

The Reasons Behind the Students' Weaknesses in University Requirement Language Courses in Speaking Skills

By

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Abstract

This paper is intended to investigate and scrutinize the reasons behind the students' weaknesses in university requirement language courses, i.e., English 099, English 101, and English 102 particularly in speaking skills. In my own experience as a teacher of English in elementary, preparatory and secondary cycles in Jordan, and as a teacher of English in both Philadelphia University and the University of Jordan on the one hand, and as a school supervisor in Education Development Center UNRWA – UNESCO and as General Education Specialist (English) UNRWA – UNESCO on the other hand, through classroom visits to some UNRWA schools, community colleges and Education Science Faculties in the five fields of UNRWA operations: Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza, I have discovered that the reasons behind our students weaknesses may refer to the textbook (content), methods used, teaching aids or to the teacher himself. The textbook (content) is excluded in this paper, simply because, in my point of view, the creative teacher can change any activity, whatever it is, to suit his purpose and to achieve his objectives. The overall goal of this paper is to enable our teachers to help their students become efficient, independent, and intelligible speakers of English, able to express their intended meaning with confidence and to understand native speakers of English with minimal difficulty. A major objective of this paper is to improve students' communicative competence and help them achieve more pragmatic competence in oral communication, i.e., to be able to interpret and convey intended meaning; to use politeness strategies; to know which language forms are appropriate for certain situations.

Keywords: *Speaking, competence, performance, role-play, group work, work-curricular activities.*

1. Introduction

The Importance of Speaking Skills

One of the four language skills, speaking is generally considered the most difficult to learn. Many students have the misconception that writing in the target language is superior to speaking. Nevertheless, it is only our tongue that builds a communication bridge between the listener and the speaker.

Oral Language is an excellent tool for communication, thinking and learning. It shapes, modifies, extends and organizes thought. Oral language is a foundation of all language development and, therefore, the foundation of all learning. Through speaking and listening of course, students connect with others, learn concepts, develop vocabulary and perceive the structure of English language.

Speech is a vehicle to link individuals to society. That is to say, we as teachers should prepare our students to communicate with others in English. Oral communication is the verbal and non-verbal interaction with an audience to communicate thoughts, information, and feelings. To speak fluently and confidently in a variety of situations is our students need and an important goal of education.

Speaking is fundamental to human communication. In our daily life most of us speak more than we write, yet many English teachers still spend the majority of class time on reading and writing practice almost ignoring speaking and listening skills. This is not a good balance. If the goal of your language class is truly to enable your students to communicate in English, then speaking skills should be taught and practiced in the language classroom.

There is no required course through which students are involved in speaking practice. Moreover, there is only very little time devoted to spoken English which concentrates on improving the students' pronunciation. But nothing is offered to help them become well and more fluent speakers of English.

In most classes, speaking used to be neglected in our syllabus and there existed a common phenomenon on "dumb English". The students keep silent and the teacher monopolizes the class.

The direct cause may be rooted in our teaching itself. For instance, the aural/ oral class, students are made to listen then speak, and the audio-visual class is seldom followed by discussion. As a result, the students are given few opportunities to practice speaking. Even worse speaking is not included in most English tests. It is no wonder the students fall into the habit of using only their ears and eyes instead of their mouths. Even in our oral class, emphasis is generally put on making individual sentences and drilling on mini-dialogues, neglecting training in longer discourse.

Teachers play an important role in structuring the type of environment that will promote effective oral language development. They can establish a classroom tone, which promotes openness, respect and trust. Students on the other hand should feel some ownership in the classroom voice. Teachers act as models for language use. It is important to accept your students' language and to extend that language so that students develop flexibility and competence.

Many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) put it, "Success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language." Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the classroom, they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be.

Finally, teachers are language diagnosticians. By listening to their students talk, teachers should know their students, their interest, their language needs, and their learning styles. They learn what students know, how they learn, and the language and experience they bring to the classroom.

2. Accuracy vs. Appropriacy

We, as teachers, teach about the language but not the language itself. That is to say, we are after accuracy but not after appropriacy. Accuracy means grammar, rules, structure, form (usage) or linguistic competence. Appropriacy, on the other hand, means how to use the accurate language in the appropriate situation. Appropriacy means meaning (use) or communicative competence.

