analysis is the reduction of a large magnitude of gathered information to extract meaning. In the same context, other researchers like Patton (1987) states that during the process of analysis, three procedures occur. The first procedure is organizing the information, followed by reducing through summarizing and classifying the information, and finally identifying the patterns and themes of the information. Accordingly, the researcher prepared the data for each tool: observation and interview. Data preparation included watching and listening to the recorded material of the observation, and analyzing the field notes of the checklist to obtain an idea about the first-hand data. Then, the researcher wrote his notes in the margin to register his impression of these data.

#### ***The Analysis of the observation Field Notes***

In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, the researcher utilized field notes to answer the research question concerning how English language major students of QOU engage in extemporaneous speech. By referring to the gathered data of the observation, findings have been extracted and discovered. The observation technique is utilized from analytic field notes to answer the first question. It can be realized that the process of delivering extemporaneous speeches was efficient and exciting. Based on the researcher's observation of the collected field notes from this section of the study, it can be inferred that most students were engaged pleasantly and positively in an extemporaneous speech.

Nevertheless, some students were hesitant to start or share in this activity. Other students were full of enthusiasm and motivated to participate and present speeches. The first participant sought to be very shy and putting his hands on his pocket. Students have applied the procedures of extemporaneous speeches accurately. They used notecards, involved some important expressions and terms, to guide them while delivering the speech. The second participant was encouraged to pick a topic and speak about. He started his speech slowly; his voice was low. His presentation was about the mobile phone. Although he used concise and simple sentences, sometimes he did not find the exact word to pursue his speech. So, he tended to stay silent or switched to another idea. When he lost the track, he looked to the instructor as if he were asking for assistance.

Regarding students' speeches, they lasted from two to four minutes. Although some students looked shy, most of them engaged in extemporaneous speech pleasantly and happily. The third participant seemed stimulated and encouraged to deliver a speech. This was appeared from his concern and interest to participate even though he uttered a few simple sentences and short speeches. For most of them, it was the first experience that they were addressing audiences, and this is the main reason for their excessive shyness. The fourth participant raised his hand and seemed motivated to speak. He talked about "Time Management". He started his presentation by greeting the instructor and the researcher. He used his body movements and facial expressions while delivering his speech. He was smiling all the time. Even though several mistakes have been committed but still talking in enthusiasm, he used the "notecard" and took a glance when it needed. Throughout the observation process, the researcher observed that the participants were courageous enough to deliver their speeches and were overwhelmed with the enthusiasm to speak extemporaneously. Also, the researcher observed that the participants were very eager to express themselves in front of their peers.

As they involve in presenting their speeches, the ability of some students to express themselves was not high and seemed unable to continue their speeches. Other students talked in enthusiasm, and they were very concerned to present their best. Eventually, the researcher felt some of the problems that the participants face when they attempt to produce extemporaneous speech, including word choice, grammatical mistakes, and mispronouncing some sounds. Also, the

researcher witnessed and observed some nervous gestures of a few students, such as tremors of their voices and abrupt stops.

### ***The Analysis of the Interviews***

Regarding the interview, the researcher had transcribed the raw and recorded material into written text. Then, essential notes were written in the margin to be utilized in the process of coding. Afterwards, the coded are identified, and finally, the researcher extracted the themes by utilizing Thematic Analysis (Atlas TI Software Tool Version 8). Thus, the researcher used thematic analysis approach to analyze the qualitative data elicited from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was applied to identify, analyze and report themes within the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The researcher adopted the inductive thematic analysis approach to analyze the participants' interviews.

Concerning the interview technique, it is utilized to answer the second research question; five students were involved and interviewed. The five interviewees were students of English Language and Literature Department at Al-Quds Open University. Their ages range from 18 to 20. All of them exposed to the same procedures of admission, schedule, courses, major and university. The interviewees were selected purposefully since the researcher wanted to get benefit from their experience. The researchers had interviewed them personally and face to face in order to reveal their own perspectives, beliefs and experiences in engagement in extemporaneous speech. In responding to the second research question, 'to what extent does extemporaneous speech improves students' ability in speaking skill?'

Students were happy to express their thoughts, beliefs and their experiences in practicing the extemporaneous speech. They stated that it was a pleasant and exciting experience since it considered a new technique and the first experience, they encountered the audiences. Participant AM 03 indicated that 'extemporaneous speech is exciting since it is a new strategy; I killed my nervousness and fear, and it can develop my ideas'. Students indicated that in the first minutes they were worried and somehow shy, then after they relaxed and it gets much comfortable. Participant ME 02 said that 'it is a new strategy; I like it because I can talk freely and it is beneficial regardless of my shyness at first'. Further, EFL undergraduates were asked about the extent that extemporaneous speech can help in developing and enhancing their speaking skill's ability. They informed the researcher that extemporaneous speech provides them with the chance to develop their speaking skills, makes them more focused as well as construct new sentences. One of them said: "Yes, to a large extent. It gives me the chance to develop my speaking skills". Another one stated that: "It develops my speaking skills, and makes me more confident. I can focus on my topic and vocabulary when I engage in this speech". Also, the number of sentences and expressions are increased and improved after involving in the process of delivering extemporaneous speeches. Participant FA 04 stated that 'extemporaneous speech provides me with the chance to develop my speaking skills and speak more fluently and communicate my ideas well'.

