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## Exploring Malian EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Practices in Developing Malian EFL Learners' Speaking Skills: Case of High Schools

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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the pedagogical practices employed by Malian EFL teachers to enhance students' speaking skills. Recognizing that a primary objective in language learning is the ability to speak the language, this research focuses on how Malian educators facilitate this aspect of language acquisition. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study involves the observation of thirty lessons conducted by ten Malian EFL teachers. The aim is to identify the specific strategies and activities utilized to foster speaking skills among learners. The findings reveal a significant gap in the use of activities designed to promote speaking. In 70% of the observed lessons, such activities were notably absent. Conversely, in 20% of the sessions, techniques such as role-play, discussions, and debates were employed. Additionally, information gap activities and games were incorporated in 10% of the lessons. The data further indicate a predominance of non-communicative activities, accounting for 67% of the observed practices, whereas communicative activities constituted only 33%. These results suggest that while some communicative methods are present in Malian EFL classrooms, there is a substantial reliance on non-communicative practices, which may hinder the development of effective speaking skills. This study underscores the need for a more balanced integration of communicative activities to better support language learners in achieving fluency and competence in speaking.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical practices, Speaking skills, EFL teachers, Mali, Communicative activities.

### Mali'deki İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğreten Öğretmenlerin Pedagojik Uygulamalarının Mali EFL Öğrencilerinin Konuşma Becerilerini Geliştirmedeki Rolü: Lise Örneği

### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Mali'deki İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreten öğretmenlerin öğrencilerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirmek için kullandıkları pedagojik uygulamaları incelemektedir. Dil öğrenmenin başlıca hedeflerinden birinin dili konuşabilme yetisi olduğu göz önüne alındığında, bu araştırma, Malili eğitimcilerin dil ediniminin bu yönünü nasıl kolaylaştırdıklarına odaklanmaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma metodolojisi benimsenerek, on Malili İngilizce öğretmenin verdiği otuz ders gözlemlenmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı, öğrencilerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirmek için kullanılan belirli stratejileri ve aktiviteleri belirlemektir. Bulgular, konuşmayı teşvik eden aktivitelerin kullanımında önemli bir eksiklik olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Gözlemlenen derslerin %70'inde bu tür aktiviteler belirgin bir şekilde yoktu. Buna karşılık, oturumların %20'sinde rol yapma, tartışmalar ve münazaralar gibi teknikler kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca, derslerin %10'unda bilgi boşluğu aktiviteleri ve oyunlar dahil edilmiştir. Veriler ayrıca, gözlemlenen uygulamaların %67'sini iletişimsel olmayan aktivitelerin oluşturduğunu, %33'ünü ise iletişimsel aktivitelerin oluşturduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlar, Malili İngilizce sınıflarında bazı iletişimsel yöntemlerin mevcut olmasına rağmen, etkili konuşma becerilerinin gelişimini engelleyebilecek önemli ölçüde iletişimsel olmayan uygulamalara bağımlılık olduğunu

*göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, dil öğrencilerinin akıcılık ve konuşma becerilerini kazanmalarını daha iyi desteklemek için iletişimsel aktivitelerin daha dengeli bir şekilde entegrasyonunun gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.*

**Keywords:** Pedagogik uygulamalar, Konuşma becerileri, İngilizce öğretmenleri, Mali, İletişimsel aktiviteler

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the oral form of language. It is the form of language that is acquired in first language acquisition. We learn to talk before we learn to write. Some factors contribute to the development of the speaking skills. It involves knowledge of pronunciation and one's ability to articulate language correctly; it also consists of the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Modern language teaching methodologies require the development of what Hymes referred to as communicative competence. Kurum's 2017 definition of speaking is comprehensive, suggesting it is more than just constructing sentences with correct grammar. It spans the mechanics of speech, its functions, pragmatics, and social interactions.

Experts universally agree that speaking a language is learned best through interaction. Teachers should aim to foster an environment where students engage in genuine communication through relevant tasks and activities. Doing so can help students' speaking proficiency. Activities like discussions, role-playing, simulations, and information gaps are just a few techniques to enhance communication skills.

