

## SIMPLE WAYS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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### **Abstract**

*Most learners of English as Foreign Language find it difficult to deal with English Productive Skills–Speaking and Writing in effective ways. Because of the poor level ability in speaking and writing, students are failed to make an effective communication in English language. Some learners feel shy, even shameful, to speak in English as they are afraid of making mistakes. Instead, they usually use their own language while working in pair or group. It is noticed that many learners lack the confidence to speak in English, so we need to find ways of developing their communicative competence and motivate them through fun, stimulating, non-threatening activities. English Speaking is not too easy, not really difficult though. This paper will present some effective ways to help learners either build the better ability in English speaking or lead themselves toward better communication skills in English language. Additionally, the paper will demonstrate some funny and interesting speaking activities related to daily life communication as well as classroom activities. That will be helpful for both learners and teachers of English as Foreign Language.*

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**Keywords:** *productive skills, fun, stimulating, speaking activities.*

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### **Introduction**

#### **1. What is Speaking Skill?**

*Speaking skill is a productive skill that requires students/ learners to produce words or language or to express ideas orally. It is used to communicate between one to another by speech or saying. According to Chaney, 1998, speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts".*

In English language, there are four main skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are called receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are productive skills. In spite of writing, speaking is done at the real time one producing without editing,

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*Simple ways...(Socheath)*

and revising. This is one of reasons that students consider speaking skill is difficult.

## 2. What is Teaching English Speaking?

David Nunan, 2003, state that *teaching speaking* is to teach ESL learner 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, called as fluency.

The aim of teaching speaking skill is to improve and strengthen students' ability and competence in communicative skill so that students can express their feeling, words and ideas to others in English and will be able to communicate with others, even cross-culture, in successful ways.

## 3. Some Problems of Learners in English Speaking Skill

Through my teaching experience so far, I have noted some challenges in teaching and learning speaking skill in my classroom. Some students feel shy to talk in English as they are afraid of making mistakes. While working in pair and group, they use their first language more than English. In conversation, some of them find it hard to speak out or to respond, but they can understand the messages.

These problems happen to ESL learners because they have low level of the language (vocabulary, skills and grammar), they have lack of motivation, the learning environment discourage them, they have less student-talking time (STT), the lessons don't interest them and teachers do not either use appropriate techniques or prepare suitable activities to the right level of the students.

### Teaching and Learning Speaking Skill

#### 1. Some Guidelines in teaching speaking skill

- Select topics that interest students

- Plan the classroom activities to get students more active in either pair work or group work
- Pair work and group work should be changed
- Get students practice in fluency and accuracy
- Increase student-talking time and reduce teacher-talking time
- Encourage student to use their own words in English
- Monitor and motivate students while they are working
- Give constructive feedback to students

## 2. Preparing lesson plan in teaching skills

### a. PPP Lesson:

One effective way used in teaching speaking is *PPP* (*Presentation, Practice and Product*) lesson plan.

#### Presentation:

In this stage, it aims to present new target item of language to students before getting students practice it. Make sure that *Form, Meaning, and Use* of the language are briefly introduced to students so that they know how to use it. Teacher should prepare the tasks to fit the level of the students. There are many techniques to introduce the new language item. We can do it through reading, listening, picture, real situation and other context.

#### Practice:

In the practice stage, it is good to get students practice the new language item immediately so that they can picture it in mind. Usually, it have aim to improve accuracy and fluency. It enables students from controlled practice to less-controlled practice and then to freer practice.

#### Product:

Product stage gives students extra tasks to improve their fluency. Students are asked to do it freely so that they can talk any topic they are familiar with, but it should be based on the new language item they have just learnt.

### b. SP Lesson:

To provide students more opportunity to fluently use language skill taught so far, Skill-Practice Lesson should be employed. It includes Pre-speaking tasks, Main-speaking tasks, and Post-speaking tasks. In this

lesson format, all the four skills are used to interact with each other so that students have chance to practice all skills, not only speaking. Receptive skills (listening and reading) are used to improve Productive skills (speaking and writing).

Pre-speaking tasks (Before):

Before the speaking tasks, it is to make sure that students are ready first. It can start from listening tasks or reading tasks. Thus, students have ideas or feel focused on the topics from the listening or reading.

Main-speaking tasks (During):

During the speaking tasks, students are encouraged to actively involve in the speaking activities. They will speak or do tasks related to what they hear or read in the first stage.

