TEACHING OF SPOKEN ENGLISH TO A MIXED ABILITY CLASS

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ABSTRACT:
My aim in the study is to investigate the performance of the mixed ability class and the difficulties encountered by the teachers and the students while teaching and learning spoken English in such a class. Through interviews, the input of the experienced teachers is investigated. The students are also approached through a questionnaire to find out their responses. The researcher interviewed eight teachers involved in teaching spoken English classes at various institutions in Multan.

The possible solutions of the difficulties is also the aim of this study and to do this, the researcher thoroughly investigated teachers’ perceptions on how they meet learners’ needs in a mixed ability context. The findings show that eclectic approach is the best way to meet learners’ needs and it is necessary to use extra material for both good and not so good students. There are good students, average students, and low performers in a mixed ability
class and it is difficult to teach three different levels at the same time. The interviewees highlighted the importance of different material and the need to individualize as much as possible. In-class observations were also made to observe the teaching methodology and the material used.

There is a variety of strategies that can be put into practice in order to meet all learners’ needs. A pedagogical model has been proposed but unfortunately, no “magic method” guarantees all learners’ development and success with regard to learning spoken English.

Keywords: SPOKEN ENGLISH, MIXED ABILITY CLASS, TEACHERS’ TRAINING, LEARNERS, TEACHING METHODS

1. INTRODUCTION:

The world is in various stages of social, economic, and demographic transition. Economically and politically, the world has changed more rapidly in the past few years. Now, the world is called a global village and no nation can afford to be aloof from the developments taking place outside its geographical boundaries. Learning English is considered a token of success in the world but it does not imply subjugation of one’s own language. No language is superior or inferior but there are certain social, economic and political aspects associated with each language. The prospects associated with English are so great that it can undoubtedly be called a token of success in every walk of life. Harry Mashabela, the black South African writer says:

“Learning and using English will not only give us the much needed unifying chord but will also land us into the exciting world of ideas; it will enable us to keep company with kings in the world of ideas and also make it possible for us to share the experiences of our own brothers in the world.” (David Crystal, p 101, 1998). Different methods, techniques and approaches are used for effective teaching of English:

- Direct Method
Halliday (1985) has identified three major functions of language: the ideational, the textual, and the interpersonal. Two of these, the ideational and interpersonal, have particular relevance to a discussion of how the spoken language is used. The interpersonal function of language is reflected in the kind of social talk that we participate in throughout the day in conversational exchanges with family, friends, colleagues, etc. This kind of relaxed verbal interaction is the use of language to establish and maintain social relations. Halliday’s second component of language, the ideational one, is quite different from its use for social relations. This is the use of language to express communicating a message but with keeping up a relaxed and cooperative chat relationship.

Despite studying English in schools and colleges, students in Pakistan are not able to communicate in English fluently and confidently. This is an unfortunate state of affairs that even majority of our students, after having done their masters, hesitate to speak and are reluctant to be interviewed in English. Many of the students, especially those who come from rural areas, are suffering from this malady. The story does not end here; the issue gets grave when we encounter the bitter fact that students who know English well, do not speak or use English.

The present study will point out the flaws and try to present an effective pedagogical model. It will also analyze the teaching methodology and material selected for learners and try to explore how further improvement can be brought.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researches into language won the applause with the publication of Skinner’s verbal behavior in 1957 and the reconsideration of then task by Chomsky in 1959. Some schools in the United Kingdom handed down a decision to separate the students to their IQ levels. It was observed...
that the new groups were having variations amongst the students and it was no within the realms of possibility to alter their groups and the curricula every time (Kelley 1979). This new discipline was having connection, in the black and white of Bloomfield as cited in (Stern, 1983: 296) with the processes whereby the inner feelings of speakers are altered into the expatiations of hearers. It goes without saying that Joan Morley is regarded as illustrious pioneer in oral prowess because he ameliorceted his aural comprehension in 1972. Prodromou (1989,2) points out that when students are given groups pursuant to the test scores, then progress rates will always be different. The differences which create confusions in a mixed ability class are language learning ability, language knowledge, and cultural background, learning style, personality, confidence, intelligence and educational level. (Ur 1996, 304).

