



The Impact of Dogme on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Recently, globally designed ELT coursebooks have come under critical scrutiny for failing to meet language learners' communicative needs and goals [1]. Consequently, Dogme ELT, a conversation-driven approach, has been recommended to better align with learners' needs and serve their interests and desires [2]. This study aimed to explore the impact of Dogme on the speaking skills of Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this, a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was employed. Specifically, 60 EFL intermediate learners from the private Vesta English Institute in Tehran, Iran, were selected using convenience sampling and divided into an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). The Oxford Proficiency Test was administered to both groups to assess their homogeneity in terms of language proficiency. Simultaneously, Weir's TEEP Attribute Speaking Scales [3] were used to evaluate learners' oral productions by two experienced TEFL raters. The experimental group received conversation-based instruction using Dogme ELT for 15 sessions of 90 minutes each, without any textbooks. In contrast, the control group underwent conventional instruction in which the teacher used the assigned textbook and covered various topics and lessons. The teacher presented the lessons from the textbook, taught each unit component, and assigned related tasks and homework. The results of the study indicated that Dogme ELT positively contributes to improvements in speaking skills ($F(1, 57) = 9.32$, $p = .003$). This study holds pedagogical implications for language teaching methodology, educators, syllabus designers, material developers, and language assessors.

Keywords: Dogme; Speaking skill; Conversation driven approach; Coursebooks

1. Introduction

Regardless of the method or approach to language teaching, materials in language courses have usually been delivered through globally designed coursebooks. However, in many cases, these coursebooks have failed to meet the needs of language learners [4]. Some scholars suggest coursebook-free language education as a way to address these shortcomings, notably Dogme ELT. The concept of Dogme ELT predates the article titled "A Dogme for EFL," proposed by Scott Thornbury [5] and published in the IATEFL issues that year. Influenced by 'transformative pedagogies,' the idea of Dogme ELT was further developed in a paper by Adrian Underhill, advocating for the avoidance of coursebooks during language instruction. Thornbury [5] agreed with Underhill, as well as with Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, who also supported moving away from textbooks. Dogme ELT has three fundamental tenets: It is conversation-centered, materials-light, and emphasizes emergent language [1]. Considering that using coursebooks primarily focused on form may not have significantly advanced learners' command of English, particularly in speaking skills, and noting that very few serious studies have been conducted in Iran to examine the effects of Dogme ELT on speaking performance, this study aims to investigate the impact of Dogme on language learners' speaking skills.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants in the study were 60 intermediate EFL students at the private Vesta English Institute in Tehran, Iran. The students who participated were informed about the purpose of the study and invited to attend a Dogme ELT lesson. There were 30 students in each group (treatment and control) who attended



the lessons at the scheduled time; the course lasted one term and focused on English speaking skills. The level of the participating students was B1, based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The students ranged in age from 18 to 28, were of mixed gender, and spoke Persian.

2.2 Design of the Study

The quasi-experimental method was used in this study. It examines two variables: the Dogme approach and course book-based language instruction, which are the two levels of the independent variable, and speaking ability as the dependent variable.

2.3 Materials

The World English course book series (Johannsen and Chase, third edition) is currently used at the Vesta Institute. There are 4 student books and 4 workbooks: *World English-Intro*, *World English-1*, *World English-2*, and *World English-3*. The participants of this study were studying *World English 3*. Each book includes 12 units of different general topics such as "Introducing oneself in English", "Transportation", "Sports", "Entertainment", "Shopping", "Nature", 'The Body', 'Food and Health', "Careers", "Transitions", etc. Each lesson includes Grammar, Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking & Pronunciation, Reading, Writing, and Video Journal, all related to the topic of the unit.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

In the first session, before any instruction, students from two intact groups of intermediate EFL learners at Vesta English Institute in Tehran, Iran, were invited to participate in this study and complete the research consent form. This institute offers conversation classes along with other four-skill courses as needed. After completing *World English 2*, students are free to choose whether to continue this course or join conversation classes. Consequently, one of the classes was a standard course book-based class, and the other was a conversation-focused class. Typically, students preparing for an exam take course book-based lessons, while those aiming to improve speaking skills attend conversation classes. Each group consisted of 30 intermediate EFL learners. The OPT Version 1 was administered to both groups during this session as a pre-test. Two raters evaluated the students' recorded oral productions, and their scores were averaged for the main analysis. The first rater was the first researcher, accompanied by another IELTS instructor with an M.A. in TEFL.