Numerous studies have explored ways to enhance the speaking abilities of EFL students. In 2015, Afrizal conducted a study to investigate using the Information Gap Technique (I.G.T.) to improve the speaking skills of EFL students in the English Department at Almuslim University in Indonesia. The study aimed to implement I.G.T. and demonstrate its effects on students' speaking skills in the same department. The research was done during the second semester of the academic year. The results have revealed that I.G.T. implementation has had a significant impact on improving students' speaking skills.

Similarly, Defrioka (2017) conducted the same study to demonstrate the effect of using Information gap activities in teaching speaking. After data analysis, he also concluded that 'using information gap activities in speaking class for eight meetings in two cycles, [...] Information Gap activities can improve the students' speaking ability' (p.125).

Additionally, Ismaili and Bajrami (2016) conducted the same study on elementary-level students at university to see the effectiveness of I.G.T. in increasing speaking competence. He concluded that information gap activities helped his students to improve their speaking skills. He also argued that 'information activities is much more efficient than conventional techniques for teaching speaking skills to elementary level students' (p.616).

Considering the studies above, there is a consistent pattern suggesting the positive effects of the Information Gap Technique (I.G.T.) on enhancing speaking skills among EFL students at different academic levels and contexts. Afrizal (2015), Defrioka (2017), and Ismaili and Bajrami (2016) all concluded that the implementation of I.G.T. in their respective settings resulted in noticeable improvements in students' speaking abilities.

Communicative activities such as role-plays, discussions, games, and information gap activities are considered practical activities for developing speaking skills. Littlewood (1981) divides these activities into two categories: functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Functional communication activities are geared towards teaching students to convey specific communicative intents, such as invitations or apologies. On the other hand, social interaction activities delve deeper, pushing students to consider both the social and functional implications of language (Littlewood, 1981). Richards and Rodgers (1986, p.76) further elucidate:

"Functional communication activities encompass tasks like comparing picture sets, determining the sequence of events from images, identifying omissions in maps or illustrations, and one student guiding

another, separated by a barrier, in drawing or map completion. Social interaction activities span conversations, role plays, simulations, skits, and debates".

Communicative activities (role-plays, discussions, games and information gap activities) benefit EFL learners because they have fewer opportunities to use the target language outside classrooms. They are praised as practical activities for developing speaking skills. Such activities enable learners to use language that emphasises content rather than structure, encouraging authentic, practical application (Ismaili & Bajrami, 2016). Prabhu (1987, as cited in Ortiz-Neira, 2019) suggests that these tasks facilitate the transfer of specific details from one party or format to another, often necessitating data translation into or from the language.

Role-playing in language education involves students simulating different social scenarios and roles to practice language usage. It is described as an activity where students adopt diverse roles and enact situations typical of those roles (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Role-playing has also been highlighted as a technique to foster oral fluency (Harmer, 2001). Liao (1997) elaborates that in a classroom setup, an information gap task arises when one party possesses data that another lacks, underscoring the inherently communicative nature of such exercises.

The research question guiding this investigation is: What pedagogical practices are used by Malian EFL teachers for developing speaking skills? It is hypothesised that Malian EFL teachers do not use appropriate pedagogical practices to develop speaking skills. This study aims to identify the activities used by Malian EFL teachers to develop speaking skills.

## **METHOD**

This study employs the qualitative research method, namely the observational method, to investigate the activities used by Malian EFL teachers.

The participants of this study are Malian EFL teachers. Ten (10) teachers were observed while teaching English. In all, 30 lessons have been observed. The researcher used an observation checklist to check if the behaviour listed occurred during the instruction.

