

STRATEGIES, METHODS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' ORAL COMPETENCY

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Introduction

Speaking is the process of creating and exchanging meaning in a range of circumstances using both verbal and nonverbal signals. Speaking is a key component in teaching and learning a second language. Despite its significance, teaching speaking has long been devalued by English language instructors, who have instead focused on having students memorize dialogues or repeat drills. But in the modern world, speaking instruction must aim to help pupils communicate more effectively.

The ever-growing need for good communication and professional teaching skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching and learning around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their learners achieve a good command of English. And opportunities to learn English are provided in many different ways such as through formal instruction or teaching, travelling, and study abroad, as well as through the media and the Internet. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Today learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. English has become a language that has an important role in the global community. English is considered as an international language which has been expanded to various aspects of a global society. Mastering English is very important for communicating, especially in the academic field. Employers, too, insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. So, it is important to pay attention and develop language skills in early age as much as possible. Because of the fact that English is very important in every sphere it is being given much attention to learning English language at schools. The demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever.

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has grown

enormously. It has become a dominant language and almost billion of people are utilizing The English language as a convenient one for communicate orally or in written.

More specifically, the focus has recently been on how to speak and use the language effectively. But, what does teaching speaking means? What is meant by "teaching speaking" is to teach ESL learners to:

- Produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns
- Use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language.
- Select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter.
- Organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence.
- Use language as a means of expressing values and judgments.
- Use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency.

Besides this point of view, nowadays .Teaching and learning of English as a foreign language gives priority to speaking skills. For this purpose, several methods, approaches, and techniques are being innovated and utilized in ESL and EFL classrooms.

The techniques and the methods used in teaching speaking in English assist learning this skill positively but it is confirmed that this is not enough as there are some difficulties in teaching and learning.

Students' inhibition

When a student speaks, it requires other students to have all eyes to him/her and exposure to the audience could often give students fright. They may also be worried about making mistakes.

Nothing to Say

One of the problems that the students feel really shy about is talking in front of other students; they suffer from fear of making mistakes and "losing face in front of their teacher and their peers". Speaking in front of other people needs courage, motivation from inside and outside such as a joyful atmosphere in the conversation and interesting topics. Another cause is that there are students who dominate and almost intimidate others with their better ability.

Low participation

There are always dominant students in the English class which makes it difficult for more reserved students to express themselves freely. Reserved students look for the teacher's attention and sit in the back and watch the lesson unfolding instead of participating.

Students Keep Using their mother tongue

Another problem that teachers face is that the students use their native language rather than English to perform classroom tasks. This might happen because they want to communicate something important, and so they use the language they know best. They have difficulty saying them in English and because they do not want to lose face in front of their peers, they think that they better use their native language so that others can understand them.

Pronunciation Problems

Many students have pronunciation problems and this is common because English and Uzbek have different sound system.

Lack of Motivation

Learners' motivation and needs have always had a central place in language learning. Thus, many students lack the motivation to learn English because according to their opinion it is a difficult language.

Lack of Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the words the students must understand to communicate effectively, but some learners have poor vocabulary.

In order to overcome these problems modern English language pedagogues are expected to use variety of techniques and in the following some of new and effective methods are introduced

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Pre-communicative activities can be called as preparatory activities which prepare the learners to communicate. Their target is making the students use the language with desired fluency without thinking of giving the message accurately. In pre-communicative activities, the teacher isolates specific elements of knowledge or skill which compose communicative ability, and provides the learners with opportunities to practice them separately. The learners are thus being trained in the part-skills of communication rather than practising the total skill to be acquired.

Communicative activities: Structural activities; Quasi-communicative activities; Social interaction activities; Functional communication activities. They are divided into two.

Structural activities focus on grammar and the ways in which the linguistic items can be combined. Quasi-communicative activities consist of one or more typical conversational exchanges. Here are three examples; • A: Shall we go to the cinema? B: No, I'd rather go to a concert. A: What kind of concert? B: I'd like to hear some jazz. • P: By the way, has John written that letter yet? S: Yes, he wrote it yesterday. P: Has he seen the film yet? S: Yes, he saw it yesterday. • (working from a plan) P: Excuse me, where's the post office? S: It's near the cinema. P: Excuse me, where's the bank? S: It's opposite the theatre.

Communicative activities are also divided into two. Functional communication activities help the students use the language they learned effectively to get meanings. In other words, they are related only to the communication of information. In these activities, "students have to overcome an information gap, get information from someone or somewhere else, or solve a problem". Social interaction activities are role-playing and exploiting simulation. [These create] a wider variety of social situations and relationships than would otherwise occur. Success is now measured not only in terms of the functional effectiveness of the language, but also in terms of the social acceptability of the forms that are used.

For most EFL learners, the English lesson is their only opportunity to practice English. Once they leave the class, they have no opportunity to speak or communicate in English. That's why the teacher should dedicate enough time during the class to teach and develop their speaking skills giving them as much time as possible to speak and communicate orally using English.