When producing an utterance, a student needs to know that it is grammatical (accurate), and also it is suitable (appropriate) for a particular situation. For example: Give me a glass of water! is grammatical, but it would not be appropriate if the speaker wanted to be more polite. A request such as: May I have a glass of water, please? would be more appropriate.

Now consider the following situation:

Ali is a foreign student in London. He does not know how to reach Trafalgar square. He approaches a policeman. Think carefully if Ali is using his English appropriately.

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Ali : Good morning, Sir. How are you ?
Policeman: (No response , only looks at Ali)
Ali : Do you know where Trafalgar square is?
Policeman: Every one knows that. Why do you ask ?
Ali : You know, I am a foreigner. I want to go there.
Policeman: Go ahead.
Ali : I don't know how to get there.
Policeman: Ah! So you want to know the way to Trafalgar square.
Well, you see that red sign there. There is a bus -stop
where you can catch bus No 23.
Ali : Thank you Mr. Policeman. God help you.
Policeman: (smiles).

In the above example all sentences uttered by Ali are accurate , i.e., grammatical but they are not appropriately used.

3. Form vs. Meaning

Structuralists analyzed language into small bits believing that knowing the parts would eventually lead to knowing the whole. They aimed at developing the learner's linguistic competence which was criticized and considered insufficient for using the language the way it should be as we have seen with the example of Ali and the policeman. Structuralists laid emphasis on form or usage rather than meaning or use. Learners of a foreign language may use and apply a certain rule without knowing how and when to say it. Analyzing language into forms does not take meaning into account.

In this context, it is not out of place to note that meaning is contextualized. Contextual meaning is the meaning a linguistic item has in context, for example the meaning a word has within a particular sentence, or a sentence has in a particular paragraph. The question: Do you know the meaning of "war"? for example, may have two different contextual meanings :

- a) It may mean "Do you know the meaning of the word "war" when said by a language teacher to his students.
- b) It may mean "War produces death, injury, and suffering, when said by an injured soldier to a politician who favours war.

4. Linguistic Competence vs. Communicative Competence

The greatest majority of Arab students find it difficult to communicate in English. Since communicative competence is generally taken to be the objective of language learning, it follows that efficient communication indicates the ability to carry out linguistic interaction in the target language. It is important therefore to realize that linguistic competence is part of communicative competence, so students need to acquire a basic knowledge of linguistic forms "skill-getting" supplemented by an equally important stage of "skill-using".

Some educators observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside the classroom. Others noted that being able to communicate required more than mastering linguistic structures. Students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but be unable to use the language. It became clear that communication required that students perform certain functions as well , such as promising, inviting and declining invitations within a social context .In short, being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence, it requires communicative competence (Hymes : 1971) – "Knowing when and how to say what to whom" . Such

observations contributed to a shift in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s from a linguistic structure-centred approach to communicative approach (Widdowson: 1998).

Linguistic competence is an important part of communicative competence which we need to develop in our classes of English. There is now fairly broad agreement that communicative competence is made up of four major strands:

1. Grammatical Competence
2. Sociolinguistic Competence
3. Discourse Competence
4. Strategic Competence

The first aims at mastery of the language code. It is this type of competence, which much classroom teaching sought to promote. The second involves the ability to produce and understand utterances, which are appropriate in terms of the context in which they are uttered. This involves status, role, attitude, purpose, degree of formality, social convention and so on. The third concerns the ability to combine meanings with unified and acceptable spoken or written texts in different genres. The following example illustrates this:

Speaker A : What did the rain do?
Speaker B : The crops were destroyed by the rain.

The reply is grammatically and sociolinguistically acceptable but in discourse terms it simply doesn't fit. The fourth relates to the verbal and non-verbal strategies which learners may need to use either to compensate for breakdowns in communication or to enhance the effectiveness of communication e.g. hesitation fillers such as "um", "you know" etc.

5. Teaching Functions

Teachers of English should bear in mind that their goal is to enable students to communicate in English. To do this students need knowledge of linguistic forms, meaning, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function. For example, making suggestion, as a function, can be realized through the following forms or structures:

- Go and see the doctor.
- Why don't you go to the doctor?
- If I were you I would go to the doctor.
- It's better to go the doctor.
- You should go to the doctor.
- How about going to the doctor.

