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Developing Speaking Skills By Cooperative Learning

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Abstract: What is learning? A famous educator Cameron Fincher in his article -"Learning Theory and Research" wrote: "Learning is in its broadest sense can be defined as a process of progressive change from ignorance to knowledge, from inability to competence, and from indifference to understanding....In much the same manner, instruction-or education-can be defined as the means by which we systematize the situations, conditions, tasks materials, and opportunities by which learners acquire new or different ways of thinking, feeling, and doing". We completely agree with him. Learning is an act of acquiring knowledge and it is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance, no matter gathered within group working or by individual training". The present need for learning foreign languages especially, the need for learning the English language is increasing everywhere day by day. This article aims at discussing the importance of organizing cooperative learning to promote speaking skills by a range of effective and practical techniques focusing on making the teaching a better experience for both teachers and students.

Keywords: speaking skills, learning, English language

Introduction

Speaking is one of the most important skills in language learning and teaching. It is referred as a productive skill in oral mode. According to Chaney, speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. We can say that speaking means to converse, or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language. Despite its importance, speaking was undervalued for many years, however, the goal of

teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills and only in that way, students should express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstances. Teaching English does not only include giving information about grammar rules, the definitions of new words. It should also involve the discussions or communications of students in English so that they can use what they are learning in a real practice. However, the main problem is how can a student explore his/her speaking activities?! There might be some reasons for unsuccessful speaking activities. May be he is afraid of making mistakes? Or is a student dominating by his high-status peers? Perhaps speaking activity is not interesting for him? Or doesn't he know a reason to communicate? Hence, the best solution to successful speaking seems to us is promote cooperative studying in either lectures or in group working activities.

Let's outline some advantages of cooperative learning. There is no wonder that learning begins with the need of some motivation, an intention to learn. David Johnson, Roger Johnson and Karl Smith in their interaction book- "Active *Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom"* approved the issue that working together is a social process that occurs through interpersonal interaction within a cooperative context. Individuals, working together, construct shared understandings and knowledge on the purpose of gaining common goals. a) Allowance and a motivation of teachers to students' input during lectures and classes, apparently it creates the reason to break the ice and urge to develop their critical thinking, brainstorming, problem solving and mind-mapping abilities. Similarly, no two individuals can think the same way. For example: today's theme is "numbers", examples are provided related to one's favorite number, birth, mobile, group, house numbers...,comments, facts on #13, #7.., this is not only distraction, but also the result of the same issue shows different solutions, different ideas and different suggestions. This is the key factor for group-study. b) Cooperative learning will lead students to do particular activities including into writing projects on various

issues, quizzes and questionnaires to warm-up the group members and stimulate their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and role plays. The team is divided into two or several groups, and they show their prepared role plays turn by turn. Role plays help learners to gain cultural-social skills as well. However there are some students feel embarrassed and not dare to utter a word. In these cases, suggestion 1; make students aware of the purpose and benefits of learning cooperatively for good spoken English by asking following questions:

- What are some things that you do by yourself and what are some things that you do with others?
- What things can we do better in groups? Why?
- What skills must we use when working in groups?
- How will we use these skills in the future?
- Why would we want to study this specific topic in groups?

Suggestion 2; Practice cooperation spoken skills with nonacademic games; Suggestion 3; Change the culture of your classroom; Ask like interactive, following question: Where would you go to see if you were given a free and good opportunity to go to the country where you want?

Suggestion 4; Establish ground rules for all cooperative learning activities

- Always ask for help when something is confusing.
- Respect one's opinion
- Don't disturb while speaking
- Avoid to discriminate each others' race, religion and language
- Be always active in team working activities; Anne Hammond Byrd, (2009)

There are main reasons for cooperative laerning activities that are not taught in individual training:

a) Be a good English language-literate
b) Develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities

c) Improve language skills
d) Become more motivated, independent and confident
e) Learn diversity of cultures
f) Outdoor activities (hiking, traveling and sport competitions)
g) Preparation to life-learn skills
h) Make friends
i) Become a future leader
j) It's really good fun!

Materials and methods

There are several activities/ strategies including discussion, simulation, and brainstorming, interview, reporting, and etc which can help developing speaking skills by cooperative learning.

Discussions are often implemented by many language teachers which focus on developing students' speaking skills. Discussions help learners to improve critical thinking skills and quick decision making, and they learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because less active students may avoid engaging in large groups and they should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas. There are three stages in the implementation of a classroom discussion: *Pre-discussion*. Viable discussion and associated partner groups are formed. The most appropriate number of participants for fluent interaction is a group of four. Each group draws up a list of possible discussion topics due to their current professional, academic or developmental concerns. Next, a topic for discussion is selected and divided into manageable areas of enquiry for the time available. Responsibility may then be apportioned among individuals for researching and exploring particular aspects of the topics. If

preferred, the whole topic may be researched and thought about by each participant. *Discussion*: The groups discuss the topic while partner groups of observer-evaluators monitor the process, using a variety of instruments to record data. *Post-discussion*. First, there should be peer feedback from the observer-evaluators. The teacher may then give feedback on content and linguistic appropriateness to groups and individuals. Finally, the groups decide on ways to enrich and extend the topic or, alternatively, to choose a new topic. (Christopher F, p 227)

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different from role plays that we usually apply during lessons is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.(Harmer, J. 1984)

Brainstorming: on a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. One of good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so leaners will be open to sharing new ideas.

Interviews: students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides enough information to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside. After

interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, learners can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

Reporting: before coming to class, learners are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and in class,they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class. These kinds of methods are preferred to apply in older students. But with younger ones, the things become rather complicated and difficult. Young learners tend to have a lot of difficulties in concentrating, which is why the techniques a teacher must choose have to be very interesting and colorful. In the young learners' classroom, the activities are usually centered on songs, poems, chants, drama, stories, games and others. All these activities can affect young learners and enhance their learning the language. A number of teachers consider games as merely fun activities that are a waste of time, games in the EFL context are much more than that. They include many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning which are all advantageous in promoting speaking. Games are useful because they offer situations that lower students' stress and give students chances to engage in real communication. (Deesri, A. (2002) It is never considered as appropriate to correct students' mistakes while they are speaking. Firstly, it distracts the student's mind and makes an obstacle to express their ideas fully. Secondly, they can become afraid and unmotivated by realizing that they are making a lot of mistakes and irritating the teacher. As Serna, Kennedy and Prater believe, one of the ways to get rid of young students' fear to make a mistake is using the puppets during role-plays or other activities. It helps children think that it is not they but the puppet that is speaking and probably making a mistake. It gives a chance both for a teacher and a student. As a teacher, one will have the opportunity to get his/her students speak at the same time of making the lesson much more attractive. Furthermore, this method encourages the students' speaking and after some practice, they themselves

will be able to speak openly. Besides, the teacher should keep the language environment not only in the classroom, but also outside. This gets the students to meet the target language in daily life and they will have to use it to communicate with teachers and friends.

Conclusion

We can conclude by saying that teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second 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 language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. Moreover, these activities make students more active in the learning process cooperatively and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

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