



THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON HOW TO DEVELOP SPEAKING SKILL AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Language is very important in our lives as it is the means by which people communicate. Speaking skills are often considered the most important part of an EFL course. In foreign language teaching and learning, ability to speak is the most essential skill since it is the basic for communication. Speaking is one of the productive skills, which is the evidence of a student that how much he or she is competent in a language. Moreover, much of the communication is made through speaking. In short, learning a language remains incomplete if one does not achieve competence in speaking. Speaking can be realized as the most common way to convey the message to others and the ability to communicate effectively is a basic requirement which needs to be taken seriously in English education. (Azadi et.al 2015) Speaking is one of four basic skills in learning foreign language besides listening, reading and writing. Normally, learners in an EFL context do not use the language in authentic situations. They possess inability in communicating appropriately and correctly. This leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and avoidance when communicating with native English speakers. (Oradee 2012)

Therefore, this paper will suggests some ways of developing the speaking skill of the university students from a theoretical perspective.

1-Introduction

Language is very important in our lives as it is the means by which people communicate. Speaking skills are often considered the most important part of an EFL course. In foreign language teaching and learning, the ability to speak is the most essential skill since it is the basic for communication. Speaking is one of the productive skills, which is the evidence of a



student that how much he or she is competent in a language. Moreover, much of the communication is made through speaking. In short, learning a language remains incomplete if one does not achieve competence in speaking. Speaking can be realized as the most common way to convey the message to others and the ability to communicate effectively is a basic requirement which needs to be taken seriously in English education. (Azadi et.al 2015) Speaking is one of four basic skills in learning foreign language besides listening, reading and writing. Normally, learners in an EFL context do not use the language in authentic situations. They possess inability in communicating appropriately and correctly. This leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and avoidance when communicating with native English speakers. (Oradee 2012)

Therefore, this paper will suggest some ways of developing the speaking skill of the university students from a theoretical perspective.

2-Speaking

According to Kayi (2006) speaking refers to the gap between linguistic expertise and teaching methodology. Linguistic expertise concerns with language structure and language content. Teaching speaking is not like listening, reading, and writing. It needs habit formation because it is a real communication and speaking is a productive skill so it needs practicing as often as possible. In Palestine students are required to read English at the primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels for about twelve years. But their level of proficiency is below the mark. They enter universities for undergraduate programs with a low proficiency in English. After completing the graduate and postgraduate levels, they have to enter the job market. In different interviews they are tested on their competence in English, but the results are often disappointing. Moreover, most of the graduate and postgraduate students are not capable of speaking good English, which is an evidence of one's competence in a language. What is the reason behind it? Obviously, there is something wrong in the method of teaching and learning. At the university level, the students usually forget what they have learned at secondary and higher secondary levels as most of the departments, except the English Department, do not take proper care of developing the students' skills of speaking in English.

Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13) Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. (Florez 1999)

Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills,



because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance ,therefore, recent pedagogical research on teaching students conversation has provided some parameters for developing objectives and techniques.

Bygate (1997:vii) believes that speaking is in many ways an undervalued skill. Perhaps this is because we can almost all speak, and so take the skill too much for granted. Speaking is often thought of as a ‘popular’ form of an expression which uses the unprestigious ‘colloquial’ register: literacy skills are on the whole more prized. This relative neglect many perhaps also be due to the fact that speaking is transient and improvised, and can therefore be viewed as facile, superficial, or glib.

Lewis and Hill (1993:54) state that speaking is a process that covers many things in addition to the pronunciation of individual sounds. Widdowson (1996:54) believes that speaking is simply the physical embodiment of abstract system or of the grammatical system of language or both. Burkart (1998:11) says that speaking is an activity which involves the areas of knowledge, they are the mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary); it is the use of the right words in the right order with the right pronunciation. The functions (transaction and interaction); it is knowing the clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building). And the social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pause between speakers, relative roles of participant); it is understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason. Mackey (2001:79) defines that speaking is an oral expression that involves not only the use of right patterns of rhythm and intonation but also right order to convey the right meaning. While Thornbury (2005: IV) says that speaking is an interactive and requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking turn. Clark and Clark (1997: 223) state that in speaking, a speaker expresses his thought and feeling in words, phrases, and sentences following a certain structure which regulates the meaningful units and meaning of sentences. The frequency of using the language will determine the success in speaking skill. In other word, without practicing, it will be difficult to speak English fluently. In countries such as Palestine where English is used as a foreign language and it is taught mostly as a compulsory subject in educational program, the speaking skill is not duly treated, simply because of the time limitation and attention to other skills i.e. speaking has not received much attention and often does not receive due attention in final examinations.

