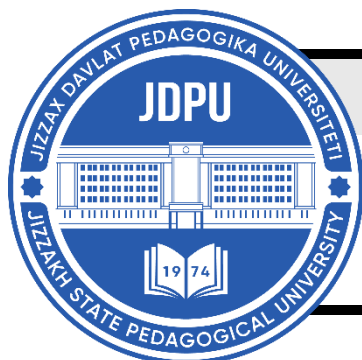


**MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL****MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**TEACHING SPEAKING IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES****Ra`no Norbekova***Jizzakh State Pedagogical University**Jizzakh, Uzbekistan**E-mail: norbekova@mail.ru***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: Teaching speaking, mixed-ability classes, differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, task-based language teaching, inclusive speaking tasks, scaffolding, peer interaction, language practice, learner engagement.

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Abstract: Teaching speaking in mixed-ability classes presents unique challenges and opportunities for language educators. This article explores effective strategies for facilitating speaking activities in diverse classroom settings, where learners exhibit varying proficiency levels, learning styles, and language backgrounds. Drawing on principles of differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and task-based language teaching, the article offers practical suggestions for creating inclusive speaking tasks, scaffolding speaking activities, and promoting peer interaction. By fostering a supportive and communicative classroom environment, language teachers can maximize opportunities for language practice, enhance learner engagement, and foster linguistic development across proficiency levels.

INTRODUCTION

The world is in various stages of social, economic, and demographic transition. Economically and politically, the world has changed more rapidly in the past few years. Now, the world is called a global village and no nation can afford to be aloof from the developments taking place outside its geographical boundaries. Learning English is considered a token of success in the world but it does not imply subjugation of one's own language. No language is superior or inferior but there are certain social, economic and political aspects associated with each language. The prospects associated with English are so great that it can undoubtedly be called a token of success in every walk of life. Harry Mashabela, the black South African writer says: "Learning

and using English will not only give us the much needed unifying chord but will also land us into the exciting world of ideas; it will enable us to keep company with kings in the world of ideas and also make it possible for us to share the experiences of our ownbrothers in the world.”(David Crystal, p 101,1998).

Despite studying English in schools and colleges students in Pakistan are not able to communicate in English fluently and confidently. This is an unfortunate state of affairs that even majority of our students, after having done their masters, hesitate to speak and are reluctant to be interviewed in English. Many of the students especially those who come from rural areas are suffering from this malady. The story does not end here, the issue gets grave when we encounter the bitter fact that students who know English well, do not speak or use English.

The present study will point out the flaws and try to present an effective pedagogical model. Itwill also analyze the teaching methodology and material selected for learners and try to explore how further improvement can be brought.

THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Researches into language won the applause with the publication of Skinner’s verbal behaviorin 1957 and the reconsideration of then task by Chomsky in 1959. Some schools in the UnitedKingdom handed down a decision to separate the students to their IQ levels. It was observed that the new groups were having variations amongst the students and it was no within the realms of possibility to alter their groups and the curricula every time (Kelley 1979). This new discipline was having connection, in the black and white of Bloomfield as cited in (Stern, 1983: 296) with the processes whereby the inner feelings of speakers are altered into the expatiations of hearers. It goes without saying that Joan Morley is regarded as illustrious pioneer in oral prowess because he ameliorceted his aural comprehension in 1972. Prodromou(1989,2) points out that when students are given groups pursuant to the test scores, then progress rates will always be different. The differences which create confusions in a mixed ability class are language learning ability, language knowledge, and cultural background, learning style, personality, confidence, intelligence and educational level. (Ur 1996, 304).

He jotted down the class material in the form of book for, listening oral skills. A book “Teaching Oral English, was written by Donne Byrone in 1976. A volume „Advanced Speaking Skills“ was displayed by Jeremy Harmer in 1978. It was the purpose of thin volume to be asked as a text material for advanced learners of spoken English. A book „teaching the spoken language“ came in the hands of public in 1983 and this book was brought forth by Gillian Brown and George. Research has also been done on selecting spoken texts for classroom use. Lately Burns, Gollin and Joyce (1997) suggest that if learners are given a text which is partially transcribed and asked to listen to tape recorder and fill in back channel responses, can lead to better awareness of such

conversational features. Cunningham Florez (1999) stresses the need of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation and extension in speaking lessons. He recommends that at preparation stage, learners need to be shown visuals of people in informal settings and asked to brainstorm as to what they might be saying. Lam and Wong (2000) have, in their research identified important strategies that learners require to effectively take part in discussion: clarifying seeking clarification, and checking whether other people have understood the message their study stresses the need for strategy training. Of late researches have emphasized the sheer significance of real speech samples (Hughes, 2000). Kasper (2001) studied classroom exchanges commonly referred to as IRF exchanges, and came up with the conclusion that IRF routine fails to address the complex nature of everyday conversation, as it is teacher who exercises the follow-up right and often student remains passive and respondent. Shumin (2002) emphasizes the importance of small talk about weather, exchanging greetings and so on in developing spoken skill of short interaction. Jones (2002) advocated the technique of split story. According to this technique, a student is asked to tell a story, but he is to stop at a crucial point and other students are invited to complete the story based on their own imaginative sense.