Moreover, a single form can often serve a variety of functions. For example, sentences in the imperative form may perform a variety of functions:

- Give me that book. (Order)
- Pass the jam. (Request)
- Turn right at the corner. (Instruction)
- Try the smoked salmon. (suggestion)
- Come round on Sunday. (Invitation)

Therefore, students must be able to choose the most appropriate form, given in the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Communication is a process, knowledge of the forms of language is insufficient.

6. Authenticity vs. Artificiality

Communicative language teaching is a departure towards a new, promising horizon. It is a radical movement which has put an end to various misconceptions about language learning. Authentic language is genuine, natural and original; it is the one used in real life. Artificial language is fabricated for certain grammatical purpose. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to facilitate communication in the classroom. In this role, one of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities he acts as an advisor, answering his students' questions and monitoring their performance. He might make note of their errors to be worked on at a later time during accuracy-based activities. At other times he might be a "communicator" engaging in the communicative activity with students.

7. Motivation and Transfer in Language Learning

Transfer of learning and motivation play an important role in learning. Transfer, the application of prior knowledge to new learning situation, is often seen as a learning goal, and thus the extent to which transfer occurs is a measure of learning success (Pea, 1987; Perkin, 1991). Motivation, defined as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts is important because it determines the extent of learner's active involvement and attitude toward learning.

"Motivation" says Jeremy Harmer (1984:3) "is some kind of internal device that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action. If we perceive a goal and that goal is sufficiently attractive, we will be strongly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reach that goal." Teachers who want to be successful in teaching should have this quotation in his mind.

Research suggests that transfer and motivation are mutually supportive in creating an optimal learning environment. If the learner perceives what he is learning to be relevant and transferable to other situation, he will find learning meaningful, and his motivation to acquire the skill or knowledge will increase. Similarly, for transfer to take place, the learner must be motivated to do two things. First, he must be able to recognize opportunities for transfer (Prawat, 1989); second, he needs to possess the motivation to take advantage of these opportunities (Pea, 1988).

The challenge of teaching is thus to simultaneously enhance transfer and motivation so that they both support learning. To do this, teachers need to first understand the nature of transfer and the nature of motivation.

Understanding and creating optimal language environments thus becomes a primary concern of the language teacher. Teachers can observe circumstances under which learners acquire language and can make adjustments toward creating optimal learning conditions. In handling learning activities, the language teacher should remember that because language learning focuses on both accuracy and appropriateness of application in various contexts of use, learners must be given opportunities to participate as language users in multiple contexts.

8. Role Play

As we all know, role-play activity is frequently employed to practice speaking. As the term indicates, the student is going to play the role that is set for him. He is not going to express his own opinions or experiences. He is to identify himself with the personality of the role he is playing. The main practice is that each student is given particular information about his role, which he must take into consideration.

But students are free to choose the language they will use to do their roles, i.e., the language of the role play activity, unlike the language of acting a dialogue (memorization), is creative. Most importantly, role play activity consolidates the language and language functions taught previously. Moreover, it is fun and motivating. Quiet students get the chance to express themselves in a more forthright way. Incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production. If the teacher believes that the activity will work, it can be very successful. However, if the teacher isn't convinced about the validity of using the role play the activity will fail.

8.1 Why role play activity is not working in our English classes?

It should be taken into account first that it is part of the student's characteristics to enjoy acting or playing roles, and so role play is an ideal way of providing useful fluency practice. Role play perhaps does not work if students are not linguistically prepared for it. If students have not mastered the structures and vocabulary needed to express a certain function, they find role play frustrating for them. Help and motivate your students learn the expressions usually used for the various functions and you will discover that the activity will be more appealing to your students.

There is another possible reason for the indisposition of students to be involved in role play . Role play is motivating provided that students are not confused by instructions which are too complicated, or frightened by roles which are too unfamiliar, or they fell shy to play a role before other students. Teachers, on the other hand, are reluctant to use role play activity believing that is a waste of time and it is of no use.

