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METHODS OF DESIGNING ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING FOR ESL TEACHING IN B1 LEVEL CLASSES

Abstract: This article explores effective methods for designing speaking activities suitable for English as a second language learners at the B1 level. It examines various pedagogical approaches and activity types, analysing their strengths and weaknesses in fostering fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence. The research focuses on practical application, providing teachers with a framework for creating engaging and challenging speaking tasks that cater to the specific needs and proficiency levels of intermediate ESL students. The ultimate goal is to equip educators with the tools necessary to design activities that enhance students' speaking skills and confidence in real-world communicative situations.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), approach, learning type, method, speaking development, activity, academic, non-academic, individual, group, communication, glottodrama, authentic language

1. Before designing activities. What to consider?

An essential factor in designing activities for ESL students in order to encourage speaking development is to consider their cultural, academic, and, if possible, personal background, as well as individual learning type. It means that it is impossible to create a single set of tasks and implement it in every student and every class, as this approach would mostly be ineffective. Each academic case must be thoroughly analysed and prepared individually. Moreover, each age group has to be approached differently and at an individual pace. On these occasions, there are some bullet points to be specifically attentive to.

1.1 Cultural background. An extremely important point to consider when designing speaking activities for ESL students is what their outlook is based on the cultural experience. Especially, when a class is intercultural. Nationality and cultural surroundings strongly affect the speaking production of every speaker. A widespread mistake for B1 level speakers is to speak with the structure of their mother tongue using English words, and the goal of speaking practice is to correct it. The key tool to affect this tendency is to understand the problem, this way a teacher can spot and point it out to the student, which leads to avoiding repetition in the future.

1.2 Learning type. As every teacher knows, there are four predominant types of learning outlined: auditory (listening), sensual (kinaesthetic), visual (watching), and read/write (understanding through text). In order to make practice maximum effective, these types must be considered thoroughly. The teacher has to be flexible in combining activities of different types and reforming each activity when ongoing, if it does not hit the class as expected. Most of the time these types are mixed with one dominating, so activities must be variable and flexible for each approach.

1.3 Age. Mostly B1 levels of ESL learners are school students. However, adults may learn the language too, which makes the variety of the approaches wider. On this occasion, not only the type of activity but the pace must be considered, as well as the attention span. Apart from the physiological features of each age group, personal capacities play a key role in the learning process, so this is another bullet point. It is also essential

to mix academic and non-academic approaches in different proportions for different classes: if middle-school students are used to completing a great number of academic studies and consume a lot of information at once, most adults have forgotten what is a classroom and might be reluctant to consume formal knowledge in plain form (and sometimes it happens vice versa, which is a very individual factor). The teacher's job is to analyse each class and select an appropriate set of activities. As every student has some background knowledge and social experience, the teacher needs to imply the schemata for each purpose, specifically when it comes to speech production.

1.4 Personal background. Last but not least factor of preparation is to clearly understand that students are first of all people and are all different. Some might be social and talkative, while others prefer not to be in the spotlight. Nonetheless, every type is productive in learning if approached correctly. It means that activities have to be flexible not only in academic approach, but in the amount of participating students as well. Especially, when working with children and teenagers. In order not to fail a lesson if something goes out of the planned curriculum, the teacher has to be ready to change or correct the process of activity to allow each student to take part in a comfortable way.

Another important factor in conducting lessons for B1 level students is to create an ambiance where no other language can be used. It is important to avoid speaking native or any other language as much as possible so that the students adapt to expressing themselves in English and make speaking a natural process.

