

The Effects of Negotiated Syllabus on Iranian EFL Learners' speaking fluency and Self-efficacy

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Abstract

The history of pedagogy and education shows that syllabus has always had a crucial role in the success of every course. Nowadays, the course designers allocate an especial room for learners' needs which are continuously changing in an expanding world. This demands a new vision in education through cooperation with others via negotiation for syllabus. Although a great body of research has been conducted in this area, little studies have been made about negotiated syllabus. This study attempted to investigate possible correlation between negotiated syllabus, speaking fluency and self-efficacy. To do so, sixty-two participants from intermediate level were chosen based on the results of PET and an oral interview to make sure that they enjoy the same level of proficiency. Then, they were randomly divided into two groups. The E-group was treated based on negotiated syllabus. The control group was exposed to a conventional speaking instruction. Finally, both groups were examined again as post-tests. To collect required data, four instruments including: The PET, an 8-items Academic Self-efficacy scale questionnaire, Speaking PET test and Real-Time Analysis of Speech Fluency were utilized. The results indicated that negotiated syllabus developed learners' speaking fluency. Also some improvement was observed in self-efficacy of E-group.

Keywords: Negotiation, Syllabus, Negotiated Syllabus, Speaking Fluency, Need Analysis and Self-Efficacy.

Introduction

From white's (1988) view point, syllabus is the specification and ordering of content of a course therefore, it can be said that the foundation for a good course is a good syllabus. A course syllabus can serve as a highly efficient facilitator of student learning (Grunert, 1997; Pastorino, 1999) and it will be successful if learners' needs are met at the end. So it is very important if learners have very well-defined purposes for learning English. As the target of any courses is to response learners needs, this issue has got a significant role in the syllabus design of any language learning methods. Diversity of learners' groups who are from different cultural backgrounds, different level of proficiency, different available time for studying, diverse individual factors and needs have called for a new model of syllabus that can cover all above mentioned factors, for which using fixed and constant syllabuses will not be completely responsible. According to above mentioned issues, the role of negotiation for adapting the content, procedure and other aspects of syllabus emerges to finish the course successfully. According to Nation and Macalister (2010) in a negotiated syllabus both the teacher and students are involved to take part in the process of decision making at many

stages of a curriculum design process. Breen and Littlejohn (2000) list conditions in which a negotiated syllabus is almost necessary:

1. Where the teacher and students have different backgrounds.
2. Where time is short and the most useful choices must be made.
3. Where there is a very diverse group of students and there is a need to find common ground.
4. Where premier needs analysis is impossible.
5. Where there is no course book.
6. Where the students' past experiences must be part of the course.
7. Where the course is open-ended and exploratory.

So, whenever a teacher faces one or more of above mentioned items, they can employ a negotiated syllabus.

The other variable that can be effective in success of the course is the matter of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1994) self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their abilities to produce specific levels of performance that affect their lives. According to his view self-efficacy determines the beliefs that people have about their feelings, thought, motivations and behaviors. Zimmerman & Bandura (1994) argue that for academic activities Learners' efficacy can be increased in quality by the belief that they are capable to regulate their own learning procedure. They state that guiding learners to set goals makes their self-efficacy and academic performance stronger. It was assumed that a direct negotiation in a speaking class would enhance enthusiasm on the part of students for practicing speaking and, accordingly, develop a more favorable attitude to learning English in general.

Review of the Related Literature

Negotiated Syllabus

Pienemann (1985) believes that syllabus designers are pretty detached from the real learners in the classrooms. Such a problem lead researchers to what is called “negotiated syllabus”. White (1988) indicates that such a syllabus provides joint participation by the teacher and learners and requires followed methods and objectives to be related with the decision-making. Breen (2000) comes to this issue with more specific perspective and stresses that as a framework, a negotiated syllabus identifies “the range of decisions that can be open to negotiation, the steps in a negotiation cycle and the elements or levels in the classroom curriculum to which the negotiation cycle can be applied”.

