

English Language Training Course

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Research Work Theme: Speaking skills

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Introduction

Traditional classroom speaking practice often takes the form of drills in which one person asks a question and another gives an answer. The question and the answer are structured and predictable, and often there is only one correct, predetermined answer. The purpose of asking and answering the question is to demonstrate the ability to ask and answer the question.

In contrast, the purpose of real communication is to accomplish a task, such as conveying a telephone message, obtaining information, or expressing an opinion. In real communication, participants must manage uncertainty about what the other person will say. Authentic communication involves an information gap; each participant has information that the other does not have. In addition, to achieve their purpose, participants may have to clarify their meaning or ask for confirmation of their own understanding.

To create classroom speaking activities that will develop communicative competence, instructors need to incorporate a purpose and an information gap and allow for multiple forms of expression. However, quantity alone will not necessarily produce competent speakers. Instructors need to combine structured output activities, which allow for error correction and increased accuracy, with communicative output activities that give students opportunities to practice language use more freely.

Why should we teach speaking skills in the classroom?

Motivation

Many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) wrote, "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language." Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be.

FACTS REGARDING SPEAKING

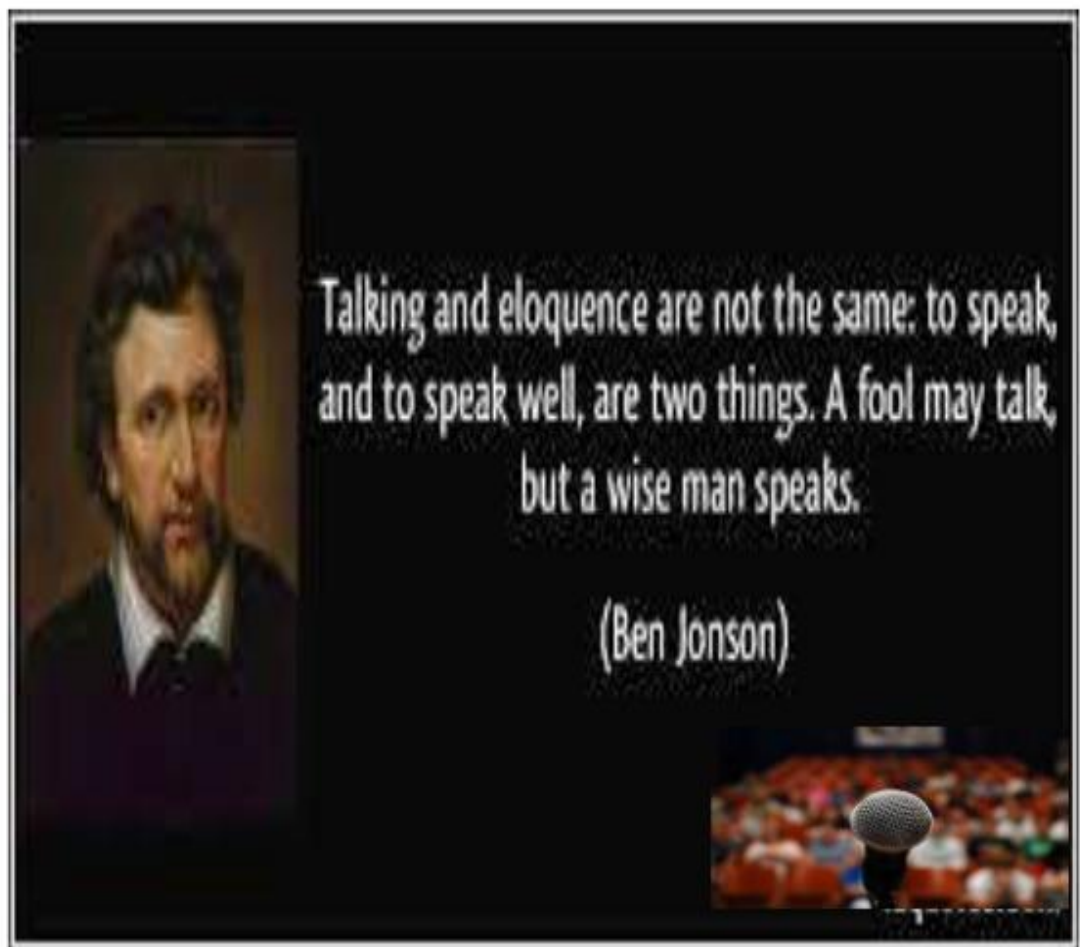
What Are Speaking Skills?