He jotted down the class material in the form of book for, listening oral skills. A book “Teaching Oral English, was written by Donne Byrone in 1976. A volume ‘Advanced Speaking Skills’ was displayed by Jeremy Harmer in 1978. It was the purpose of thin volume to be asked as a text material for advanced learners of spoken English. A book ‘teaching the spoken language’ came in the hands of public in 1983 and this book was brought forth by Gillian Brown and George. Research has also been done on selecting spoken texts for classroom use. Lately Burns, Gollin and Joyce (1997) suggest that if learners are given a text which is partially transcribed and asked to listen to tape recorder and fill in back channel responses, can lead to better awareness of such conversational features. Cunningham Florez (1999) stresses the need of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation and extension in speaking lessons. He recommends that at preparation stage, learners need to be shown visuals of people in informal settings and asked to brainstorm as to what they might be saying. Lam and Wong (2000) have, in their research identified important strategies that learners require to effectively take part in discussion: clarifying seeking clarification, and checking whether other people have understood the message their study stresses the need for strategy training.
Of late researches have emphasized the sheer significance of real speech samples (Hughes, 200). Kasper (2001) studied classroom exchanges commonly referred to as IRF exchanges, and came up with the conclusion that IRF routine fails to address the complex nature of everyday conversation, as it is teacher who exercises the follow-up right and often student remains passive and respondent. Shumin (2002) emphasizes the importance of small talk about weather, exchanging greetings and so on in developing spoken skill of short interaction. Jones (2002) advocated the technique of split story. According to this technique, a student is asked to tell a story, but he is to stop at a crucial point and other students are invited to complete the story based on their own imaginative sense.

Golato (2003) has perused the differences between naturally occurring data and discourse accomplishment tasks based on naturally occurring chat and communication. However McCarthy (2002, 2003) has come up with the finding that even in classroom situations, students can play a key role by responding and follow up moves even when they are not in the role of main speakers. Yuan and Ellis (2003) claim in their research that planning before a speaking task has a positive effect on learner’s spoken production particularly in complexity and fluency while accuracy was not affected. Alexander (2003) in his study has stressed the need for dialogic teaching as a way to further learners thinking and learning through talk. He is against the teacher dominated classroom patterns of IRF and where learner’s response is often short and lacking in depth of thought, predominance of closed questions with little speculative thinking. He is for dialogic teaching – a participatory mode of teaching in which dialogue is all important and in which teacher facilitates the interaction and encourages children to express their evaluative judgments.
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Drew [1980] agrees, research is conducted to solve problems and to expand knowledge. He further stresses, research is a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of enquiry. The present study follows the eclectic approach. To achieve the ultimate objective, the investigation of the spoken English was intended where students come from diverse backgrounds and where the classes are mixed-ability classes and most classes have a wide range of levels and abilities. The main issues were based on the following questions:

- What are the difficulties the teachers and students encounter in a mixed-ability class?
- What can be a suitable pedagogical model for a mixed-ability class?
- How do teachers try to meet the needs of all pupils?

The questionnaire is the medium of communication between the researcher and population. In the questionnaire, the researcher articulates the questions to which he/she wants to know the answers and, through the questionnaire, the subjects’ answers are conveyed back to the researchers. The questionnaire is the medium of communication between the researcher and population. In the questionnaire, the researcher articulates the questions to which he/she wants to know the answers and, through the questionnaire, the subjects’ answers are conveyed back to the researcher.

To reach this end, the researcher used the survey method that included the research tools of interviews, discussions and in-class observations by the researcher.

Given the nature of study, data for research was primary in nature based opinions of the teachers and students about the questions in the questionnaire. Both groups of the respondents were found to be very cooperative and supportive in answering the required questions.