Golato (2003) has perused the differences between naturally occurring data and discourse accomplishment tasks based on naturally occurring chat and communication. However McCarthy (2002, 2003) has come up with the finding that even in classroom situations, students can play a key role by responding and follow up moves even when they are not in the role of main speakers. Yuan and Ellis (2003) claim in their research that planning before a speaking task has a positive effect on learner's spoken production particularly in complexity and fluency while accuracy was not affected. Alexander (2003) in his study has stressed the need for dialogic teaching as a way to further learners thinking and learning through talk. He is against the teacher dominated classroom patterns of IRF and where learner's response is often short and lacking in depth of thought, predominance of closed questions with little speculative thinking. He is for dialogic teaching – a participatory mode of teaching in which dialogue is all important and in which teacher facilitates the interaction and encourages children to express their evaluative judgments. Drew [1980] agrees, research is conducted to solve problems and to expand knowledge. He further stresses, research is a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of enquiry. . The present study follows the eclectic approach. To achieve the ultimate objective, The investigation of the spoken English was intended where students come from diverse backgrounds and where the classes are mixed-ability classes and most classes have a wide range of levels and abilities.

The teachers should bear in mind the level of ability of the student. He/she should ask more difficult questions to more advanced students, and easier questions to the weaker students. Gardner divided students into seven different levels of ability and teachers should devise their teaching

practices according to the level of ability of the students. Some students can be brilliant while others bad and there comes a hell of difference between these two groups.

Teachers should solve the problems of the students instead of creating problems for the students. A “Mentoring” relationship between the learners and somebody they trust. They set their own goals in learning. “Mentoring” relationship is a kind of supportive relationship between two or more individuals in terms of discussion and being each other’s company. The teachers should not be strict and authoritative but kind and friendly. Let students do what they do and let students interview one another, talk to each other and to you. Here two types of contracts are given”

a) Self-motivated Contract

Self-motivated contract is a contract for the students themselves in which they set their own goals in learning.

b) Contracts with Others

„Others“ can be peers, parents or anybody as long as the person is whom students trust. This is a supportive relationship between two or more individuals in terms of problem solving, academic building and being each other’s company.

In our attempt to develop effective instruction in spoken language, we need to address an important issue. To develop fluency, we must generate a need to speak, to make learners want to speak. How does this need to teach skills for transferring information relate to the problem of motivation? In our attempt to develop effective instruction in spoken language, we need to address an important issue. To develop fluency, we must generate a need to talk, to make learners want to speak.

Different topics are assigned to the speakers and they are required to discuss it or to come up with a short talk. Brown et al. describe a variety of task-based spoken language activities. These have been categorized into:

1. Tasks that involve the speaker in describing static relationships among objects.
2. Tasks that involve dynamic relationships among people or objects, with events that change over time and space.

Once teachers have found out about students’ “differences” teachers can do activities according to students’ needs. The first differentiation method that teachers can use is gradation of tasks.

The second differentiation method makes use of variable teaching aids. Teaching aid is an important part of pedagogy. The choice of teaching aid affects students in the learning process. In order to attend to students with different learning style and strategies, teachers can vary class activities by using different teaching aids. There are many ROM on the market that can assist students to practice speaking and listening skills.

People spend a huge chunk of their everyday conversation time talking about themselves and the people they know, so the most natural thing in the world for the teachers is to invite our students to do the same. To get the students speaking is not easy and we have to encounter problems.

□ Two main problems

- Firstly, students might lack confidence in ability to tell an anecdote, describe their feelings confidently give their views.
- Secondly, classes are made up of students who are thrown together by circumstances.

They don't choose their classmates they would not all mix socially and they think they don't have much in common with that student so why should he listen to him?

In classroom the teachers' duty is to create a world in which the students feel comfortable and at the same time stimulate them to speak and listen to one another. To achieve this by making use of some techniques, which help to bring students' outside worlds alive in the classroom? The following four techniques are given in the activity "show me your shoes".

This involves the students observing their teacher doing an achievable task that they themselves are about to do. Focusing on the teacher reassures students about what is expected of them and gives them ideas about the kind of content to include. There is an important distinction to be made between substitution drilling and modeling.

The term visualization suggests focusing on visual images in the mind's eye. Visualizing a moment, scene or event whether real or imagined is extremely effective and powerful way in to extend personal speaking.

It is inhibiting for students speaking in pairs and groups when their classmates appear to show little interest in what they say. Sometime when students are uninterested they pretend to listen, they might be thinking about something unrelated to the lesson. While setting up a speaking activity, it is important for teachers to set simple and interesting peer listening tasks which focus students on what their partner say.

