

FACTORS INFLUENCING ORAL COMMUNICATION

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There are various factors teachers and students consider important for oral communication skills. The data showed that the students acknowledged two key factors that they found important for developing their speaking skills, i.e. the free choice of topics and discussions without having to consider “complete grammar”. Teachers expressed four key elements which they found important when fostering students’ oral communication skills: the classroom environment, the importance of vocabulary, the importance of topic selection, and the importance of being a good communicator.

Confidence by choosing topics

The students felt that they gained confidence when they were speaking about topics they were interested in as well as when they had the opportunity to choose topics by themselves. That is, students considered the choice of topic as important factors for developing their speaking skills. This relates to Harmer’s statement that keeping the students’ interests in mind could in fact lead students to feel more motivated so a successful second language learning can take place[4]. Moreover, the research done by Boonkit came to the same conclusion as in this study: the participants felt more confident, comfortable and motivated when they had selected topics themselves [1].

Comfortable when natural discussions

Another factor from the data showed that the students felt comfortable when they were exposed to situations where they either conveyed feelings and thoughts in their mother tongue and when they did not have to think about grammatical rules or feeling pressured to use “proper English”. The students’ statements can be connected to Malmberg’s claim that students must be allowed to make mistakes independently, be creative and play around with the language so their oral language skills can develop and gradually become internalized[6].

Classroom environment

As Hedge claims, creating a positive classroom environment and letting students try and work out the language together can develop student’s confidence[5]. This is something that Harmer touches upon when he discusses the impact students have on each other due to the fear of making mistakes in front of one's peers. One way of solving this problem is by what he calls “peer approval”. That is, the teacher must create a classroom where the peers are assets to the learning environment rather than critics [4].

Importance of vocabulary

According to the teachers, it was vital that the students had a strength of vocabulary in order to express their thoughts or ideas. The importance of vocabulary is also expressed that is needed for a learner to be able to transmit a message. Moreover, the teachers discussed the connection between students’ vocabulary and their confidence. This can be related to Hedge who states that vocabulary is needed for a student in to express their own personalized language, which is one of the necessities in a communicative classroom. Furthermore,

the teachers emphasized the importance of expanding the students' vocabulary or expression in order for them to gain confidence. Hedge discusses the link between speaking activities and anxiety within students where she mentions that a teacher can reduce the risk of anxiety by giving the students the scope to develop their proficiency, and thereby increasing their self-confidence [4] Moreover, one teacher expressed that she activated vocabulary use as an everyday process. The teacher's description of her activity shares many similarities with Gass's statement regarding vocabulary building. It is a time-consuming process. However, letting the students encounter the words frequently and hear the words used in different contexts will lead to the word becoming a part of the students' own vocabulary[3].

The effects of choosing topics

Another aspect that the teachers pointed out was equivalent to the students' perspective regarding the impact of choosing topics. Teacher expressed that when students are to speak about topics they have chosen by themselves, their confidence level increases and so they dare to speak in the classroom. Harmer's and Boonkit's claims that keeping the students' interests in mind is effective because it can increase students' motivation, confidence and comfort [1].

Importance of being a good communicator

By looking more closely at the results from the data, one can comprehend that the teachers discussed that being a good communicator is an important factor when fostering oral communication. The teachers encouraged the students to do public speaking so they could develop their communicative skills to achieve goals professionally. That is, the students are provided with instrumental motivation[2]. Furthermore, when the teachers encourage the student to do public speaking they are making them conscious of the target language by emphasizing how this knowledge will be useful for them professionally. By making the students conscious of the language, the teachers are fulfilling the need which refers to as the social use of language.

Students may feel a great deal of pride when they are able to comprehend something in the target language. This can be a great motivating factor in continuing to learn the language, and teachers should do whatever possible to promote this sense of accomplishment. Thus, teachers need to construct learning activities which will improve learners' oral comprehension (listening skills) and motivate them, as well.

LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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