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How Open-Ended Oral Tasks Affect Fluency - A Study

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ABSTRACT

Developing oral communication skills has been the crucial need of ELT today. Oral communication skills can be developed through performing individual presentations and pair interactions in open tasks. Learning and understanding relevant skills and tasks related to specific genre are in more practice to develop discursive ability. This paper is concerned on understanding and using appropriate strategies to develop oral tasks to competently communicate in any situation.

Key words:

discourse; interaction skills; oral communication; open tasks; oral performances; process approach

Introduction

Language is the tool of communication and speaking is the foremost skill that initiates interaction. Without speaking, interaction cannot be done. Students need to develop their interactive ability to present their thoughts and discuss on any topic. Students with limited English proficiency strive to learn English but they feel to be die-hard when they practice speaking skills. In any tertiary level institutions the questions generally raised are - Why oral fluency is needed for communication? What are the ways to develop speaking skills? How open-ended oral tasks affect fluency? How speaking affects personal communication? In the present scenario, designing interactive tasks for improving speaking skills has been the prime concern of ELT experts.

Oral skills can be broadly developed through the tasks based on personal communication, dyadic communication, group communication and mass communication. The present paper highlights on the significance of oral skills and discusses on the classification of oral communication and how it can be developed through presentation and interaction skills. It elucidates on the significance of process approaches in language learning.

Personal Communication based oral tasks

Oral presentation

The students need to be engaged in oral presentation tasks to stimulate their area of interest and to put a detailed study to engage in communicative discourse. Discursive abilities can be developed through participating in open tasks. The students can be given sufficient practice to present their topics through individual presentation tasks like

1. Small talk
2. Just a minute
3. Extempore

In small talk presentations, the student needs to briefly introduce the topic and highlight its modern trends and functional use. In Just a minute presentation, the student is confronted with the constraints of space and time and should be able to deliver the key points on the theme. An unexpected topic is provided for instant delivery without giving time for preparation. The student needs to have

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command of language and organizing skills to present a topic on the spot for quick interpretation without the use of visual images. In extempore, eloquent skills are tested, where the students need to exhibit their talent for the readiness of language and information. The degree of the delivery of the informative content, adequate command of language with kinesthetic features should justify the purpose of communication. Most of all, the student needs to speak with confidence, and should modulate the voice, tone, stress, accent and style.

The students should be given aware that they should enrich their knowledge and present it efficiently to the class. Students should have sufficient independence to develop their autonomous learning skills (Lehtanen, 2008). They should be given their own choice of selecting the topic and prepare it with their own ability with appropriate materials like textbooks, reference books and other internet resources. With the mutual consent of the teacher, the students can present the topic in their area of interest. The teacher should continuously monitor both literary and linguistic knowledge of the students. They should be assessed with the mechanics of speaking along with appropriate theme, adequate content, grammar, lexis and vocabulary.

Dyadic communication based oral tasks

Face to face communication

Interpersonal communication activities like conversation, chatting, interview, role-play and video conference are some of the most demanding tasks in which the students need to enrich their literary morale to communicate with one another. Face to face conversation is the best option to fill the informative, affective and psychomotors in the arena of language and communication development. The students need to converse with one another to know, to instruct, to understand and to analyze about a thing or a person in a given context or situation. Conversation tasks can be undertaken in context to academic, business &/ social situation to develop academic, professional and social discourse. The student should be given enough time and trials in displaying language in formal, informal, formal-informal conditions. They should be equipped with more compatibility to execute better interpersonal skills in developing personality, business, social and ethnic relations. When two students are involved in pair tasks and asked to prepare a topic/situation and to perform it, their interpersonal skills is quite developed. They can entertain one another with mutual concern and their reliance and empathy could be significantly witnessed. Communication apprehension can be put into check and thus it can reduce stage fear, shyness, voice modulation, stress, accent and style. Students should be constantly involved in task repetitions to discuss and exchange their opinions as it gradually helps them to execute good rhetoric and discursive ability in interpersonal as well as public speaking tasks (Nakamura, 2008). They can be encouraged to develop the skills of greeting, introducing, describing, narrating, interrogating, explaining and responding to the given topic and situation.

Chatting

Chatting is a pleasant and wonderful oral activity in which all the students show enormous excitement and enthusiasm in displaying personal and social interest. The student audience can boost the active participants' performance to inform and entertain the class with adequate language and communication behaviour. Chatting can be preferably given as an earlier task for promoting interaction. As the students feel comfortable and encouraging in adopting performance based approaches, Chatting works as an all time favourite task in classroom research. When the students are found to be very interested in participating and performing with good thinking skills, their discursive level can be found at the best. The students feel enthusiastic to inform, interact, discuss, and interpret and also to converse their own opinions with their peers on any topic. Even when the partners are unaware about any information, their attitude to raise peer assistance can help the faculty to successfully conduct the pair tasks.