The data was then analysed quantitatively. In other words, it receives a data transformation process, "quantifying" (Dornyei, 2011) or "quantising" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Dornyei (2011) clarifies that the prevalent integration strategy is data transformation – converting qualitative data to quantitative form or vice versa (p.269). Essentially, it is about switching one form of data to another, facilitating statistical and thematic analyses. Sandelowski (2000, p.253) further breaks down "quantitising" as the procedure wherein qualitative data undergoes quantitative processing, turning it into quantitative data. It involves converting textual or visual data into numerical items or variables, as detailed by both Sandelowski (2000, p.253) and Dornyei (2011, p.270). In brief, the study employed qualitative and quantitative analyses to evaluate the data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

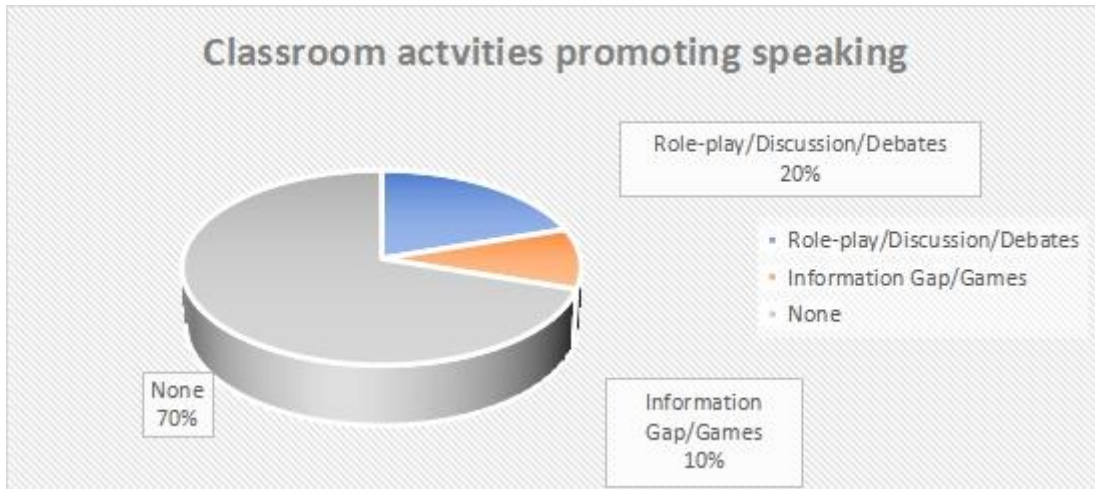
## **RESULTS**

### **Activities used by Malian EFL teachers to promote speaking**

#### **Item 1: Activities promoting speaking**

- a)  Role-play
- b)  Discussion
- c)  Information gap
- d)  Debates

- e)  Games
- f)  None



***Pie-chart 1: Activities promoting speaking***

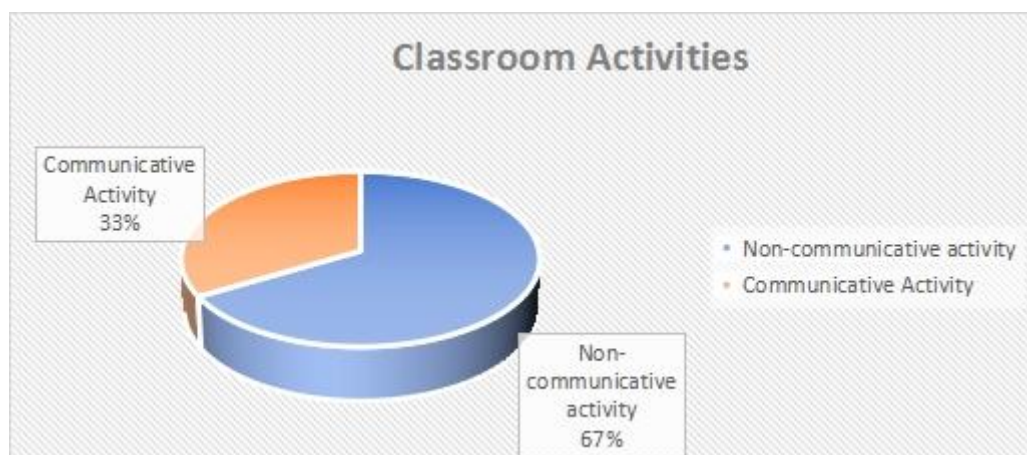
Many activities can promote speaking and help improve communication. Activities designed to reach the goal of communicative language teaching are perfect for promoting speaking. The researcher has chosen some of them to determine what teachers use in their classrooms. Teachers were observed on that basis. The pie-chart 1 indicates that in most of the lectures observed (70%), none of the activities for promoting speaking are used. In twenty (20%) of the observed lectures, role-play, discussion and debates are used in the teaching processes. Information gap activity and games are used in 10%.