Sample activities for groups of learners

When teaching ESL in schools, learning centres, or any other group form, activities must be equally involving every participant and give an opportunity to practice and be assisted by the teacher. For this approach the activities have to be relevant to the group and suitable for the level. Mostly these are conversational interactions, which are formed and edited depending on the topic. Here are some examples of the possible options:

Interview. This type of exercise is usually used for lower levels classes to demonstrate the speaking process and engage the speakers to use recently learned grammar structures, whereas with higher level students similar activity might be used in order to practice structuring ideas and enriching speech with new and more topic-relevant vocabulary. Interview might be conducted in pairs or in small groups. Provided with cue cards, students have to receive the necessary answers from one another and then give the feedback and report it to the teacher. If necessary, the teacher may outline some set phrases or sentence structures beforehand to help the students avoid misusing newly learned vocabulary or grammar rules.

This exercise is also very flexible and combines easy with every topic that a group may discuss. The questions for cue cards might be found online or designed by the teacher (which is more recommended as fits more to the individual purposes).

Debates. This activity is mostly recommended for high-school classes, college groups, and adult students, as requires skills of argumentation and critical thinking. This is an engaging conversation, nonetheless, being risky to conduct in large groups. Debates are the process of approving and disapproving the given statement, that not only involves students in speaking process, but demand expressing their ideas proving arguments to support them. In order to hold debates without turning it into a row, some strict discipline rules must be set beforehand and thoroughly followed.

The statement has to be a clear affirmative statement which does not cause any ambiguity. It would be a mistake to provide a question as a debate statement, as it might be understood from different points of view and cause the disagreement. You should remember that debates are not about agreeing or disagreeing and there cannot exist any personal opinion, and it is crucial to make the students understand this difference. Arguments provided by each side have to prove that the statement is objectively right or wrongs and provide relevant argument to support these evidences. Moreover, the teacher must not have any personal preferences regarding the topic during hosting the debates, and is in grade to accept arguments supported enough or reject those not fitting into frames of objectivity. There must not be any counterarguments, but only individual ideas for and against the statement bringing points to each side. A bad example of a debate statement is: "Is social media good or bad?". A good example of a debate statement would be: "Social media have negative influence on the mindset and outlook of teenagers". After giving the statement, the teacher should offer the class to prove it is true or false, and not agree or

disagree with it.

Another good idea when hosting debates would be to divide students in two groups with the point of view that is contrary from their own opinion on the given topic. This approach works well for the students who are already well adopted in the curriculum and have enough capacity of critical thinking.

2. Sample activities for individual learners

In the case of individual lessons encouraging a student to speak naturally is more complex as the only accessible conversation partner is the teacher. For such students, it is necessary to provide different situations and circumstances in which the student would be forced to produce the speech. Mostly, at the point of B1 level language barrier is not so strong anymore as the student has now quite a circle of grammar and vocabulary structures. This factor makes it easier to adopt any necessary topic into a speaking practice. Here are some options for engaging an individual student to speak.

1.1 Picture description. This method is suitable for kids, teenagers, and adult learners, with only different levels of complexity of the picture. However, there are several criteria to select a relevant image and set a clear task.

First of all, the picture has to be full of details. It might be a lot of subjects to describe, activities to name, and any other complex plot to talk about. Visual narrative has to be rich enough to let the student speak non-stop. Obviously, it depends on the individual creativity of each learner, and in case of a lack of ideas, the teacher has to help spot features to describe.

The picture also must be relevant to the student's language level and individual capacities. This means that the image should be interesting for the learner based on their age, interests, and outlook.

Lastly, the task has to be clear enough and vary based on the grammar topic or a vocabulary piece to practice. So instead of just asking to describe the provided picture, the teacher may offer to create a story around it or describe the positions of objects and directions of each movement (if the topic is relevant). In the case of higher-level students, the picture may reflect a problem to resolve or a situation to analyse.

1.2 Speaking prompts. In order to encourage fluent and well-structured speech it is necessary to offer something to start with. Instead of a bare example, the teacher may prepare several prompts to set the sentence structure to use, and bring the system into the student's speech. This exercise is also flexible and allows to involve any topic and grammar structure to work on. Moreover, after a set task for the prompt, the conversation might be developed with some follow-up questions. However, not any prompt works well. The phrase has to offer a clear idea to continue. An inefficient prompt would be: "I think, that...". A good prompt would be: "My biggest wish about life is...".

