Key Elements influencing the enhancement of Speaking Skills

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Abstract:

Speaking involves the construction and sharing of meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols across various contexts. Low motivation in speaking presents a significant challenge for educators, as students often exhibit reluctance to speak due to shyness and a lack of predisposition to express themselves in public, especially when required to share personal information or opinions. This research employs a realist ethnographic approach, complemented by Research and Development (R&D), making it a comprehensive study within qualitative research.

Language teachers continuously develop speaking skills using various techniques and strategies. Data indicates that selected teachers predominantly employ the communicative approach, direct method, audio-lingual method, among others. Common techniques include discussions, role play, oral reports, questions and answers, conversations, and debates. Teachers effectively assess students' performance, offering corrections in engaging ways such as repetition, collaborative error correction, and providing opportunities for students to seek help both in and outside the classroom.

Additionally, teachers consistently use strategies that foster learners' speaking skills, creating activities that facilitate communication. They often develop supplementary materials like conversations, discussions, questions and answers, storytelling, and debates to support English speaking activities. Analysis of the data reveals that these activities are adapted to meet learners' needs, enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. This tailored, interactive, and supportive approach underscores the importance of employing diverse techniques to develop students' speaking abilities.

Keywords: speaking; skill development; factors of speaking.

Introduction

Teachers have access to a plethora of alternative strategies for teaching speaking, which can significantly benefit teacher training institutions in developing more relevant English-speaking activities for both formal and non-formal education. These strategies cater to teachers' actual needs, addressing both theoretical and practical aspects of language instruction. Additionally, these strategies can serve as valuable references for teachers in their quest for professional self-improvement.

Some findings by the teachers can initiate self-reflection on their current speaking practices, leading to enhanced teaching methodologies and better student outcomes. However, teaching speaking is not without its challenges. Teachers often encounter issues such as

clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, fluency, stress, rhythm, intonation, colloquial language, and rate of delivery.

By identifying and addressing these challenges, educators can create a more effective and supportive learning environment for their students, ultimately fostering improved speaking skills and greater confidence in language use.

Speaking is the process of constructing and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols across various contexts. According to Chaney (1998: 13), speaking encompasses a dynamic exchange of meaning. Florez (1999: 7) adds that speaking involves the concept of delivering, accepting, and processing information. Speaking is inherently an unplanned process, capable of commencing and concluding in any situation. As Kayi (2006: 33) posits, speaking is a fundamental human skill, with individuals engaging in persistent verbal communication, seldom pausing to analyze the underlying processes involved.

Fulcher (2003: 77) emphasizes that speaking serves as a direct instrument to convey messages to listeners. The effectiveness of this communication hinges on the speaker's and listener's control and adaptability in various situations. The speaker's awareness and enthusiasm play crucial roles in successfully transmitting ideas. Additionally, speaking functions as a means of bolstering students' confidence. It fosters a warm, uninhibited, and sympathetic relationship among students and between teachers and students.

The spontaneous nature of speaking, coupled with the need for adaptability, underscores its complexity and significance in the educational context. It is an essential skill that not only facilitates communication but also strengthens interpersonal connections and enhances self-assurance among learners.

Speaking ability can be evaluated using several key indicators. Pronunciation, defined as the way language is spoken, encompasses segmental features like vowels, consonants, and intonation patterns. Correct application of these elements is essential for effective communication. Vocabulary, a critical linguistic factor, involves the number of words and their combinations to form meaningful language in speaking. It is particularly crucial in the early stages of language learning, as it forms the foundation of communication.

Grammar, the set of rules governing both spoken and written language, must be adhered to for clarity and accuracy. Although grammar is sometimes overlooked in spoken interactions, it remains an important aspect of language proficiency. Fluency, indicative of one's ability to communicate smoothly, requires the speaker to meet certain criteria. A fluent speaker can articulate words coherently and has a clear understanding of what they intend to convey.

Comprehension, defined as the mind's ability to understand, plays a vital role in speaking. Effective communication necessitates mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener. This ensures that conversations are meaningful and that both parties can respond appropriately to each other's speech.

