

Research Article

ADOPTING TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS IN EFL SPEAKING CLASS AT THE UNETI UNIVERISTY HA NOI

¹*Le My Thu, MA and ²Khieu Thi Huong, MA

University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI) , Hanoi - Vietnam

Received 14th September 2020; Accepted 10th October 2020; Published online 23rd November 2020

ABSTRACT

A great bulk of research on second language acquisition has agreed upon the fact that speaking is the most crucial part of language skill, thus should be integrated with listening, reading and writing rather than be taught separately (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). However, the history of learning and teaching languages has experienced numerous cases of failure in aiding students to successfully master speaking skill. Its rooted cause was blamed on the fact that students are not given an adequate amount of time and opportunities to interact with each other in class. Shumin (1997) concludes that communicating well in a second language requires learners a number of things, not just only a firm background of grammar and vocabulary. Those things may include great opportunities to be absorbed in an interactive second language environment.

Keywords: EFL speaking class; second language acquisition; master speaking skill.

INTRODUCTION

Typical learner problems in EFL speaking class

The history of teaching oral production has recorded significant problems listed in the following table that almost every learner of EFL class has experienced.

- Unable to maintain oral interaction beyond short phrases or sentences
- Frequently make communication failure and confusion
- Short of lexical resource to talk about common topics
- Have no communication strategies
- Take too long to think of ideas and speak them out
- Find it impossible to join conversations
- Unnatural spoken language
- Poor grammar and pronunciation (Adapted from Richard, J.)

Reasons for common problems in EFL speaking class

Most common problems in EFL speaking class tend to arise from the failure of teachers in involving students in class activities. Indeed, Andriyahti (2009) in his own primary research on teaching speaking has concluded that teachers are the first people to blame on. Specifically, those teachers forget to create an English atmosphere where students are guided to use English as the primary function for communication, but they frequently feel at loss to express their feelings with others in English (Ardriyahti, 2009). Thus, as time goes by, students seemingly feel reluctant to use English to communicate and only rely on their mother tongue even in EFL class. All in all, being given inadequate opportunities to speak in class is the main reason for students' failure in mastering speaking skills.

Goals for a successful speaking class

Richards, J. has claimed a list of criteria for a successful speaking class which involved:

- Activities serve for communicative values
- Students are involved in both controlled practice and freer practice
- Opportunities for individual practice
- Success in communication should be recorded in students' practice tasks
- Class activities should have pleasure factors

Development and application of role-play activities in EFL speaking class

Regarding the literature review on activities for a successful speaking class, I would like to apply role-play activities as a way to motivate learners to proactively participate in speaking practice task.

Definition

The first essential and important component which should be taken into consideration is the definition of role play. According to Oxford dictionary, a role play is "the changing of one's behavior to fulfill a social role". Additionally, the term role play can be referred in three main senses: in a wide range of games; specifically in role playing games; and in the frame of education, emphasized in classroom. Islam (2012) pointed out that students actually imitate the real life to complete their assigned tasks. It also means that students are asked to perform some certain characteristics which could be met in reality in given context (Liu & Ding, 2009). In addition, Sari (2011) advocated that role play was a teaching technique which required students to practice the language they needed outside classroom.

Impacts of role-play activities in learners' performance in speaking class

Islam (2012) declared role play activities in classroom were tools for students to transfer spoken language from real parts of society into proposed projects under the forms of individual or group working. How people's views or opinions were impacted in the real world was also inspired in role play exercises, which would be classified due to the created environment (Ardriyahti, 2009). As a matter of fact, role play is regarded as the most useful tool to motivate students,

*Corresponding Author: Le My Thu, MA,

University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI) , Hanoi - Vietnam.

