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THE IMPORTANCE OF JAM SESSIONS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

PARUPALLI SRINIVAS RAO

Lecturer in English,

English Language Centre, King Faisal University

Al-Hasa, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



PARUPALLI SRINIVAS RAO

ABSTRACT

With the emergence of the present globalization of the modern era, the entire life of the humanity has undergone a series of drastic changes in almost all the fields. The present twenty-first century witnesses all these radical changes. As changes are inevitable the ideas of human beings change constantly, the thinking process of human beings undergo rapid changes whenever there are certain innovations in every field. It is not at all wonder to say that there is no time for people to think of or judge the people's talent as there is a heavy competition in every field. So there is a need to search for short cut methods to resolve this problem. Undoubtedly, the same scenario is applied to the current job market around the globe. Many corporate and business organizations aim at recruiting the highly versatile and talented people who can act as the main pillars of their firms to make their foundations very strong and help in the perennial progress of their organizations. At this juncture, they need to focus on recruiting employees who are well qualified and trained in both hard skills and soft skills. At same time, the employers focus on communication skills besides hard skills and soft skills. In oral communication, the job seekers have to develop their oral communication skills by practising activities such as JAM, group discussions, debates, presentations and so on in order to grab the attention of the employers. In this regard, job seekers or employees should be trained in communication skills particularly in the activities mentioned above. JAM session is an important activity in the beginning to be practised by the learners in English to speak fluently. Therefore, the responsibility is on English teachers and trainers to groom their learners in oral communication, particularly in speaking activities like JAM sessions. This paper throws a light on the importance of JAM sessions where there is a huge demand for oral skills at the time of job interviews and presentations. This paper also highlights the significance of these JAM sessions since they prepare the learners to speak fluently at interviews and workplaces. Furthermore, some DOs and DON'Ts of the JAM sessions are also discussed elaborately. Finally, some useful tips and suggestions are also given both for the teachers to train their learners in speaking activities like JAM and for the learners to practice JAM and other activities in order to achieve mastery over oral communication.

Key words: activities, employment, JAM sessions, English language classroom, learners, interviews, oral communication skills, teachers, techniques.

Introduction

In the modern society, there is a need to learn language skills as there is a huge demand for them in business, sales, marketing and other fields. Many successful people occupy the higher positions in their respective fields as they acquire language skills. It shows a clear picture of the present society that no one can get success in their life without having communications skills. The talent of having excellent communication skills is a boon for any individual to mould his/her career into a successful one. Hence, there is a necessity of learning these oral or communication skills in order to prove the ability and talent of the individuals. There is also a great demand for oral communication skills and presentation skills in the present job market and the job aspirants should acquire these skills to prove themselves to be excellent and outstanding in their performance in the interviews and workplaces. Regarding speaking skills, Chaney (1998: 13) asserts, "Speaking is an interactive process of getting and evaluation of information in order to produce meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts". Girard, Pinar and Trapp (2011) say, "Using oral presentations in their classroom lead to greater class interaction and participation, an increased interest in learning, and noticeable improvements in their students' communication and presentation skills".

As there is infinite number of job aspirants competing for a limited number of vacancies, it has become a major problem to select suitable skilled professionals within the limited time. In order to hasten this process and recruit the right candidates for the respective positions, a perfect and accurate process is needed for the interviewers. The employers test the technical skills and soft skills of job aspirants in a systematic way and analyze their skills whether they are suitable for the particular position or job. At this juncture, the job aspirants need to showcase their skills in front of the interview panel to grab opportunities. To present these skills, they need to communicate well to impress the interview panel. In order to perform well in this way, they need to be trained systematically in oral communication skills by practising certain activities such as JAM sessions,

group discussions, debates, presentation skills and so on in the English classrooms or training centres. In this regard, Just a Minute (JAM) session is a very useful activity for learners and it helps them in improving their fluency, accuracy and time management skills. At the time of interview, job seekers can present or give information exactly in a brief or concise manner. There, JAM session shows its impact on job aspirants. Thus, the importance of JAM sessions for learners is clearly seen to express or convey their ideas concisely and meaningfully.

