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# Students' Perceptions and Challenges in Improving Speaking Proficiency: Approaches and Techniques

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### Abstract

This paper tries to find out how the success of the language learners is attained through proper speaking skills. As of English language, it cannot be denied and neglected because it is accepted as the official among most of the countries. Most of the students miss their job opportunities due to the lack of proficiency in speaking but they are talented in their own field. Students do not have exposure to the spoken format of language because of old education system like memorizing the contents of textbook and writing exams so that they do not concentrate on practical knowledge. This research tries to identify the problems involved in developing speaking proficiency and it insists on the importance of language. This research provides certain approaches and techniques that can be initiated for the development of speaking proficiency.

**Keywords:** ELT, CLT, ESL, speaking skill, communication, vocabulary, strategy, role play, storytelling, and activity based learning.

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### Introduction

The teaching of speaking has witnessed a lot of changes in the recent years. In English, there are four basic communication skills. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. In those four basic skills speaking stands as the most important of all the communication skills. Importance of speaking skill cannot be underestimated in the present job market. Speaking is considered as an act of producing vocal sounds. It is the ability to express one's thoughts at any time and in any circumstances. Speech occurs in the form of transformation of ideas, knowledge and information. Language serves as a tool for the expression of thoughts and to convey the meaning. The primary goal of language is to interact and to communicate with a person or among the group. In order to know and understand each other human society used language especially speaking. In the fields of technology, science, arts and working world English stands in the form of an international language and also as the business language. English language is accepted as the official language in most of the countries after colonization. It is the language which is intensely essential to all, particularly students. To express the views and thoughts powerfully and effectively, students must be good with speaking skills. Those students are appreciated for their skills and knowledge. Effective communication helps the sender to make the receiver understand his exact ideas clearly. Students with good speaking skills are mostly preferred with good job opportunities. Improvised speaking skills will enhance and highlight students' personality. If a student really wants to sparkle in his career, it is mandatory that he/she should be gained with language skills in order to face the competition in job hunt with confidence.

To enhance the performance of speaking skill in ESL students, a diversity and variants of methods has been put into action. By the factual representation, it is known that most of the languages do not have written form, hence speaking is the deliberate form of communication. Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT) is considered as the approach which had a great impact on oral communication that is speaking skill. Audio-lingual method uses repeating and memorizing grammatical structures whereas CLT assists students in creating meaningful phrases. The main objective of the language is considered as its communicative functions rather than the peerless knowledge of the system. As a mean for learning a language properly, CLT stimulates the proficiency of the speaking skill by advancing interaction. In order to communicate successfully and effectively CLT instigates students to use the knowledge of the established position of the language. This article highlights the causes of poor communication skills among students. It also presents the importance of speaking skills with various suggestions for the improvement of speaking skill.

### **Causes for the lack of speaking skill**

Students are aware of the importance of English language but most of the students do not concentrate on the steps to improve their basic skills especially speaking. Students lack in confidence which results in poor speaking and communicating efficiency. Most of the students hesitate to speak English because they do not have eagerness and involvement. Students are unwilling to learn and speak English. English is not their native language and it is new to the students and they do not given proper practice which is essential for them. One of the main reasons that students can never develop fluency is due to the fact that they have studied in the medium of regional language. There are so many reasons that students fear and hesitate to speak in English. A few to be listed are public fear, hesitation to present themselves in public. They relate the language with their personality and hence they had this weird feeling that their prestige will get offended if they could not deliver the content properly. Students lack self-motivation to overcome their fear. They realize and know the importance of English language, and they also wish to speak at times but they are not ready to improve their proficiency.