- 7% • Verbal (words spoken)
- 38% • Vocal (tone, range, appeal, credibility of voice)
- 55% • Visual (physical appearance, gestures, eye contact)

Speaking is fundamental to human communication

Just think of all the different conversations you have in one day and compare that with how much written communication you do in one day. Which do you do more of? In our daily lives most of us speak more than we write, yet many English teachers still spend the majority of class time on reading and writing practice almost ignoring speaking and listening skills. Do you think this is a good balance? If the goal of your language course is truly to enable your students to communicate in English, then speaking skills should be taught and practised in the language classroom.



Dealing with common arguments against teaching speaking skills in the classroom

Students won't talk or say anything

One way to tackle this problem is to find the root of the problem and start from there. If the problem is cultural, that is in your culture it is unusual for students to talk out loud in class, or if students feel really shy about talking in front of other students then one way to go about breaking this cultural barrier is to create and establish your own classroom culture where speaking out loud in English is the norm. One way to do this is to distinguish your classroom from other classrooms in your school by arranging the classroom desks differently, in groups instead of lines etc. or by decorating the walls in English language and culture posters. From day one teach your students classroom language and keep on teaching it and encourage your students to ask for things and to ask questions in English. Giving positive feedback also helps to encourage and relax shy students to speak more. Another way to get students motivated to speak more is to allocate a percentage of their final grade to speaking skills and let the students know they are being assessed continually on their speaking practice in class throughout the term.

PROBLEMS FACED DURING SPEAKING

- **Glossophobia**
- **Lack of Vocabulary**★
- **Grammatical Errors**
- **Lack of Structures**
- **Time Pressure**
- **Hesitation & Shyness**
- **Shattered Confidence**
- **Fear of Being Insulted**



REASONS TO FACE PROBLEMS **DURING SPEAKING**

- **Poor Listening**
- **Environment**
- **Pronunciation Errors**

A completely different reason for student silence may simply be that the class activities are boring or are pitched at the wrong level. Very often our interesting communicative speaking activities are not quite as interesting or as communicative as we think they are and all the students are really required to do is answer 'yes' or 'no' which they do quickly and then just sit in silence or worse talking noisily in their L1. So maybe you need to take a closer look at the type of speaking activities you are using and see if they really capture student interest and create a real need for communication.

HOW TO RESOLVE THIS ISSUE?

The biggest challenge of life is to overcome the fear of speaking.



Another way to encourage our students to speak in English is simply to speak in English ourselves as much as possible in class. If we are shy about speaking in English, how can we expect our students to overcome their fears about speaking English? Don't worry if you are not completely fluent or don't have that elusive perfect native accent, as Swain (1985) wrote "We learn to speak by speaking" and that goes for teachers as well as students. The more we practise the more we will improve our own oral skills as well as help our students improve theirs.

When students work in pairs or groups they just end up chatting in their own language.

Is the activity or task pitched at the right level for the students?

Make sure you give the students all the tools and language they need to be able to complete the task. If the language is pitched too high they may revert to their L1, likewise if the task is too easy they may get bored and revert to their L1. Also, be aware of the fact that some students especially beginners, will often use their L1 as an emotional support at first, translating everything word for word to check they have understood the task before attempting to speak. In the case of these students simply be patient as most likely once their confidence grows in using English their dependence on using their L1 will begin to disappear. Are all the students actively involved and is the activity interesting? If students do not have something to say or do, or don't feel the need to speak, we can be sure it won't be long before they are chatting away in their L1.

