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INTERACTIVE METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: Developing oral proficiency remains one of the most persistent challenges in English language teaching, particularly in contexts where learners study the language mainly in the classroom. This article examines interactive methods of teaching English and their potential to improve learners' speaking skills. Drawing on sociocultural theory, the interaction hypothesis, the output hypothesis and communicative language teaching, it explains why interaction is central to the development of spoken language. The article then reviews six interactive approaches: role-plays and simulations, pair and group work, discussions and debates, task-based learning, project work, and digital tools. A sample lesson sequence for students of tourism and hospitality illustrates how these approaches can be combined in practice. The article also considers the changing role of the teacher, common obstacles, and principles for assessing speaking. It concludes that systematic, well-structured interactive instruction increases learners' speaking time, fluency and confidence, and better prepares them for real professional communication.

Keywords: interactive learning, English language teaching, speaking skills, communicative competence, role-play, task-based learning, collaborative learning, tourism education.

1. Introduction

English is the principal language of international communication, and nowhere is this more evident than in tourism and hospitality, where employees must greet guests, give information, negotiate and resolve problems in real time. Despite years of study, however, many graduates who know English grammar and vocabulary well still hesitate or remain silent when they have to speak spontaneously. This gap between knowing about a language and being able to use it is often attributed to classroom practices dominated by teacher talk, repetition and written exercises, in which learners have few chances to produce extended speech (Harmer, 2007).

Over the past decades, language pedagogy has gradually moved from teaching about the language to teaching through its use. Interactive methods are the practical expression of this shift. In an interactive classroom, learning takes place through communication among all participants: student with student, student with teacher, and student with the learning environment. The aim of this article is to outline the theoretical foundations of interactive teaching, to describe the main methods that support speaking development, and to discuss the conditions under which they work best.

2. Theoretical Background

Several complementary theories explain why interaction promotes speaking development. First, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory holds that higher mental functions arise in social activity and that learning is most effective within the zone of proximal development, where a learner can accomplish with support what he or she cannot yet do alone. In language learning, that support is usually provided by a more capable peer or the teacher during dialogue.

Second, Krashen (1982) emphasized the importance of comprehensible input and a low affective filter, that is, a learning atmosphere in which anxiety does not block acquisition. Input

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alone, however, is not sufficient. Swain (1985) argued that learners also need to produce language, because producing output forces them to notice gaps in their knowledge and to process grammar and vocabulary more deeply. Long (1996) added that conversational interaction, especially the negotiation of meaning when understanding breaks down, makes input more comprehensible and draws attention to linguistic form.

Third, communicative language teaching places the ability to use language for real purposes at the center of the curriculum (Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Taken together, these views suggest a definition: interactive teaching is an organization of the learning process in which knowledge and skills develop through joint activity, dialogue and the exchange of ideas, and in which every participant contributes and receives feedback.

3. Interactive Methods for Developing Speaking

3.1. Role-plays and simulations. Role-plays reproduce situations that learners are likely to meet outside the classroom, such as booking a hotel room, welcoming tourists at an airport, guiding a city tour or handling a guest's complaint. They allow students to rehearse professionally relevant language in a safe environment and to practice choosing an appropriate register, using politeness formulas and responding quickly to a partner's unpredictable turns (Harmer, 2007). Role cards that give each participant different information or goals make the interaction more authentic.

3.2. Pair and group work. Pair and group activities greatly increase the amount of speaking time per student. In a teacher-led question-and-answer session only one learner speaks at a time, whereas in pair work half of the class can speak simultaneously. Techniques such as think–pair–share, information gap and jigsaw create a genuine need to communicate because each partner holds information the other lacks (Brown, 2007). Such formats also reduce anxiety, since students speak to a peer rather than in front of the whole class (Horwitz et al., 1986).

3.3. Discussions and debates. Discussing problem-based questions, for example, "Does mass tourism threaten cultural heritage?", develops the ability to give reasons, agree and disagree, interrupt politely and manage turn-taking. Unlike rehearsed monologues, debates require spontaneous reactions and encourage critical thinking. To be effective, they should be prepared with useful language (functional phrases and topic vocabulary) so that weaker students can participate.

3.4. Task-based learning. In task-based learning, learners complete meaningful tasks, such as designing a tour itinerary, preparing a presentation about a region or agreeing on a travel program, and language is the means of reaching an outcome rather than an end in itself (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). A typical cycle includes a pre-task, the task itself, planning and reporting, and a final language-focus stage in which typical errors are analyzed. This sequence combines fluency practice with attention to accuracy.

3.5. Project work. Projects, such as a promotional video about Samarkand, a tourist brochure or a virtual excursion, integrate research, collaboration, creativity and speaking. A public defense or presentation in English develops monologic speech and builds confidence in formal performance, which is valuable for future professionals who will regularly give information to groups.

3.6. Digital and mobile technologies. Video conferencing, voice messages, collaborative platforms and speech-recognition applications extend speaking practice beyond the classroom. Recording and reviewing their own speech helps students notice pronunciation and intonation problems and track their progress over time. Technology, however, is a tool rather than a method; its value depends on the communicative tasks it supports.

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4. A Sample Lesson Sequence for Tourism Students

The methods above can be combined in a single lesson. For example, a lesson on handling guest complaints may begin with a short discussion of the students' own experiences as tourists (warm-up). Learners then listen to a model dialogue and identify useful expressions (input). In pairs, they perform a role-play with differing role cards: one student is a dissatisfied guest, the other a receptionist (task). After a few minutes of preparation, selected pairs present their dialogue to the class, and the teacher records errors and good examples on the board (report). The lesson ends with a language-focus stage on polite apology and problem-solving phrases, followed by a second role-play with changed partners and situations (repetition). Repetition with new partners is especially useful because it allows learners to improve fluency and accuracy on the same communicative task.

5. The Teacher's Role, Assessment and Challenges

In an interactive classroom the teacher moves from being the source of knowledge to being an organizer, resource and facilitator (Brown, 2007). The teacher's responsibilities include giving clear goals and instructions, forming groups, monitoring, maintaining a supportive atmosphere and providing timely feedback. It is helpful to distinguish fluency work from accuracy work: during a speaking activity the teacher notes errors without interrupting, and corrective feedback is provided afterwards (Thornbury, 2005).

Assessment should reflect the interactive nature of speaking. Instead of judging only grammatical correctness, teachers can use rubrics that cover fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy and interactive communication, in line with the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020). Self- and peer-assessment, supported by recordings, further develop learners' awareness of their progress.

Typical challenges include a language barrier, fear of making mistakes, overuse of the first language in pairs and unequal participation in groups. They can be addressed by providing language support, setting clear rules, rotating partners, assigning roles within groups and praising attempts to communicate. Motivational strategies, such as setting meaningful goals and creating a cooperative atmosphere, also play a significant role (Dörnyei, 2001). Finally, tasks must match learners' level and professional needs; tasks that are too difficult lead to silence, while tasks that are too easy do not stimulate development (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

6. Conclusion

Interactive methods create conditions for natural speech interaction, increase motivation and responsibility for learning, and foster collaboration and critical thinking. Role-plays, discussions, pair and group work, tasks and projects expand the volume of speaking practice, develop fluency and confidence and prepare future specialists in tourism for real professional situations. Their success depends on careful planning, appropriate language support, a facilitative teacher and assessment practices that value communication. Further research could examine the effectiveness of specific interactive techniques with particular groups of learners and explore how digital technologies can be integrated into interactive speaking instruction.

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