

Improving the Productive Skills of the Students through Selected Teaching Strategies

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How to cite this paper: Khin Hnin Si | Pwint Oo Khin "Improving the Productive Skills of the Students through Selected Teaching Strategies"

Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-3 | Issue-5, August 2019, pp.2443-2446, <https://doi.org/10.31142/ijtsrd27956>



IJTSRD27956

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the ways to highlight the needs for developing the productive skills of the fresh students, at the University of Computer Studies (Pakokku), Myanmar. This paper explores the strategies to enable the learners to communicate among themselves in their daily life. It also includes an eclectic approach to the current methodologies and the implementation of teaching writing and speaking strategies. Then needs analysis is used in order to investigate the actual needs of the students. To achieve successful learning in class, suggested activities are also provided. As writing and speaking have many features in common, by deliberately controlling a number of variables, language teachers can make writing closer to speaking and improve students' speaking skill through writing activities and vice-versa. This paper recommends the procedures and strategies as well as communicative activities to be of great help for developing the students' productive skills.

KEYWORDS: productive skill, strategies, implementation, procedures, activities

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there have been many changes in English language teaching because language methodologies are also changing with the times. Though different teaching methods are effective against their own ways, each has its own strengths and weakness. Therefore, language teacher needs to know what the students' needs are, which method is the most suitable for current situations, and what the needs of the country are.

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In this age of globalization, English has increasingly become the medium in every domain of communication, both in local and global contexts. As a result, English language skills are more and more needed to communicate with the outside world.

In future job seeking process of students, technical skills alone are not enough for them to get better job and English communication competence also plays an important role. However, most of the students in this University are still weak in writing and speaking rather than listening and reading. Although the four language skills are integrated, more emphasis should be placed on speaking and writing skills, or productive skills, to meet the needs of the students. Therefore, the effective teaching and learning for developing students' target language skills, which are essential for their professional and social survival, are still needed. Moreover, they should be given much exposure and adequate practice to be successful in learning a foreign language. To fulfill these needs, second language teachers should always find out and apply the teaching methods which are the easiest about improving students' language proficiency and which are effective to promote speaking and writing exposure in a short time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the age of competitions, the students of Universities of computer Studies need to be proficient in their related fields of science and technology, and possess social skills,

communicative skills and English language proficiency in order to keep abreast with their contemporaries. English is the only foreign language taught as a compulsory subject in all the schools and higher education institutions in Myanmar. And it also plays a major role in forming professional qualities of students. In order to gain control over their own learning process, enhancing strategies in second or foreign language classrooms is one of the teachers' roles, since their mission is to facilitate the learning among their students and make their thinking process visible. In order to teach a second language (L2) effectively, the language teacher must take into consideration the needs of the students and select the most suitable teaching strategies to enhance their L2 learning process.

At Computer Universities, English is a compulsory subject through the course period. All of the subjects except Selective Myanmar Language Subject which is prescribed as a supporting subject for first year course are written in English in order to make the material more accessible to international students. Throughout the academic life, students have to deal with the countless English lectures, tutorials, labs, project reports and presentation. However, it is unfortunately found that, compared to the other language skills of reading and listening, the competency in speaking and writing English of the majority of the students at University of Computer Studies (Pakokku) is still considered unsatisfactory. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore students' needs in their learning language and apply

the most suitable teaching methods in order to fulfill the students' needs and develop their language proficiency.

Aim and Research Question

This study aims to investigate students' present learning situation, their attitude to learning language and the actual needs for developing the productive skills of the students. Their English language proficiency differs from each other because they come from different places and they have different exposure to speaking and writing. The findings of this study will give language teacher more knowledge about the students' attitude towards learning English and their needs and which teaching strategies are suitable most for developing students' productive skills.

The research question is:

What is the present learning language situations of the students and which are the most suitable teaching strategies for developing the productive skills of the students at the University of Computer Studies (Pakokku)?

3. METHODS

This research has been conducted with Computer Science and Technology Specialisation students who are attending

First Year Course (2018-2019 Academic Year) at the University of Computer Studies (Pakokku). We use questionnaires and interviews for collecting quantitative and qualitative data from student respondents. In this survey, the questionnaire, which consisted of 13 multiple choice items, are used in order to investigate the actual needs for developing the productive skills of the students. 150 students are made to take the questionnaire on a voluntary basis and the majority of the students are at the age of 16 to 18. Their perspectives on English language learning and their interest in taking part in writing and speaking activities differ from each other because they have different exposure to their natural skills. Based on data collected from the respondents, this research calculates the students' needs and interest to improve their language.

3.1. NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDENTS AND THEIR RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS

The following table shows the questionnaire which is used to carry out the survey on needs analysis of the students and the response of the participants towards learning language in number and percentage. Each respondent is allowed to tick only one option for each item in the questionnaire.