especially quiet and shy ones, to gain more confidence when speaking English (Ardriyahti, 2009; Shen & Suwanthep, 2011; Islam, 2012). Sari (2011) added his opinions that shy students would feel enjoyable and unstressed with their own masks to show their personality or thoughts in role play tasks. It can be inspired from the definition of role play that when carrying out role play activities, students can express themselves freely and comfortably because students' situations are broadened to the world outside, not only in classroom (Ardriyahti, 2009). Furthermore, Reira & others (2008) assumed their views that role play gave students opportunity to repeat their hobbies and habits which helped to reduce their stress or anxiety whenever standing in front of a new task. That facing with various and difficult situations in role play activities also enables participants to increase their own experience (Islam, 2012). Similarly, Nouralian & others (2013) supported that learners would be open-minded to the real and huge world as they had to be more flexible to a variety of complicated case studies. On the other hand, role play activities encourage students to practice their oral communication skill as much as possible (Ardriyahti, 2009; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Islam, 2012). This type of technique obviously offers participants to use a wide range of spoken language (Ardriyahti, 2009), which asks them not only to use appropriate foreign language and structures but adjust their vocal expression or intonation to be suitable to the context as well (Islam, 2012). Moreover, both of the preparation and implementation time for role play activities gave students opportunities to review their range of language. Thanks to the annual interaction in the second language, students would promote either their speaking skill or their creativity (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010). Islam (2012) suggested role play activities be truly the society of various personalities or behaviors, so in order to accomplish the tasks, students had to vary almost of time. Islam (2012) also summarized that students tend to show more enthusiasm and active attitude to English lesson with role play exercises. He also emphasized the positive effect of this technique on learners' communicative skills, which made them more confident to speak English in class accurately and fluently; and shared their ideas, feedbacks or hidden feelings without hesitation. Another research conducted by Aliakbari & Jamalvandi (2010) advocated the same result of the effect of using role play activities on the progress of speaking skills. Nouralian & others (2013) even state that students participating in role-play activities applied new vocabulary in a free way with more fluency and more accuracy. The authors also found out that students were more creative and confident to fulfill their role play tasks by using appropriate vocabulary, grammar structures in every situation.

RESEACHER'S CONTEXT

I am now working with the first-year students at The UNETI – Ha noi. Male and female students live in separate dormitories. All of their activities, from learning to eating, playing, and shopping must not be carried out within the confines of the campus. Student can leave the campus without his or her teacher's permission. The situation, however, is more flexible in the English classes, which might be due to the fact that teachers of English are, to a certain extent, affected by Western culture. One of the regulations that affect English teaching and learning at the institution, besides that of "can-leave-the-campus" gives most chances for students to use their English in real world situations. All the above cultural factors have created a unique teaching and learning climate in the institution and have an effect on all aspects of English teaching and learning there. Such an organizational culture is also a reflection of Eastern culture affected by Confucianism as well as Marxist ideology, as Ellis affirms, "Whether of the old Confucian style or the Marxist-Leninist variety, the power-distance between teacher and student, the collectivist nature

of social groups, the need to save face, and finally the confirmatory messages in the system of pronouns have all served to perpetuate the conformist teacher/student relationship in Vietnam." (Ellis, 1994, p.67). At the university, students just learn written language in the form of reading and writing, and they also need a grasp of English grammar to pass their written tests. To meet the needs of their students, language teachers traditionally used the grammar translation method that focuses on grammatical rules, the memorization of vocabulary, the translation of texts and written exercises. Those might be the main reasons for the limitations in teaching speaking effectively. As a result, students find it difficult to perform speaking tasks in communicative language class at university. This leads to the fact that second language learners tend to be shy and lazy to communicate with each other in English. Thus, in order to motivate students to communicate in English in warm environment, teachers have always discussed the new and effective methods or ways of teaching speaking. Communicative approaches with three clear stages (Presentation – Practice – Production) are considered to be the best devices so as for teachers to evaluate students' comprehension to the second language acquisition. Specifically, using role play in speaking lessons is one of the powerful techniques which can be applied in communicative language classroom. Nevertheless, this new technique is so strange that PPU teachers and students find it difficult to carry out their lesson. As a consequence, an action research should be conducted to explore the effect of role play in teaching speaking to freshmen or first-year students from PPU who are considered to be at pre-intermediate level. Those students rarely had opportunity to practice speaking at high school where students are often asked to concentrate on grammar to get high scores. Consequently, an arising question for Vietnamese educators is which cultural aspects they should take in consideration before trying to adapt developed teaching methods. From my point of view, such of the following points need to be considered:

Students' orientations and motivation:

Vietnamese society is typically characterized as a collectivist society. The educational system of Vietnam which is considered as a closed system and knowledge-centered, expect students to "return" the desired behavior. That is assessed by examinations (Le Van Canh, 1999). Vietnamese learners' motivation in learning English is limited; there are three main types in terms of needs. First, many people learn English to enable themselves with further study at universities or colleges. Second, some might learn because of their employment opportunities. And finally, most young learners just learn to pass their examinations. David (2000) showed that assessment system is under the control of classroom teachers and other educators; they themselves decide to persuade students that higher quality learning outcomes will be rewarded. It is the educators' duty to help students set their aims of learning, for example in English teaching, which skill learners need to acquire or they learn English for what purposes? Our learners have obvious goals and strong motivation; they easily succeeded in learning by reducing their fear of failure.