Post-speaking tasks (After):

It is also called following-up tasks with aim to produce their language in another skill such as writing. Students will be asked to do other activities which are not speaking.

### 3. Communicative Language Teaching

Teaching productive skills aim to enable students/learners to create communicative language in effective way. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. This way enables students to have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. Therefore, ESL/EFL teachers should create a classroom environment which students are interested in and are given more chance to practice real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. The interaction among students is important to make them more active and to build cooperative learning environment for them. Students should be strongly encouraged to work in pair, small group, and large group.

To create an effective learning environment in the classroom, we need to provide three essential conditions: the provision of *exposure to the target language*; the provision of *opportunities for learners* to use the target language for *real communication*; and the promotion of *motivation* for learners to engage in the learning process. (Willis, 1996)

### 4. Suggestions For Teachers in Teaching Speaking

Here are some suggestions (from Channey, 1998) for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

- ✓ 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.

- ✓ Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.
- ✓ Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time. Step back and observe students.
- ✓ Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.
- ✓ Ask eliciting questions such as "What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to prompt students to speak more.
- ✓ 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..."
- ✓ Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.
- ✓ Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class; contact parents and other people who can help.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.
- ✓ Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

### **Ways to Improve Speaking Skill**

Are there any ways to help students learn better in speaking skill? Sure, there are. It needs the involvement of teachers and learners/ students to actively build the communicative environment in and out of classroom. Students/ learners should be aware that speaking skill needs the knowledge of:

- Vocabulary (words, collocation and their meaning)
- Parts of speech (noun, verb, adverb ...)
- Pronunciation (tone of voice, stress, intonation)
- Expression and sentence structures
- Tense (past, present and future)
- Other skills- listening, reading and writing

- Non-verbal communication (eye-contact, gesture, facial expression and body language). Be careful, Body language may have different meaning in different culture. Awareness of other cultures...

Additionally, other requirements are self-motivation, self-confidence, chance making, and own learning styles and strategies.

Although we do not live in an English-speaking country, to improve our English, we can find the available resources where can be reached easily.

- Talk with friends in English about everyday life, studying or working
- Find partners for conversation (in the class and out of the class)
- Watch TV or film and read books or news in English, then start discussion
- Set the scene which you like, then act it out in own language
- Listen to radio (online) , then try to summarize in your own words and speak out
- Offer help to other with English work, then you can talk in English
- Take English class and try to use English as much as possible
- Use yahoo messenger or skype to chat with voice with friends or other people with good command of English.
- Search for online conversation. You will talk with English native speakers.
- Practice where and when you can.
- Be confident to talk with other. Don't be shy or afraid of making mistakes

Before you start conversation or speaking, please be sure that you are ready for it by preparing some useful phrases and expression, words related to the topic and sentence structures, planning what to say, and preparing yourself with good feeling and smiling face. Another key point is to remember that good speaker is good listener and reader. The more you listen and read, the better you can speak.

*" Hear, speak, read and write is a good sequence".*  
(Michael Lewis & Jimmie Hill, 2002:31)

## English Speaking Activities in ESL Classroom

Here are some activities employed in English language classroom.

<i>Speaking Activities</i>	<i>Practice (Accuracy and Fluency)</i>	<i>Level of learners/students</i>
Drills	Controlled	Beginner
Songs	Controlled	Beginner
Chants	Controlled	Beginner
Information gaps	Controlled	All
Stimulations	Less-controlled	
Describing things	Controlled/ less- Controlled	All
Brainstorming	Less-controlled	All
Jigsaw activities	controlled	All
Conversations	Less-controlled	All
Find someone who	Less-controlled	All
Role-plays	Less-controlled/Freer	Elementary- advanced
Interviewing	Less-controlled/Freer	Elementary- advanced
Story completion	Controlled	
Story telling/ story retelling (Narration)	Less-controlled/Freer	Elementary- advanced
Reporting	Freer	
Discussion	Freer	Intermediate- Advanced
Presentation	Freer	Intermediate- Advanced

### 1. Drills

Drilling is a controlled practice activity. It is useful in the early stages of a lesson when presenting or practicing new language, when preparing for an impending exam or to hammer out bad habits. By repeating set patterns, input-response becomes automatic. The drills can be picture drill, choral drills, interactive drills, substitution drills, transformation drills and drilling using flash cards. Usually, they are most appropriate for beginner or elementary level of students.

