

ENHANCING STUDENTS' INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Research in Communicative Approach to Language Teaching has shown that competence in Oral and written language enhances as learners actively use the language. Exchanging ideas has become significant in the area of globalization. English is the second largest spoken language in the world and learners find it very difficult to communicate in English, though they learn it for years together, as it is taught as a knowledge subject and not as a skill subject. Hence enhancing communication skills in English becomes the need of the hour. My desire is to encourage my learners to interact more in English classes. The class room interaction will help to improve other language skills. This paper is a result of my personal experience with learners of Foundation Programme. This paper tries to bring out their problems and the methods adopted to train them in imparting speaking skills. This paper also describes the importance of "Enhancing Students' Interaction" to acquire Communicative and sociolinguistic competence. Then it analyses the problems to increase interaction. After that it suggests how the teachers can promote an increase in student interaction.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Learners, Learning, Interaction

INTRODUCTION

In the process of reviewing the everyday classroom activities, one of my findings is that the bulk of our classroom activity is oral in nature-mostly repetition, drill type exercises, group or pair work, acting out a situation, role play etc. Activities with spoken components such as discussions, elicitations, brain storming activities, vocabulary exercises, guessing, schema rousing questions, games, matching tasks etc are very useful for our students. Very often teachers come out having a successful lesson. But the disappointment is to follow later because what is taught today is not retained till next lesson. The reason I have found is less enthusiasm and lack of proper input when it comes to interacting in English.

IMPORTANCE OF INCREASING STUDENT INTERACTION

In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), we are preparing our learners to participate in some other social group, some language communities other than his own to fulfill a role in that community. The teacher has to expose the learners to that language behavior. Secondly pedagogical textbooks often lack sufficient pragmatic input for our students. Thirdly when we observe some learners we see insufficient lexis. So there is a need to involve student in order to increase the interaction to acquire communicative competence. What are the things required?

Participation and Practice

We learn to speak by speaking. Language learning is a skill. It can't be learned by knowing of it but by experiencing it. Playing cricket or football is a skill. One can't be a good player of cricket or football by knowing all the rules and regulations of the game or by mastering volumes of books on the subject. But one can learn playing it and can develop the skill of playing the game only through constant practice and participation. *So participation and practice will*

develop learner's ability in that language. In other words the teachers need to promote the learner interaction by involving the students in interaction. **Lexical items, morphological and syntactical patterns, sentence types** should be practiced so that students can express themselves. Interaction through pair and group work maximizes the opportunities to practice as more learners speak for more time.

Collaboration

Collaborative learning, particularly through the use of collaborative tasks has been shown to foster language development since learners can see a reason to use the language in order to interact.

Socialisation

Socialisation includes collaboration. Interaction does not only promote language development but it also fosters the development of social skills (e.g. politeness, respect for others) that people need to operate successfully in any culture. Students observe some speech acts such as greetings, invitations, refusals, apologies and thanking often take place between individuals. By highlighting features of language and language use, the teacher can improve the interpersonal relations of the learner. According to *Littlewood(1981), communicative work includes functional activities(e.g. problem solving) or social activities (e.g. role play).*

Motivation

Motivation is a fundamental aspect of successful learning. At the introductory stage the class should be properly motivated to receive the new knowledge. In recent 'learner-Centre' approaches to language teaching, the teacher's job is to provide materials and conditions for learning. But the learner has to take the responsibility for his own motivation and performance. Interaction gives learners the opportunity to use the language successfully and to measure their progress which in turn should lead to an increase in motivation. **Brophy in his book *Motivating Students to learn (1998) points out that pupils become more involved and derive more satisfaction from activities they understand those with aims.***

PROBLEMS THE TEACHER'S FACE TO INCREASE INTERACTION

Interaction seems so desirable and sensible in theory but we all know that actually promoting and increasing it can be uphill struggle. Let us consider some of the reasons for this.

Student Resistance

It is unfortunate that some learners are not interested in role play, pair work and group work. They feel shy to participate. In spite of motivation and encouragement they resist to participate. If the learners have no interest, they don't take part in interaction

Self-Consciousness

Some of the students are introverts who become nervous and embarrassed when asked to speak in English. So as a language teacher I try to identify such students and I join them in role play. This technique helped to some extent.

Large Classes

Since the classes are large, there are more pupils to be monitored and more chances of problems. When the teacher is monitoring interaction, there is a greater likelihood of noise.

Mixed Abilities

In every class we have to group the students for pair work or group work. But we have to group them according to their levels. It is sometimes challenging to the teacher.