Need Analysis

Historically, the beginning point of Needs analysis was introduced in 1970s (West, 1998). McKillip (1987) defines needs as the value judgments. Need has always had a crucial role in the process of designing and accomplishment of any language courses, whether it is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or General English (GE) course. Iwai et al. (1999) indicate the word need analysis involves activities aimed for collecting information that are considered as the basic framework for developing a curriculum to answer the needs of a specific group of language learners. We can divide the term need analyses into formal and informal. Informal needs analyses have been managed by instructors for assessing the elements of language in which their student should be master on. It can be said that cause teachers have always intended to satisfy the necessities and needs of their learners during the courses, many approaches were born and then gradually replaced by each other. However, Iwai et al. (1999) believe that formal needs analysis is relatively new to the field of language teaching.

Speaking Fluency

Brumfit (1984) sees fluency as something that exists in a relationship of opposition with ‘accuracy’, describing it as real language use. The other definition of fluency was made by Day and Shapson (1987). They indicate fluency as the ease and flow that exists in second language speaker’s speech in comparison with native speakers. Fluency research has since broadly taken two paths: the cognitive science route and the linguistic route. Another distinction in fluency was made by Lennon (1990) who divided fluency into broad and narrow. In the broad view, fluency is considered as general proficiency, which has both accuracy and complexity of production inside in the narrow view, fluency is limited to temporal measures. In this case the variables like length and number of pauses and stoppages and repetitions are considered.

The Study

Speaking as one of the main skills of a language can be considered as the most important sign of a learner’s proficiency in target language. A body of research has been conducted in the area of speaking (Chambers, 1997; Koponen & Riggenbach, 2000; Fillmore, 1979; Brumfit, 1984; Segalowitz, 2010). But, up until now, Speaking fluency has got little attention in Iranian curriculum and the most use of syllabuses in this case are from out of the country, which cause many problems such as inconsistency with culture, learners’ background knowledge and so on. Subsequently, these elements lead both the teacher and language learners to a complicated situation, in which the context has inconsistency with the

content of the course. It is frequently said that beliefs that people have about their abilities to make special performance in target situations can affect their ability and develop their skills (Bandura, 1994; Schunk, 1990; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005). This matter of beliefs, which is called “Self-efficacy” can even affect people’s educational achievements and improve them too (Dörnyei, 2001; Ehrman, 1996; Gardner and McIntyre, 1993; Schmidt, Boraie & Kassabgy, 1996; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989).

According to Nation and Macalister (2010, 150) a negotiated syllabus involves the steps of:

1. Negotiating the goals, content, format and assessment of the course.
2. Implementing these negotiated decisions.
3. Evaluating the effect of the implementation in terms of outcomes and the way the implementation was done.

This then should lead to a return to step 1.

Negotiated Syllabus and speaking Skill:

Proponents of this innovation believe that the syllabus which comes out from the negotiation process is more flexible and relevant to learners’ needs and hence it is more motivating and allows learners to play a more informed and self-directive purpose in their learning (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). Meanwhile, “negotiation creates a situation in which there are chances and opportunities for learner to articulate and, consequently refine their prior perceptions, purposes and intentions as reference points for new learning” (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000) and allows for changing the perceptions and thinking power in the learners, without specifying particular content, methodology, structure, or grammar. In relation to speaking domain, Lo and Hyland (2007) suggested that if we provide opportunities for students to engage them at a more meaningful level with the language through refocusing their speaking class activities to address them to their social and cultural context as well as designing speaking tasks and activities which have meaning and interest to them and offer opportunities for social interaction and self-expression” they will be motivated and engaged and their speaking skills will be enhanced.

Self-Efficacy and speaking Skill:

More than two decades of research have clearly shown that self-efficacy influences academic motivation, learning and achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). Nowadays, self-beliefs have drawn more attention in the field of language speaking. Speaking is self-beliefs that underlie student motivation in speaking. In other words, it can be defined as the belief about one's ability to speak. According to Hayes (1996) in speaking skill; cognitive constituents are associated with affective and motivational factors which can affect the students' speaking. Speaking self-efficacy is an individual's personal belief in his ability to speak. Within the motivational component, self-efficacy has a significant effect on speaking (Pajares&Valiente, 2006). Learners with high self-efficacy see difficult speaking tasks as challenging and work attentively to master them (Lavelle, 2005; Lavelle, 2006).