Furthermore, the findings showed that they obtained confidence in speaking after practice. Likewise, extemporaneous speech assisted them in improving and developing their abilities in speaking skills as well as providing them with confidence in expressing their ideas freely. Participants Am 01 mentioned that 'it provides me with confidence, and allows me to express myself freely'. Moreover, extemporaneous speech improved their communicative abilities in speaking skills since it stimulates them to use the stored data in their minds to use them in a proper context. Also, it provides them with self-confidence, which is essential to communicate and interact in communicative situations. According to students' perspectives and experiences, they indicated that although they were reluctant and sometimes can say nothing, extemporaneous speech is a pleasant activity that assists them in improving their communicative abilities and enhance self-confidence. Participants SU 05 added "extemporaneous gives me confidence. It helps me to express myself and feeling, and it is something new for me". This was a common belief and opinion of the five participants involved in the study. This justified their eagerness and readiness in engagement in extemporaneous speech.

### **Discussion**

The central theme of the study was to examine students' engagement in extemporaneous speech, as well as to investigate to what extent extemporaneous speech assist in developing students speaking skills abilities. The findings of this part were derived from the observation and interviews conducted with the course participants. Regarding the results of the observation, the researcher found that most of the students were happy and pleasant to engage in extemporaneous speech. This appeared through their interests and preparation to involve in delivering and presenting their speeches. Few were stimulated and courageous to present speeches. The analysis of the interviews revealed several findings. The coincidence themes that stemmed from the interviews were variants. The first theme that sprang from the analysis of the unstructured interviews as follow: Engagement in extemporaneous speech can improve students' ability in speaking skill, increase the utterances and expressions and enhance their confidence. The findings extracted from both techniques can be summarized

as undergraduate English language major students of Al-Quds Open University engage pleasantly in extemporaneous speech. Furthermore, it provides students with vocabulary, pronunciation and bridges the gap between the students' and their peers as well as enhancing students' confidence. In responding to questions of the interview, one could touch the similarity and interchangeability in their stories regarding engagement in extemporaneous speech. Engagement in extemporaneous speech could improve their abilities in speaking skills, increase the number of expressions and utterances, and communicate with their peers and instructor without hesitation inside the class in English language, as well as reinforce their self-confidence.

### **Findings**

The observation of students' engagement in extemporaneous speech uncovered that students engaged pleasantly and happily. Even though it was only one lecture that students involved, shy and hesitant students engaged pleasantly which was an indicator of the positive impact of this activity on students' performance. Although some students faced problems in doing so, such as word choice, grammatical mistakes, and mispronouncing some sounds. It was clear from participants' responses to the interview questions that such activity would provide them with the capacity to improve their speaking abilities as well as enhancing their confidence. Engagement in extemporaneous speech provides students with the opportunity to enhance their communicative abilities and increase their utterances from their own point of view. Moreover, it reinforces a vital aspect in communication and speech delivery which is self-confidence. Such a thing is significant, mainly when we deal with foreign language learners since self-confidence is essential in confronting and addressing audiences.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The researcher in this study targeted purposively only one class of English Language Department, which is considered as a small sample bulk. Therefore, future research should involve several sections to assure gaining a larger sample. Moreover, the current study is a descriptive qualitative case study describing students' perceptions and beliefs in engagement in extemporaneous speech. Consequently, future research should address this phenomenon by conducting an empirical study.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Upon the findings of the study, the researcher inferred that extemporaneous speech is a proper and practical activity that allows students to develop and improve students' capacity in speaking and oral communication. Also, it approves as a successful technique in enhancing students' confidence which is necessary to stimulate and encourage students to communicate freely without reluctance and hesitation. The analysis of obtained data demonstrated the benefit of students' engagement in the extemporaneous speech, which helped them to progress and improve in their speaking skills across presentations and speeches of extemporaneous speech. A considerable development related to their nonverbal behavior, followed by the organization of ideas and thoughts then communication which had and left positive and critical perspectives and beliefs on constructing confidence. Moreover, the findings revealed that students believed strongly that this type of speech delivery, extemporaneous speech, assists them in improving their speaking abilities, increasing their utterances and enhance their confidence. Accordingly, it is essential to exert more efforts to conduct more extemporaneous speeches in classes to provide students with more experience and training as a result of its efficiency in improving students' abilities in speaking skills. Therefore, this technique or type of speech delivery is recommended to be involved and introduced in oral communication courses as an efficient technique and strategy to be performed to achieve the instructional goals of the course, which assist students in their future careers.

### **Future Research**

As illustrated in the literature review, the existent research on students' engagement in extemporaneous speech is rare and insufficient. Researchers and scholars in speaking skills examined variant elements participating in development students' abilities in speaking skills. Unfortunately, the level of students still low and weak, and the engagement of students in extemporaneous speech has been ignored in the literature. Hence, it is essential to test and explore this field in future research and conducting similar studies in different parts of the world. In future research, it should be much concern to explore the effect of large audiences on students' extemporaneous speech performance. Also, investigation of the connection between extemporaneous speech and development of communicative abilities would be an amazing area to investigate quantitatively in future research. Finally, the researcher hopes that the findings hint the practitioners of tertiary education to adopt and utilize extemporaneous speech in oral communication courses in order to develop students' abilities in speaking skill.

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