BEING A TEACHER YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES???????

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- Encourage your students
- Have Patience
- Create Opportunities
- Warm-up Exercises / Energizers
- Pronunciation Drilling
- Dictionary a Good Friend
- Are you really a good example for them to follow?
- Provide Conducive Environment

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Interviews
Guessing Games
Jigsaw Tasks
Discussions
Short Speeches
Role Plays
Simulation
Gap Activities
Brain Storming
Story Telling / Completio
Picture Description



Was the timing of the activity good? The timing of a speaking activity in a class can be crucial sometimes. How many teachers have discovered that their speaking activity ended up as a continuation of the students break-time gossip conducted in the L1? After break-time, why not try giving students an activity to calm them down and make them focus before attempting speaking activities that involve groups or pair work. Another way to discourage students speaking in their L1 is to walk around the classroom monitoring their participation and giving support and help to students as they need it. If certain students persist in speaking in the L1 then perhaps we should ask them to stay behind after class and speak to them individually and explain to them the importance of speaking English and ask them why they don't feel comfortable speaking in English in the class. Maybe they just need some extra reassurance or they don't like working with certain students or there is some other problem that we can help them to resolve.

When all the students speak together it gets too noisy and out of hand and I lose control of the classroom

First of all separate the two points a noisy classroom and an out-of-control classroom. A classroom full of students talking and interacting in English, even if it is noisy, is exactly what you want. Maybe you just feel like you are losing control because the class is suddenly student centred and not teacher centred. This is an important issue to consider. Learner-centred classrooms where learners do the talking in groups and learners have to take responsibility for using communicative resources to complete a task are shown to be more conducive to language learning than teacher-centred classes. Nevertheless, many classrooms all over the world continue to be teacher centred, so the question you have to ask yourself is, how learner centred is my classroom?

HOW TO SPEAK?

Speak like a?



STAR

S= Situation

T= Task

A= Attitude

R= Result

To teach speaking is to teach 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. (Nunan, 2003)

Losing control of the classroom, on the other hand, is a different issue. Once again walking around and monitoring the students as they are working in groups can help, as you can naturally move over to the part of the classroom where the noise is coming from and calm the rogue students down and focus them back on the task without disrupting the rest of the students who are working well in their groups. If students really get too rowdy then simply change the pace of the class and type of activity to a more controlled task, for example a focus on form or writing task where students have to work in silence individually. Once the students have calmed down you can return to the original or another interactive group activity



Presentation skills are extremely useful both in and outside the classroom. After completing a project, a presentation is a channel for students to share with others what they have learned. It is also a chance to challenge and expand on their understanding of the topic by having others ask questions. And in the world of work, a confident presenter is able to inform and persuade colleagues effectively. Presentations can also form a natural part of task based learning. By focussing on a particular language point or skill, the presentation is a very practical way to revise and extend book, pair and group work. The audience can also be set a task, for example, a set of questions to answer on the presentation, which is a way of getting students to listen to each other. It is important that the students plan and deliver the presentations in groups at first, unless they are extremely confident and/or fluent. This is because:

1. Shy students cannot present alone
2. Students can support each other before, during and after the presentation
3. Getting ready for the presentation is a practice task in itself
4. When you have a large class, it takes a very long time for everyone to present individually!

Conclusion

These are just some of the problems that teachers with large classes face when teaching speaking activities in the classroom. These problems are not new nor are the solutions offered above. Teachers all over the world continue to face the same hurdles, but any teacher who has overcome these difficulties and now has a large class of energetic students talking and working in English in groups together will tell you it is worth all the trial and error and effort at the outset. If you believe in the importance of teaching speaking skills in the classroom but are having difficulties making speaking activities work in your classroom why not contact your local teaching associations. Maybe they run workshops for teaching speaking skills, or maybe they can put you in contact with other teachers in similar situations but with more experience teaching speaking skills who will be willing to share their experiences with you.

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Thank you for your attention