Foreign language learners learning to acquire the oral proficiency in the target language may have some problems, both internal and external. Internally, they may experience the feeling of anxiety. They may feel reluctant to use the target language as they may be afraid of making mistakes. They may have the feeling of discomfort using the target language as “it deprives them of their normal means of communication” (Nascente, 2001, p.18).

3--Teachers' Objective of Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

A language teacher, according to Rivers (1968), should have the following objectives in the teaching of a foreign language:

- a. To develop students' intellectual powers through foreign-language study;
- b. To increase students' personal culture through the study of the great

Literature and Philosophy;

- c. To increase students' understanding of how language functions and to bring him, through the study of foreign language, to a greater awareness of the functioning of his own language;
- d. To provide the student with skills which enable him to communicate orally, and to some degree in writing, with the speakers of another language and with people of other nationalities who have also learned this language;

4--Principles for Teaching Speaking

- a. Giving students practice with both fluency and accuracy. In accordance with Nunan (2003, p55), accuracy is the extent to which students' speeches match what people actually say when they use the target language. Fluency is the extent to which speakers use the language quickly and confidently, with few hesitations or unnatural pauses, false start, word searches, etc.
- b. Providing Opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and limited teacher talk. Teacher should be careful about the participation of the student in the class. He or she should encourage the student to speak in the class and provide opportunities for them so that they may feel free to speak ignoring limitations. Nunan (2003) has pointed out referring the result of a research: "...teachers do approximately 50 to 80 percent of the talking in classroom".(p55)

He further suggested that pair work and group work activities can be used to increase the amount of time that learners get to speak in the target language during lessons. One further interesting point is that when the teacher is removed from the conversation, the learners take on diverse speaking roles that are normally filled by the teacher such as posing questions or offering clarification (Nunan 2003, p.55).

- c. Designing class activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and intersectional speaking.

When we talk with someone outside the classroom, we usually do so for interactional or transactional purposes. Interactional speech is communicating with someone for social purposes. It includes both establishing and maintaining social relationships. Transactional speech involves communicating to get something done, including the exchange of goods and /or services. Most spoken interactions “can be placed on a continuum from relatively unpredictable” (Nunan1991, p.42). Conversations are relatively unpredictable and can range over many topics, with the participants taking turns and commenting freely. In contrast, Nunan states that “transactional encounters of a fairly restricted kind will usually contain highly predictable patterns” (1991, p.42) and he gives the example of telephoning for a taxi. He further says that interactional speech is much more fluid and unpredictable than transactional speech. Speaking inside the classroom need to embody both interactional and transactional purposes, since language learners will have to speak the target language in both transactional and intersectional settings.

Fluency

Hedge (2000) defines it as the ability to respond coherently within the turn of conversation, to link the words and phrases of the questions, to pronounce the sounds clearly with appropriate stress and intonation and to all these quickly in ‘real time’ (Johnson ,1979). And it is called ‘fluency’. Hedge (2000) also includes fluency as a component of communicative competence. In the classroom, particularly grammatical errors are tolerated during fluency-based activities. However, it does not mean that CLT does not aim for a high standard of formal correctness. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), the teacher will note the errors during fluency activities and return to the learners later with an accuracy based activity.

6-Developing of speaking skill

Providing students with a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks plays a significant role in the improvement of students’ fluency when speaking (Tam, 1997).