Students from rural background suffer a lot because they can learn the language as a theory but they fail when it comes to practical knowledge. Those students are considered to be least exposed to English language. Those students learn English only for the purpose of examination. Their only motive is just to get through the paper with some average marks. One of the most important factors which prevent students from communicating in English is that they feel embarrassed while they commit mistake during their speech. The influence of native tongue can also be an another major problem that should be highlighted among the other causes. When they try to speak in English first they think in their mother tongue and then they would translate their thoughts into English before framing into sentence. As they lack in vocabulary, they are not able to speak fluently which result in the struggle to use the exact terms. Hence it becomes arduous for them to speak what they actually think in their mind. One has to improve their listening skills if they want to improve their speaking. Most of the students expect perfection in their speaking thus they are not so confident. They wish to use only the impressive words to attract the audience but due to the lack of vocabulary they are unable to put their thoughts into action. In the process of speaking, they will try to analyse their speech which will result in finding fault with their own speech. Society is the yet another reason for the lack of students' communication. It fails to support the students to speak English. Students should encourage themselves to communicate with each other in English however most of the students would neglect the other student who speaks in English thinking that they are simply rude or showing off. This also results in lack of achieving the language goals among the students. It is the fact that students want to get mingled with English speaking groups to attain confidence and perfection in English speaking skills.

### **Factors affecting ESL students in concern with psychological aspects**

There are various kinds of factors that affect ESL learners, but the psychological factor is considered as the most important cause that affects the foreign language or second language learners especially when it comes to the proficiency of speaking skills. So, it is appropriate to list out those factors based on psychological aspects.

Three major factors that affect speaking proficiency are lack of motivation, anxiety and finally the effect of self-esteem. Let us have a detailed analysis of these three major factors based on psychological aspects.

### **a. Importance of motivation**

Motivation can be defined as goal directed behavior. Motivation level will be high only if students expect to get succeed and to value the success. As Ortega quoted, “motivation is regarded as the desire of the students in learning a language. It is not enough when the students just have the desire to learn the language, the students also need to provide a great effort to reach the goal” (Ortega, 2009). Here Ortega suggests the students to make an effort to reach their goal. In the study of second/foreign languages, Light brown and Spada classified motivation into two types. They are the needs of the students regarding communication and then their attitude towards communication (2001). To support the student's venture to achieve his/her career ambition, the students are motivated in this way to achieve their goals in speaking the second language.

### **b. Anxiety**

Javed explains that “anxiety is a natural psychological aspect which contains the feeling of fear which sometimes cannot be controlled” (Javed et al., 2013). When it comes to the process of learning a language Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) takes place frequently. Especially when it comes to speaking, even adults are tend to be anxious and fearful due to the presence of audience as their speech would get reflect in other's judgment and their image. People will ignore the speaker, if the speaker cannot convey his content properly. The speech would be an utter failure if the audiences are not able to comprehend it. This leads to anxiety.

### **c. Effect of self-esteem**

Lathifa cited that, “self-esteem is one of the psychological factors which present many contributions in students' speaking performance” (Lathifa, 2015). The students who have self-esteem can speak fluently because they do not care much about their mistakes while speaking. The students who have high self-esteem would learn the language with great effect. It is said that self-esteem will favour the students in both in academic forum and profession.

## **Significance of speaking skill**

In present situation, the significance of English language is known to everyone. Academic environments demand students to speak in English at many situations. Certain circumstances which enforce students to speak in English are conversation with professors, presentations, viva-voce sessions and so on. These situations do not pave way for the use of native language. Students have to develop the skill properly in academic environment as they had to interact with each other in working environments. So, students must know how to communicate effectively with good speaking skills. Great opportunities will knock at their doorstep only if they are able to speak effectively. Though students possess technical knowledge, language is a must to express their knowledge, and those candidates are wanted by the employers. Candidates who work in IT industries have to deal with foreign clients for which speaking skill is very essential. Whatever fields the student chose, whether it is any business organization or as in the fields of academic institutions, along with the academic qualifications one has to possess proficiency in speaking so that he will be given more importance and respect. Successful career expect one's good presentation skills. Recruitment process consists of interview and group discussions. In those process employers will observe keenly on the students speaking skills. They usually concentrate on how the candidate expresses his knowledge effectively and thus he has to convince the recruiters. These are the essential skills that a student must acquire from part and parcel of their degree.