A very popular British quiz game, Just a Minute (JAM), has become an ideal game in all the EFL/ESL classrooms across the globe to practise speaking skills. JAM has deserved its popularity around the globe after completing eight hundred episodes on BBC. It is an all-round fun event that controls the speaker's mind over the articulation of his/her tongue. For English language teachers, JAM session is very simple to prepare, but a great fun to play with the learners in the English classrooms. This activity is more suitable for a small group of learners, whereas it can also be managed with a larger group of learners when it is well-prepared and well-organized.

The basic principle of this game is that the speakers have to speak continuously for 60 seconds (one minute) on a given topic, but they have to speak on it without any deviation, hesitation and repetition.

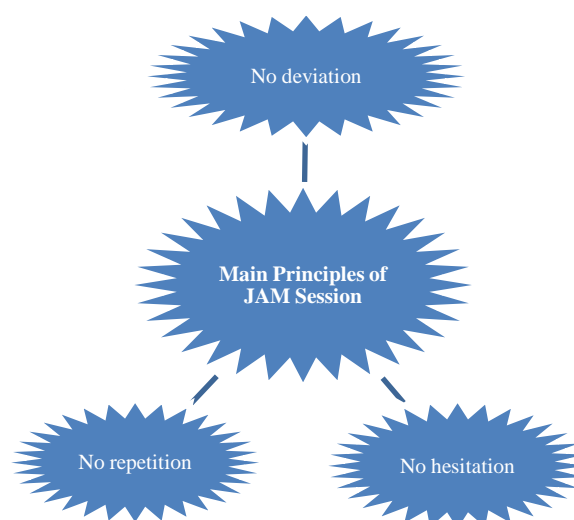


Fig: The Main Principles of JAM Session

Here deviation means that the learners have strayed off the topic or the learners are talking which is irrelevant to the given topic. Repetition means the same vocabulary is frequently used by the speakers except the content words or phrases. Hesitation means when the learners are in dilemma or when they have doubts whether they have to use certain vocabulary or grammatical structure or not. Hence the main aim of the teacher is to engage them to come out of this phobia. While the speaker is speaking, the other learners can challenge the speaker's speech if they find any repetition, deviation or hesitation. If the challenge is successful and the teacher accepts the challenge, then the challenger gets a point and the speaker continues his/her speech on the given task for the remaining time.

JAM session is one of the most useful activities to be introduced into the English classrooms to develop the speaking skills among the learners. Let us examine how this activity is introduced and organized in the EFL/ESL classrooms. This activity is played in the EFL/ESL classrooms by dividing the whole class into two groups and rotating through each group so that each and every learner can get his/her turn. While dividing the class into two groups, the teachers can take into the consideration of the learners' gender, ethnicity, nationality, age or even by naming the teams. Then the teachers can suggest each group to make a list of topics on which their counterparts are supposed to speak for one minute. Then the teachers should go through the list of these topics to make sure whether these topics suit the level of the learners or not. Hence, the teachers should take utmost care in choosing the best topics among them where the topics challenge the learners' vocabulary without being too difficult. Some of the familiar and useful topics that the teachers can give the learners may include: 'About Myself', 'My Mother', 'My Parents', 'My family', 'My Best Friend', 'My Favourite Teacher/Dish/vehicle/Book/Sport/Subject/Hobby....', 'The Best Place I have ever Visited', 'The Best Vacation I've ever been on', 'My First Day at School', 'The Best/Worst Movie I have seen', 'I love English Subject because', 'I can see at the Art Museum/at a Ballgame/in the Park/in the Zoo,

.....', 'What can you do as a tourist in Delhi/London/Paris/Washington/Rome/Dubai.....?', and so on. It is the duty of the teachers to explain all the rules involved in this game first and then demonstrate two or three topics to the learners in order to prepare them ready to start the game in the classroom. Here the teachers should inform the learners that they have to speak for the whole one minute without giving longer pauses except those taken by a normal speaker. The teachers should also inform the learners not to change the topic or information as the opposing group may raise an objection whenever they think that it happens and the opposing group may indicate their objection by raising a hand. At this juncture, the teachers should take utmost care so that every learner gets an opportunity to take part in this event or task. The teachers can also either prepare the learners to organize it themselves or they can choose the next contestant or speaker. In this connection, it is better to use a stopwatch or a timer so that the speakers can organize their speech just by watching the time. The teachers should also give an indication or a sign by beeping at 45th second that the learners can prepare themselves to wind up their talk with a reasonable or meaningful conclusion. It is better to give them a score that is tallied on the board. While giving this score, the teachers should take these points into consideration: whether they have given some big pauses, they have repeated their thoughts or ideas and they have deviated from the topic. The main concern of the teachers is to encourage the learners by giving extra or bonus points to them especially for those who use good choice of vocabulary and/or effective use of a tricky grammar point. The learners have to carefully and respectfully listen to the speakers while the speakers are speaking. Here the teachers should encourage the speakers whenever they feel nervous or disappointed by encouraging them with gestures like smiling, nodding and using a wide range of "keep going!" and so on. In case the learners really hit trouble in their speech, the teachers should drop a hint to continue the speech or suggest a piece of vocabulary that might unlock a few more seconds of their speech. As this is the game that each and every learner faces the same problem or challenge and