A popular approach used by teachers to encourage students to speak is to assign a topic and require them to discuss it or come up with a short talk. Presentations are a great way to have students practice all language systems areas and skills. They also build confidence, and presenting is a skill that most people will need in the world of work. I found that students who are good presenters are better communicators all around.

- Presentation skills are extremely useful both in and outside the classroom. A presentation is a channel for students to share with others what they have learned. It is also a chance to challenge and expand on their understanding of the topic by having others ask questions.

- Presentations can also form a natural part of task based learning. By focusing on a

particular language point or skill, the presentation is a very practical way to revise and extend book, pair and group work. In lights of the mentioned problems, this study proposes a model that can assist teachers to meet the needs of all levels of learners in a mixed ability class.

Stage 3:

Participating StageStage 2:

Ice-breaking StageStage 1:

Observing Stage

The proposed model for teaching Spoken English to a mixed-ability class

This model facilitates the learning and teaching process in a mixed ability class. This model comprises three stages-the observing stage, the ice-breaking stage, and the participating stage. At (stage 1), teachers' dominance is at the strongest. This is because students are not yet able to speak and many of them are shy at this primary stage. At this stage, the teachers speak and demonstrate the use of spoken English. Firstly, students are asked to listen and observe the teacher and try to memorize the sentences. Observation is the simplest way to learn and then try to do. For teachers, it is important to observe students interaction with one another, the way they speak, the topics they discuss and their responses towards others' comments.

At (stage 2), teachers devise lessons to suit students' interests, personality and capabilities. Teachers make decisions about the topics to focus on and organization of activities. This is the most complicated stage for teachers and they have to do something to break the ice. The teachers ask easy questions and make the students speak. They motivate, prompt and encourage the students.

At (stage 3), teachers' dominance is at the minimum and they are free to talk to each other, discuss the matters freely. The teachers are very much friendly and the students are participating vigorously. This is the stage where teacher is silent and the students are speaking.

The following benefits are expected:

- a) It helps teachers to work along the students with different levels of ability and at the same time not burdening teachers with individual lesson plan.
- b) It explains how teachers can use information about students to discover their specialties.
- c) It represents a methodology that explains reduced teachers' dominance in teaching.
- d) It provides freedom to the students to participate maximum and improve their speaking ability.
- e) Every conversation in the model, however fluent or halting it may be, is a success because students are asking and answering something real about their lives.

The suggestions above are not exhaustive and neither they are absolute. The actual designing of lessons still has to depend upon particular groups of learners. Teachers should try out different

teaching techniques so that the chances for every student to develop individually.

Both the teachers and students gave the following suggestions for further improvement.

1 The material for spoken English class should be selected carefully and it needs to prepare the students for interaction at various levels.

2 Body language should be used for a better expression and the students be guided to get relaxed while speaking.

3 As for as teaching methodology is concerned, the teachers should make the students speak and interesting topics should be included and teachers should be friendly with the students. To get them speak “ice-breakers” should be used to remove the shyness of the uncommunicative learners.

4 Audio video aids must be used to keep the students attentive and this is expected to improve their listening skills.

5 Material should be arranged according to the modern needs of the time and strange topics should be avoided.

6 Students should not be divided according to their level of ability. Mixing good students with bad students can be very useful to get the bad students speak and raise their confidence.

7 Teachers should take less time in the class and chances should be provided to students to speak.

8 There should be a variety of homework tasks; easy for bad learners and difficult for good learners.

9 Courses are made but not executed and boys and girls are not mixed, in future this practice shouldn't be repeated.

10 Placement or diagnostic test should be held to place the students according to their levels of ability and to use material accordingly.

11 Extra material should be used for advanced learners as they finish their task faster than others and teachers should keep them busy.

12 The teachers should give students a varied set of activities to fit the different learning styles and to keep the learners motivated.

CONCLUSION

The study appraises opinions and perceptions of teachers and students involved in teaching and learning of spoken English. On the whole, it emerges from the survey that there is a potential for further improvements in the spoken English classes. There stands a need for greater efforts by the teachers involved in spoken English classes where students come with different backgrounds. The results of the survey contain important implications for further research and the findings of the study are expected to serve as a starting point for further analysis.

The present research fulfills objective of providing a basic framework of analysis of the

material used and teaching methodology in a mixed ability class. An attempt has been made to fill the existing gap in literature on spoken English classes in Multan. As much as possible, an attempt has been made to make the study comprehensive, in terms of scope of the study and breadth of the analysis. However, both the material constraints and the lack of existing research on the subject either restricted or precluded the discussion of some of the issues in this research. Of particular mention is the issue of surveying the students and teachers learning and teaching in mixed ability classes at various institutes in Multan city. This is expected to help in understanding the application of the spoken English in their practical life. The researcher tried his best to point out the problems in a mixed ability class and possible solutions have been put forward. Suitable material to meet the needs in a mixed ability class according to the levels of ability and homework tasks are yet to be explored. However, this would be a meaningful task to be put on the agenda for future research.

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