Teachers' roles and the relationship between teachers and students:

in Viet Nam, teachers are supposed to be the only providers of knowledge and therefore are highly respected by the students, students' parents, and the society as a whole. Teachers maintain such a high profile in their function as the norm of knowledge, wisdom, and behavior that they do not accept their role as "instruments to see that learning takes place" (Medgyes, 1986). Vietnamese teachers should realize their roles that provide students

with knowledge and develop it in the most effective possible way. It is necessary for teachers to adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms and their own teaching (Richard & Nunan, 1990). However, theories are always different from practice in specific environment. So modifications to meet the students' expectations and socio-cultural context of teaching and learning, flexibility in using the syllabus and deciding how to approach the classroom culture are on the part of teachers.

Classroom interaction:

An examination of classroom discourse shows that it is teacher-centered and teacher-led. Classroom interaction is largely one-way; either between teacher and individual student or between teacher and the whole class (Le Van Canh). Interaction is directed by teachers through question-answer pattern. Learning follows the hierarchy of first listening to teacher, then repetition, then copying models (Kennett & Knight, 1999). Learning and memorizing rules are viewed as a safe way in the traditional learning style because Vietnamese learners are also influenced by Confucianism. That means some activities like role play, problem-solving tasks or discussion are strange to them. (Canale & Swain 1980) suggest that it is relevant to provide learners with the opportunity to take part in meaningful communication interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, e.g. to respond to genuine communication needs in realistic second language situations. In Vietnamese context, it is necessary to accept a hierarchy of negotiated interaction which students could achieve first accuracy, then fluency or acquisition following learning. If teachers commit themselves to such a context of teaching and learning, they should be more patient to encourage students' positive attitudes towards learning.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Unquestionably cultural factors have certainly influenced education in general and on teaching and learning approaches in detail. However we can neither make any changes towards the culture itself nor its related aspects such as people's points of view, their beliefs etc... The best solution should be not adopted but theoretical tenets in such a way satisfying or meeting the cultural contexts in different countries. From my point of view, the findings above have following implications for English teaching and learning in Vietnam: First, for teachers and educators it is time to reconsider the most suitable approach to teaching and learning. Traditional methods are still favorable, not absolutely outdated. Zhenhui Rao (2006) suggested that the current communicative language teaching is not perfectly suitable for all Chinese students. Therefore teachers should be always very cautious in choosing teaching methods. In English class, learners should be given chances to participate in meaningful interaction which is not feasible in every classroom. Besides, Vietnamese students are influenced by Confucianism, so they seem slow in adapting to the participatory approach to education on account of their traditional passiveness. Therefore a flexible combination of different ways of teaching and learning turn out to be effective and applicable in Vietnamese context. In my teaching practice, I often use various methods of teaching to suit different situations. In detail, if I know my students prefer learning rules before speaking or writing, I can use Grammar-Translation method before getting them to do tasks. Second, the testing system needs reforming in order to reduce the students' pressure to pass the exams. Cahn also suggests that students should be tested in terms of skills to use the language communicatively rather than a good memory of language rules. The traditional approach could be improved by adjusting it to meet the principles of communicatively, e.g. focus on both forms and functions of the language. In addition to the form of

