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CHALLENGES IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO EFL LEARNERS

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Annotation:

This preliminary study aims to describe the challenges that the teachers face in teaching English speaking to the students. Speaking is perceived as the most fundamental skill to acquire since the onset of the communicative era is treated as the ultimate goal of language teaching, and its proper development has become the attention of both teachers and learners. However, it is also a commonly recognized fact that achieving proficiency in foreign language speaking is not an easy task. Thus, it is important for teachers to be aware of the challenges in teaching speaking so solutions to them can be seeked for.

Keywords: Challenges, teaching, speaking, EFL learners.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the basics which should importantly be mastered by English learners. Nunan (2003, p. 40) says that "speaking is the ability to express opinion, ideas, or thought orally; it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning in order to be understood by the people we are speaking with". Therefore, in language learning, the speaking ability is important to express thoughts, ideas and feelings with others.

Nowadays the ability of speaking foreign language is considered to be one of the main important requests of modern life. As Richards states the goal of teaching speaking is to provide learners with communicative competence and classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech. In Students should therefore actively participate in the teaching and learning process, especially in speaking. Through speaking, students will be familiar with utterances used. Learning to speak English fluently and accurately is always a grand task in

learning a foreign language. It offers advantages for students. It can increase professional vocabulary, especially when we communicate with other people.

Harmerstates that getting students to speak or to use the language they are learning is a vital part of a teacher's job. Students are the people who need the practice, not the teacher. From this statement, it can be concluded that the teacher aims to develop students' ability in speaking skill. However, it is undeniable that English teachers face challengers in teaching speaking, especially to EFL learners.

Main part.

Nowadays, speaking is generally perceived as the most fundamental skill to acquire. Since the onset of the communicative era it has been treated as the ultimate goal of language training and its proper development has become the focus of attention on both teachers and learners. However, it is also a commonly recognized fact that achieving proficiency in foreign language speaking in classroom conditions is not an easy task. Even advanced learners often finish a language course with the conviction that they are not sufficiently prepared for speaking beyond the classroom.

According to Tarone, speaking is usually viewed as "the most complex and difficult skill to master". Thus, the basic idea in any oral interaction is that the speaker has the objective of transmitting his ideas, feelings, attitudes and information to the hearer through speech. However, in such oral communication, any faulty production may lead to mismatches and misunderstandings which could derive from lack of the target language, difference in the background knowledge and socio-cultural diversity Olshtain and Celce-Murcia.

Consequently, in order to ensure proper interpretation by the hearer, Harmer listed some elements necessary for spoken production. According to him, "the ability to speak fluently presupposes not only knowledge of language features but also the ability to process information and language 'on the spot'". Likewise, many prerequisites for speaking in another language were suggested

by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain namely knowledge of vocabulary, knowledge of syntax and the ability to use discourse connectors.

In addition, speaking as a skill constitutes a real hurdle to overcome by both the teacher and the learner. In other words, the teacher has to find appropriate procedures to help the learner with while the latter has to find a way to master the language. In this context, Brown and Yule state: "Spoken language production, learning to talk in the foreign language, is often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for the teacher to help the students with". Furthermore, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain claim that oral communication can be considered as challenging and easy at the same time. On one hand, it requires command of listening and production subskills as vocabulary and pronunciation. On the other hand, one can make oneself understood by adopting communication strategies as repetition and body language.

This difficulty results basically from the character and inadequate frequency of speaking opportunities in the classroom in comparison to the abundance of natural varieties and genres of oral communication. Furthermore, Harmer has reported that students are often reluctant to speak because they are shy and are not predisposed to expressing themselves in front of other people, especially when they are being asked to give personal information or opinions. Students often feel worried about speaking badly and thus losing face in front of their classmates.

In fact, selecting the most appropriate types of spoken discourse for classroom practice in a particular language course is also a very hard. Additionally, Thornbury argues the decision must be appropriately made in order to make use the regular speaking practice in the classroom to go beyond. Moreover, Ur mentions some problems in teaching speaking including inhibition – fear of making mistakes, losing face, criticism, shyness; nothing to say – learners have problems with finding motives to speak, formulating opinions or relevant comments; low or uneven participation – often caused by the tendency of some learners to dominate in the group; mother-tongue use – particularly common in less

disciplined or less motivated classes, where learners find it easier or more natural to express themselves in their native language.

According to River, the main goal of teaching speaking is to develop the communicative efficiency. When learners try to express themselves there is a hesitation; cliché expressions which fill in pauses, much repetition and frequent indefiniteness as the speaker seeks the most convenient combination of element to express his intended meaning [1, p. 15-16].

These difficulties are due to a lack of interest in the subject, poor listening practice, deficient vocabulary, or lack of self-confidence and fear of making mistakes.

