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STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Dr. B. Narasinga Rao, Guest Faculty in English, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, A.U. College of Engineering (A), Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Abstract:
         Being able to communicate effectively is the most important of all life skills. Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, whether this be vocally, written, visually or non-verbally. How well this information can be transmitted and received is a measure of how good our communication skills are. Developing communication skills can help all aspects of a person life, from professional life to social gatherings and everything in between. The ability to communicate information accurately, clearly and as intended, is a vital life skill and something that should not be overlooked.
         Communication is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. In the professional world, communication matters to the core and oral communication at the work place is vital to the success of any organization. With proper communication, a bonding and trust builds amongst the employees which promote excellent working conditions. 21st century has been adjudged as an era of communication; innovative technologies have revolutionized the business world. In the 'instant world' that epitomizes dynamism the way we convey our thoughts plays a major role in building relationships. Hence there is a need to refine our oral communication.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, language skills, strategies for developing oral communication skills.

Introduction

         All of us use communication skills when we use them at home with family, at school or college with our teachers and classmates, in the work place with our superiors and colleagues, on computers when we answer emails, and on the telephone when we answer to calls. In fact, communication is lifeblood of social as well as business world. Communication means interacting with others to promote understanding; to achieve a result oriented goal; to pass information to another person so that they can take action. It can involve listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Importance of Communication Skills in Engineers' life

         Importance of communication skills starts from their college days which are further carried out in interviews, jobs and their day to day life. Communication skills are very important in Engineers day to day life. For an engineer communication skill is just like oxygen without which he can't survive. As "the engineers design the future" communication is much needed them for their survival.

Importance of Oral Communication Skills

         Oral communication skill is an asset for anyone more so a graduate. A graduate with good oral presentation skills has a better chance in career advancement and promotion. According to the Ontario Curriculum for Language, "Oral Communication skills are fundamental to the development of literacy and essential for thinking and learning. Through talk, students not only communicate information but also explore and come to understand ideas and concepts; identify and solve problems; organize their experience and knowledge; and express and clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Listening and

speaking skills are also essential for social interaction at home, at college, and in the community."

How to teach oral communication skills

In recent years a debate has developed over which approaches to structuring, planning and implementing lessons are more effective. Many linguistics and ESL teachers agree that students learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language learning (CLT) and Task-based language teaching (TBLT) are best for this aim.

Communicative language learning (CLL) in oral communication

The communicative approach is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be at work, and this will allow them to learn how to use the language. Classroom activities guided by the communicative approach are characterized by trying to produce meaningful and real communication, at all levels. As a result there may be more emphasis on skills than systems, lessons are more learner-centric, and there will be the use of authentic materials.

Task-based language learning (TBLL) in Oral Communication

Task - based language learning offers an alternative for language teachers. In a task-based lesson the teacher doesn't pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based on the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as the students to complete it. The lesson follows certain stages.

Pre-task

The teacher introduces the topic and gives the students clear instructions on what they will have to do at the task stage and might help the students to recall some language that may be useful for the task. The pre-task stage can also often include playing a recording of people doing the task. This gives the students a clear model of what will be expected of them. The students can take notes and spend time preparing for the task.

Task

The students complete a task in pairs or groups using the language resources that they have as the teacher monitors and offers encouragement.

Planning

Students prepare a short oral or written report to tell the class what happened during their task. They then practice what they are going to say in their groups. Meanwhile the teacher is available for the students to ask for advice to clear up any language questions they may have.

Report

Students then report back to the class orally or read the written report. The teacher chooses the order of when students will present their reports and may give the students some quick feedback on the content. At this stage the teacher may also play a recording of others doing the same task for the students to compare.

Analysis

The teacher then highlights relevant parts from the text of the recording for the students to analyse. They may ask students to notice interesting features within this text. The teacher can also highlight the language that the students used during the report phase for analysis.

Practice

Finally, the teacher selects language areas to practice based upon the needs of the students and what emerged from the task and report phases. The students then do practice activities to increase their confidence and make a note of useful language.

The advantages of TBL

Task-based learning has some clear advantages

- The students are free of language control. In all three stages they must use all their language resources

rather than just practicing one pre-selected item.

- A natural context is developed from the students' experiences with the language that is personalized and relevant to them. With PPP it is necessary to create contexts in which to present the language and sometimes they can be very unnatural.
- The students will have a much more varied exposure to language with TBL. They will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms.
- The language explored arises from the students' needs. This need dictates what will be covered in the lesson rather than a decision made by the teacher or the course book.
- It is enjoyable and motivating.

