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Teaching Speaking Skill at the UG Level – Problems and Prospects

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Need to Know the Problems of Teaching Speaking Skill at UG Level in Colleges

While learning a language, being able to express what we want to say can be one of the most rewarding achievements of all language skills. Speaking has become the essential skill of real life in the present day global market. Students have their own purposes and hopes for learning English in India. This skill raises the self esteem of a student and helps in getting proper employment. Therefore, the focus has shifted to acquiring speaking skill for qualification at UG level. However, there is a significant lack

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of material available to help teachers to develop their learners' skills in this important area. Many classrooms all over the world continue to be teacher centred and Mumbai colleges are no exception.

English language has maintained its primary position even after so many decades since the British left India. The way English is taught in our colleges today, is to a great extent, the main reason for the deterioration of the standard of English in India. We must accept that the standard of its teaching has deteriorated vastly and that is why it is essential to know the problems of teaching speaking skill at UG level in the colleges. The present writer aims to help tertiary students improve their English oral skills. There is frequently too little class time available for students to try to put into practice, the skill deemed necessary for an effective presentation. There is much relevance of oral skills in English academic and professional contexts. Students want to monitor their progress. The development of speaking skill is a relatively neglected area of ESL teaching, which relates to a big problem facing most students.

The Problems of Teaching English Language at UG level

1. The syllabus does not mention a specific plan of what to teach and when to teach. It is for the teacher to decide how and when to teach a particular teaching item.
2. There is a dearth of competent teachers. This problem arises due to the lack of teachers who are specialized in the Method of Teaching of English.
3. In the absence of Assessment, speaking skill is not given importance in many classrooms. As a result a large number of students pass out of schools and colleges with inadequate competence in expressive communication skills.
4. The method and techniques used by the teachers are out of date. Chalk and board and lecture method are the main methods of teaching used by the majority of teachers. They ignore all the other methods of teaching.
5. Due to resource constraints, very few audio-visual aids are available. Some are so expensive, the colleges can only afford to buy a few if at all they could buy any .

6. We have four lectures per week for the teaching of English in colleges, but in most of the colleges, classes are not held, due to the lack of adequate number of teaching staff. Sometimes teachers rush through the syllabus for the sake of syllabus completion.

7. The size of the classes everywhere is considerably large and so, student's participation in class work is quite impossible. This is one of the reasons why it is impossible to give individual attention to the students.

8. Teachers' and students' regional dialects interfere with proper pronunciation. Many teachers have difficulty in pronunciation and are not cautious about the stress and intonation of their spoken English. So, mother tongue interference is very obvious in so many cases.

9. Teachers spend their lives in the company of students. Their lapses and failings go unnoticed by their peers. This professional isolation is a barrier to professional development and imparting knowledge and skills to students.

10. Many teachers concentrate mainly on teaching grammar and vocabulary, since these are the areas tested in the examinations.

Experiment

A study was conducted on 700 First year Bachelor of Commerce students of Mumbai University. A questionnaire was given to them in order to obtain their views on this very important language skill. The study revealed the following points:

- A. Speaking skill is necessary for them to be gainfully employed.
- B. Students feel more confident when their pronunciation is accurate.
- C. Needs analysis should be done in the beginning of the teaching programme. This process is absent in the current system.
- D. Students were of the view that oral skills would develop confidence for self education and facilitate ability for life-long learning.
- E. Effective oral skills would help them in clearing competitive examinations and would give them success in professional and personal life.

F. Only 20% students believed that B.Com syllabus of Mumbai University has helped them in improving their oral skills.

G. They were disappointed with the current unit based credit system which does not give them the opportunity to participate in speaking activities in the classrooms and tutorials, as they are the whole time busy in completing written assignments and tests. They do not also get time to participate in co-curricular activities because of this system.(Anjali Verma,2013)

Strategy to Improve Speaking Skill

A. Speaking skill in second language needs to be consciously developed amongst students. It should be taught and practiced in the language classroom.

B. Students should be encouraged to speak out loud in English.

C. Interesting methods of teaching speaking has to be designed and should be practiced in the classroom.

D. Some percentage of the final grade should be allocated to speaking skill and students should be told that they are being assessed continually on their speaking practice in class throughout the term.

E. Teachers should try to make the class student-centred and not teacher- centred where students are talking and interacting in English.

F. Students have to be made familiar with the sounds of the second language. Language learners often feel that the language they are learning is spoken much faster than their own. They have difficulty in perceiving and recognizing individual words or phrases. (Cook,2011)

G. Students need to be given practice in stress, rhythm, intonation patterns and be aided in the development of their fluency

H. They should be made competent with practice to take short and long speaking turns.

I. Group work/pair work should be encouraged along with role play, language games and mind engaging tasks and retrieving text order should be given to students.

J. Conversational listening skills should also be enhanced.

Students should be able to use language in real life situations. English being the principal language of commerce and communication in India, the need for improving English speaking skill is very necessary. We have to train our students not only for casual conversation, but also for academic discussions and for monologues in long turns. The language system has to be internalized and it has to become available for the communication of meaning.

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