Statement of the problem

Up until now, a great number of syllabuses have been offered in EFL and many teachers have utilized them in the classrooms, and EFL has experienced ups and downs. The addressed problem is whether negotiated syllabus can take parts to burden some speaking difficulties of EFL learners on one hand and learners' self-efficacy on the other hand. To respond to this problem this study explores investigates the effect of negotiated syllabus on EFL speaking ability enhancement. Besides, it investigates that how negotiated syllabus can affect learners' self-efficacy. Therefore, the problem and purpose of this study are examined in the form of the specific questions as follows:

Research Questions

1. Does negotiated syllabus have any positive effect on the Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability?
2. Is there a relation between negotiated syllabus and the Self-efficacy of the Iranian EFL learners?

Method

Participants

Sixty-two Iranian adult language learners participated in this study.

Materials

In this research, four instruments were utilized:

1. The Preliminary English Test (PET): as pre-test, The PET was administered in order to prove that the two groups enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency and compare learners' Language ability.
2. Real-Time Analysis of Speech Fluency (Yaruss, Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 1998)
3. Academic self-efficacy questionnaire (Wood, R., & Locke, E., 1987)
4. Speaking PET test

Design

In this study two groups from adult EFL learner were randomly assigned as experimental and the other as the control group. The pretest was administered before the treatment and posttest was administered after the treatment.

Procedures

Participants were chosen from Kharazmi institution in Tehran. They had been already ranked by institution in level of proficiency as intermediate. But at the first stage, a PET test was taken from both experimental and control groups for making sure that they serve pretty the same level of proficiency. For the selection of a homogeneous group of participants, their scores on the general proficiency test were summarized, and the mean and standard deviation were computed; the learners whose scores were less than one standard deviation away from the mean score were selected for the study, and the examinees who presented extremely high or low levels of proficiency were removed from the study. Besides, an academic self-efficacy questionnaire including 8 items were used to measure the level of (ASE) in both groups as pre-test and post-test, and 2 items which had unacceptable reliability index were excluded. ASE questionnaire has 1 to 8 numbers for grading, and number 0 indicates that test taker is definitely not able to do the item and number 10 indicates that test taker is definitely able to do the item. Besides, a Real-Time Analysis of Speech Fluency was conducted in both groups as pre-test and post-test to grade their level of fluency in speaking at the first and last stage of treatment.

Treatment

Both experimental group (E-Group) and control group (C-Group) participated in an English language course which finished in 12 sessions (1 hour and a half a day, three days a week) including administering pretest and posttest and pure treatment sessions(out of class

time). The experimental group received the treatment based on the negotiated syllabus, but the control group was exposed to conventional speaking instruction as the teacher decided.

Results and Data Analysis

Table 1 showed that the reliability of PET, consisted of 100 items, was estimated as 0.91 using KR-21 which is quite high. Also the inter-rater reliability indices of PET speaking pre-test and post-test, consisted of 4 parts each, turned out to be 0.84 and 0.85 respectively via performing Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Moreover, the first draft of self-efficacy questionnaire included of 8 items and 2 items which had unacceptable reliability index were excluded.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for the Instruments

Test	No. of Items	Method	Reliability index
PET	85	KR-21	0.91
PET Speaking Test (Pre-test)	4	Inter-rater	0.84
PET Speaking Test (Post-test)	4	Inter-rater	0.85
Self-efficacy Questionnaire	6	Cronbach Alpha	0.80

Homogeneity Tests Results

The mean, standard deviation and standard error mean of both groups are represented in Table 2. As evident from Table 2, the performance of the experimental group ($M = 75.22$, $SD = 8.78$) is not considerably different from the control group ($M = 74.00$, $SD = 8.91$) in terms of language proficiency.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Experimental and Control Groups' PET Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
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Experimental	32	75.22	8.783	.791	.365
Control	30	74.00	8.917	.672	-.327

Table 3 below reflects the results of independent sample *t*-test that was conducted to compare the experimental and control groups' proficiency scores. Table 3 shows that the hypothesis of equal of variances was met as the significance for Levene's Test (.75) was above .05.

