Teaching Speaking Skills through Communicative Activities
A Classroom Report

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Introduction

We need to do a lot of experiments, innovations and pedagogical variations in the classrooms to improve the teaching and learning of English in India. It is found that even after learning English for so many years in schools and colleges, students are not able to speak English in real life situations. One of the aims of this research paper is to find out some pedagogical applications to teach speaking skills effectively through communicative activities to make students more pro-active in the use of the English language in real life situations.

Focus on Social Relationships

One of the primary uses of language is to establish and maintain social relationships (Peter Watkins2007:77). We may greet people when we meet them, exchange small talks about weather, work, sports and family relationships. As a part of this social use of language we also try to entertain each other by telling jokes, narrating an event and stories, etc. We may also share

views and opinions on a variety of subjects. The language is also being used in formal context to a great extent. There are number of formal speaking situations which may arise in day-today life.

Attention to Listening Skill

Teaching of speaking skills requires focused and well planned pedagogy so as to develop students' ability to speak in English. Effective speaking depends upon the speaker's ability to interact with other persons. Speaking cannot take place without effective listening skills. So, speakers must pay attention to their listeners and adopt their own responses and questions (Caroline Woods 2005: 41).

Presentation-Practice-Communication

Cajkler & Addelman (2000:33) state that one of the current models of teaching language is *Presentation-Practice-Communication* which emphasizes the importance of the teacher's oral input and the learner's practice and repetition of the oral model in the acquisition of the target language. The most important aspect is significant input on the part of the teacher at the initial stage of lesson that must be based on oral and aural activities, which in turn lead to a practice stage based on speaking and listening activities.

My Experiment – Use of a Variety of Tasks

As a part of an experiment, I tried to instill into the learners the ability to move from a closely structured & guided use of language (such as repetitions) to less guided and free language productions (to make them their own utterances). It can be stated that one can always make his/her classroom situations from dependence to independence which may give a lot of opportunities to use the target language. Therefore, teaching of speaking skills requires the use of variety of tasks on the part of teacher in terms of communicative activities. Cajkler & Addelman (40) states this notion as 'diminishing support' and gives examples of speaking activities based on Presentation-Practice-Communication model:

- **Presentations**: The teacher mimes the action and presents the vocabulary and phrases for less able students.
- **Practice** :

- ➢ Repetition of phrases and vocabulary
- ➢ Responding to flashcards
- ➢ Responding to the teachers questions
- ➢ Pair work
- ➢ Questionnaire on hobbies

✦ **Communication**: talking freely about one's leisure, personality, describing people, places & things etc.

Pedagogy

In my experiment, a diagnostic test-achievement test-control group design was used. There were 50 students of undergraduate class in Nashik (K.T.H.M. College, Nashik, Maharashtra State, India) involved in the study. The experiment group was randomly selected from various departments of the college. The experimental group was given extensive use of communication activities for four months in well-planned sequences. A wide range of communicative exposure activities and speaking skills-focused tasks were deployed for getting their interest and to retain students' participation in the teaching and learning.

A diagnostic test was carried out to see to what extent learners know English and their areas of difficulty such as grammar, pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, etc. After eliciting the views of learners, the communicative activities were selected for the experiment. I used some basic communicative activities and some advanced communicative activities to balance the objective of teaching speaking skills.

As a researcher I took the help of Cajkler and Addleman (40) pedagogical model P-P-C to deal with speaking skills in the class with the help of communicative activities. As this model enables moving from dependence to independence classroom situations, i.e., the teacher draws back his support and let his classroom activities with more students' involvement and enabling them to become independent in language production. The teacher remains the resource during lessons for students to do more language productions.