While conducting a research, various research tools are used to gather information and interview is one of these. Interviews were conducted with the various students and teachers
learning and teaching respectively at various institutions in Multan. The respondents were approached to discuss with them the pre-determined questions based on logical relevance and pre-conceived objectives of the research. These interviews were conducted in a relax and comfortable way. The researcher has already informed and requested the interviewees to share their valuable opinions and experiences in the context of spoken English classes.

Observation is the simplest way to find out about students’ personality and learning strategies. Through students’ interaction with one another, the way they speak, the topics they discuss and their responses towards others’ comments, teachers can predict students’ personality types.

To determine the learner’s needs, the researcher himself participated in classroom work and on-going business in this regard. The researcher attended a week in each class of spoken English at five different institutes at Multan city. During all these discussions and presentations, the researcher observed the use of language, teacher-pupil interaction and students talk with one another.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The information collected guided the researcher to draw out the results concerning the particular area. The qualitative data was converted into quantitative form assigning the values of 1 to “Yes” and 2 to “No”. Data generated through the survey was analyzed by using the extant statistical techniques based on statistical software SPSS.

5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The study comes up with various inconsistent results regarding the use of material, audio visual aids, teachers’ methodology and excessive use of teachers’ speech in a spoken English class where students are with different needs and diverse backgrounds. These results are analyzed across each question presented and answered in the questionnaire. These results comprise only two questionnaires prepared for students and teachers. Definitely, mixed ability
class is the mixture of students and to know the methods the teachers use to handle this mixture the following question was asked.

Qualitative Analysis

In a spoken English class learners come with diverse backgrounds and different levels of abilities, what methods you use in your class?

The response was almost similar by the teachers and all stated that they use different methods to support learners and develop their speaking skill. They claimed that a placement test is useful to judge the ability of the students and then handle the situation accordingly. All agreed that there is no one method to do in a mixed ability class and the case varies individual to individual. As they belong to different level of ability, the methods should also differ in a mixed ability class.

There are good students, average students and bad students in your class. How can you teach three different levels at the same time?

The teachers were divided in their opinions while responding the above question. Some were of the view that that was a deplorable situation for them as a teacher and it was difficult to teach such a class. On the other hand some were of the opinion that a good teacher mixes the students and in this respect good learners are a great help for the bad learners.

What do you do when a learner is shy and uncommunicative in your spoken English class?

All the teachers responded that that is the difficulty encountered in a spoken English class and paradoxically they claimed that they make the shy learners speak and motivate them with different and interesting tasks. As the one teacher answered:

“I encounter this problem very often in my spoken English class and I do something to motivate them. First of all, I instruct the shy learner to observe the classmates who are doing well in the class. Secondly, I ask easy and simple questions of their interest and thus get them speak. On answering the questions I do clap and appreciate them before others to make them
confident and to speak”. I make comments like “marvelous, amazing, wonderful, very good” etc. to encourage and motivate them.

Should the material be the same in a mixed ability class?

“No, Never, Not at all, definitely not” were the responses of the teachers at this question. Material should be easy for bad learners and difficult for the achievers. They said that the learners come with diverse backgrounds; their family differs, their qualification differs, their learning styles differ and sometime their religion differs. So material should also differ to meet the needs of the learners and develop their speaking skill. One teacher disagreed and was of the view;

“Yeah, I think material should be the same for all learners but teaching methodology should fluctuate according to the situation. To change the material again and again for individuals is not possible for a teacher and if there are 15 learners in a class how can teachers arrange material for every individual. This is the teaching methodology to be changed according to the situation and learners’ needs.”

What difficulties you encounter in a mixed ability class?

All of the teachers were of the view that so many difficulties are encountered in a mixed ability class. Main problem is the learners’ diverse backgrounds and it is not easy to mix up them with other peers. Government sector is in a deplorable situation and they are lacking confidence. Poverty is another problem, the poor students are less confident. They think themselves inferior and they avoid the rich students.