8.2 How to activate Role Play activities:

To make Role Play work effectively, I do believe that the teacher should do the following:

1. Make sure first that your students have learnt the structures and language needed for expressing the functions required in the role.
2. Adapt the role suggested in the role card to make it look familiar to your students. You may delete or add some dimensions of the role to make it more interesting to the students.
3. Give cues for the role play chains in simple language. That is, you may ask your students some questions related to the material on the cards to remind them or to familiarize them with the language, structures, vocabs and functions they were exposed to previously.
4. Give your students enough time to read through the situation, and to prepare their roles in groups. Students who finish quickly can write down their conversation.
5. During the Role play, the teacher should emphasize the following aspects of face – to face conversation:
 - a) Paralinguistic features:
Stress, intonation, rhythm, tone of voice, speed of delivery, pitch and loudness have to be included in the utterances if conversation is to represent life– like communication events.
 - b) Extra – linguistic features:
Since Role Play is a face – to face interaction, it is important to encourage students to use appropriate gestures and facial expressions, which accompany the language.
6. It is sometimes appropriate for the teacher to get involved and take part in the role play
7. As students practise the role play they find that they are stuck for words and phrases. In this case the teacher has to feed-in the appropriate language .
8. It is rarely appropriate for the teacher to jump in and correct every mistake. This could be demotivating.

9. The Basics of Teaching Speaking

1. Make lessons interesting :

Bored students won't remember much of the lesson. Don't talk for long blocks of time. Instead, keep students involved and interacting with you and each other in English. Vary the types of techniques you practice and activities you use.

2. Make yourself understandable :

Simplify your vocabulary, grammar and speaking speed to the degree necessary to be understood, and keep any instructions simple and understandable. As your students' English ability increases, so should the complexity and speed of your English .

3. Motivate your students:

To boost internal motivation, remind your students of the benefits that English can provide, such as English – speaking friends., better job opportunities, easier shopping etc.

4. Provide a useful context:

Learners will remember material better and take more interest in it if it has relevant contextual meaning.

5. Remember that native language affects English learning.

The learner's native language will provide a basis for figuring out how English works. Sometimes the native language can affect English production. To illustrate, some students, say "He a student" instead of "He is a student", because of the interference of mother tongue (Arabic) as the Arabic version is "هو طالب" but not "هو يكون طالب".

6. Don't assume all errors are bad.

Native language interference contributes to a gradual process of learning in which language is refined over time to become more like natural English. For example a learner may progress through phrases such as "no I like peanuts", "I no like peanuts", "and finally, "I don't like peanuts". Teachers must not get discouraged watching students exchange one error for another; this process is natural part of language learning. Give priority to problems that hinder communication rather than incorrect but understandable errors.

7. Encourage your students to think in English not in Arabic.

Our students get stuck in a habit of thinking in Arabic and then mentally translating what they want to say into English. This is time consuming and frequently leads to confusion when direct translation isn't possible. Thinking in English requires students to use learned words, phrases, and language structures to express original ideas without focusing too much on language rules or translation. To illustrate, how would you change the statement "Linda ate apple." into a question? Of course "Did Linda eat an apple"? More than likely you didn't think about adding the aux "do" (in the past tense "did" because "ate" is past tense) before the subject, changing the irregular verb "ate" to "eat" and raising your intonation at the end of the sentence.

The EFL teacher should not believe that his students will spontaneously think in English. But once they are motivated and prepared to learn English, the teacher can have his students successfully practice with communicative language exercises through role-play, dialogue, conversation, description, etc., which are accepted by all teachers as appropriate language forms for communicative –interaction activities in EFL classes.

8. Build confidence in your students.

There are many reasons why students tend to be silent listeners rather than active learners in the oral-English class. The most important reason is psychological pressure of making mistakes in the presence of their classmates the second reason is their poor vocabulary and structures. Without self-confidence, your students are unlikely to take risks, and risk-taking is necessary in language learning particularly in speaking. Learners need to feel that it's safe to make mistakes. Try to reduce feeling of embarrassment when mistakes are made, and give more compliments than criticism.

9. Account for different learning styles.

Some students are hands-on learners, some like to watch, some like to have detailed explanation. Students may prefer a visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), kinesthetic (moving) or tactile (touching) way of learning. Some like to work in groups, some work better individually. Language teaching should take a variety of learning styles into account through varied activities.

Learning style is the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes and recalls information. Teachers should know about learning styles because of the following reasons:

- Students learn better and more quickly if the teaching methods used match their preferred learning style.
- As learning improves, so does self-esteem. This has a further positive effect on learning.
- Students who have become bored with learning may become interested once again.
- The student-teacher relationship can improve because the student is more successful and more interested in learning.