### 2. Songs and Chants

Songs and chants are speaking activities for young students. They are used to give the children a chance to listen to songs and reproduce the language they hear. They are working on the sounds, rhythm and intonation. The children can learn to pronounce words and to speak out in controlled ways. The language in the songs should be simple enough and natural.

### 3. *Information gaps*

Information gap activities are the controlled practice that serves many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Students are asked to work in pairs. Student A have information which student B do not. Then they ask some questions to get information to complete the gaps. Keep them talking and teacher should monitor carefully because they may copy from each other without talking.

### 4. *Stimulations*

In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. A student can act as a teacher, dancer, singer, news reader and so on. They also need to bring what they will use to make the activity more interesting. The activity is entertaining, motivates the students, and increase self-confidence. Students may find it more interesting than role-play activities.

### 5. *Describing things (pictures/ real situation)*

In this activity, students are given pictures which teacher prepare what to get students practice. Students can work pair or group with different pictures. They are supposed to take turn to describe about the picture with language they have already learned. Finally, one student representing the pair or group describes it to the class.

### 6. *Brainstorming*

At first, the topic is set by the teacher. Then teacher asks students express their ideas on the topic. There should be judgment on what they say, but encourage them to say it again or help them with leading questions so that they will openly talk.

### 7. *Jigsaw activities*

These activities are like a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces of information fit together to make one picture in the end. Before starting, the students should be given reasons to communicate. Teacher can prepare two similar copies of a text whose information is missing. Then students have

to ask their partners to fill in the blank. In another way, teacher also can ask them to find if there is similarity or difference between their worksheet by asking each other.

8. *Find someone who...*

It is good to practice language use with “find someone who...” through speaking. Teacher can prepare sentences with language item, for example, to practice (to have ...). Teacher gets students to move around and to ask others in the class to find someone who matches the description. The first one who can complete the all sentences with name of their friends is the winner.

9. *Role-plays*

The teacher sets the situation for students and asks them to pretend to be actors or actresses or someone who acts in the story. Students are not given any script for speaking, but they use their own language. If the scene is about hospital, actors are doctor, nurse, patient, and others. They can set their own topic about which they can talk.

10. Story telling/ story retelling (Narration)

After listening to a story, the students are asked to summarize the story in their own word. Otherwise, they can also create their own stories. Then ask them to tell their group or classmates. Story telling also helps students with creative thinking skill.

<b>Sequencing words for story telling</b>	<b>A. Giving your opinions</b>	<b>B. Agreeing in English</b>
First of all, ... Secondly, ... Previously (before that) ..... Then... Later (on)... But before al that... Finally...	"I think..." "I feel that..." "In my opinion..." "As I see it..." "In my view..." "I tend to think that..." "I'm sure that..." "I strongly believe that..." "What do you think?" "What's your view?"	"I think you're right." "I agree with you." "You're absolutely right." "I totally agree." "I agree with you up to a point, but..." "That's quite true, but..." "I agree with you in principle, but..."
<b>Disagreeing</b>	<b>C. Giving advice in English</b>	<b>D. Making requests</b>
"I'm not sure I agree with you." "(I'm afraid) I don't agree." "(I'm afraid) I can't agree with you." "I don't agree at all." "I totally disagree." "I couldn't agree with you less."	"If I were you, I would..." "Have you thought about..." "Why don't you..." "In your position, I would..." "You should perhaps..." "You could always..."	Could you pass me some the pen? Can you help me please? Will you explain this exercise to me? Would you open the window please? I'd like you to speak slowly. I want you to send to me back as soon as you can. Would you mind possibly turning down the radio?

### 11. Reporting

Teacher can give a task to students to do at home such as reading news, watching TV, or writing about an event they may see. In class, they are asked to report to their group or classmate. It is most appropriate for intermediate or advanced level.

### 12. Discussion

Students work in small or large group and teacher gives some topics for students to select. In each group, there can be positive side and negative

to argue with each other by giving their own reasons to support their ideas. They can talk more as they find the topic interesting. It also helps them with creative thinking.

### **Conclusion**

Last but not least, in speaking skills, there are variety of activities and techniques available to teacher and students/learners. Teachers are suggested to select the techniques that are most fit their students' ability. Learners should try all to see how these techniques really work for them. *We will know more than we know when trying them.* Teacher plays a virtual role to lead students to reach their need. To ensure the lively classroom in speaking, teacher has to prepare activities for students whereas students have to practice what the gives.

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