In a mixed ability class learners are not of the same level, few of them are slow and other are advanced learners and this is a difficult situation for teachers. In this context the researcher’s question was:

What do you do with regard to slow and advanced learners?
In response to this question different teachers viewed the issue differently and many reasonable opinions they shared. One group said that slow and advanced learners be divided and treated likewise with different materials. The other group was of the opinion that slow and advanced learners should be mixed and pairs of a slow and an advanced learner be made. In this way the same material can be useful and effective.

Should the learners be divided according to their level of ability? Support your argument in favor or against.

There was a great division between teachers and one group was in favor while the other against. First group was of the view as one teacher replied;

“I divide the learners into three categories: average, achievers, and bad learners and there I use three types of material to meet their needs. By doing this practice I got the desired results and mixing the learners creates confusion among the learners.”

Do you give your students different homework tasks? If yes, than why?

Many of the teachers replied that they give different homework tasks and often students are assigned tasks what they like and select their own homework task. They are totally free to choose the topic of their own interest because the sole aim is to make them speak confidently.

“I never give homework task to my students and everything is done in the class,” was a reply of a teacher.

Fluency is another issue of discussion in a spoken English class some are very fluent speakers while others very poor. So should it be valued or not. The following question was asked;

What do you think about fluency in learners’ speech?

Teachers were of the opinion that fluency in learners’ speech doesn’t matter and actually, this is a mental skill. To get them fluent is to passionate them and whatsoever a learner is speaking is a success. Every step of the learner in a mixed ability class is a success no matter he is
speaking haltingly. The main thing to do for teachers is motivation and if the students were motivated then fluency would come automatically.

To explore the reasons of students’ roaming here and there this was the question made by the researcher;

Why do students go to other institutions for learning the spoken English separately?

Different reasons were given to this question, and main reasons were fee package, quality education and references that are the reason for going the students to other institutions. One teacher replied the question as;

“Some students are roaming here and there and many want to make friends but those who are keen don’t care.”

What can be a suitable pedagogical model for a mixed ability class?

Many of the teachers replied that teacher should be friendly with the learners so that they may discuss and share their views confidently. Audio visual aids, overhead projector, discussion and dialogues are much more useful. Varied instructions should be used.

Quantitative Analysis

All the students replied in positive and agreed that English is much more important in their daily lives and no student replied in negative It reflects that students are serious and know the significance of English.

With regard to the improvement in spoken ability, it appears that for 92% the students it did improve their spoken ability while 8% it didn’t. This might be due to the variation in teaching and students’ abilities to teach and learn respectively.

To what extent did it improve spoken ability, the answer is recorded as 50% of the students were of the view that it was improved in an excellent way while for 35% it was rated as good and the balance as average.
This result leads to the implication that both the material and teaching methodology needs to be tilted towards improving the spoken ability of the students.

A similar question was asked about the improvement in their listening skills. The response was very impressive as 85% of the students were of the view that it did improve such skills while only 15%, it didn’t. The same is reinforced by the fact that for 20% it was excellent and 45% it was rated as good and only 35% rated it as average.

To what extent did it improve the students’ listening ability was marked as 20% excellent, 45% as good and the balance marked as average.

In terms of speaking skills, 80% of the students responded “Yes” while the rest said “No”. Although, the 20% appears to be a small figure but a number of factors might be responsible for such impression of students. These include the background of the students’ variation in learning abilities, desire to learn and level of hard work by the students.

The extent to which it did improve spoken ability was quoted as excellent by 40% of the students, good was marked by the same number of the students and 20% was marked by 20% of the population.

The extent to which it did raise the confidence of the students was quoted as excellent by 40% of the students, good by 30%, of the students while 10% of them quoted as average.

Since material plays a significant role improving the spoken ability of the students and to reach the conclusion above question was asked. The result was not satisfactory as only 60%, of the population replied positively and 40%, of them replied in negative. This implies that the teachers should do their best to provide the material for discussion keeping in mind the interest of the students.