Table 3: *Independent Samples Test for PET Scores*

Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means				
		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	
<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>					
Equal variances assumed	.102	.751	.54	6	.590	1.219
		2	0			
Equal variances not assumed			.54	59.611	.590	1.219
		2				

Independent samples *t*-test results, as shown in Table 3 above, revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the means between the two groups on PET, $t(60) = .54, p > .05$, in which the *t* observed was less than the *t* critical (2.00). Hence, it was concluded that the students in the two groups were homogeneous regarding English language proficiency.

Investigation of the First Research Question

The purpose of the first research question of this study was to examine whether negotiated syllabus has any significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. In order to answer this research question, independent sample *t*-test was used. Before discussing the results of *t*-test, the related descriptive statistics are given in Table 4. Based on Table 4, the mean and standard deviation of the experimental ($\bar{x} = 4.06, SD = .87$) and control ($\bar{x} = 3.88, SD = 1.08$) groups do not differ on pre-test. On the other hand the results in Table 4 indicates that, on post-test of speaking fluency, the students in the experimental

group ($\bar{x} = 5.31$, $SD = 1.26$) have performed better than those in the control group ($\bar{x} = 4.49$, $SD = 1.24$). Besides, Table 4 reflects that Skewness and Kurtosis of the four sets of speaking fluency scores are not beyond +/- 1.96 and therefore have normal distribution.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of Two Group's Scores on the Pre-test and Post-test of Speaking Fluency*

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pre-test	Experimental	32	4.062	.876	-.631	-.162
	Control	30	3.888	1.081	-.393	-.953
Post-test	Experimental	32	5.314	1.264	-.020	-.772
	Control	30	4.499	1.249	.147	-.640

Table 5 represents the results of independent *t*-test that was carried out to compare control and experimental groups' speaking fluency scores on the pre-test. Table 5 indicates that the assumption of equal of variances was met ($p > .05$).

Table 5: *Independent Samples T-test for Speaking Fluency (Pre-test)*

Levene's Test for Variances			T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	2.114	.151	.699	60	.487	.174
Equal variances not assumed			.694	55.88	.491	.174

Independent *t*-test results, as appeared in Table 5 above, showed that there was not any statistically significant differences in speaking fluency scores for experimental ($\bar{x} = 4.06$) and control ($\bar{x} = 3.88$) groups ($t(60) = .69$, $p > .05$), in which the *t* observed (.69) was below the *t* critical (2.00). So, we came to the conclusion that the students in the two groups have the

same level of speaking fluency before facing the treatment of the study i.e., negotiated syllabus.

Further, the results of independent *t*-test that was used to compare control and experimental groups' speaking fluency scores on the post-test are represented in Table 6. A quick look at Table 5 hands on that the assumption of equal of variances was not violated ($p > .05$).

Table 6: *Independent Samples T-test for Speaking Fluency (Post-test)*

Levene's Test for Variances			T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	.011	.916	2.550	60	.013	.81473
Equal variances not assumed			2.551	59.824	.013	.81473

T-test (Table 6 above) found a statistically significant difference in speaking fluency scores for experimental ($\bar{x} = 5.31$) and control ($\bar{x} = 4.49$) groups ($t(60) = 2.55, p < .05$), in which the *t* observed (2.55) was larger than the *t* critical (2.00). Therefore first null hypothesis that states negotiated syllabus has no significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency was rejected, and it was claimed that negotiated syllabus develops Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. In fact, the students in the experimental group have performed better than the control group with the mean difference of .81.