No.	Statements	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
1.	Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.	112(74.66%)	35(23.33%)	3(2%)	0(0%)
2.	Learning English is helpful to large extent in studying my subjects.	127(84.66%)	20(13.33%)	3(2%)	0(0%)
3.	Learning English can help me find better job opportunities.	120(80%)	24(16%)	6(4%)	0(0%)
4.	I think that I need to improve receptive skills: listening skill and reading skill for my future career.	108(72%)	32(21.33%)	8(5.33%)	2(1.33%)
5.	I think that I need to improve productive skills: writing skill and speaking skill for my future career.	121(80.66%)	29(19.33%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
6.	Fear of making mistake and lack of confidence make me silent in the class.	99(66%)	31(20.66%)	15(10%)	5(3.33%)
7.	I would like to do pair work or group work rather than individual work in speaking activity in the class.	98(65.33%)	30(20%)	12(8%)	10(6.66%)
8.	I practice English speaking daily.	46(30.66%)	20(13.33%)	21(14%)	63(42%)
9.	In my opinion, writing skill is very important in my studying.	99(66%)	42(28%)	9(6%)	0(0%)
10.	I have got enough practice for improving the writing skill.	42(28%)	40(26.66%)	39(26%)	29(19.33%)
11.	Writing in pairs or in groups make me improve my writing skill rather than writing individually.	89(59.33%)	46(30.66%)	10(6.66%)	5(3.33%)
12.	I spend some of my free time to practise my English.	46(30.66%)	21(14%)	21(14%)	62(41.33%)
13.	I am confident to speak English in public.	25(16.66%)	20(13.33%)	35(23.33%)	70(46.66%)
14.	I am satisfied with my English language proficiency.	25(16.66%)	40(26.66%)	33(22%)	52(34.66%)

Table1: Number and Percentage of respondents according to responses

3.2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of the questionnaire that examined the attitude to the students towards studying English language and the students' need, it can be found that almost all of the students have desire to be proficient in the English language. 84.66% of the students say that learning English is helpful to large extent in studying their subjects and 80.66% of the students surveyed state that speaking and writing skills are the most important for their career and it is followed by listening skill and reading skill. Moreover, most

of the students are willingly to improve their speaking skill but they want to take part in pair and group works in speaking activities rather than individually. However, the majority of the students mentioned that silence occurred in the speaking skill is because of fear of making mistake and lack of confidence. Besides, most of the students do not spend their time to practise English Language skills daily. While almost all of the students say writing skill is very important for their studying, most of them have not done enough practice to improve writing skill. Nearly 60 % of the

students surveyed state that writing in pairs or in groups makes them improve their writing skill rather than writing individually. It is found that nearly half of these students are still less confident enough to speak English in public and over half of the students are not satisfied with their English proficiency.

With the regard to the data collected from the students of University of Computer Studies (Pakokku), most of the students had strong desire to improve their speaking and writing skills and positive attitude towards the natural skills not only in the class but also in their future careers. Therefore, the language teachers need to investigate what the students need, try to find out which are the best ways to make the students improve their speaking and writing skills and let them participate in any kinds of language producing activities. Hence, the following methods are selected for enhancing an active role of students in the learning process and improving the students' productive and communication skills.

4. SOME SELECTED STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

In order to fulfill the students' need for improving their language productive skills: speaking and writing, there are a variety of teaching strategies the teacher can use. Within a given lecture time, the language teacher needs to create a comfortable atmosphere for leading to the involvement in all students in the process of learning target language as well as strategies which consist of activities to encourage student interaction. Depending upon the extent to which teachers and students play their roles in the language teaching and learning process, the author has selected some strategies to improve students' language production.

Depending on the students' needs, some writing tasks and speaking activities are suggested. Activities are designed to provoke communication between the students and the teacher so that their writing and speaking skills can be developed. These activities can stimulate their interest and motivation and give them the chance of developing their productive skills. For the sake of the students, some activities which are expected to be useful in language skills development are suggested as follows.

4.1. PAIR-WORK OR GROUP-WORK

Since the goal of learning is to make students able to communicate, the teachers have to encourage the students to participate in certain condition. One technique that can be delivering by the teacher is pair or group work to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings (Richard & Rodger, 1999 and Pacheler et al, 2009).

Suggested Activity : Expressing Feelings
Time Alloted : 10-20 minutes
Purpose : To be able to express their feelings
Grammar and Function : Use of verbs followed by gerund and conjunctions
Organization : Pair work
Skill Developed : Writing and Speaking
Procedure : The students are divided into pairs. The teacher gives all the learners the words such as "like, dislike, adore, love, hate, detest, can't stand, don't mind,

enjoy" and so on. And then, the teacher writes *sample questions* on the white board such as "How do you feel living in a hostel?", "What is your feeling on being a computer university student?" and so on. The students have to prepare to make a sentence by using at least two words of different feeling.