The extent to which it did provide the material was quoted as excellent by 45% of the students, good by 20% of the students while 35% of them marked it as average.
Majority of the students was satisfied with the teaching methodology of the teacher as 92% of them replied in “Yes” and rest replied in “No. The result indicates that teachers are contributing well in spoken English classes.

The extent to which they were satisfied was also encouraging as 70% of the students marked “Excellent”, 25% of them marked “Good” and only 05% marked “Average”. The result implies that teachers’ methodology is brilliant in a spoken English class.

All the students were unanimously of the view that they used to get assignments during the spoken English class and these assignments were found to be helpful in improving their speaking ability.

The students were divided at this question and 70% of the students responded positively and the rest of them replied in negative. This result implies that teachers give assignments but they don’t care for the authentic and useful material.

The extent show that the situation is very bitter as just 8% of the population marked excellent, 40% replied good and the 52% of the students marked as average.

The students were divided in equal magnitude regarding the use of the audio visual aids being used by the teachers in a spoken English class. This shows that the students’ views need to be given more consideration and it implies that a few teachers are content with discussions only and they pay no heed to use audio visual aids in the class.

For 45% of the students the topics of discussion were interesting and for 55% of the students marked “No.” it can be because of the fact that in the class the students come with diverse backgrounds and definitely, their interests also differ.

The majority of the students were of the view that the interest level of the topics was average. The result implies that teachers don’t care for the students’ interests in a spoken English class.
All the students were unanimously of the view that their teacher was friendly and no student replied in negative. This result implies that the teachers should be friendly to solve their language problems and this practice should be continued.

The result of the question was not satisfactory as 30% of the population replied positively that they are discouraged when they feel difficulty while speaking. This result implies that teachers should advise the advanced students to cooperate with others and they should encourage their classmates.

With regard to the group work activities 75% of the students responded that they enjoyed these activities in a spoken English class and 25% of them replied in negative. The teachers should create interest of the students and only then the students can enjoy. One fourth of the students don’t enjoy group work activities and it is the duty of the teacher to do something to facilitate them. Such students are introvert and they avoid meeting or working with others. Teachers should pay special attention towards such students.

The extent shows no ideal situation as only 48% of the students enjoyed group work in an excellent way and the rest of the population was divided into good and average. This is very unsatisfactory situation for a spoken English class because in a language class to be sociable is very necessary.

The response is very dismal as 70% of the students replied in negative and this result implies that the teaching of the spoken English should assign different homework tasks as they are not of the same levels of ability. Only 30% of the population marked yes.

To what extent did these assignments help the students to express themselves confidently was not satisfactory as 20% of the population marked it excellent. This result implies that assignments were not given according to the level of ability of the students. The students should be free to select their homework tasks according to their interests and level of ability.
The extent shown is also shocking as 25% of the population marked it as Excellent, 60% of them replied as good and the balance marked it as average. The following is the graph showing the details;

The students were divided into two groups and the result was almost equal as 48% of the students marked “Very Cooperative” and 52% of them marked “Very Humorous”. No one student marked “Very Strict.” This result implies that the teacher shouldn’t be strict while teaching a spoken English class and should be friendly and cooperative and only then good results can be produced.

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It is a fact that no two students can be the same in terms of language background, learning speed, learning ability, and motivation; it is utopian to think that our classes could be homogeneous in terms of these aspects.

EFFECTIVE LEARNING

As a teacher our aim is to reach all of our students. Hence every student has a different way of learning that’s why some students get bored while others find it interesting. Since each student comes from a different family, a different environment and with different cultural values so effective learning is a challenge for teachers. Their needs as learners differ, there are good students, average students and bad students and it is difficult to meet all their needs. Rural students become another problem in a mixed ability class and a gap can easily be detected between rural and urban students.