Lack of Interest in the Subject: One of the problems that the students felt really shy about is talking in front of other students; they suffer from fear of making mistakes and "losing face in front of their teacher and their peers", as said by teacher. Speaking in front of other people needs courage, motivation from inside and outside such as a joyful atmosphere in the conversation and interesting topics. Another cause is that there are students who dominate and almost intimidate others with their better ability. In the class, where many students have good ability in English writing skill but when they should communicate in English, they fail to express their ideas verbally. They are afraid and anxious about saying something wrong or incomprehensible, especially when some students are not familiar with the topic. Most of the students in foreign language classrooms stay silent because they have "nothing to say ". This may be because the teacher has chosen a topic about which students know very little. Moreover; the common expiration second language learners use when they are imposed to participate in a given topic is "I have nothing to talk about", "I don't know", "no comment" or they keep silent.

Poor Listening Practice: Listening plays a major role in the interactions that occurs between two or more people. Student may have an experience in expressing himself in the foreign language in a conversation. Therefore, the student does not

comprehend sufficient elements in the message to be able to make further contribution to the discussion.

Deficient Vocabulary: Most of the students find difficulties in using the appropriate words when expressing their thoughts so they use the simple form of language. The teacher must be aware of this psychological factor and help his/her students to feel at ease while using the foreign language. Vocabulary refers to the words the students must understand to communicate effectively, but some learners have poor vocabulary.

Mother Tongue Use: Another problem that is faced is that the students used their native language rather than English to perform classroom tasks. This might happen because they want to communicate something important, and so they used the language they know best. They have difficulty saying them in English and because they do not want to lose face in front of their peers, they think that they better use their native language so that others can understand them. Foreign language students of the same mother tongue tend to use it outside and even inside the classroom because they feel more comfortable and less exposed to the target language.

Lack of Self Confidence and Fear of Making Mistakes: When a student speaks, it requires other students to have all eyes to him/her and exposure to the audience could often give students fright. They are also worried about making mistakes. In many classes, some students prefer to keep their ideas to themselves because they are afraid of being corrected by the teacher. However, students' mistakes must be corrected, but when the student is attempting to encode his thoughts he should be interrupted as little as possible. This problem reveals more when learners try to participate in the classroom but many factors stop them to do so. Ur [2, p. 23] argued that "it is too easy for a foreign language classroom to create inhibition and anxiety." Such factors refer to the feeling of shyness and fear of making mistakes and these are due to the development of communicative skills and the feeling of linguistic inferiority. Students fear to make mistakes especially if they will speak to critical audience. He states that: "learners are often inhibited

about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom. Worried about, making mistakes, fearful of criticism or loosing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts".

Low Uneven Participation: There are some students who tend to be dominant and take almost the whole students' talk time. However, others prefer to speak only if they ensure that what they will say is correct, and some others keep silent, show no interest or participation all along the course. Harmer (2001) suggests streaming weak participators in groups and letting them work together. In such cases they will not hide behind the strong participators, and the teacher can achieve a high level of participation. Another factor that can create problem of participation 41 is the classroom arrangement that may not help students to perform some speaking activities. Low participation is due to the ignorance of teacher's motivation too. If the teacher does not motivate his learners, the talkative ones also will show no interest. So, increasing and directing student motivation is one of the teacher's responsibilities.

Pronunciation Problems: Many students had pronunciation problems and this is common because English and most other languages which used to be the native language have different sound system.

Lack of Motivation: Ellis states that learners' motivation and needs have always had a central place in language learning. Thus, sometimes many students lack the motivation to learn English because they consider it to be a difficult language.

Language is used in our daily interactions to fulfil many different goals such as communicating information, ideas, beliefs, emotions and attitudes to one another. When using language for communication, both the interlocutor and the addressee are involved in two major processes: transmitting ideas and interpreting the message produced. Thus, developing the oral skill is considered as one of the major building blocks in language learning as it requires a combination of knowledge of the target language with skills and strategies that enable to use it effectively. This skill is also very

complicated as it relies not only on the teachers' competence in promoting knowledge and giving feedback on the oral outcome but needs as well the learners' willingness and acceptance of teachers' oral correction to refine their performance.

Conclusion

Using English language for communication involves two major processes from the part of both the interlocutor and the addressee: transmitting ideas, beliefs, emotions and attitudes to one another and interpreting the message produced. Therefore, this study looked at the productive aspect of communication and focused mainly on how to develop EFL learners' spoken performance.

The teacher has to play different roles in the classroom at the same time. Three roles if the teacher is trying to get students to speak fluently:

Prompter: the teacher should help his/her students when they get lost, or cannot think of what to say next or in some other way lose the fluency the teacher expects of them. Sometimes, the best option teacher can do is to leave the students to struggle out on their own. However, the teacher may offer discrete suggestions to help the students.

Participant: teachers can participate in discussions or role-plays themselves to prompt covertly, introduce new information this will help the activity along, ensure continuing student engagement, and maintain a creative atmosphere.

Feedback provider: teachers should be aware of when and how to give feedback in speaking activities because over-correction may inhibit students and take the communicativeness out of the activity.

Accordingly, this piece of work dealt with the teaching issues relevant to the spoken skill by highlighting the concept of spoken language and the difference existing between the latter and the written one. This work also addressed teachers' intervention to improve EFL learners' outcome as far as this building block is concerned. Thus, it tackled the approaches dealing with the teaching of

speaking as well as the strategies adopted by teachers to involve learners in the learning process and correct their oral errors.

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