It is also important to clarify what exactly the student needs to do. For instance, should they finish the sentence with several words, or only one, should it be a particular grammar form, or is it up to the student's idea. The success of this practice fully depends on how clearly the task is set.

3. Project-based learning

Although project-based learning requires some time, it is one of the best ways to encourage and provoke direct contact with the English language. Usually, this method is used for schools, however, it might also be successfully applied to adult groups and even individual learners. The efficiency of the outcome only depends on the form of the project and the initial aim. As the main focus of this article is speaking, this will be the primary goal of any example given.

1.1 Presentation. The main task of the presentation is to investigate the topic and present it to the audience, which might be a class or the teacher. The topic may vary, but anyway preparation process involves independent research, which means enlarging vocabulary and contact with authentic language. After this experience, the student is offered to use all the accessible means of their speech to convey what they have learned to the audience. This is mostly suitable for those struggling to find ideas on what to speak about, as provides a clear set of content to discuss. Moreover, presentation develops the skill of structured speech and paraphrasing, and even teamwork if done in a group.

1.2 Glottodrama. Learning through theatre performance is a creative, uniting, and efficient way not only to develop the speech of learners but also to break the barrier of fluency. Surprisingly, not the show itself, but the preparation and rehearsals are the key tool that brings the outcome. An additional benefit is that such activities attract the student's attention to the art of theatre and literature of a certain culture, which encourages the level of concern about the language.

One of the most challenging factors of implementing learning through theatre in the class is that not every student wishes to perform in public. As it was mentioned before, personal aspects must be clearly analysed before planning the activity. Moreover, this method is mostly suitable for kids and teenagers, where psychological features and capacities are the strongest factors to consider. However, good organization and clear leadership multiply the chance of success.

Another important factor in the successful implementation of glottodrama is the wise choice of the story. It should be chosen and then edited (which is mostly necessary) to be relevant to the student's interest and up to date. The story must be interesting to be a part of so that the participants get more involved in rehearsals and communicating within the set plot.

The Glottodrama approach might also be applied as a secondary (non-academic) activity. In schools, there are usually drama groups that also approach to develop academic skills acquired during academic sessions. In this case chance to succeed is higher as involves only the students interested in drama and theatre, but involves fewer participants, which makes the activity selective and not universal.

4. Encouraging independent practice

Nowadays authentic content is widely accessed by any age group of language learners thanks to the internet and gadgets implemented in daily use. Social media, television and radio broadcasts, and unlimited sources of any type of informative content make acquiring the authentic language faster and more accessible even in non-English-speaking countries without face-to-face communication of the native speakers. On this occasion, the teacher has a great opportunity to encourage further independent investigation. This interest might be reached by offering curious content during the lessons, which is mainly related to cultural aspects of the English-speaking countries. These might be captures from famous TV series, books, video clips, popular songs, films, etc. By catching the learner's attention by hooking pieces of information and following advice to find out more and then sharing the information during classes complemented with suggested links and sources to investigate. This approach not only motivates speaking development, but encourages soaking the authentic language, idioms, collocations, and vocabulary chunks during the research. In this occasion, the role of the teacher is to navigate among the tricky aspects of the language that a student may encounter, such as obscene lexis, idioms, set phrases, citations related to cultural references, etc., and encourage to use the newly learned phrases in appropriate situations.

Concluding the research work we would like to mention that main approach to encourage fluent and accurate speech of our students is to provide clear examples of what it sounds like (with the speech of the teacher and authentic materials) and to create circumstances in the class so that students have no other option rather than to communicate in English, and then form their speech to be grammatically and lexically correct. Moreover, the main responsibility of the teacher during designing activities for speech encouragement is to be flexible and clearly understand the needs and problems of each student or group based on specific aspects. If so, fluent and natural speech would be reached within a brief period and without tough struggles.

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