It is common for teachers to modify or adapt teaching methods to suit their student's needs and learning styles. However, it is essential for teachers to understand the underlying principles and techniques of the method in use and to be mindful of how their modifications might affect the method's effectiveness. Significant departures from the method's principles and techniques may sometimes reduce effectiveness or lead to unintended consequences. In such cases, it might be necessary for the teacher to reconsider their approach and align it more closely with the method's principles and techniques.

### **Nature of classroom activities used by Malian EFL teachers**

#### **Item 2: Classroom activities**

- a)  Non-communicative activity
- b)  Communicative activity



***Pie-chart 2: Nature of classroom activities***

In a language classroom, communicative and non-communicative activities are essential to helping students develop their language skills. Communicative activities focus on using language as a means of communication. These activities aim to provide students with opportunities to use the language in realistic, authentic situations that closely mimic real-life communication. In short, these activities help students develop their speaking, listening, and interpersonal skills and their ability to use language in various context-appropriate ways.

On the other hand, non-communicative activities focus on language structure and form rather than communication. Examples of non-communicative activities are reading comprehension exercises. These activities help students develop their language knowledge and build the skills to use language accurately and effectively in communicative situations.

The above item aimed to determine which activities are frequently used by Malian EFL teachers in their classrooms. Teachers' lectures were observed to determine which ones are frequently used. From this perspective, the results indicate that sixty-seven (67%) of the activities in the lectures observed are non-communicative, thirty-three (33%) are communicative. It is important to note that both types of activities are essential and should be balanced in the language classroom. Meanwhile, communicative activities provide opportunities for students to use language in context. Non-communicative activities provide the foundation and support students need to use language accurately and effectively.

## **DISCUSSION**

The observation findings demonstrate that enough is not done to develop learners' speaking skills in Malian high schools at the classroom level. For example, sixty-seven of the activities (67%) done in class are non-communicative (grammar drills...) against thirty-three (33%), which are communicative. Teachers should focus more on designing and using activities that promote the development of speaking rather than focusing on the grammar structures of the language. Students could be perfect in a foreign language but unable to speak the target language due to sufficient exposure to language patterns rather than to encourage them to use the language. Furthermore, a significant part of the lectures is allotted to writing and reading skills; 72% of the classroom instruction is about them. Only twenty-eight (28%) are about the speaking and listening skills. Learners need opportunities to actively use and practice the language in real-life situations, both inside and outside of the classroom, to build their confidence and improve their language proficiency. Additionally, if learners know that teachers will explain them in French, they will not try to understand English lessons.

Overall, most of the classroom activities do not promote speaking skills. For example, seventy per cent of the activities (70%) teachers use do not promote speaking skills. Only thirty per cent of the activities

(30%) are about promoting speaking skills. Therefore, most courses are about grammar drills, vocabulary building, and translation exercises.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the teaching practices of Malian EFL teachers regarding activities aimed at promoting speaking skills and the balance between communicative and non-communicative activities in the classroom. The observed predominance of lectures lacking specific activities targeting speaking skills highlights a potential area for improvement in actively fostering oral communication among students. While role-play, discussions, and debates are recognised as practical tools for promoting speaking, their relatively low frequency of use suggests opportunities for greater integration into classroom instruction.

Furthermore, the significant prevalence of non-communicative activities compared to communicative ones underscores the need for a more balanced approach to classroom dynamics. While non-communicative activities build a foundation of language structure and form, communicative activities allow students to apply language skills in authentic contexts. A more equitable distribution of these activities could enhance students' language proficiency and ensure a comprehensive language learning experience.

Overall, this study emphasises the importance of reflective teaching practices and continuous professional development for EFL teachers. By aligning teaching methods with the underlying principles of communicative language teaching and striving for a balanced integration of activities that promote language accuracy and communication skills, educators can enhance the effectiveness of language instruction and better support the linguistic development of their students.

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