this also gives a good opportunity for the learners to encourage and support each other while working together for the given activity to achieve their main objective of winning the game.

The Main Advantages (Positive Aspects) of a JAM Session:

The following are the main advantages or positive aspects of a JAM session:

- It builds self-confidence among the learners.
- It helps the learners prepare to talk on any challenging topic in a light-hearted setting, initially in the classroom.
- It develops the learners' speaking ability to talk not only with his peers but also with others outside.
- It leads the speakers to speak for more than a minute on the given task.
- It encourages the learners to work in learner-friendly atmosphere.
- It helps the learners use relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures in context.
- It leads the learners to work on their own, without depending on the others.
- It becomes a good practice for specific target language, depending on the topic, such as family, hobbies, sports, places of visit in a city, buildings in a city, etc.
- It is a very good fluency practice game where it requires the quick recall of appropriate vocabulary.
- It increases the learners' autonomy so that the learners can prepare their own speeches.
- It boosts the learners in using accurate and good vocabulary and grammatical structures if some extra or bonus points are given to the participants.
- It helps the learners correct or rectify their mistakes once their session is completed.

- It helps the teachers prepare notes on the common mistakes made by the learners in the areas of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.
- It prepares the learners to face any kind of challenge they face in their lives.
- It helps the learners in giving presentations in meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc.

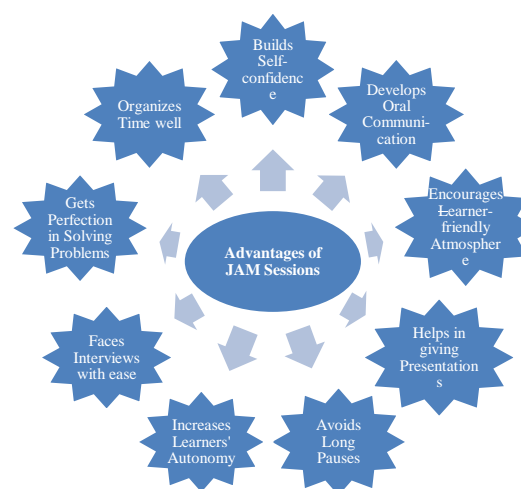


Fig: The Advantages of JAM Sessions

- It helps the learners settle down in a good profession.
- It motivates the learners to lead their groups independently, without the help of their teachers.
- It leads the learners to increase their ability of spontaneous speech without any preparation or any notes.
- It helps the learners condense their complete essence precisely in the minds and make them to speak out only the relevant information within the stipulated time, i.e. one minute.

While preparing the learners for JAM sessions, the teachers should take utmost care in selecting the topics. The teacher should always give preference to the learners' interests and the topics chosen for this purpose. The topics should be selected according to the needs and interests of the learners. When a topic is announced to the learners for a JAM session,

the teacher has to give some useful vocabulary to the learners at the preliminary stage. Later on, he has to leave it to the learners so that they will select their own vocabulary and grammatical structures for this purpose. The JAM session prepares the learners to be independent to prepare a speech or a small talk on the given topic. This may lead the learner to be more autonomous and even to prepare them to deliver short speeches without any preparation, i.e., impromptu speeches. By leading the learners to their autonomy stage, the burden of the teacher slowly reduces and the learners can think and act independently. The teachers should encourage the learners to have more practice on some topics as there is a saying, "practice makes a man perfect", and hence the teachers are supposed to help them in improving and developing their oral communication skills as it helps the learners give a talk with utmost confidence and ease in a JAM session.

