



From Classroom to Career: Speaking Skills for Employability among Rural Students

*S. Nivetha¹, Dr. D. Bellarmen²

¹ Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous) - Karur (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.)

² Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous) - Karur. (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.)

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*Corresponding author: [S. Nivetha](#)

Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous) - Karur (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.)

Abstract

Achievement of mastery over speaking competencies is one of the major requisites in the globally illuminated job hunting. Even after many years of learning the language there have not been a strong impact among the students as far as speaking skill is concerned. Exposure to speaking skill means learners' attempt towards practicing the skill. To provide them appropriate strategies for giving them sufficient exposure is the need of the hour. The significance of this study lies in its exploring materials for enhancing speaking skill of final year students in order to prepare them for globally employable opportunities. The exploratory results show that the tasks enable the learners to improve their fluency and accuracy in speaking.

Keywords: *Speaking Skills, Employability Skills, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Communicative Competence, Learner Autonomy, ESL Learners.*

Introduction

India is a power house in terms of the availability of work force which is 50% of the country's population is below the age of 25. But still the nation is behind the high youth unemployment rate. It is rather employability than unemployment which is a concern for every youth in India. The job market at present has inevitably become global and students need future-ready 21's century skills. Bridging these skills gap there is a need for appropriate training that involves communication skills in English. The global driven employment requires one language for all the nations that is undoubtedly the English language. Keeping this in view in every curriculum provided in schools and colleges English occupies pivotal role. The language is used in many states as an official language and for international communication as well.

The Role of Teachers

Speaking being the prominent skill for development teachers focus their attention towards appropriate classroom management. Provision of opportunities to students to interact for acquiring competencies in a natural way is the primary role of a teacher. Students being hesitance for psychological factors keep silent. So, it is necessary for the teachers to motivate them through interactional activities that are well prepared in advance. The three primary functions for encouragement to speak in the classroom are listed out by Harmer (2007). First, students should have the opportunity to practice real-life (authentic) speaking in the classroom atmosphere where they are likely to feel less anxiety. Second, speaking activities provide knowledge for the teachers and learners on how well learners can speak English and the kind of errors being made. So, the teachers focus on specific speaking features to foster. Finally, the acquired language knowledge can be activated as long as the learners speak English in the classroom; moreover, some linguistic elements can become automatic resulting in the learners' ability to use them unconsciously, and in this way the fluency can be improved. Providing more opportunities to students for using the language is also an important role of a teacher. Teachers in oral classroom set up a role of facilitator in organising the students to make sure their participation.

According to Harmer (2007) a teacher is like “a gardener, because they plant seeds and watch them grow”. A teacher is a councillor for reasons when the students repeat what they say and utter one word answer. Teachers, in fact let learners to commit mistakes because interruption in many times discourages them. The mistakes committed by students during interaction can be corrected through proper practice individually and indirectly. Such feedback enables learners to positively work on their correction.

The Role of Students

Teachers are the only enabling factors despite their involvement in different roles according to the leaning situations. It is the fact that learners decide the learning possibilities. Some students didn't understand why they need English. As a great saying goes up with a horse that can be taken to a pond by thousands and none can make it drink, the learners' role plays a prominent place to reflect on the teachers' role. Thus, the roles of teachers and those of the students complement each other. Autonomy being the key factor in the learning process directs every student to their own learning. Autonomy in learning is considered to be the ability to take charge of one's own learning. The term autonomy has been used in five ways as follows (Benson and Voller (1997) 1. Situations in which learners study entirely on their own, 2. An inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education, 3. A set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning, 4. The right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning, 5. The exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning. Responsibility is another key factor for students' learning environment. Just as teachers are responsible for creating environment for learning, learners too are accountable for their active participation. Unaware of the importance of the language demotivate students while participating. Being necessity is the mother of invention they understand the need for the language only when they become job seekers. It is the student who should be ready to take responsibility of learning for their future readiness.