Chatting can be done as an ideal or social conversation where the students reflect their ideas on any topic or situations. The students need to use their metacognitive and metalinguistic ability to frame their ideas in language. Gradually, the students should be able to engage in discourse and able to display their innate language ability in simple, compound or complex sentences in their real communication. This highlights their linguistic ability to frame appropriate sentences with their new invented vocabulary.

When the students work in a pair, eventually they become supportive to one another in terms of language and communication development, by evoking mutual understanding to explore new ideas and information with the rhetorical devices like describing, elucidating and explaining about the topic and situation.

Interview

Interview is one of the best oral activity where the speaker can put into self-check, analyze and examine their thoughts and ideas, attitude and respond to the listener. The student needs to be more informative and interactive with the interviewers. The role of both the interviewer and interviewee could be enacted both by the students themselves to explore and improve their interrogative and explanative skills. To handle the students with close examination, the role of interviewer could be performed by the teacher and a student as interviewee. The teacher should envisage the students to prepare themselves to acquire and learn the sense of inquiry and should possess scrupulous understanding in their subject area of interest. Both the teacher and student should be the active performers where they interact, influence and view one another with their ideas and beliefs. Cognitive skills are subjected to examination as the students' confident level is increased. The concrete and the discrete knowledge of the student can also be observed when the student exchanges thematic information on any subject. The students can receive feedback and improve their personality with due respect to the traits of language and communication behaviours (Nakatani, 2010).

Role Play

Role plays are the simulative oral tasks, by which with continuous oral performances, the students practice to gain oral fluency (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Lee & Ridley, 1999). The students should put into various real simulations to check their verbal knowledge and non verbal cues that is related to various situational contexts subjected to any academic, social and business environment. They need to study the profound character and subject of the role they need to play. They need to know the proportion of language to be exhibited with the peers. The student should understand that in what proportion of language, form and variety should be executed. Students should be aware of the significance of personal, business and social environment while they communicate. They need to realize their role and action in any communicative event. Students as they practice more pair tasks, they will be able to understand the pragmatics of real communicative situation.

Video conferencing

Video conferencing is an advanced audiovisual task that provides authentic display of language performance and self-assessment of the personality. It envisages the literal transaction of knowledge and business. When the mode of telephonic conversation fails due to the barrier of acoustics, non-verbal cues, paralinguistic features and lack of personal identity, video conferencing envisages the impact of visual media through direct face to face communication. Personal, social, business and technical communication can be developed by interviews held through video conferences. The importance of phonological aspects of communication can be clearly defined and determined to execute better meaningful interaction. Both local and global communication is possible through video conferences as it promotes intellectual and informative use of business interaction. The students need to understand the significance of their role in oral presentation and discussion in negotiating, justifying, explaining, defining and reporting their personal, academic, social and business pursuits with appropriate tone, stress, accent and style.

Group Communication Based Oral Tasks

Group discussion, panel discussion

When the students are convincingly confident to interact and discuss on any topic/subject of their area of interest in a group, their literary and linguistic zeal and communicative potentiality can be seriously witnessed. In a group discussion, students comprising 6-8 members in a group discuss about a given topic, analyze the issues by sharing their opinions and drawing others attention on their ideas and keen to solve the problems by suggesting and recommending certain key points and drawing conclusion with the support of the peer members. The students may get illuminated with quoting references found from any textbook and media resources. They should be able to lead the discussions, share the opinions, convince their ideas and provide solutions on the issue along with the peer group members. They should

be able to efficiently communicate and interact with one another and should not create any loop or hole in discussion. When one student fails to communicate, the other should extend substantiate support with ideas and should make the discussion more convincing to the topic. The student should also be given sufficient awareness to understand that all the students should necessarily participate in discussion. It should not create a climate that some students will be dominating others or not giving enough time and space to reveal their ideas. The teachers should monitor that a fair chance should be given to all the students and no student should be left out in the shelter of others interaction.

Group discussion, panel discussion and debate are the activities where the team work and team-spirit will be thoroughly highlighted. The students as a team should work together to understand the concept and solve the issues of the problem given in the subject. They should identify the strength and weak points of the topic and should be able to convey all the necessary ideas to make the discussion more successful. Stage fear, shyness, lacking of grammar and vocabulary needs to be invariably reduced as the student is more concerned occupied in highlighting more ideas and necessary information. The students should communicate within the given time limits, introduce all the team members, open the discussion, lead the discussion with the strengthening of core points, suggest and recommend any revisions and conclude the topic highlighting its importance in present scenario. When contradictory issues on a given topic are to be highlighted in a debate, students take two sides on for and against the topic concerned. The skills of arguing and producing contradictory statements can justify offering their own opinions on the topic and subsequently it aids to cognitive appeal to analyze and solve the problem.

