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ENGLISH AS A SECONDARY LANGUAGE - ENHANCING SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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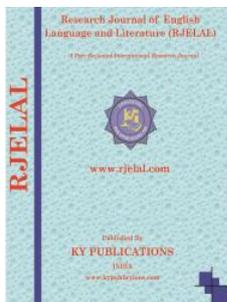
ABSTRACT

In the context of learning a language, be it Primary or secondary, there are 4 macro skills that need to be developed to effectively communicate in that language and speaking is one of them. In the environment of pedagogy of EFL (English as Foreign Language), increasing the confidence & competence of speaking in students at undergrad level is a critical task amongst the instructors. This issue led to designing of qualitative research as part of the regular course of study as an approach based on task. Results of the research indicate that speaking competence, topic creativity and confidence were major contributors to speaking development specially when addressing audiences.

Keywords:Development of English speaking, ESL/EFL enhancing factors, communication skill.

Introduction

In order to effectively communicate in any language, we need to have 4 macro skills and speaking is one of them. This is particularly relevant when the language in question is not the mother tongue or primary language of the speaker. We all know English to be a universal language, used in all walks of life, specifically the world of internet, hence development of speaking skills in English along with other required skills is necessary. This development would result in better and effective communication between the international community and the native English speakers.Goh(2007) & Bailey(2005) realized the significance that speaking plays in effective communication and put to task of laying out developmental actions for enhancing speaking through speaking assessment, material and task types, principles of teaching and syllabus design.

A regularly asked question by the instructors of English in the EFL context is why students at the undergraduate level in India are not able to communicate confidently in English, particularly with speakers of international community in the real world situations.Different studies have pointed out that one of the possible reasons for this lack of confidence by the students in India is the fear of making mistakes while speaking English and being judged for that. Most of the students in India have been exposed to 7-9 years of English studies at various levels before they enter tertiary education. The question of improving the competence and confidence of English speaking in undergrad students led us to conduct an interview/survey with university students of EFL and we asked them about the possible factors contributing to enhancement of their English-speaking skills. The pilot study pointed out that opportunity to speak and confidence development were part of major factors that could help. The response of this survey along with research on developmental factors to improve accuracy, fluency

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and confidence in speaking were utilized to develop a course and its design. In order to enhance effectiveness of the course, activities and speaking principles highlighted by the study "Special Communication – Listening & Speaking" were used as basis of design. We also found very relevant action ideas highlighted by K. V. Madhavi(2013) for development of speaking in the environment of regular classrooms.

Jaatinen, R(2001) researched the topic of task-based approach of learning, the same was utilized for obtaining the primary questions in the research presented to the participants of the course:

1. For EFL learners, what are the factors that would help in developing/improving of speaking skill?

2. What are the weaknesses and strength of learners in EFL while using English language for special communications?

We expected study outcome to directly develop and boost the speaking performance of the participants and give teachers more insight to alternate activity for development of speaking skills in learners in India in the context of ESL/EFL.

Reviewing Literature

We covered 3 primary facets while reviewing literature: Speaking - significance &related research, EFL learners speaking weakness &strengths, and learning approach based on tasks.

Speaking - significance & related research

Listening and reading are considered the primary receptive skills when it comes to learning and use of language the primary productive skills are speaking and writing. Development of all these skills is required for effective communication to happen in any language. Prasongporn in 2004 highlighted that out of the 4 macro skills required for communication, speaking is the most critical in making the communication effective. Business organizations and individual speaker both benefit in a number of ways when speaking improves effectiveness of communication. E.g.,Davison in 2006pointed out great feat can be achieved by effective speaking during activities like job

interviews, job training, ceremonial speeches and a variety of other business activities. In the business domain, Communication or speaking skills are placed above other skills like academic credentials, motivation or even work experience when hiring new employees, the same was demonstrated through a study conducted by K. V. Madhavi (2013).Ahmed Amin Awad Raba in 2017 pointed that EFL students have very limited opportunity to speak in English outside their classroom environments. They also do not have ample exposure to the international community or native English speakers. Hence, instructors of EFL setup need to ensure that more opportunity and activities are presented to students for strengthening the competence in English speaking.

