HOW TO IMPROVE STUDENTS` SPEAKING SKILLS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY.

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Abstract

Improving students` speaking ability remains one of the most demanding tasks for English language teachers, especially when learners feel shy or afraid of making mistakes. This action research study explored the reasons why students were hesitant to speak English and examined practical classroom strategies that could help increase their participation. The research was carried out during teaching practice at School Number 14 in Namangan with a class of fifth and sixth grade students. Information was collected through classroom observations with other teachers and short feedback questions asked to students. The results showed that fear of making mistakes, low confidence, limited chances to practice speaking, and uninteresting tasks were the main factors that prevented students from speaking. After introducing pair work, speaking games, role-plays, and supportive feedback, students gradually became more active and confident. The study suggests that a friendly and supportive classroom environment plays a key role in helping students develop speaking skills.

Keywords: speaking skills, classroom interaction, student confidence, communicative activities, action research, English language learning.

Introduction

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most important skills in learning a foreign language. Through speaking, learners are able to express their thoughts, share ideas, and take part in communication with others. Despite its importance many students find speaking English difficult and often feel nervous when they are

asked to speak in front of others. During my teaching practice at School Number 14 in Namangan I noticed that many students in fifth and sixth grades avoided speaking during English lessons. Even when they understood the topic, they preferred to remain silent rather than risk making a mistake. This situation made me reflect on my teaching approach and encourage me to investigate the problem more carefully. The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons behind students` reluctance to speak and to find simple but could help them feel more confident. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. Why are students reluctant to speak English during lessons?
2. Do other teacher face similar difficulties when teaching speaking skills?
3. What feelings do students have about speaking English and what prevents them from participating actively?

Literature Review

Many researchers have highlighted that speaking skills require not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also confidence and motivation. Harmer (2007) explains that students learn to speak more effectively when they are given opportunities to communicate in meaningful situations rather than simply repeating language patterns.1 Penny Ur (1996) points out that fear of making mistakes is one of most common reasons students hesitate to speak in foreign language classroom. 2 Brown (2001) emphasizes the importance of creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable and supported. When learners feel safe they are more willing to experiment with language and take risks. 3Scrivener (2011) also supports the use of communicative techniques such as pair work, role-play, and

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group discussion nothing that these activities help students practice language in more natural ways. Visual aids are another useful tool for encouraging speaking. 4Wright (1989) suggests that pictures and visual materials can stimulate students` imagination and help them express ideas more easily. These ideas from previous studies influenced the strategies chosen this research.

Methodology

This study followed an action research approach. Action research allows teachers to identify problems in their own classrooms, test possible solutions, and reflect on the results. It is a practical method that connects theory with real classroom experience.

Participants and Context

The research took place at School Number 14 in Namangan during my teaching practice. The class included 15 students from fifth and sixth grades. Although the students had basic English knowledge many of them were hesitant to speak during lessons.

Data Collection Methods

Several methods were used to gather information and understand the problem from different perspectives:

1. **Classroom observations:** I carefully observed students` reactions during speaking tasks and noted who participated and who remained silent.
2. **Reflective notes:** After each lesson, I wrote short reflections describing what worked well and what needed improvement.
3. **Teacher discussions:** I spoke informally with other teachers to learn whether they faced similar challenges in their classes.

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4. **Student feedback questions:** I asked students simple questions about their feelings toward speaking English such as whether they felt comfortable, afraid, or supported

   These questions helped me better understand students` emotions and preferences during speaking activities.

Findings

After reviewing the collected information several common factors were identified. Many students were worried about making errors in pronunciation or grammar. Some students admitted that they knew the answers but still chose not to speak because they feared being corrected or laughed at. A number of students believed that they were not good at English which reduced their motivation to participate. Their negative self-beliefs made them less willing to take part in speaking activities. Tasks that felt repetitive or lacked purpose made students lose interest quickly. However when activities were interactive or included visuals students showed more enthusiasm. Feedback from other teachers confirmed that these problems were not unique to one classroom but were common in many English lessons.

Action Research



After analyzing the results from the exploratory phase I realized that the main issue was not only students` lack of vocabulary but also their fear of speaking and low confidence. Based on this understanding I decided to try a few simple strategies to encourage students to speak more during lessons. The action plan was implemented over a period of four weeks during my

regular English lessons. Instead of making big changes I focused on small but consistent activities that could help students feel more comfortable. First, I started using pair and group work more often. I noticed that students felt less nervous when they were speaking to a partner rather than in front of the whole class. I also began each lesson with short and simple questions just to get students used to speaking from the beginning. In addition, I used pictures and flashcards to help students come up with ideas. When students had something to look at, they found it easier to say something even if it was just a short sentence. I also introduced role-plays and small speaking games. These activities helped students relax because they were not speaking at themselves but as a “character”. As a result, they became more willing to participate. Another important change I made was how I responded to mistakes. Instead of correcting students immediately I focused on encouraging them to express their ideas first. This made the classroom feel safer and less stressful for them.

Results

At the beginning of the study only small number of students were willing to speak during lessons. Out of 15 students only about 4 students (27%) participated actively while the rest preferred to stay silent. However, after applying these strategies for a few weeks I started noticing clear changes in the classroom. More students began to speak especially during pair and group activities. By the end of the research period around 11 students (73%) were participating in speaking tasks. Out of these, about 9 students (60%) became actively involved they answered questions shared ideas and even volunteered to speak. One of the most noticeable changes was students` attitude. They seemed less afraid of making mistake and more willing to try. Even weaker students started to say simple sentences instead of staying completely silent. Pair work turned out to be especially effective. During these activities the classroom became more active and I could hear students using English more frequently. The warm-up questions at the beginning of lessons also helped a lot as students got used to speaking every day. Of course, not everything

improved equally. About 40% of students still needed more support especially with vocabulary and sentence formation. However, even these students showed some progress compared to the beginning.

Conclusion

This action research project showed that improving speaking skills is not only about teaching vocabulary and grammar but also about supporting students` emotionally. Fear of mistakes, low confidence, and lack of engaging activities were the main reasons students avoided speaking English. Introducing simple strategies such as pair work, visual materials, games and positive feedback helped create a more relaxed learning environment. As a result, students became more willing to speak and participate in classroom communication. In the future, it would be useful to continue exploring additional ways to support shy learners and maintain students` motivation. Overall, this experience demonstrated that small changes in teaching methods can make a meaningful difference in students` speaking development.

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