assessment system, basic criterion to evaluate students' levels should be made clear and logical. For example, what level we should put students at university or high school, or secondary school graduate students, how much of grammar and vocabulary they should acquire at a specific level. Finally, we also need to improve the teacher training course. Mc. Groarty (1984) asserts that students, program planners, administrators and teachers will be able to provide better instructions only after considering the specific purposes for which the language is to be used. And this is supported during teacher training courses. Training should help to develop teachers' ability to decide the appropriateness, feasibility, applicability and practicality of methods against their socio-cultural and pedagogical situations. Trainers in teacher training courses should be provided with hands-on experience in teaching English effectively in their local context, with a partnership to address the challenging from the cultural and educational system. In my opinion, mutual understanding and sympathy between teacher and learner can help us overcome the challenge easily. If we know our students' characteristics and their expectation from us, we might set ourselves some principles in teaching. Teachers are not only knowledge providers but also consultants helping their learners choose suitable strategies, and also guides facilitating classroom interaction communicatively. Teachers should let students familiarize themselves with working in pairs or groups on problem-solving tasks, projects and discussion in order to develop analytic thinking, increase communicative interaction. In addition, to promote students' creativity and understand questioning in class should always be encouraged by teachers, by giving students chances to contribute, share ideas, and express their opinions as much as they can. Being tolerant and patient when teaching is also the teachers' responsibility, this helps effective and successful learning outcomes.

REFERENCES

1. Aliakbari, M. & Jamalvandi, B. (2010). The impact of "Role Play" on Fostering EFL Learners' Speaking Ability: A Task-Based Approach. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ920501.pdf>.
2. Ardriyati, W. (2009). Role play: One Alternative and Effective Teaching Method to Improve Students' Communicative Skill. Retrieved from file:///E:/download/ipi7849%20(1).pdf
3. Brown, H Douglas, 2001. Teaching by principles an interactive approach to language pedagogy. Longman Press. London.
4. Canale, M&M. Swain (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative curriculum in language teaching and testing. Applied linguistics, 1, 1-47.
5. Dahlin, B&Watkin, D (2000). The role of repetition in the processes of memorizing and understanding, a comparison of the views of Western and Chinese secondary school students in Hong Kong. British Journal of Educational Psychology.
6. Ellis, Rod. 1994. The study of second language acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Islam, P. (2012). Effectiveness of role play in enhancing the speaking skills of the learners in a large classroom: An investigation of tertiary level students. Retrieved from file:///E:/download/14475-52603-1-PB%20(1).pdf
8. Kennett, P. and Knight, J. (1999). Baseline study report on lower secondary English language teaching in Vietnam: ELTTP Project. Hanoi: Ministry of Education and Training and the Department for International Development.
9. Le Van Canh (1999). Language and Vietnamese pedagogy context. KA Viet - VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages, 2008 - tapchi.vnu.edu.vn
10. Liu, F. & Ding, Y. (2009). Role play in English Language Teaching. Retrieved from

- <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/viewFile/3988/3534>
11. Mc. Groarty (1984). Some Meanings of Communicative Competence for Second Language Students. TESOL Quarterly. Volume 18, Issue 2, pages 257–272, June 1984.
 12. Medgyes P (1986) . Queries from a communicative teacher. ELT journal, Oxford University Press.
 13. Nouralian, R., Khodabandehlou, M., Jahandar, S. & Najafi, M. (2013). The Impact of Psychodrama (Role play) on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Speaking Ability. Retrieved from http://www.cibtech.org/J%20LIFE%20SCIENCES/PUBLICATIONS/2013/Vol_3_No_3/JLS-81-024-ROSHANAK-THE-ABILITY.pdf
 14. Reira, J. R. M., Cibanal, J. L. & Mora, M. J. P. (2008). Using Role playing in the Integration of Knowledge in The Teaching-Learning Process in Nursing: Assessment of Students. Retrieved from <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/tce/v19n4/03>
 15. Rao Zhenhui (2001). Matching Teaching Styles with Learning Styles in East Asian Contexts. The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VII, No. 7, July 2001. <http://iteslj.org/>
 16. Richards, J.C. (2008). Teaching Speaking Theories and Methodologies. Cambridge: English Language Teaching.
 17. Richards JC, Nunan D. (1990). Second language teacher education- books.google.com
 18. Sari, N. P. (2011). Improving students' speaking ability by using role play. Retrieved from <http://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789/4259/1/NURINA%20PERMATA%20SARI-FITK.pdf>
 19. Shen, L. & Suwanthep, J. (2011). E-learning Constructive Role Plays for EFL Learners in China's Tertiary Education. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED514202.pdf>
 20. Shumin, K. (1997). Factors to consider: Developing adults EFL students' speaking abilities. English Teaching Forum 25(3)