Special communication speaking normally happens in settings when speaking performance gets conducted keeping in view audiences under divergent circumstances. Principles of Special communication speaking and public speaking should be entwined when considering ways to enhance communication skills for special circumstances. Hence, when we need to improve communication with a specific audience speaking is not a mere act of everyday conversation and is much more complicated, as it involves considering of other skills like accepting listener's feedback, tailoring of messages, organizing of thoughts and choosing the topics etc. (Lucas, 2001)

EFL learners speaking weakness & strengths

We include various factors in the list of things that impact the performance of English speaking and making it more effective, some of the critical ones are: Collocations, vocabulary and pronunciation. They are considered of utmost importance when it comes to EFL context. Not to mention the students need to be provided ample opportunity to speak in various situations and must be given regular tasks of speaking English for improving the fluency, and TAM in 1997 highlighted the same.

Skills in English speaking are strengthened by competence and confidence.Dornyei, Z (1994) highlighted that to build up the confidence in the learner for eliminating his/her fear about making

mistakes was the topmost priority of the teacher; this would ensure that learner starts to feel comfortable while using English in conversations. Jaatinen, R (2001) and Bailey in 2005 identified sufficient material and task coupled with appropriate teaching methods and syllabus design to pivotal in development of competence and confidence in speaking. Sociolinguistic & linguistic competence like strategic discourse, grammatical and sociolinguistic expertise along with elements like affective factors, sociocultural factors and listening skill were involved in effective speaking as demonstrated by Shumin in 1997. An EFL learner must understand the word and sentence to convey proper meaning, i.e. they should know things like sound segmentation of different words and stress patterns in sentences. Speaking confidence is developed by fluency which is strengthened by unhesitant and accurate understanding and use of English language structure that is in turn enabled by grammatical competence in the speakers.

Learning approach - Task-based

The pedagogical approaches based on taskthat was discussed by Nunan in 2006, along with the described course was used for designing of the speaking activity, that has the following principles emphasized:

Content selection was based on needs, Opportunity of English use was provisioned, and Classroom learning was contributed to by enhancing the experience of the learners, and English in the real world was linked to the speaking situation

Methodology of Research

The research methodology was divided into 3 parts majorly: framework of research, Instruments of research and subjects, &collection of data and analysis.

Framework of Research

Fig. 1 displays the framework of the research for gaining insights of study's basis.
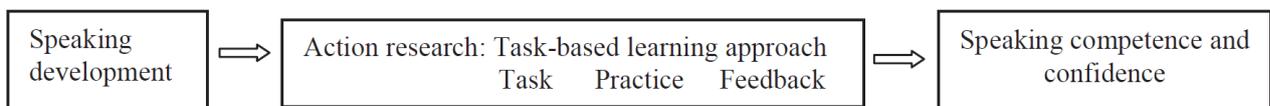

Figure 1. Research framework

Instruments of research and Subjects

Eighteen of the students who enrolled for the course called 'Special Communication – Listening & Speaking' were selected as the subjects of the study. This was part of an elective study in their BA degrees with English as a major or minor in the Arts Faculty. In order to acquire data for our research we utilized 2 primary instruments that contributed to the findings of the study:

Interview question

For finding the answer to the 1st question of the research - In order to find answers to the first research question - For EFL learners, what are the factors that would help in developing/improving of speaking skill? – we used 2 questions as part of the interview: A) According to you what were the factors that aided you in the development of speaking in special communication environment? and B) What are your suggestions for improving the

competence in speaking for Indian students in EFL context?

Speaking Recording

As the second instrument in the research we recorded the speaking performance of the participants. A speaking task was nominated for recording and analysis as the answer to the 2nd question in the research - What are the weaknesses and strength of learners in EFL while using English language for special communications? The recording played a critical part in answering the question through analysis.

Collection of Data & analysis

For the entire course duration of 15 weeks we collected data. Speaking performance of the participant was recorded in sheets named 'Weakness &Strengths' for all tasks, these sheets included commentary from both the instructor as well as the classmates. We then invited the students

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for the interview in which they answered the question about what factors according them would help enhance development of speaking skills. These answers were made the part of the 1st question in the research described earlier. The 2nd research question was answered based on the analysis of the recordings and focus was kept on language use, pronunciation, and speaking content.