1. MATERIAL

If there are individual differences, then the material in a mixed ability class must also differ. For teachers it is not possible to collect material accordingly and teachers are in a fix how to deal such a class. Selected material can be boring and very hard for some students, whereas some find it interesting and very easy.
2. PARTICIPATION

Some students participate eagerly in the class presentations, discussions and dialogues while others are passive and just listening and observing all the activities. They don’t pay heed to the presentations and discussions and they believe let them do.

3. INTERESTS

As the students come with diverse backgrounds, their interest is not the same due to their knowledge of language; and their personality. For instance, some students find lessons boring, as the topic has no familiarity with their own life or their interests. Students remain uncommunicative and shy if the teacher is talking too much in the class.

5.1 DISCIPLINE

Often the quicker students finish the tasks given before the other students. As a result, they may misbehave while waiting for others to finish. The weaker students can’t finish the tasks as quickly as the strong ones and may lose their confidence. Thus management problems can discourage the learners.

5.1.5 SILENT AND SHY STUDENTS

This type of students is a challenge for teachers in a spoken English class because it is difficult to encourage them to engage discussions or other kinds of verbal interaction. The really shy students under no circumstances could imagine themselves speaking in front of their peers.

5.1.6 SLOW AND ADVANCED LEARNERS

This is another problem for teachers because the advanced learners finish their tasks very fast and they can’t wait for the slow learners. Advanced learners can never enjoy the material that is according to the needs and levels of the slow learners.
5.1.7 DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

In a mixed ability class students come with diverse backgrounds: their family differs, their education differs, their learning styles differ, levels of ability differs and sometime their religion differs and it is not possible to teach all these different individuals at the same time. Teachers can’t prepare material for every individual in the class.

5.2. SOLUTIONS OF THE PROBLEMS

As the researcher has mentioned, that the aim of the study was to explore the possible solutions for the difficulties encountered in a mixed ability class and give possible solutions. There are certain suggestions for the solution on the basis of teacher’s opinions and personal observations in the spoken English class.

5.2.1 VARYING INSTRUCTION

At certain point of the interview all teachers stressed the importance of varying instruction. They understood that giving students a varied set of activities was the only way to fit the different learning styles and to keep learners motivated.

In my opinion, it is quite obvious that teachers must vary instruction. It has often been seen pupils get bored and distracted as a consequence of the same routine. Topics should be selected from the students’ own experiences and interests to keep them motivated.

5.2.2 EXTRA MATERIAL

This point was also mentioned by the interviewees. Teachers find themselves in common dilemma of having some students finishing their tasks faster than others. To avoid this situation, the informants recommended me to always be prepared with extra material, mostly to keep the advanced students busy. The extra material should be amusing and not difficult. If
tasks are beyond their reach, the effect can be frustrating and lead to a gradual loss of motivation.

5.2.3 AUDIO VISUAL AIDS

The use of audio visual aids increases the interest of the students and they pay greater heed to improve their speaking ability. Teachers should be tactful enough to attract the students. Simple dialogues should be selected and the students should follow after the dialogue.

5.2.4 OPEN-ENDED TASKS

Open-ended questions should be asked that have a variety of possible correct answers instead of a single answer. These tasks allow each learner to perform at his own level. Encourage the learners to be creative without limiting the students to single no or yes answer.

5.2.5 PERSONALISING THE TASKS

It is important for teachers to give students the opportunity to express their ideas, feelings and experiences. By these tasks, all students can participate and by knowing students’ personalities helps the teachers to prepare and adapt materials easily in order to make it interesting.

5.2.6 GROUP/PAIRWORK ACTIVITIES

Group/pair work activities are useful not only for the teacher to observe the students but also for the students to cooperate and to learn from each other. When a good student works with a bad student he/she can be a source of help. Varying the way students work in the class will help meet variety of levels in the class.

- Pair work

You can pair strong with strong, weak with weak, or strong with weak. Perhaps in the very controlled activity, the strong with weak will work well. In a freer activity, perhaps strong with strong will be of benefit. Variety in the pairings is the key here- and you should also be
sensitive to the general relationships between different students, and learn to note who works well with whom.