1-6 Group discussion is one of the best methods of learning speaking in foreign language. It helps the students to improve their speaking skill. In group, the students will have opportunity to use English among themselves and practice each other with their friends. Practicing speaking with their friends will increase their confidence in saying some words without any worry whether they say some words incorrect or not. Besides that, learning in group will improve their vocabularies mastery. Argawati (2014)

To improve students' speaking, they should be given enough opportunities to speak in class. So, teacher talk time should be less and student talk time should be more. It is important for language teachers do not take up all the time. According to Nunan also, "Pair work and group work can be used to increase the amount of time that learners get to speak in the target language during lesson." In this way, the students will get chance to interact and practice the language with other students.

2-6 Teaching speaking through role play

Role play is a familiar technique that is usually applied in the classroom to improve the students' speaking skill. In role plays, students are assigned roles and put into situations that they may eventually encounter outside the classroom. Because role plays imitate life, it helps the students to develop real life speaking skills by imagining and assuming the roles where they create a pretend situation, and they pretend to be some different persons.

For English teachers, using role play technique can be used as one of activities that can promote the students to speak.

3-6 Role of Communicative Language Teaching in developing speaking skill.

Communicative Language Teaching claims to develop the ability of learners to use language in real communication. Brown and Yule (1983) characterize communication as involving two general purposes –the interactional function, where language is used referentially to exchange information. CLT, then, is directed at enabling learners to function interactionally and transactionally in second language. The distinction between a weak and a strong version of CLT parallels the distinction between task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching.

4-6 Use of target language to talk about language is the best strategy for learning spoken language (Maguire et al., 2010). As for Thornbury (2007: 40), the process of developing speaking skills consists of three stages:

- awareness – learners are made aware of features of target language

Knowledge • appropriation – these features are integrated into their existing knowledge-base,

- autonomy – learners develop the capacity to mobilize these features under real-time conditions without assistance.

On the other hand Rivers (1968) :p159-160) has outlined some elements of speaking skill that help L2 learners. These are discussed below:

a. Use of Dialogues

Use of dialogues can promote students' speaking skills to a great extent. Different situations can be offered to the student through dialogues, which is really conducive to them. Rivers says "Many a student well trained in manipulation of language structures has found himself completely at a loss in conducting a conversation with native speaker of the language because the books from which he (and his teacher before him) learned the language forms failed to emphasize the characteristic features of everyday spoken language and persistently used archaic or pedantic turns of phrases." (Rivers 1968: p167-68)

b. The Audio-visual Approach

Some teachers firmly advocate the use of some form of audio-visual aid in the teaching of speaking, especially in the early stages. Because the audio-visual approach helps the students promote speaking skills. Rivers says," In its simplest form the audio-visual approach has been employed for many years in classroom where objects, pictures, actions, and gestures have been systematically used with aural-oral work to elucidate meaning... advocates of an audio-visual approach put forward several reasons for considering the visual element essential to the efficient learning and speaking". (Rivers1968, p.175)

c. Conversation Groups and Foreign Language Clubs

Rivers emphasizes on forming conversation groups and foreign language club in order to promote speaking skill. He says," More intensive practice in the art of conversation can be provided, at the advanced level, in small groups meeting together at regular intervals". (Rivers: 1968, p.202-205) Foreign language clubs can also help promote speaking ability of L2 learners as there is interaction between the learners. Speaking ability can also be developed in foreign language club, where students are forced into an effort at communication in an informal atmosphere. (Rivers: 1968).

7-Suggestions for Teachers in Teaching Speaking

Here are some suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language according to Ryan (2001):

1-Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

2-Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.

3- Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time. Step back and observe students.

4- Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.

5-Ask eliciting questions such as "What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to prompt students to speak more.

6- Provide written feedback like "Your presentation was really great. It was a good job. I really appreciated your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice..."

7- Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.

8- Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class; contact parents and other people who can help.

9- Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.

10- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

11- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

CONCLUSION

Teaching speaking is a very important part of foreign language learning. The ability to communicate in a foreign language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that foreign language teachers' pay great attention to teaching speaking by providing students with adequate exposure with the language and with adequate motivation to communicate through it. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired.

Speaking is the key to communication. By considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners to improve their speaking and overall oral competency.

With this aim, teacher should be aware of the problems that may face in conducting the English speaking class; starts from the problem faced by the students and the teachers, in addition, the problem from the language itself that is not spoken in the community.

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