Strategies for Developing Oral Communication Skills
Talking About Self

To establish the initial rapport between the students and the teacher this activity really works. This activity is carried out in two stages. Firstly, the students are asked to write in points, about themselves which they would like to share with the other students; focusing on their personal, educational and cultural background. They are also encouraged to share their innermost feelings; or their passion, hobbies and dreams for life. In a nutshell this self-introduction is a way to open up and reach out to others. As it is done in an informal manner, students love this activity. Some tell about their role model, others may disclose their weaknesses and fears of life. Some tell about their failures, and others express frustration over parental, peer and societal pressure While speaking many students get emotional and start crying; some get overexcited and try to address the audience as if they are real leaders. Some start shivering because of stage fear and some may even fumble. But as a teacher I see to it that every student speaks. Overall it, it turns out to be a very refreshing activity and paves the way for the students towards effective oral communication.

Playing Word Game

In this activity a simple and vivid word is given to a student for example□ Temple", □ colour green", "mother" etc. The student has to speak out on the given word maximum for a minute without fumbling, faltering or committing any grammatical error. If another student catches an error he points it out and becomes the next speaker, but the word changes. If it is a group activity, the words can be given by the rival team; or even by the teacher. Another way I make them play is as we play □ antakshri□ where the next speaker has to start with one of the words which may have occurred in the last sentence. The students enjoy this activity to the hilt. In addition, it removes the fear of impromptu speaking.

Role Play

The best way to get students speak is involving them in role-play. Create various social contexts and have a variety of social roles assigned to the students. For instance, the teacher may tell the student "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and..."

Giving Reviews on Popular Movies / on a YouTube muted video

Everybody watches movies. Especially the youth is addicted to watching the popular stuff or the box office hits. If we ask them to read an interesting novel and write a review on it, not everyone would come forward willingly. But my experience has made me learn that every student loves to talk about his favourite movie, its star cast, the plot and the good or bad points of it. Again this activity can be both individual and group based. While giving the review the students learn to express their views clearly.

Simulations

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different from role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves,

which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

Information Gap

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group, brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming are that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.

Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class.

Interviews

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people within or outside the class. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

Story Completion

This is a very enjoyable, free-speaking activity involving the whole class for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

Reporting

Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine story and, in class, they report what they find as the most interesting piece of news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced during a day, if it is worth sharing to their friends, before the class commences.

Playing Cards

In this game, students should form into groups of four. Each suit will represent a topic. For instance:

- **Gold:** Earning money
- **Hearts:** Love and relationships
- **Spades:** An unforgettable memory
- **Clubs:** Best teacher

Each student in a group will choose a card. Then, each will write 4-5 questions about that topic to ask the other people in the group.

For example:

If the topic "Gold: Earning Money" is selected, here are some possible questions:

- Is money important in your life? Why?
- What is the easiest way of earning money?
- What do you think about lottery? Etc.

However, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare yes-no questions, because by saying yes or no students get little practice in spoken language production.

Picture Narrating

This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.

Picture Describing

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

Find the Difference

For this activity students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in the pictures.

Suggestions for Teachers

Here are some suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language: Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

- Reduce teacher speaking time in class and increase student speaking time. Step back and observe students.
- Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways to make student participate.
- Do not correct students' pronunciation very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.
- Involve speaking activities not only in class but also outside the class.
- Move around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.
- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.
- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

Suggestions for Students

- **Listening -** Students need to listen to their teachers, other students, and oral versions of texts. This is to allow students to find meaning in texts and vocal strategies, respond appropriately when involved in a conversation, understand and interpret the content of texts or point-of-view, and demonstrate critical thought
- **Speaking -** Students need to be able to interact with others, using appropriate language, clarity, and strategies that emphasize or help express meaning and emotions
- **Reflecting -** Students need to recognize their strengths and weaknesses when preparing for and participating in communication activities, and reflect on how they can improve.

Conclusion

Teaching oral communication is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to

communicate in a second language clearly and effectively contributes to the success of the learner in school/college and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers' pay greater attention to teaching speaking skills. Instead of leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. Various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more involved in the learning process that makes their learning more meaningful and fun. From the above presentation we concluded that oral communication skills are the very important aspects of the engineers' life. Oral communication skills are much needed in the 21st century to survive in the day to day life for an engineer. An engineer without good oral communication is just like a computer without operating system. Along with knowledge, oral communication is the path that leads to success.

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