10. Know your students. Make good relationship with them:

Build trust with your students by building relationships and being approachable. Make sure quiet students are included and more assertive ones don't dominate the lesson.

11. Techniques of Teaching Speaking Skills:

1. Focus on communication and interaction.

Murphy (1991) points out, "students need considerable practice with less tightly controlled opportunities to express themselves fluently and spontaneously via longer stretches of self-generated discourse". The classroom should be a place full of interaction, where students are actively engaged in negotiating meaning and in creating and initiating communication (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). One way of accomplishing this is through group work and pair work activities. Learning opportunities of this kind increase the amount of student speaking time and give each student more opportunities to practice such communicative skills as sustaining a conversation and turn-taking. On occasion, students also will be encouraged to demonstrate their speaking skills in front of the whole class, since this could be valuable experience for them in occupational or academic settings later in life.

English is never used for ordinary day-to-day communication. As a result, the students are hardly ever exposed to the natural use of English in real life situation. This poses an enormous problem for the teacher, who must try to involve his students in communicative language activities in the class. In spite of these difficulties, the teacher may find his class well motivated to using communicative- interaction activities if he follows these steps:

1. Tell your students your plan and purpose. Students are told that they are going to use English during the class for a particular period of time and they are going to practice pieces of language as that they will be able to use English in context even outside the classroom.

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2. Explain the context or situation. Before beginning any language activity, the teacher should present a context or situation and explain it to the class. The context may be one, for example, in which a teacher greets his students or a man asks direction to a place. The teacher should then tell his students that they are going to see how English is used in this context.
3. Provide language items or structures. After the context is clearly understood by the students, the teacher should give them the language module or structure for the context.
4. Ignore mistakes in pronunciation .While students are engaged in oral communication language work, they should not be interrupted , as this will inhibit their fluency in speaking , thereby distracting them from communicative interactions.

Good teachers go beyond building blocks of English such as vocabulary lists or grammar drills to develop oral communication skills. Teachers bring communication into their lessons by guiding their students through tasks or activities, which require meaningful communication in a relevant context. Here are some tips for making your lessons communicative:

a. Clarification Skills:

Teach your students how to ask for clarification. The following phrases may serve as a starting point and can be expanded or adopted to an appropriate level.

- Do you understand?
- Excuse me / Could you repeat that?
- Once more. / One more time.
- Please speak more slowly.
- How do you spell that?
- Did you say.....?
- What does..... mean?
- I don't know.
- I don't understand.

b. Pair and Group work

Questions and answers in class are not enough, because we have only 50 minutes for each period. Within this period, we, as teachers, can not ask all students to speak, particularly in a 50-student class. In order to give each student a chance to speak, we divide the class into several small groups. After listening to a passage, for example, students first talk it over in their small groups. Everyone is required to say something about it. When students work with each other or one-to-one with you, they are forced to communicate. Make sure you have taught them how to ask for clarification when they don't understand. Information gap activities, role plays, and collaborative problem solving are some communicative activities

c. Teach real interaction patterns. Introduce the following basic interactional patterns: initiate, respond , follow-up :

A: what did you do last night? (initiate)

B: I went to the library. (respond)

A: Oh really ? (follow-up)

d. Give your students time to talk. Break the monotony and give students plenty of time to talk. It will keep them alert. Make small jokes, be friendly and call them by their names. It sounds warmer and friendlier and lessens the distance between the teacher and the learner.