In session three, based on the principles of Dogme (which is conversation-driven, light on materials, and focused on emerging language), the treatment was conducted over 15 sessions, each lasting ninety minutes, with students meeting twice a week. Although discussion and dialogic inquiry, as two types of institutional classroom talk [6], were dominantly used in the experimental group, recitation/elicitation, instruction/exposition were employed while the teacher was giving feedback. The students nominated engaging topics aligned with their interests and needs. The class was then divided into six groups to discuss the topic for about fifteen minutes and brainstorm ideas while the teacher walked around, giving mini-lectures or providing scaffolding. After 15 minutes, the groups started discussing the topic with the entire class and interacting with members of other groups. The teacher then continued the discussion by engaging with students individually, asking questions about different aspects of the topics to encourage their opinions and insights. Usually, the discussion was enriched by interactions among the students themselves. When students struggled to produce certain words or structures, the teacher helped by providing those terms, or the students used dictionaries or searched online on their phones for linguistic or real-world information. Additionally, the teacher corrected errors, provided necessary feedback, and offered brief instructions and explanations, either through recasts or explicit feedback after activities. These explanations addressed all types of errors and gaps the learners had, including grammar, vocabulary, discourse, language functions, and more. Due to the large class size, the teacher aimed to give each student at least a few minutes to speak. For the following session, some exercises were assigned to students on certain grammar structures and vocabulary (such as synonyms, antonyms, and collocations), and language functions. Another EFL teacher with an M.A. in TEFL taught the control group using the specified textbook. That teacher followed the textbook lessons, covering each unit while

students completed related tasks and homework. Both the teacher and the students simply followed the activities in the book. Like the treatment group, the control group attended 15 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, meeting twice weekly.

Finally, in the last session, all students in both groups took the OPT speaking test. Additionally, the two raters used Weir's TEEP Attribute Speaking scales [3], assigning scores from 0 to 20. The criteria included fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and interactional strategies. Afterwards, the researcher analyzed the data from both the pre-test and post-test by entering it into SPSS software version 24.00 to address the research question of this study.

2.5 Data Analysis

Analysis of covariance was used to address the research question of this study. According to Pallant [7], ANCOVA is applied when there's a two-group pre-post-test design (for example, comparing the effects of different interventions with measurements taken before and after for each group). The scores on the pre-test are treated as a covariate to 'control' for pre-existing differences between the groups.

3. Results

A one-way ANCOVA was used to examine the effect of using Dogme ELT on the speaking skills of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The independent variable is Dogme ELT (Group), and the dependent variable is speaking skill. Participants' scores on the pretest of speaking skills served as the covariate in this analysis. The number of students, mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the means for the scores in both the experimental and control groups were calculated before presenting the ANCOVA results (see **Table 1**)

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Skill Scores on Pretest and Posttest by Group

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Pretest	Experimental	30	14.017	1.684	.307
	Control	30	13.750	1.535	.280
Posttest	Experimental	30	15.983	1.882	.343
	Control	30	14.883	1.654	.306

Table 4.1 shows that the mean of speaking skill in the experimental group ($M = 14.02$, $SD = 1.68$) and control group ($M = 13.75$, $SD = 1.53$) are close to each other on the pretest; however, the mean of speaking skill in the experimental group ($M = 15.98$, $SD = 1.88$) is much higher than the mean in the control group ($M = 14.88$, $SD = 1.65$) on the posttest.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Speaking Skill Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	134.507	2	67.254	56.188	.000	.663
Intercept	8.051	1	8.051	6.726	.012	.106



Pretest	116.357	1	116.357	97.212	.000	.630
Group	11.160	1	11.160	9.324	.003	.141
Error	68.226	57	1.197			
Total	14494.000	60				
Corrected Total	202.733	59				

Table 4.2 summarizes the results of the ANCOVA. After adjusting for the speaking skill scores on the pretest, there was a significant difference between the speaking skill scores of the two groups on the posttest, $F(1, 57) = 9.32$, $p = .003$, $p < .01$, partial eta squared = .14. Therefore, it can be claimed that

Dogme ELT can contribute to the improvement of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills. Besides, according to the results shown in Table 4.2, a strong relationship was found between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on the total speaking skill, as indicated by a p value of .000, $F(1, 57) = 97.21$, $p < .01$. This means that the speaking skill scores obtained on the pretest influenced the scores on the posttest. Additionally, Table 4.2 shows that the partial eta-squared (effect size) value is 0.64.

4. Discussion, Suggestions, and Implications

The results of this study showed that when classroom discussions focus more on dialogue and inquiry, and the students themselves select the topics, they encourage greater sharing of information and opinions, as well as increased engagement from learners. This approach also uncovers gaps in their language knowledge that can be effectively addressed. Although Dogme enhances speaking skills and provides language learners with the opportunity to communicate authentically, several important considerations remain. First, Dogme may not be suitable for learners preparing for exams. It is best suited for intermediate-plus learners who are capable of participating in discussions, or it may cause reticence among less proficient learners. Teachers need to draw learners' attention to their knowledge gaps; otherwise, they might not experience a sense of achievement, which could lead to decreased motivation. Additionally, teachers must be sufficiently skilled to scaffold learners and foster their trust and confidence. The class size should be small enough to allow everyone to participate and interact with both the teacher and peers. If the course spans multiple terms, it is advisable to coordinate between teachers to ensure coherence between previous and upcoming courses.

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