Discussion & Findings

Below are major findings of the research because of the questions that were asked. We have also documented qualitative findings that were additionally arrived at. We have summarized the finding and the discussion around them:

Enhancement of Speaking Skill Development - EFL Context

Based on the answers provided by the participants in the course during the interviews we have derived this section's findings. Speaking performance was strengthened by one major factor i.e. Confidence Building when speaking with an audience. The participants were also prepared for speaking by completing the task that were built into the course that has their basis on special communications speaking in various situations. The preparation for these tasks resulted in being effective strategies for reducing anxiety, and increasing the confidence of these students for speaking. Mastering of these tasks gave them a boost they felt like never before. We were not surprised when the results of the study showed that confidence was a major and critical factor that played a major part in speaking performance of English in EFL environments being considered. Appropriate task designing along with promotion of speaking performances were recommended for development of English skills in students under the ESL/EFL context by Zhang(2009), Trent(2009), Nunan(2006) and Bailey(2005) etc. Some of the other factors that present outside of the classroom and affecting the enhancement of speaking skills were identified as ample exposure to English multimedia WebPages, TV programs, radio broadcasts, music etc. listening to these enhanced EFL learner's speaking skills. The current understanding that listening and speaking skill are interconnected with respect to language development and learning is supported by prior studies such as K. V. Madhavi (2013). Additionally, a number of activities in the course were suggested as positive impacting ELF student's speaking skills which included to seek opportunity of speaking in real world situation, and encouraging to get exposure through media listening etc.Furthermore, as highlighted by Songsiri in 2007 exposure to speaking & listening activities and practice in the real world appear to be the most practical approach of enhancing confidence to speak for the ELF students. In Table 1 some of factors quoted in the interview are mentioned below:

Table 1. Factors enhancing speaking development

Participants	Factors
No. 1	Confidence should be developed first; more confidence very important to make students gain confidence to speak.
No. 2	I love to watch foreign movies. Listen to songs – help pronunciation; confidence is the most important in speaking English.
No. 3	The course helps me to be confident, listening to more news, songs and TV programs.

Speaking performance Weaknesses &Strengths

We obtained this section's findings when a specific speaking task for the students was recorded and analyzed primarily for language used, pronunciation and content among other things. Weakness were discovered in the sentences' grammatical structure and the pronunciation of the words. Primarily word stress and ending sounds of some words were found to be incorrect and is categorized as weakness. Incorrect use of tenses was another area where the students faltered while Speaking performance strengths identified in the study were the plethora of subjects that were spoken about in the task and the immensely wide variety of vocabulary used by

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the students. We observed that students were motivated in speaking and felt confident because they were given free choice in selecting the topic of the speech and it proved to be a confidence enhancer. English lexicon of the EFL students were automatically activated and increased by use of extensive variety of words/vocabulary on the chosen topics. Ending sounds like /s/, /sh/, and /z/ along with word stress, pronunciation and sentence grammatical structure were observed to be the weak points of the students in the speaking task. Nonetheless, active positive feedback from the teacher and peers yielded major improvement in the speaking performance as it raised awareness in the participants and motivated them to improve/learn about their weakness. In Table 2 we have presented example of weakness and strengths observed in this exercise:

Table 2. Speaking strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Examples	Weaknesses	Examples
Creativity of topics	A speaker's role as the Asian first-lady of the 55th US President, a museum tour guide and curator, a flight attendant, a golf trainer, an emcee of TV programs, a PR of a business organization, etc.	Pronunciation	Word stress: errors encourage, faculty, etc. Final sounds: no final sound, such as /z/ in always, themselves, confuse and /s/ in arts, students, etc.
A wide range of vocabulary	Particular words related to the topics such as curator, apprentice, commencement day, comprehensive, etc.	Grammatical structure	Errors found in the use of the past tense when talking about the past events: 'I graduate from this faculty in 1999.'

Implications and Conclusion

We did a qualitative study in the research investigating the factors that could enhance speaking skill development of EFL students in India at undergraduate levels. During the duration of 15 week of the course/study a level of confidence was developed gradually through regular speaking and listening by the students. A pedagogical design based on task was used to provide students opportunities to speak in a variety of situations, this helped turn passive vocabulary into active vocabulary and also helped expand their lexicon of English language that was promoted by the variety of topics that they spoke on during the course of the study. Mistakes in sentence structure grammatically and pronunciation were categorized as weakness for the study while creativity in the content and subject of the topics were identified as strengths of speaking performance. Suggestionto improve EFL/ESL student's speaking skills primarily included factors like exposure to English music, movies and multimedia along with frequent speaking and listening practice that could be done online as well. The course design developed in this research, which is based on tasks, could be implemented for promoting a specific skill or skill integrated training in ESL/EFL context as well as learning of any other secondary/foreign languages.

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