The following communicative activities were introduced considering the need and necessity of the learners:

i)   Warm ups

ii)   Brain Storming

iii)   Greetings and Responding

iv)   Requests and Suggestions

v)   Language Games

vi)   Casual conversations and Questioning

vii)   Talking about one's personality

viii)   Short audio

ix)   Short video

x)   Short Discussion

xi)   Group Discussion

xii)   Role plays

xiii)   Describing people /place /things

xiv)   Presentations

xv)   Pronunciation tasks

Classroom Procedure

I introduced the communicative activities by describing the particulars of the activities clearly so that all the students understood the processes. Then I set the goal for the activities. Role cards were used for some activities like role plays, language games, describing a person or place, etc. at the initial level. The cards given to below average students included words and expressions of common uses. While introducing conversational situations I made use of brainstorming first to forecast what vocabulary, grammar and idiomatic expressions they might

use and then gave them the task of day-today conversational situations. As a part of classroom management, I made small groups according to the three categories: advanced (excellent), average (confident /good) and below average (slow learners) for group activities only. Enough time was given them to prepare and organize their thoughts and express themselves. Another crucial part was that I remained as a resource in communicative mode to answer students' questions and not to correct their pronunciation or grammar unless they specifically asked me about it. After the role play/activity was over, feedback was given on grammar or pronunciation problems which were noticed during the activity.

Some of the communicative activities required formation of group of students to give them practice in target language. This kind of grouping made them more informal and friendly that they become more confident and they were ready to participate in various communicative activities. For instance I carried a pre-viewing discussion and a post-viewing discussion in case of showing a short video to make them use target language extensively.

While introducing questions and casual conversations some specimen question patterns and casual pieces of conversation were provided to the group of students. I gave those situations in which they would get involved in producing utterances of their own. The following instances of casual conversation, questioning and talking about one's personality can serve as examples:

I)   **Casual Conversation :**

A: What do you do?

B: I am a student.

A: Which college do you go?

B: I go to KTHM College?

A: When does it start?

B: It starts at 7.30 a.m.

A: How far is your college from your home?

B: It is about five kilometers.

A: How do you go to college?

B: I go to college by bus.

II)   **Questioning**

A: What did you watch last night?

B: I watched TV.

A: Which programme did you watch?

B: I watched a panel discussion on NDTV India.

Thus, the above mentioned small tasks can get students involved in the teaching and learning process better and will help them pick up the language.

Analysis and Result

Data was collected from oral tasks, scores of diagnostic test and achievement test, questionnaire of interest and attitude of learners, students' interview, teachers' views, etc. A diagnostic test of 50 marks was prepared which included introducing self, introducing others, talking about friends, daily routine, spontaneous talk for a minute and conversational situation.

The oral diagnostic test was carried out with the help of video camera. The performances of the students were recorded on video during the diagnostic test and after deploying the communicative activities for teaching speaking skills for students for 3 and half months (53 days: 164 hrs). The results were analyzed on the basic of improvement in the achievement test in terms of grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and accuracy. Apart from this, interview of some of the selected students were taken and the result was analyzed. The following table shows the improvement of students in achievement test.

Table No: I

Result of Diagnostic Test and Achievement Test

Content of measurement	Below Average Students (%)		Average Students (%)		Excellent Students (%)	
	Diagnostic Test	Achievement Test	Diagnostic Test	Achievement Test	Diagnostic Test	Achievement Test
Grammar	60%	23%	30%	46%	10%	31%
Fluency	72%	27%	19%	41%	9%	35%
Vocabulary	64%	19%	21%	55%	15%	26%
Pronunciation	79%	35%	11%	47%	10%	18%
Accuracy	76%	40%	16%	39%	4%	21%

Some Observations

I noticed the following after employing the communicative activities to teach speaking skills in the classroom.

I)   Students become motivated and more positive to learn other subjects too.

II)   Students were ready to participate in any of the classroom activities.

III) They were ready to carry out 'routine' exchange, for example, when greeting someone, starting a conversation, asking for information, etc.

IV) Learners took part easily and confidently in casual conversation in English.

V) Learners now came to know when it was appropriate to speak, how could they speak politely and make interpretations and so on.

VI) Students were easily able to discuss and manage activities such as inviting others to speak, asking for repetition and so on.

VII) Learners were able to speak with intelligible pronunciation.

VIII) Students could select appropriate vocabulary and use grammar to organize whatever they say.

Conclusion

To conclude, I found it profitable to use this communicative activities experiment to teach speaking skills as most of the students became motivated and friendlier to use the language quite fluently.

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