Principles involved in JAM Sessions:

As JAM sessions are more useful for the learners to promote their speaking skills, there are certain principles that both the teachers and the learners have to follow in the classrooms. Especially, the English language teachers or trainers are advised to follow these principles in order to make the learners more confident and proficient in using the language and improve their speaking skills as well as presentation skills. The following are the principles of a JAM session:

- The teachers should give a model speech on some topics so that the learners can understand how to present the given task.
- Each task should not exceed the limited time given, i.e., 60 seconds or one minute.
- Never discourage the learners by always finding out their mistakes or faults.
- Talk about their positive points while they make a speech.
- The topic for the purpose must be written on the board.
- The learners are given some time to think about what to say.

- Initially, the teachers should encourage the active and enthusiastic learners to give a talk on the topic given.
- A stopwatch should be used for timing.
- Topics selected for JAM sessions should be very unique and more interesting.
- Teachers should help the students whenever they find problems in getting ideas.
- The game can be adopted for a range of learners.
- The teachers should even encourage the learners by filling with suitable vocabulary and grammar.
- Always motivate the learners to wear confidence and a smile on their faces.
- The teachers should always encourage the learners whenever they use some good vocabulary and grammatical structures.

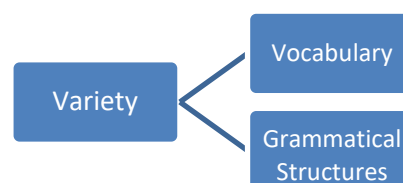


Fig: Factors involved in an Outstanding JAM Talk

- The teachers should observe carefully that the flow of the learners' speech continues till the end of the task.
- As common topics are boring, select the current topics in order to make these JAM sessions lively and interesting.
- There should not be longer pauses in the speakers' speech.
- The medium of communication is restricted only to English.
- Common mistakes of the speakers are explained to the whole class.

- If there are any objections, the other participants can raise their hands and interrupt the speaker only with a prior permission from their teachers.
- There is no room for group or team participation; only individual participants have to participate in this activity.
- Time duration of two minutes is given to the participants for getting the points that they have to elaborate, but one minute is given for presenting these points.
- The teachers stop the stopwatch when the member(s) of the opposite group objects on the talk and once the objection is resolved, the teacher starts the time again and the speaker continues speaking.
- Speakers have to speak continuously for a minute on the given topic before the judges while standing on the podium.
- In some cases, the individuals are advised to rectify their mistakes when they are alone.
- In large classes, the whole class can be divided into two or more teams so that the classroom management can be easier.
- The teacher should encourage the learners to use good vocabulary and complex sentences in their speech.
- Give the learners a strictly controlled time for their preparation of not more than two minutes where learners note down the opening points, some important points of the talk and a good conclusion.
- The judging criteria is based on the choice of points, choice of words, body language, confidence, fluency, grammar, pronunciation, enunciation and formal attire.
- Always encourage the learners to prepare themselves at home on some other topics of their interests and ask them to record them.
- Ask the students to playback their recordings to find out whether the content, structure and fluency are up to the mark.
- Once the topic is given to a particular participant, he/she is not allowed to share his/her ideas with peers.
- Make changes if there are any flaws in their speech.
- Encourage the learners to use their impromptu speeches with their close friends or with the members of their families.
- In case of any involvement in malpractices during the session leads to immediate disqualification.
- The ultimate goal of the participants is to give a speech on a particular topic and to start speaking on the task easily, coherently, fluently and spontaneously.
- There will not be any argument or questions once the final decision has been taken.
- The teacher should allot points for the following reasons:
 - Add bonus points for each and every correct use of vocabulary and grammar.
 - Add points for each and every second that the speaker speaks.
 - Add points for the positive points for every objection that proved to be correct.
 - Subtract points for the negative remarks for every correct objection.
 - Add bonus points for fluency and accuracy.
- Finally, the winner of the session will be announced after scrutinizing or verifying all the points. The speaker who gets the maximum points will be announced as the

winner of the session at the end of the round.

Therefore, the English language learners and learners have to follow the principles mentioned above strictly as guidelines for JAM sessions. In order make these JAM sessions meaningful, they have to keep these principles in their mind and do these activities systematically. Thus the proficiency of the learners' speaking skills will be improved through these JAM sessions.