The Role of Tasks

The role of students can be influenced by the teachers' role that initiates authentic materials for enabling the students to learn the language. As Nunan (1988) points out speaking skills can be developed through communicative tasks. Therefore, teachers are to prepare suitable tasks that motivate learners to participate accordingly. TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching) prepares learners to put forth their active participation. Speaking tasks that are used regularly enables the learners to develop their proficiency in Speaking. Harmer (2001) states three basic reasons for administering speaking tasks to students in the classroom, firstly, speaking activities provide chances to rehearse the real life language use, secondly, speaking tasks provide feedback for both teacher and students and finally, they provide opportunities to the students to activate the various elements of language they have stored in their brains.

Need for the Study

Of the four macro skills, speaking leads in terms of employability. Improving speaking skills of the learners has consistently been a worry for language teachers. The present employability necessitates enhancement of speaking and practice in classrooms. Implementation of suitable methods and approaches has been a great deal for every English fraternity. The study reports such methods and approaches practiced in classrooms for developing speaking skills of the final year undergraduate students of Arts and Sciences Colleges in Thanjavur District, in the state of Tamilnadu.

Methodology

The study employs an experimental design which involves 60 students from final year studies in an Arts and Science college. Sample of 60 students were selected through a diagnostic test to assess their speaking skills after which the students were divided into two groups with 30 students each. The first group served as a control group and the other one as an experimental one. The control group followed the usual methods of teaching while the experimental group was being exposed to the materials prepared for the study for improving speaking skills. The class hours were conducted in two phases 2 hours and 30 minutes each. The focus for the study was introducing oneself and others in which learners learn to use describing words and simple present, past tenses and appropriate vocabularies. The students were paired and during pre-task they were asked to introduce Mr. Dhoni, the cricketer to the other partner in the pair. One student took up the role play of Mr. Dhoni while the other one introduced. Having done the pair discussion, they were asked to role play. They came out with minimal response and were unable to use simple present and past tenses wherever required. Meanwhile, the teacher on the board wrote down at least 10 responses uttered by each and every pair and gave necessary tenses indirectly so that the students were not discouraged for making correction. During task the students as pair received a page (given in annexure) with information about Mr. Dhoni. Now the students discuss again about him with the help of details given in the page. After 20 minutes of discussion the students with more involvement did the same role play with more usage of simple present and past tenses and new vocabularies for introduction. In the post task stage, the students were then asked to introduce themselves to the entire group using the ideas they already gained during the while task stage.

Conclusion

To conclude the activity presented represents a reasonable move in meeting the learners' understanding of rules and vocabulary for introducing oneself and others. The activity makes the students more stimulating and motivating for performing with involvement. The students show more understanding while performing the during task phase. The teacher feels the activity in classroom situation explores more suitable ideas and makes her more creative in preparing such activities. Based on the observation done during activity changes are made for future references.

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Annexure

Activity 1: Discuss with your pair and introduce Mr. Dhoni using the tenses, structure and words given. Some of the tenses are underlined. Your partner role plays Mr. Dhoni.

- Pursued graduation from St Xavier's college
- Definitely has some cool hobbies
- Cleared his higher secondary from DAV School, Shamali.
- Was born on July 7, 1981
- He's a car freak, and his favourite is a Hummer H2.
- Enrolled for a bachelor's course in commerce in 1999.
- Captain Cool is the most well-known nickname of Dhoni
- He is very conscious of his looks and his personality
- Loves to ride bikes and collect super cars
- Spends a good two hours chit chatting.
- He was born and brought up in Ranchi.
- Apart from cricket Dhoni also enjoys playing Football
- Is very sensitive about his family matters
- Stays calm, whatever be the situation.
- Friends call him 'mahi'
- He used to be a *backbencher* in school
- Dhoni grew up as a fan of cricketing legends such as Adam Gilchrist & Sachin Tendulkar
- Would study the entire syllabus on the last night before the exam
- Is respectful towards his peers.
- His favourite is his Harley Davidson.
- Dhoni' favourite dish, is chicken butter masala.
- Dhoni is a big Kishore Kumar fan.
- He had Childhood passion for painting

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