2. The classroom should use authentic materials and authentic language, where possible, to help students learn how language is used in real-life context. Tasks should be as close as possible to the real-world tasks that the learners are likely to need to perform outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman,2002:128).
3. With respect to modification of errors, direct correction of learner errors in the classroom should be minimal , should be as private as possible and should be aimed at only those error that directly interfere with communication. Murphy (1991) suggests that teachers be tactful about the error correction because embarrassing students is “widely recognized as being counterproductive”. He recommends making corrections indirectly, where possible, by paraphrasing, reformulating or expanding on nonstandard utterances produced by students. This type of indirect correction follows Ur’s (1991) principle that it is far better for students to practice accurate language than inaccurate language, while at the same time saving the students from embarrassment. Ur also suggests anticipating errors and trying to prevent them, rather than fix them later, so as to avoid numerous corrections during a communicative activity.
4. Involve your students : If your students feel really shy about talking in front of other students then one way to go about breaking this barrier is to create and establish your own classroom culture where speaking aloud in English is the norm through:
 - arranging the classroom desks differently, in groups instead of lines.
 - encouraging your students to ask questions in English (students should be productive not receptive).
 - applying pair/ group work (close pairs / open pairs) .
 - giving positive feedback also helps to encourage and relax shy students to speak more.
 - allocating a percentage of their final grade to speaking skills.
 - encouraging your students to give complete answers .Mostly, what most of our students are really required to do is to answer “yes” or “no” which they do quickly and then just sit in silence or talk noisily in Arabic .
 - Another way to encourage your students to speak English is simply to speak in English as much as possible in class but not in Arabic. If you don’t speak in English, how can you expect your students to overcome their fears about speaking English. “We learn to speak by speaking”. The more you practice speaking the more you will improve your oral skills. This goes for teachers as well as students.

5- Listening comprehension (Cassette recorders should be used):

The most serious problem is the unsatisfactory control of listening comprehension. Nevertheless, this receptive skill "the forgotten skill" (Chastain, 1976:278) seems to have been subsumed insignificant and eventually neglected. This tendency may be explained by the fact that what the learner hears is somewhat analogous to the stimulus received by a learner. Teachers have apparently assumed that listening comprehension is an inevitable by-product of learning to speak, according to Paulston and Bruder (1976) students who are going to study in an English-speaking environment will need to learn how to listen and take notes, to comprehend native speaker in all kinds of spoken situations, and to understand radio and TV broadcasts. In essence, the phonological system of a foreign language (i.e. English) is acquired by listening, and oral communication is impossible without a listening skill. Listening skills serve as the basis for the development of speaking.

6- Integrate listening and speaking:

The more your students listen carefully with understanding to the native speakers, the more they are able to speak. Our students should be exposed to native speakers in listening classes. Further,

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teachers should develop interaction listening exercises. Face-to-face listening is the most common and the least practiced by course books. Any form of "live listening" (the teacher speaking to the students) is suitable.

Moreover, most teachers would agree that listening comprehension and speaking are two of the most important and perhaps the most difficult skills to teach students of English in a country where English is a foreign language. Opportunities for practicing listening and speaking in English in an authentic communicative setting do not abound in an EFL situation, particularly since students do not generally hear English spoken outside the classroom. How can EFL teachers begin to remedy these situations?

First, teachers should recognize that listening is interactive, not passive, requiring much effort and practice on the part of students. Second, teachers need to know how to select and design appropriate and authentic language-learning materials and activities. They should also provide extended practice in grammar, vocabulary and language functions presented in the classroom. Since one of the greatest obstacles to learning English in a foreign-language situation is motivation, teachers must be held accountable for encouraging language learning through the use of materials and activities that bring the students' world into the classroom.

Most importantly, students have to learn how to listen, just as they have to learn how to speak, and therefore they should be exposed frequently, from the stages of language learning, to listening-comprehension activities based on natural authentic speech. Moreover, teachers need to prepare students psychologically for listening activities, telling them that they will not be able to understand everything they hear and that they should not panic because of this. Instead, students should be invited to guess the meaning of words and phrases they do not comprehend.

In presenting oral language activities, teachers should focus on interest level. Topics that bring the students' world into the classroom will make learning more meaningful while repeated exposure to spoken English will encourage and build oral language skills.

7-Speaking exercises should be taught as speaking but not as reading exercises. Examples are: "Look and Say" exercises, "About You" exercises, "Ways with Words" exercises.

8-Writing exercises which are mostly neglected consolidate speaking exercises. In most general terms, writing exercises serve as a reinforcement for reading as well as for speaking. Writing exercises are mostly postponed to the end of the class and then students are asked to continue such exercises at home and they are not checked on the following day.

9- Retelling activities

We may engage our students in retelling activities through reading them a story or a passage two or three times (better to be recorded by a native speaker) before asking them to retell it. Key words and expressions from the story or the passage are preferably written on the chalkboard to help them get hold of the idea.

10- Information exchange

Information exchange is exercises to get over our students talking in duos. The two short passages given to each pair have the same structure but different content. When the two students in each pair finish reading their passages, they exchange information by asking each other questions.

