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IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

In today's era teaching English language has become a big challenge for all language teachers, as today the need is not only just language teaching but also to develop the student's abilities in the language. The most difficult task for any language teacher is to develop interest among students towards language learning, because each student's area of interest may differ from another as well as has his own difficulties in language learning. One may be good in understanding the language but unable to reproduce the same while communicating. Generally in the traditional classroom, language teaching is limited to reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary in writing but there is no much scope for the use of learned vocabulary and grammar in speaking. The present paper is based on how content based instruction helps in improving speaking skills.

Key Words: Content Based Instruction, Speaking Skills

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

It is not easy to imagine the world without two "e"s. One is Electronic Communication and second is English. English is a need for everyone today. The importance of English in education and student's life in the world of globalization cannot be denied. English is a primary language for internet access and it remains a major medium of instruction in schools. There are large numbers of books that are written in English language. If English is abolished today, it will affect the education system in India. So, unless and until we translate these books into various regional languages, it will continue affecting the education system in our country. In this era of science and technology, when India is making its pathway towards brain gain under the regime of our honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, English language plays a vital role to connect the people globally. Hence it should be served as an important official language in present education system along with other regional languages.

IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING SKILLS

To carve a niche in a professional life, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, the four language skills are considered to be the most important parameters. Proficiency in all the four skills helps one to be a well-rounded communicator. But among the four, speaking plays a vigorous role in effective way of communication. One's ability to speak skillfully to reflect thoughts, opinions, and feelings and to convince others provides him with several distinct advantages. It develops one's negotiation skills and self-confidence.

Knowledge of English opens up a large number of employment opportunities in almost every business domain. Almost every employee expects his employee to have basic excellent English speaking skills.

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING and LEARNING LANGUAGE

The following seem to be problems faced by English as a Second Language Learners (ESLLs) to speak in English.

Student's Lack of Interest: Learner's disinterestedness in language might be because of his/her area of interest which is different from language learning. Lack of adequate knowledge about the language importance also makes an individual to step back from learning.

Student's Inhibition: Unlike listening, reading and writing, speaking requires some real time exposure. Most of the students might have the inhibitions to communicate in English out of fear for making mistakes and that others may make fun of them.

Mother Tongue Influence: For ESL learners, it is difficult to overcome the influence of their mother tongue on target language. They use mother tongue in the class because it looks natural. They think in their native language and try to translate it in English.

Lack of Basic Vocabulary: Sometimes it is not due to learner's inhibitions but his/her lack of knowledge in basic vocabulary which stops him/her from speaking in the middle of their speech.

Nothing to Say: Students may sometimes know the content but don't know how it is to be expressed in English.

Student's low participation: In a heterogeneous group of class there are always some dominant students who make it difficult for reserved students to express themselves freely. Reserved students try to compare themselves with these dominant students who always interrupt to grab the attention of the teacher and lose their confidence.

Lack of Exposure: Students are learning the language but not practicing it in real time situation, for what actually it is aimed at. They restrict their language learning to the ESL classrooms only.

SOLUTIONS FOR SPEAKING PROBLEMS

The above mentioned problems are common for ESL classrooms. Till now traditional teaching is being practiced in the language classrooms through grammar translation method. But the main aim of language teaching is learner should be able to communicate language in day to day life which seems difficult through traditional methodologies of teaching. Traditional teaching is useful for the academic achievements but may not help learner in real time situation. Usually in language classrooms, students learn language by involving themselves in the activities such as recitation, fill in the blanks, grammar drilling, by listening to the teacher's use of target language, loud reading of the text etc. This approach, however, does not combine all the four skills simultaneously so that they can be used together to reach the target. Skills-based learning reverberates and revives classroom environments where independence, thinking skills, collaboration and active learning are developed at the same time as knowledge is acquired.

Where there is a problem there is a solution.

"Success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language." Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be.

The above mentioned problems can be overcome by bringing few transformations in the teaching approaches. One such approach is Content Based Instruction.