Insufficient Language

The common problem of most of the learners is insufficient language. So they are hesitant to take part in interaction. Fluency in speaking relates to “the learner’s capacity to produce in real time without undue pausing or hesitation” (Thornbury 2000.3)

No Proper Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is vital for language learning. Having developed no proper critical thinking, pupils carry negative feelings about their ability to learn the English language. This condition makes learning almost impossible because “learning depends to a large extent on how the pupils feel about what is taking place” (Underwood 1984). In other words, learner’s motives, needs, attitudes and emotional states determine the quality of learning.

If the learners, for example, are tense, angry, anxious or bored they are less likely to take what is offered to them. Thus the learner’s state of mind or disposition governs their whole learning activity.

HOW TO PROMOTE AN INCREASE IN STUDENT INTERACTION

Keeping all the problems in view the teacher has to promote student interaction. This section will suggest some solutions to the above mentioned problems.

Teaching Process

Students of a new language will not learn to speak fluently merely by hearing speech in class, although this is most important for familiarizing them with accepted forms and the flow of authentic speech as well as for giving them practice in receptive side of communication. The teacher will need to devise situations which help he learners to use the language.

Nunan (1998) says, “Communicative task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form”.

Let me illustrate a **Speaking lesson**:

A: Excuse me Miss, What’s your job?

B: I’m a photographer!

A: What do you do?

B: I take photos for magazines!

A: What’re you doing at the moment?

B: I’m working on a project about London!

A: That sounds interesting!

B: Umm, it is!

What Does the Teacher do to Present this Dialogue?

- The meaning of the dialogue.
- Grammatical structure (simple present / present continuous).
- Lexical items (Excuse me! That sounds interesting)
- Stress and intonation.

Of all the four aims stated, the most challenging is to help pupils derive meaning individually. Once the meaning of the dialogue is understood, I believe, the other three aims can easily be met. As the first I tried introducing only the questions in the dialogue by way of role play- teacher playing the role of various professionals and answering the questions. The variety of roles the teacher plays here are often familiar and lively. So they involve pupils actively in the role- play. This is in order to make sure the each of the pupils get the **meaning of the dialogue**-at least globally.

In the second step is focusing on the **structure**-the difference between the simple present and the present continuous. The third step is **lexical items**- Excuse me! That's interesting! The teacher has to introduce such items to the pupils so that they can chunk them well.

*“Language fluency and accuracy is achieved by retrieving
and combining ready-made chunks of language.
The ability to chunk language successfully is central
to understanding of how language works.”*

In the fourth step, teacher plays a cassette to practice the spoken elements of **stress and intonation**.

The whole process outlined above can perhaps be summed up in the following diagram.

Presentation-----Practice----- Production

Lesson Plan

Table 1

Teacher Activity	Student Activity	
Presentation	Practice	Production
1. Present the items of Conversational language 2. Give practice in the key phrases 3. Teach pronunciation/intonation 4. Give more contexts 5 Check pupil's comprehension	1. Identify the key elements 2 Practice saying them orally 3 Role play/pair work	1. Speaking (information exchange) 2. Writing 3 Interaction 4. Public-speaking 5. Monologue

Pre-Teaching Task

There are many common feature of spoken language: colloquialism, ellipsis, deixis, false starts, repetition and rephrasing, back channeling, vague language, run-ons and overlaps (Bygate, 1987). Therefore learners need classroom activities which enable them to develop the skills to participate in oral interaction.

The task should introduce the language within a clear and meaningful context that learners can understand. It should be interesting and authentic and should depict the culture of the target language. The teacher has to find more suitable task according to the level of the students.

Demands and Supports

There are five types of demands - conceptual (role-play, guessing game can help them to understand this), language (pronunciation, intonation, stress and rhythm etc), interactional (group work and pair work), involvement and physical demands. I scaffold and give feedback to meet the demands.

Meeting the Mixed Abilities

In the mixed ability class the teacher has to prepare an easy, medium and difficult version of the same task. So the students of different levels can interact together at a level appropriate to them. For an example, after some listening practice students with different tasks can tell each other what they have found out.

Mood Cards and Pictures

Speakers are always in a definable mood-happy or angry, anxious, worried or upset or eager, impressed or wanting to impress. The fact is that mood influences what we say and how we say it. The teacher brings 2 or 3 pictures of people's faces depicting facial expressions, for instance, anger, happiness, excitement or boredom. These will help in meaningful interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Interaction helps learners develop language use and social skills. So maximizing interaction in the class is an important part of the teacher's job. The teacher has to plan it in the process of lesson planning. Awareness raising activities, authentic language samples, input interpretation, good motivation and constant drill in sentence pattern will prove fruitful for increasing student interaction.

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