## **Strategies to improve speaking skills**

Regular practice of language will result in fluency of the language among the students. Basic structures of the language should be introduced to the students from the beginning that is from their high school. The students from rural area should not be degraded. Both the teachers and friends should help them to overcome their fear. Education system should bring certain measures to develop students speaking skills. Students should have the habit of reading stories. At the initial stage, they can start with children's moral stories and slowly they can grab even classic novels. Reading books will provide students with different vocabularies, and the sentence formation. This reading practice will pave way for them in constructing their own sentences according to their needs and situations. Sometimes rules of

grammar may confuse students in the beginning so they should not always stick to grammar while they practice to speak. Through the continuous speaking process they will come to adjust with the rules of grammar. Here the role of teacher is very important. In order to make the student comfortable with the language, teacher should encourage the student to speak. Teachers can develop speaking skills of the students by assigning them some interesting classroom activities. Students should be motivated to dedicate themselves in these learning processes. Good English movies will help the students to know the sentence structure and they will also learn pronunciation of words directly from the native speakers of English language. Reading newspapers and carrying dictionaries are simple method and those are considered to be daily practice which students must take out of their own interest.

### **Important strategies in teaching speaking skills**

To make the students proficient in speaking should be the aim of the ESL teachers. Making strategies is not an easy task, the teacher has to think about how to implement it and whether it satisfies the needs of the students or not. The teacher has to use effective teaching strategies to attain the proficiency of the students. The ESL teachers have classified various teaching strategies for speaking, let us look into the most important strategies for second language learners.

#### **1. Making clear lesson plans**

The teacher has to make clear that what the students are going to learn in every lesson. If the teacher doesn't have a clear idea of what he is going to teach the students then the goal will look unclear and students cannot reap any benefit from teaching and thus leads to a lack of speaking skills among students. Therefore, the teacher has to form a clear lesson goal first.

#### **2. Method of Showing and telling**

Another most important strategy for teaching is considered to be showing and telling. That is the first teacher has to show models to make the students have a pictographic view and he has to share his knowledge with students for a better understanding of the students. The teacher has to tell the students what he should do so and in the end, the student has to take the role of showing and telling. Thus it will enhance the students' speaking proficiency.

#### **3. To conduct questioning sessions in checking students' understanding**

Most of the researchers suggest that the teacher has to ask questions to students to know whether the students have understood the concept. It will make the students to participate in a speaking activity while answering the questions asked by the teachers. A few techniques will help in effectively making this strategy. They are randomized sampling, student-answer board and tell a friend.

#### **4. Providing students with feedback**

The teacher has to take some time in giving students feedback based on their tasks. That will help the students to know their mistakes and it will help them for correcting those mistakes in the future. Not only that, feedback will kindle the students to have participated in the classroom activity. It will help them to improve themselves.

#### **5. Role plays**

It will help the students to come out of their shells. This act will make the students confident in speaking due to the practice of a particular role. Practice can be considered as the most important aspect when it comes to role play.

### **Activity Based Learning proposed by Related Research**

Some of the approaches and techniques suggested by the researchers will be listed below in order to prove the aim of the research. These suggestions will help enhance speaking proficiency:

- EkoMarlianto in his mini research titled *English Speaking Skill through Role play* introduces the background of English language among non-native speakers. His purpose of study is to find whether students of first grade can improve their speaking proficiency through role play technique. The researcher concludes that students don't have any text to play their role with dialogues, they just prepare the ideas beforehand and hence they participate with the other

members. So that he will certainly gain confidence due to interest and creating sentences in his mind and act accordingly. So, absolutely role play is one of technique that can be used for the improvisation of students speaking skill.

- In the journal NELTA Surkehet, Dhani Ram Sharma suggests story telling as a method to improve speaking proficiency in his research named *Action Research on Improving Students' Speaking Proficiency in Using Cooperative Storytelling Strategy*. By using this technique among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students he tried to improve students skills based on comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency.
- ShanthaSambath and MekalaSethuraman in their research article titled *Constraints in Spoken Proficiency: Causes and Remedial Measures* have implemented pedagogical intervention and Oral Communication Tasks (OCT) among engineering students to develop their speaking proficiency.

### Conclusion

This article concludes by insisting students to realize the importance of speaking skills. The research evaluated the causes which affect speaking skills and thus provide various suggestions on the basis of activity based learning. The curriculum should be framed involving the text with activity based learning. Teachers should insist students to take part in those activities which will result in good speaking skills.

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