

IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH READING SKILLS AMONG FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS FROM VERNACULAR BACKGROUND

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Abstract

Speaking in English is a major problem for the students who come from vernacular medium instruction. After the completion of the graduation the students go to work in private sectors because of their lack of speaking skill. Speaking in English is completely absent in 1st year engineering vernacular students. If the student asked to answer any question in English, most of them remain silent. The present paper is an effort to put forward certain techniques to improve speaking skills through reading skill for the 1st year engineering vernacular students

Introduction

Language plays an important role in our life. It is our primary source of communication, through which we share our ideas and thoughts with others. Some people even say that language is what separate us from animals and make us human.

In today's global world the importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since English is the most common language spoken everywhere. With the help of developing technology, English has been playing a major role in many sectors including medicine, engineering and education, which in my opinion is the most important arena where English is needed. But students from vernacular medium and some students whose medium is English were also unable to use English with confidence there is no fluency in their speaking. The present paper is an effort to put forward certain techniques to improve speaking skills through reading skill for the 1st year engineering vernacular students

Assessing the background of the students

There are lots of students who are confident speakers, but the moment we start talking about diverse topics, they seem to feel blocked and unable to talk with ease. Often we hear reactions like I don't know what to say, 'I don't have any ideas. This can happen for various reasons like

- Lack of vocabulary
- Lack of grammar

- Lack of self confidence
- Lack of ideas
- Lack of factual resources
- Insecurity because of pronunciation.
- Lack of speaking practice and input from receptive reading.

“Where there is little reading there will be little language learning. ... the student who wants to learn English will have to read himself into a knowledge of it unless he can move into an English environment” (Bright and McGregor, 1970, p.52).

Language acquisition without reading is difficult. Reading is a good way of comprehension. A good reader is able to understand sentences and structures of a written text. Bright and McGregor are of the opinion that reading is ‘the most pleasant route to command of the language’, because it is via reading ‘the student is most likely to find words used memorably with force and point.’(1970, p.53). It appears that reading is a key factor in language learning. One important notion of developing reading skills and speaking skills is to use the language for learning as well as communication. Reading can play a big part in successful language learning. It can develop speaking skills. It needs to be noted that speaking holds a very significant place in foreign language learning because through speech messages are conveyed. According to Ur (1996, p.120), “of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important”.

Reading outside the classroom is the most significant influence on oral communication ability. Students who read a lot are more likely to speak well. Students through reading develop in both fluency and accuracy of expression in their speaking. Davies and Pearse (2000) stresses the importance of communication as: “Real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom.”

2. Speaking

Speaking is being capable of speech, expressing or exchanging thoughts through using language. “Speaking is a productive aural/oral skill and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning (Nunan, 2003, p.48).” (Harmer, 2001) notes down that from the communicative point of view, speaking has many different aspects including two major categories – accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practiced through controlled and guided activities; and, fluency, considered to be ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously’. Bygate (1991, p.3), also emphasizes knowledge of the language, and skill in using this knowledge for an effective communication. Language knowledge and skill in using it, are considered two fundamental elements of an effective communication. Among the elements necessary for spoken production, are the following (Harmer, 2001, p.269).

- Connected Speech: effective learners of English need to be able not only to produce the individual phonemes of English (as in saying I would have gone) but also to use fluent ‘connected speech’ as in (I’d ‘ve gone). In connected speech sounds are modified, omitted, added or weakened.
- Expressive Devices: native speakers of English change the pitch and stress of particular parts of utterances, vary volume and speed, and show by other physical and non-verbal means how they are feeling.
- Lexis and Grammar: spontaneous speech is marked by the use of number of common lexical phrases, especially in the performance of certain language functions.

- Negotiation and language: effective speaking benefits from the negotiatory language we use to seek clarification and to show the structure of what we are saying. This study highlights vocabulary and grammar knowledge among these elements. Reading will enable learners to develop their vocabulary and grammar knowledge which will effectively contribute to their speaking skills. Vocabulary and grammar knowledge will enable learners to understand so reading will increase learners' understanding capability which they need for a better communication.

Methodology

25 trainees from Tamil medium were identified and the trainer spent extra time and made special efforts to help them to overcome their inhibition. At first, confidence was created in the trainer. It turned out that the trainees avoided speaking in English as they were afraid of committing mistakes and face humiliation in front of others. little by little, the trainer built confidence in them making them understand that committing mistakes is part of learning a language. It was observed that all of them knew of the importance of English in today's world and it was clear that they loved to speak in English and feel that speak in English would uplift their status.

This activity requires students to engage in a reading from an article/ short stories

that they find in a textbook or other source. The activity is organized according to the steps outlined below.

Step 1: students were asked to read the selected stories /same storie for 10 times whether they were understand it or not.

Step 2: now they were asked to read the same stories with the proper pronunciation with the help of the teacher.

Step 3: they were asked to identify the meanings for the new words. Until it becomes the part of their memory.

Step 4: this practice were asked to done by the students for 2-3 months.

Comparisons of the test

Pre test: It was hard for them to catch the message from the stories due to the unfamiliar accent, vocabulary pronunciation and prosodic features: stress and intonation

Post test: Students develop an ability to gain pleasure and also satisfaction from reading on their own in the language they are learning. They are exposed to the language in a more natural and less structured way. In other words, they get different unpressured feeling on the structure of the language since they read for pleasure, and not for a grade or a test.

Conclusion

The major hindrance felt by the students of vernacular is their lack of confidence and motivation to come forward. With the help of this reading exercise instructor/teacher can kick start the speaking of participants by improving their vocabulary, sentences construction, confidence etc. Communication without vocabulary will break down. One of the most useful ways to improve your speaking is reading. Reading will help you to develop your ability to express ideas, whilst also enlarging the size of vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the crucial factors that will influence fluency in speaking. Reading

introduces learners to a wider body of language and contexts. Reading helps learners build up better grammar skills. As learners develop stronger reading skills, they develop more sophisticated speaking skills.

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