In this respect, a teacher should consider the following techniques when teaching and developing speaking in his/her students.

1. Creating Realistic Situations

It will help the students if they practice and use English in a realistic situation. The teacher should think of a situation where the type of language he wants to introduce is commonly used.

2. Engaging All Students

When teaching speaking, the teacher should see the classroom as a community. The students should communicate with each other, and not only with the teacher. The teacher should think of ways to engage all the students and make them speak with a reason to do so.

3. Supporting the Qualities of Spoken Language

When we speak our own language, we sometimes use different ways to communicate, to make sure people understand us and that we understand them. For example, we ask someone to

repeat, or use different body language ... students should learn to do the same when they speak a foreign language and teachers should support these qualities when teaching speaking.

4. Personalizing Speaking Topics

It will be easier for students to speak in a foreign language about topics they are interested in: Personal topics and topics close to their lives. The teacher should think about his students' lives and interests when he plans to teach and develop speaking.

5. Creating an Unfearful class

A lot of students are afraid of speaking in class, they are too shy, or they don't want to make mistakes. It is the role of the teacher to create a friendly class where students feel happy and relaxed. It encourages them to speak without fear or hesitation.

6. Planning Different and Various Types of Speaking Activities

It is a good idea to plan two types of activities: one where students practice vocabulary and grammar in a more controlled way, and another type where students can speak freely.

Activities to promote speaking:

Discussions

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like "people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel". Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups.

Role Play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and..."

Simulations

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

Information Gap

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.

Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class.

Interviews

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions.

Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

Story completion

This is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

Reporting

Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.

Picture describing

One way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokes person for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills. For this activity students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in the pictures.

1. Think, pair and share

Set a problem or a question around a certain topic, and pair up your students. Give each pair of students enough time so they can reach a proper conclusion, and permit the kids to share their conclusion in their voice. This way your students will be engaged, communicating, and remember more of the class than ever before.

2. Brainstorming

Interactive brainstorming is mostly performed in group sessions. The process is useful for generating creative thoughts and ideas. Brainstorming helps students learn to work together,

and above all, learn from each other. You'll be surprised by all the great ideas they come up with!

3. Buzz session

Participants come together in session groups that focus on a single topic. Within each group, every student contributes thoughts and ideas. Encourage discussion and collaboration among the students within each group. Everyone should learn from each other's input and experiences.

As a teacher, you could give your students some keywords to spark the conversation.

Of course, there are many other interactive teaching ideas as well. I split up the activities in different categories:

- Individual student activities
- Student pair activities
- Student group activities
- Interactive game activities

Individual student activities

4. Exit slips

These are best used at the end of the class session. You'll ask the students to write for one minute on a specific question. It might be generalized to "*what was the most important thing you learned today*". Then, you can decide if you are going to open up a conversation about it in your next class. You can ask them if they still remember what they wrote down. Need a digital exit slip template?

5. Misconception check

Discover students' misconceptions. See if students can identify what is the correct answer when given a false fact. It's useful when going over a previous lesson. It encourages students to think deeply and wager all the possibilities.

6. Circle the questions

Make a worksheet or a survey that has a list of questions (make them specific) about your topic, and ask students to circle (or check) the ones they don't know the answers to. Then, let them turn in the paper.

Create corners concerning different questions that were circled. Let your students work on the extra exercises and explanation in the corners, individually. As your students will all have circled different questions, you have to give each student a different and *personalized* order to visit the corners.

7. Ask the winner

Ask students to silently solve a problem on the board. After revealing the answer, instruct those who got it right to raise their hands (and keep them raised). Then, all other students have to talk to someone with a raised hand to better understand the question and how to solve it next time.

Student pair activities

8. Pair-share-repeat

After a Think-pair-share experience, which I've written about in the first interactive learning lesson idea, you can also ask students to find a new partner and share the wisdom of the old partnership to this new partner.

9. Teacher and student

Let students brainstorm the main points of the last lesson. Then, pair up your students and assign them 2 roles. One of them is the teacher, and the other the student. The teacher's job is to sketch the main points, while the student's job is to cross off points on his list as they are mentioned and come up with 2 to 3 points that the teacher missed.

10. Wisdom from another

After an individual brainstorm or creative activity, pair students to share their results. Then, call for volunteers who found their partner's work to be interesting or exemplary. Students are often more willing to share the work of fellow students publicly than their work. Of course, you can always encourage sharing their objectives as well.

Grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation were the speaking skills that were being developed.

Due to the fact that the project might enhance the students' speaking abilities and generate positive student reactions toward English learning in general, speaking in particular, project-based learning was beneficial in improving the students' speaking abilities. With the help of several learning areas, the students had the opportunity to improve their speaking abilities through project-based learning activities. By learning some projects as the major activity, the students may enhance their speaking abilities and employ the necessary range and flexibility of the speaking element to deal with topics and express thoughts.

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