WHAT IS CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION

Content-Based Instruction is a significant approach in language education. The approach not only focuses on the language itself but also on the subject matter or the topic. In this approach, language becomes the medium of the instruction through which the required content is learned. In content based instruction, language is used as a combination of several skills. Students are motivated when learning is more focused on something other than language, such as, ideas, opinions etc. Content based approaches are based on student's knowledge and his previous experiences. CoBI objective is to make students learn content through the medium of language in which language is tested on how students are able to deliver or use language to

express the learned content. In this method students are motivated to learn from concrete to abstract i.e teacher start the lesson from the content what students know and then take them slowly to what they don't know .The assessment of their learning is also done on what they know rather than what is not known to them. CoBI is a student centered approach and teacher acts as a facilitator who helps students in overcoming their difficulties. Here is an example of Content Based Activity.

CONTENT BASED ACTIVITY

Content: Water –The Elixir of Life

Organization: Groups or the whole class (30 students)

Aim: To bring awareness of the importance of water, to identify different ways of saving water and give posture presentation on it.

Language Focus: imperatives, sentence structures, vocabulary, daily activities.

Materials: posture size charts, markers of different colors.

Procedure

1. Ask students few primary resources for the existence of life on the Earth.
2. Introduce the topic.
3. Divide students in five groups .Each group is of six students.
4. Ask students to give reasons why they are important and listen to their ideas.
5. Ask each group to make a note of uses of water in our daily activities and share it with other groups. For example;
 - for household purposes
 - for irrigation purposes in agriculture
 - for planting trees and to produce electricity.
6. Next ask them how we are wasting water unknowingly and to come up with different ways of saving water.
7. Ask them what happens if there is a shortage of water and excess of water.(merits and demerits).How it effects our land and man's existence and what steps to be taken to overcome these problems.
8. Give some prompts to help them for example beauty of nature, barren lands, soil erosion, construction of dams etc.
9. Listen to their ideas and appreciate the best saving tips and solutions.
10. Now ask each group to design a posture including pictures on the whole content they have learnt. Give the time limit for 5-7 minutes. Ask them to give titles to their postures.
11. Ask them to write slogans to encourage people to save water and present their postures to the whole class.
12. At the end, analyze their postures. Appreciate them for their involvement in the activities. Ask other groups to give remarks and feedback. Give your feedback and remarks too to make the class neutral.
13. The postures can be displayed in the classrooms and the best posture among them can be displayed on the school notice board to motivate them for their participation, efforts and creativity.
14. At the end, sum up the whole session and ask each student to work on the same content individually as an assignment.

ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment should be done on student's ability to speak confidently.
2. Is he able to communicate meaningfully?
3. Whether others are able to understand his pronunciation or not.
4. Is the vocabulary used is relevant to the content or not.
5. Don't concentrate much on their grammatical errors at the beginning stage of their learning. It kills their speaking spirit.

SUGGESTIONS

- Teacher has to steer the class and make sure of equal participation every student.
- Give clear instructions and keep on repeating them, to avoid confusion in students.
- Ask them to discuss, plan and then proceed. Segregate time for discussion, plan and presentation.

- Guide them to write slogans on their notebooks first and then come up with a final slogan on the posters.
- Appoint monitors for each group to remind students to speak in English and no one should dominate each other.
- Don't tell the students the assessment criteria. If you tell them on what basis you are going to assess them, they may get distracted and focus on the assessment but not on the activity.

ADVANTAGES OF CONTENT BASED ACTIVITY

Collaborative Learning: Team work always gives scope for slow learners who feel shy to speak before the whole class. Here students can exchange their knowledge with each other. The group should be a heterogeneous but their area of interest should be similar so that whatever task is given to them they work collaboratively according to their skills. Peer group learning always helps slow learners and gives responsibility to active learners to help others. It gives greater opportunity for sharing skills and knowledge.

Creativity: It gives scope for their creativity. One, who is good in drawing, can present his drawing skills.

Cognitive Skills: It develops student's high order thinking ability to evaluate, analyze, remember, make comparisons and understand cause and effects.

Real Time Exposure: Content Based Activity emphasizes a connection to real life and explore more opportunities to use their content knowledge.

CONCLUSION:

The environment plays an important role in the learning process and content based approach provides such opportunities to the learners to express them and motivate them for their open participation.

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