Activity : One student has to ask question and the other one has to give answer and vice-versa using above sample questions and the verbs followed by gerund.

For example:
 Student A : How do you feel living in a hostel?
 Student B : I don't mind sharing a room with a friend but I can't stand waiting for taking a bath.

Through the activity, students must be encouraged to use the target language and every student must participate in this activity. By the use this activity, each learner can get interactions between the teacher and the learners which are fundamental to successful learning.

4.2. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative learning is an approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of students working together to solve a problem, create a project or complete a task. To be effective learning, careful planning should not be left out. Planning involves preparing for a task before the task is performed. Typically it involves having time to think about a given topic, having time to prepare what to say, and taking brief notes about what to say. The task may involve being given a set of pictures that represent a story to talk about, describing a model, preparing a small lecture, making a decision, or providing personal information (Nation and J. Newton, 2009). In most of the activities, it can be found that about ten minutes' planning time is usually enough for the students to give good results. With certain activities it may be needed to allow students time to think about what they are going to say or write.

Suggested Activity : Describing your home town
Class size : Any
Preparation time : 10 to 15 minutes
Purpose : To increase vocabularies and make long sentences
Skill developed : Writing and speaking
Procedure : The teacher makes groups of students who come from the same region and gives them some topics they have to discuss as follows:

- A list of all the products that their community or region produces or trades
- A list of all the produces that other communities or regions trade with theirs
- A place where raw materials come from
- A place where the produce is produced
- Roads and trade routes
- Important landmarks

Each group has to think and discuss together to describing their regions and write them down on the paper. After a given time, each group has to select a group leader to present their information to the whole class. For almost classroom activities, the students should be encouraged to

use available resource such as their prior knowledge and the information on a variety of books or dictionary and internet. As a language teacher, it is very important to build student confidence, help them to see value in learning and stay focused on the task.

4.3. ROLE-PLAY

Role-play is one of the excellent activities of getting our students to practice their English speaking activity. Participating in role-play activity in the classroom leads to a lot of language production and lets even quieter students have a chance to participate in speaking activities and makes all the participants joyful in the class. As a role play activity, the students can imagine themselves into a person they like or admire and the situations they want to.

Sample role-play activities are:

- A. Imaginary people – The joy of role-play is that students can become anyone they like for a short time such as *The President, the State Counselor, a millionaire, a celebrity person and so on*. For this activity, the teacher must suggest a topic per student by letting them select one they want or drawing lots. The students should be given about five minutes to prepare their topic. Students can also take on the opinions of someone else. And then, the teacher makes each student present their topic and the rest of the class listen. By doing so, all the students increase their knowledge and improve their listening and speaking skills.
- B. Imaginary situations – Functional language for a large number of scenarios can be activated and practised through role-play. The situations ‘At the library’, ‘Student enrollment’, ‘Presenting the new invention’ and so on are all possible role-plays. A sample role-play activity can be played as follows:

Role play activity	: At the library
Time	: 10 minutes for preparation
Purpose	: To enquire how to get a library card
Organization	: Whole class
Skill developed	: Speaking skill

Procedure:

- A. Creating an imaginary situation
- B. Dividing students into two groups (librarian group and the student group)
- C. Instructing to make (at least) three possible questions and answers
- D. Role-playing

Throughout this activity, students may need new language to be fed in by the teacher. It is sometimes appropriate for the language teacher to get involved and take part in the role-play. After watching these activities, the teacher should give advice them if necessary to get a much wider range of language opportunities. In the English lessons of the University of Computer Studies, the author has used a number of role plays to improve students’ communicative speaking activities. By doing so, the students have learnt new vocabularies and structure in a natural and memorable environment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research was conducted with an aim to explore the students’ current English language learning situation and to fulfill their needs. In research study, it has been found that most of the students are weak in doing practice to improve their language and participating in their class activities because of being afraid of making mistake and their lack of confidence. It may cause students’ difficulties in communicating with their ideas both written and oral speech. In order to overcome these problems, the language teachers have to plan some teaching strategies such group work, pair work and creating collaborative learning environment which can promote students’ active participation in learning.

In fact, the main aim of language learning is to communicate with each other effectively. Therefore, the productive skill becomes the important skills for the students to give more attention and can be regarded to be more important than other language skills in English Language Teaching. Moreover, being fluent and accuracy in writing and speaking is essential for the student in their field of study as well as their future career. Therefore, it is important that they will have got a lot of practices for developing their productive skills. In this research paper, the activities for speaking practice through writing activities have been presented. Thus, it is hoped that this research report will be of help to some extent for students who want to develop their productive skills and teachers who are taking responsibility to improve their students’ productive skills.

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