DOs in a JAM Session:

The following are some of the DOs that must be followed by the candidates those who are going to take the JAM sessions:

- Explain the JAM topic in a clear and simple language that all the learners can understand it.
- Put a nice smile on your face (as there is a proverb, "Face is the index of mind.") until the end of the one-minute session.
- Begin with a thanking note.
- Be confident while presenting the topic.
- Try to present the topic with brief details.
- Continue the speech by keeping your looks on the audience.
- Make sure that there is no room for nervousness.
- Follow the KISS (Keep It Simple and Straight) Rule.
- Convey the message in audible and much clear voice.
- Have always a positive look.
- Make sure that the topic is not deviated.
- Deliver the presentation with apt vocabulary and correct grammatical structure of the sentences.
- Give brief details about past/ present/ future.
- Maintain the positive outlook throughout the session.

- Define the topic in a simple language.
- Concentrate more on choosing the topics. Try to choose topics related to the fields of politics, economics, social life, technology, language, law and so on.
- Prepare the speech with a right beginning (as there is a saying, "A good beginning is half done."), continue with appropriate points and end with a good catching point.
- Continue your speech without longer pauses in between.
- Finish the session with a right conclusion.
- End your talk with a thanking note.

DON'Ts in a JAM Session:

- Don't present the speech with grammatical mistakes.
- Don't repeat the same vocabulary unless they are content words, pronouns, prepositions, etc.
- Don't get nervous and don't be tensed up while giving a talk in the JAM session.
- Don't give more gaps between words.
- Don't try to beat around the bush and express your opinion straight away what you want to say.
- Don't give too much long pauses.
- Don't take too much time to say a simple expression.
- Don't try to bring your mother tongue in the middle of your speech.
- Don't try to use bombastic or new words that you don't know. Try to maintain your complete speech with simple, easy and clear English words that you know.
- Don't put any questions to the audience.
- Don't face the other side of the audience.

Keeping in view all the points in mind, the speaker should prepare well for his/her session and show his/her talent during the JAM session to make

his/her speech well-organized and impressive that excel the speeches of others.

Nowadays, JAM sessions create terror in the minds of most of the job seekers and they form a kind of phobia. As a result, they cannot perform well during these sessions. In this case, the teachers should note down their names and should encourage them to visit their offices. There the teacher has to counsel them in such a way that the learners have to overcome all these fears and become bold. As these JAM sessions are of immense use for the job seekers, the main concentration of the teachers should be on conducting as many JAM sessions as possible so that the average level participant also comes up with bright and new ideas to make his speech more attractive. As the classroom is the right place to do more and more rehearsals, there is a possibility for the learner to enhance their speaking skills and presentation skills.

The teachers are advised to follow the above mentioned principles of a JAM session very strictly so that it will be very convenient for them to organize such sessions in the EFL/ESL classrooms. Moreover, it is the duty of the teacher to make the learners active, alert, energetic and attentive in order to make the classrooms lively, dynamic and noisy. The learners are also advised to read the English newspapers, listen to the radio for international, national or even local issues.

Conclusion

In this research paper, the main focus has been on the importance of JAM sessions in oral communication, the advantages of oral communication, the principles of JAM sessions, the DOs and DON'Ts of JAM sessions and the role of teachers in conducting in EFL/ESL classrooms. In this regard, the data has been presented which is pertinent to JAM sessions in a comprehensive way.

In research findings, the importance of practising JAM sessions in oral communication and the advantages of JAM sessions in interviews, group discussions, debates and presentations have been identified for the benefits of learners as well as job seekers. In fact, rubrics are essential for a particular

activity. Similarly, DOs and DON'Ts of JAM sessions are also important for learners and they have been explained in a detailed way.

Some useful suggestions are given with regard to the importance of JAM sessions as a part of oral communication. English language teachers need to start speaking activities with JAM sessions in the classrooms because JAM sessions help the learners speak on any topic within a minute after a two-minute preparation. These sessions help the learners improve their fluency and time management skills that help them in group discussions, debates and presentations later. Moreover, the teachers have to encourage the learners to speak on the lesson taught on that day by the teachers at least for a minute. Then, the learners can speak on it for a minute whatever they understand from teachers' explanation of the topic or lesson. It is also one of the useful techniques incorporated by the teachers in improving their learners' speaking skills.

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