Investigation of the Second Research Question

The second research question of this study sought to find out whether negotiated syllabus has any significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. With the purpose of answering this research question, independent sample *t*-test was performed. Before discussing the results of *t*-test, the related descriptive statistics are given in Table 7. Table 7 shows that the mean and standard deviation of the experimental ($\bar{x} = 48.22, SD = 12.28$) and control ($\bar{x} = 49.83, SD = 14.17$) groups are not very different from each other on pre-test.

Instead the results in Table 7 shows that the students in the experimental group ($\bar{x} = 60.53$, $SD = 14.25$) have demonstrated quite better than those in the control group ($\bar{x} = 51.23$, $SD = 13.73$) on post-test. Besides, based on Table 7, Skewness and Kurtosis of the four sets of self-efficacy scores are not beyond ± 1.96 and then the assumption of normality for applying parametric analysis is not violated.

Table 7: *Descriptive Statistics for Two Group's Self-efficacy Scores (Pre-test and Post-test)*

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
					Kurtosis	
Pre-test	Experimental	32	48.22	12.28	.203	-.443
	Control	30	49.83	14.17	.623	-.084
Post-test	Experimental	32	60.53	14.25	.124	-.503
	Control	30	51.23	13.73	.832	.257

The results of independent *t*-test that was used to compare control and experimental groups' self-efficacy scores on the pre-test are provided in Table 8. Table 8 shows that we enjoy the assumption of equality of variances since the significance value associated with Levene's test is less than .05.

Table 8: *Independent Samples T-test for Self-efficacy (Pre-test)*

Levene's Test for Variances			T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	.619	.434	-.480	60	.633	-1.615
Equal variances not assumed			-.478	57.525	.635	-1.615

Table 8 above shows that there was not found any statistically significant differences in self-efficacy measures for experimental ($\bar{x} = 48.22$) and control ($\bar{x} = 49.83$) groups ($t(60) = .48, p > .05, t_{observed} < t_{critical} (2.00)$). As a result, we concluded that the students in the two groups had the same level of self-efficacy before experiencing any special instruction.

Additionally, in order to compare control and experimental groups' self-efficacy scores on the post-test, independent t -test that was conducted (Table 9). As can be seen in Table 9, the assumption of equal of variances was not violated ($p > .05$).

Table 9: *Independent Samples T-test for Self-efficacy (Post-test)*

Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means					
		Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed		.120	.730	2.612	60	.011	9.298
Equal variances not assumed				2.615	59.952	.011	9.298

Independent t -test (Table 9 above) detected a statistically significant difference in self-efficacy measures for experimental ($\bar{x} = 60.53$) and control ($\bar{x} = 51.23$) groups ($t(60) = 2.61, p < .05$), in which the t observed exceeded the t critical (2.00); as a result we rejected the second null hypothesis and claimed that negotiated syllabus improves the Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. In fact, the students in the experimental group have surpassed the students in the control group with the mean difference of 9.29 out of 100.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study attempted to investigate the effects of negotiated syllabuses on speaking fluency and self-efficacy in Iranian EFL learners. The first question investigated the effects of negotiated syllabus on speaking fluency. Findings showed that the procedure that was applied in the syllabus of the course can have positive effects on performance of the students. Also negotiation had significant effects while it was running in the class on speaking as a part of speaking activity. Besides, since students took parts in the process of selecting contents of the course, they showed higher motivation in implementation and performance of the syllabus, especially for topics of speaking.

The second research question examined the effects of negotiated syllabus on self-efficacy. The result indicated that a well-done negotiation for syllabus can improve self-efficacy as the students can make better use of their potentials and their judgmental vision of their abilities increased as a result of the tight negotiation and subsequently reduction of affective negative factors such as anxiety about self-expression, fear of speaking about ideas in front of people. So, Based on the results of this research, it is concluded that having a process syllabus with the focus on learners' need, cultural background and interests leads to higher level of self-efficacy and subsequently speaking fluency. This means that the enhancement of learners' self-efficacy will increase their level of fluency and attention to learners' needs, cultural background and interests on the one hand, and engaging them with the negotiation for content, procedure, and the way of assessment of the course raise learners' beliefs about their ability.

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