11- Using dialogues

Fill in dialogue, a kind of open ended exchange, is particularly appealing to students. Some parts are deleted from the original dialogue and the students are required to fill the blanks while doing the dialogue. This kind of dialogues allows the students more freedom, since they do not have to stick to the original version.

12- Description

Another oral exercise to be occasionally used is description. Names of persons and things that are known are written on pieces of paper, which are distributed among the students. Each student describes the person or thing assigned to him.

13- Discussion

Discussion is an essential device for our communication. We present a few simple problem solving topics to our students in order to ease the difficulty they may encounter at first and thus build up their confidence in voicing their opinions.

14- Co-Curricular activities

All these techniques and devices are aimed at getting the students to speak English. While the exercises and activities involved in them have been proved efficient, they must be confined to classroom during class hours. To meet this urgent exigency we focus our attention on co-curricular activities. We should encourage our students to carry on an English speaking drive. An English corner in the classroom or in the centre or in the department should be opened where all students, majors or non-majors, can talk to each other in English. English speech contests and dramas should also be organized every semester / year. Thus within and without the walls of the classroom, varied activities help our students a lot overcome "dumb English" and enhance their speaking ability.

10. Conclusion: Proposals for Improvement

Students clearly feel that classroom-based speaking practice does not prepare them for the real world. They often highlight listening and speaking as their biggest problem. Partly because of the demands of listening and speaking and partly because of the way speaking is often taught. It usually consists of language practice activities (discussion, information-gap activities, etc.) or it is used to practice a particular grammar point.

These are some of the problems that teachers of English may face when teaching speaking activities in the classroom. These problems are not new nor are the solutions offered above. Teachers all over the world continue to face the same hurdles and they are advised to:

- 1- Join workshops for teaching speaking skills and therefore, language centers should encourage their teachers, particularly newly appointed ones, to join such workshops and attend demonstration lessons led by experienced teachers.
- 2- Bear in mind, as with most techniques, it is important not to give up. The task is not easy, but it isn't impossible either. The aim is simply to try and increase the amount the students speak English.
- 3- Our study plans and curricula should be constantly examined and recognized to ensure balance between the four language skills. We should also ensure against excessive emphasis on traditional approaches as well as against the unrealistic compartmentalization of language skills currently prevailing in the curricula of many of our language centers. And, finally, every effort should be given to increasing the time

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allotted for the productive skills (speaking and writing). It is through the teaching of speaking and writing that our vocation becomes one of "sensitizing, subtilizing and humanizing." (Clayton, 1981:125)

- 4- The suitability of teaching material is so important. Teachers should be trained on how to employ such materials appropriately.
- 5- Very often teachers fail to allot a sufficient amount of time to developing oral communicative skills, i.e., class activities are mostly cut to minimum as students are not given the chance to practice oral activities which promote communicative competence. Through my own experience, students should be given their chances to practice speaking. They should have confidence to communicate, a supportive atmosphere to encourage their attempts, and valid reason for trying to communicate. (Chastain , 1979:345)
- 6- Testing oral communicative skills: The importance of testing language proficiency should be stressed. In fact, testing the ability to communicate orally in English has been mostly neglected.
- 7- The importance of the above proposals suggests that immediate action should be taken to salvage the worsening state of affairs pertaining to EFL in public schools.
- 8- Finally , it is not of place to state the characteristics of the EFL teachers:
 - a. Who have a contagious enthusiasm for his teaching. Who love their students and their work.
 - b. Who are creative. What can a teacher do to engage the students' mind? There are a myriad of techniques that the creative teacher can employ information-gap exercises, games, songs, problem solving...etc.
 - c. Who can add pace and humor to the class. Students then may have a good time learning, and they may make a lot of progress because they are not afraid to make mistake.
 - d. Who are encouraging and patient with all of their students , never allowing even a shadow of displeasure to cross their face in reaction to continued incorrect speaking after endless corrections. When the teacher is positive – encouraging initial and repeated attempts -the students will apply themselves more diligently. Motivation thrives on success.
 - e. Who will take an interest in their students as persons –who will try to discover discussion topics that interest their students. Who try to find out what their students' interest are : hobbies, family, travel, etc.
 - f. Who treat their students as persons, on an equal basis with all members of the class.
 - g. Who leave their emotional baggage outside the classroom. The classroom is a stage and to be effective the teacher must in some cases be an actor.

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