Overall, these indicators—pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension—are essential components of speaking ability. They collectively contribute to a speaker's capacity to convey and interpret messages accurately, fostering effective communication in various contexts. By focusing on these aspects, individuals can enhance their speaking skills and achieve greater confidence in their language use.

The rationale for employing an ethnographic approach in this research stems from its proven effectiveness in yielding rich, detailed information about language education. James Spradley (1996) defines ethnography as the study of cultures, behaviours, habitual systems, and languages through extended periods of close observation, reading, and interpretation. Ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the cultures they study, gaining a deep understanding of their subjects.

The methodology

The research is conducted in a well-known area celebrated for its extensive network of language courses, making it an ideal setting for this study. This location is home to over 100 language institutions, providing a rich environment for examining English language education.

Data collection in this research is crucial, involving multiple sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of classroom and course dynamics. The researcher employs techniques such as questionnaires, recordings, observations, and field notes. The data is then analysed using methods like data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This rigorous methodological approach ensures the reliability and validity of the research findings, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of English-speaking education.

In developing English-speaking skills, teachers and administrators at the language institutions emphasize the use of English in daily communication, advocating for constant practice both inside and outside the classroom. The educational approach involves a mix of theory, practical speaking exercises, and guidance on effective learning and practicing techniques. Specifically, the approach comprises 20% theory, 60% practical exercises, and 20% guidance and motivation.

This comprehensive strategy aims to improve students' English-speaking abilities by providing them with ample opportunities to practice and receive feedback, thus fostering a supportive and effective learning environment.

Teacher factors

Teachers at the academy possess extensive experience in various strategies for enhancing English speaking skills. These educators boast strong educational backgrounds, having graduated from esteemed universities such as the State University in Kediri and Malang. Data from student questionnaires, teaching process recordings, and interviews confirm that the teachers are both creative and engaging due to their participation in numerous English teaching training programs.

In assessing teachers' roles in speaking classes, students reported positively on their teachers' implementation of speaking programs, such as Foundation Speaking, Active Speaking, Moving Speaking, and Pre-active Speaking. Out of 80 respondents, none rated the teachers' performance as "Very low" or "Low," with the majority rating their teachers' roles as "Very high" or "High." This feedback reflects that more than half of the students agreed that teachers effectively organized group discussions, presented new language concepts systematically, encouraged English speaking participation, provided adequate practice opportunities, monitored performance, and offered guidance during group or pair discussions.

Student interviews further corroborated that teacher demonstrated creativity in organizing and applying diverse strategies in teaching and learning speaking skills. In Active Speaking classes, students noted that teachers consistently supported group discussions by providing relevant vocabulary, managing student performance, and conducting evaluations post-activity. This comprehensive and practical approach highlights the teachers' pivotal role in fostering an engaging and effective learning environment for developing English speaking skills.

Student factors

English learners' different educational levels, from senior high school to doctoral programs, driven by the need to use English in their jobs and education. The students at these institutions exhibit high motivation to learn English, seeking various ways to practice the language in their daily lives.

The learners demonstrate positive attitudes, tolerance, and helpfulness towards their peers, aiding each other in mastering expressions. Teachers provide audio and video materials for learning, preferring digital formats over CDs and DVDs. These resources are downloaded and saved on students' mobile phones for convenience. Classroom organization primarily involves whole class methods, with pair/group work and question-and-answer sessions also prevalent. The flexible seating arrangements and small class sizes, particularly in active speaking sessions with students, facilitate effective teaching and learning of speaking skills.

Conclusion

Language teachers constantly employ various techniques and strategies to develop speaking skills, including the communicative approach, direct method, and audio-lingual method. Frequently used techniques comprise discussion, role play, oral reports, questions and answers, conversation, and debate. Teachers effectively assess students' performance in every meeting, offering corrections in an engaging manner. Techniques like repetition, collaborative error correction, and providing opportunities for students to seek help in and outside class are commonly used.

Teachers consistently use strategies to foster learners' speaking skills, ensuring activities that facilitate communication. The study highlights that teachers often create supplementary materials, such as conversations, discussions, questions/answers, storytelling, and debates, to support English speaking activities. Analysis of the data reveals that these activities were adapted to meet the learners' needs, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. This approach underscores the importance of tailored, interactive, and supportive techniques in developing students' speaking abilities.

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