Presentation and Case Analysis

In this activity, the teacher may present a case and ask the students to analyze the given case or situation and to solve the problem. This leads the student to exercise problem-solving and brain-storming skills to logically understand, observe, analyze and provide solution to the given problem in the case. Case analysis can be done as an individual, pair-work or team work. Students can eventually use their rhetoric and discourse devices in interactional communication. They should be able to state, explain, interrogate, argue, discuss and justify their opinion in the group communicative oral tasks.

Rhetoric Public Speaking

The teacher should ask the students to present a topic/idea/situation/subject of any interest. In this rhetoric based oral activity, the students will be able to predict and state their own ideas, substantiating some valid points of references thus illustrating the topic. The skill of expressing facts, revealing statements will expose the determination and confidence of the students.

Narrating

The teacher should ask the students to narrate their experiences or tell about any exciting incidents or short stories to assess the continuous speaking ability of all the individual students. This leads the students to do wide extensive reading and thus they select their own topic of interest and narrate a story to the peers. Discourse devices can be put into communication and the students can be exercised to think, organize, present the story coherently and they should be asked to explain the significance of plot, character and situation. While encouraging displaying rhetoric devices in communication, the students' versatile power in exhibiting language skills can be markedly improved (Albert & Kormos, 2011; Porter, 1986). The student may be subjected to frame sentences of their own, select appropriate structures, use varied vocabulary for narrating the incidents and hence both grammar and lexis is improved with their ability to organize and display to narrate the incident in logical sequence and coherence with adequate knowledge on language, grammar and lexis.

Describing

The process of description in scientific or technical terms has been a great deal or of exercise in technical communication. The students may be asked to define any scientific terms or they may be asked to describe on any process. The students should state, define, elaborate and describe the process step by step in logical sequence and discourse terms should be displayed to interconnect the ideas coherently and finally the production of the end product of the process is elucidated. In this describing activity, the students may be asked to describe about a technical process, to describe graphical representation like

charts, diagrams, graphs to illuminate the pictures, figures and also to describe photos, cartoon pictures, documentaries, films or news paper or visual advertisements in 100 words. The teacher may also ask the students to describe their personal attempts in learning English language and communication skills. This will also help the students to think, understand, analyze and dress his/her own language and communication ability.

Interrogating

The concept of making the student to put into the sense of inquiry will make the students to understand how to ask, to argue, to question, to enquire, to answer, to respond and to explain on any subject of interrogation. Interrogating is the basics of engaging into conversation, in dialogue speaking and the simulation of role play. The sense and attitude to ask question is also important in language display and the students to clarify doubts on any subject/issue should be invariably put to practice in interrogating with the teacher and the peers in the classroom. It is the technique of interrogation that has emphasized interaction in classroom. Responding the question in subjective way and asking questions in open-ended, close-ended or tag questions have made the students to practice in a more professional and technical way. These techniques lead them to respond in interview based activities like mock interviews conducted in the classes.

Explaining

Explaining on any situation is one of the basic rudiments of oral discourse. Participating in communicative events and performing the oral based activities helps the students to exclaim or to provide feedback to the performance of their peers (Ogasawara, 2008). When the peers reveal the positive first and negative next the students are able to judge, compare and evaluate the performances. The teacher as a role model should help and provide positive feedback to the students to distinguish their acts in communicative events. They should be given the suggestions and directions to improve their future performance in oral communication tasks. The prime attitude of the teacher is to monitor, guide and motivate them in their oral tasks. The teachers should focus the students to help them improve their language and communicative ability and should provide adequate feedback to them to understand their errors and to rectify it in subsequent performances.

Conclusion

The students can be given liberty to select and discuss the subject of their own area of interest being personal, social or formal. They should be able to narrate, describe, interrogate, explain and substantiate it with both literary, linguistic and communication zeal with their peers and teachers. Immediately, a tremendous wave of interest can be widely witnessed among the peers and eventually they themselves think and discuss on new topics, new situations and open conversation in the class. Task repetition needs to be done to facilitate the students to acknowledge their gradual improvement in their performances. When the students are able to perform better, then the teacher and the students should share a common concern and caution that the topic and situation should not be repeated. When they are able to perform vigorously, time constraint should also be made so that the active performers should prepare, plan, organize and perform with the given space of time.

The students should be constantly motivated and encouraged to develop cognitive skills to construct their ideational knowledge to framing language content. They should be able to exhibit their ideas and thinking skills with relevant content and information by right planning, consistently preparing, and coherently organizing with appropriate language items. Besides selecting the topic, organizing ideas, planning and preparing the thematic content, they need to focus on delivery techniques. They need to understand the audience expectations, technical aids and tools needed for presentation and the utility of audio-visuals in interpreting the textual message. Kinesthetic and proxemic features contribute for a successful delivery of personal reflections. Facial expressions, eye contact, appropriate gestures, pleasant postures, voice modulation, spacing and distancing and the contextual use of presentation are to be keenly understood for a successful personal and interactional communication.

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