

ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR CLASSES: A METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ANNOTATION

This article analyzes a number of methodological considerations in the development of English as a Foreign Language students' speaking ability in extracurricular activities. At present, in the school environment, students find few chances for communication practice due to the limited time spent in the classroom. This article reviews the role of different interactive methods, such as role-play, discussions and task-based learning, within the informal context of extracurricular classes. Data were collected on a sample of 30 secondary school students during 8-week instruction using pre-test and post-test design. The analysis suggests that use of pedagogical strategies can significantly improve EFL learners' motivation, lower their affective filters, as well as boost their oral fluency.

Introduction

As we move toward an era of rapid globalization and technology, the importance of English speaking skills for communication and successful employment opportunities is undeniable. For those who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking proficiency has always been an ultimate goal in their learning process.

Yet, speaking fluency remains one of the greatest obstacles in language acquisition. Learners at traditional English learning institutions cannot seem to develop their speaking ability despite mastering grammar and vocabulary to a reasonable extent. This has often been attributed to rigid syllabuses, overcrowded classes and insufficient time for interactive learning sessions within regular, forty-five minute English classes.

It is widely accepted by Applied Linguists that oral proficiency plays a fundamental role in the learning process. Richards & Rodgers (2014) stated that communicative competence, an overall goal of the learning process, not only implies the possession of linguistic

competence but also its appropriate use in specific social situations which is somewhat impossible to achieve within constraints of the traditional classroom. Brown (2001) furthermore described authentic interaction as the core element of communication whereas students can often feel a strong sense of "foreign language anxiety" which hinder their ability in evaluation. Littlewood (2011) mentioned that extracurricular environment would result in less psychologically stressful situation, or a more conducive condition to stimulate spontaneous speech: outside of the classroom, students will feel more relax. Removed of the stress associated with grading and the pressure of time limits imposed during lessons, out-of-school language learning environments enable a more interactive and experimental approach.

Therefore, it is obvious that extracurricular activities play a significant role in filling in the gap between theory and practice. This article aims to provide a methodological view of the speaking skills enhancement in extracurricular activities as well as some practical, research-based recommendations for the students as the language educators.

Methods

The current research examined the relationship between extracurricular activities and students' speaking ability in an English lesson. In the study, mixed research design including the quantitative evaluation as well as the qualitative observation was applied.

Participants and Context: The study focused on a group of thirty secondary school students aged 14 to 15. The extracurricular classes took place twice a week for 60 minutes each. According to the results of an initial diagnostic test, the students' level was pre-intermediate (A2 on CEFR).

Methodological Approach: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a framework of language teaching was central to the pedagogical intervention. Richards (2006) stated that, 'learning happens most effectively when students are engaged in meaningful communication rather than rote practice.' Alongside CLT, the study also integrated task-based learning (TBL), suggested by Ellis (2003), as it aims at promoting meaningful communication through the completion of communicative tasks, thus enhancing the students' ability to use language effectively.

Tools and Methods:

1. **Information Gap Activities:** Based on Prabhu's (1987) theory, students were presented with tasks where they had complementary information to share with each other in order to achieve common objectives.

2. **Support and Scaffolding:** Using Vygotsky's ZPD theory, "scaffolds" such as sentence frames, functional language cards, or thematic word banks were provided to students so that they felt more confident in tackling demanding tasks.

3. **Role Play and Simulation:** Students were engaged in simulated authentic communication situations, such as a job interview, travelling vlogs, or buying goods in a

market, etc. This not only enhanced their sociolinguistic competence but also their adaptability in using the language.

Data Collection: The assessment tools used to collect data were pre-test and post-test consisting of structured interviews which were graded by two qualified independent teachers on four different components of communicative skills: Fluency and coherence, Lexical resource, Grammatical range and accuracy, and Pronunciation.

Results

The comparison between pre-test and post-test data suggested that the students had made a significant progress in their speaking skills development. The results obtained are presented as follows:

- Enhancement of Speaking Fluency: Before the intervention, only 25% of students were able to sustain the interaction for at least two minutes without significant delays. However, after 8 weeks of intensive instruction, this percentage has increased to 60%. Students started using logical links and fillers appropriately.

- Reduction of Foreign Language Anxiety: The observations made and the data collected from students' responses have shown that as many as 80% of the participants felt less intimidated to speak during extracurricular activities in comparison to the regular classroom. The lowering of the "affective filter" has surely played a significant role.

- Increased Use of Lexical Range: Students shifted their linguistic production from "passive" vocabulary usage to active integration of "difficult" idiomatic language and phrasal verbs in their own utterance by means of repeatedly practicing roles and other games.

Discussion

In light of these results, it can be concluded that the low anxiety and task-oriented environment of extracurricular activities contributed to enhancing the students' speaking ability. This is also consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that if students have access to sufficient input and are motivated to produce output with a low level of anxiety, they are more likely to develop communicative competence. In this extracurricular setting, a sense of "psychological safety" has allowed students to experiment with new language and consequently develop greater fluency. Nonetheless, it has also been observed that informal communication does not always imply the lack of systematic approach; only when teachers assume a facilitating role with clear methodical framework and prompt feedback, students will tend to use L2 when faced with the L2 communicative demands. The Task-Based Learning proved very effective in this situation; the focus on the completion of communication tasks helped turn language into a medium for accomplishing these tasks rather than an object of learning itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, extracurricular activities provide an irreplaceable opportunity for boosting EFL learners' speaking performance as they compensate the lack of sufficient practice

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during regular lessons through interactive, task-based language activities that offer the opportunity for immersion and experimentation within the classroom setting. Taking the following factors into consideration is strongly suggested for educators to develop successful English extracurricular programs:

1. Maximize Interaction: Designing tasks in which students speak to each other as much as possible will enable their ability to gain the highest degree of Student Talking Time (STT) as compared to Teacher Talking Time (TTT).

2. Adopt Task-Based Learning: Teachers should try their best to help students achieve an objective through communicative tasks rather than solely on teaching a certain aspect of grammar isolated from context.

3. Create an Optimal Learning Environment: Teacher must be vigilant about fostering a "mistake-friendly" atmosphere where students are less conscious of any potential errors while practicing their speaking skills.

4. Establish a Balance between Fun and Rigor: The activities should be designed so that students remain engaged and intrinsically motivated but it is crucial for teachers to monitor and provide useful, constructive feedback to the students.

In summary, well-designed, methodical extracurricular activities are indispensable for the development of fluent English speakers of the 21st century.

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