• **Group work**

These groups could be of mixed levels or similar ones. The hope is that in a smaller group, the weaker student will feel more able to contribute. Also, if the group is working with a set of information, divide the information between the students, forcing them to work together. You may consider dividing your class into groups by level for the whole lesson enabling you to give a different level or number of tasks to each group.

• **Whole class- mingles**

A mingle activity involves students talking or interacting with different members of the class in a short period of time in order to achieve a task. This means that any one student will work with students at different levels-experiencing stronger and weaker levels of communication. This supports the weaker students and provides opportunities for the stronger ones. Overall, variety in the types of working groups, and an open discussion of the class situation will help to deal with some of the difficulties that are present in the mixed ability classes. The aim of these strategies is to create a positive working environment, which is all part of ensuring better learning.

5.2.7 **LEVEL OF ABILITY**

The teachers should bear in mind the level of ability of the student. He/she should ask more difficult questions to more advanced students, and easier questions to the weaker students. Gardner divided students into seven different levels of ability and teachers should devise their teaching practices according to the level of ability of the students. Some students can be brilliant while others bad and there comes a hell of difference between these two groups.
Teachers should solve the problems of the students instead of creating problems for the students.

5.2.8 LEARNING CONTRACT

A “Mentoring” relationship between the learners and somebody they trust. They set their own goals in learning. “Mentoring” relationship is a kind of supportive relationship between two or more individuals in terms of discussion and being each other’s company. The teachers should not be strict and authoritative but kind and friendly. Let students do what they do and let students interview one another, talk to each other and to you. Here two types of contracts are given”

a) Self-motivated Contract

Self-motivated contract is a contract for the students themselves in which they set their own goals in learning.

b) Contracts with Others

‘Others’ can be peers, parents or anybody as long as the person is whom students trust. This is a supportive relationship between two or more individuals in terms of problem solving, academic building and being each other’s company.

5.2.9 MOTIVATION AND THE NEED TO TALK

In our attempt to develop effective instruction in spoken language, we need to address an important issue. To develop fluency, we must generate a need to speak, to make learners want to speak. How does this need to teach skills for transferring information relate to the problem of motivation? In our attempt to develop effective instruction in spoken language, we need to address an important issue. To develop fluency, we must generate a need to talk, to make learners want to speak.
5.2.10 TASK-BASED ACTIVITIES

Different topics are assigned to the speakers and they are required to discuss it or to come up with a short talk. Brown et al. describe a variety of task-based spoken language activities. These have been categorized into:

1. Tasks that involve the speaker in describing static relationships among objects.
2. Tasks that involve dynamic relationships among people or objects, with events that change over time and space.

5.2.11 GRADATION OF TASKS

Once teachers have found out about students’ “differences” teachers can do activities according to students’ needs. The first differentiation method that teachers can use is gradation of tasks.

5.2.12 VARIETIES OF TEACHING AIDS

The second differentiation method makes use of variable teaching aids. Teaching aid is an important part of pedagogy. The choice of teaching aid affects students in the learning process. In order to attend to students with different learning style and strategies, teachers can vary class activities by using different teaching aids. There are many ROM on the market that can assist students to practice speaking and listening skills.

5.2.13 PERSONALISED SPEAKING

People spend a huge chunk of their everyday conversation time talking about themselves and the people they know, so the most natural thing in the world for the teachers is to invite our students to do the same. To get the students speaking is not easy and we have to encounter problems.

- Two main problems

- Firstly, students might lack confidence in ability to tell an anecdote, describe their feelings confidently give their views.
Secondly, classes are made up of students who are thrown together by circumstances. They don’t choose their classmates they would not all mix socially and they think they don’t have much in common with that student so why should he listen to him?

MEETING THESE PROBLEMS

In classroom the teachers’ duty is to create a world in which the students feel comfortable and at the same time stimulate them to speak and listen to one another. To achieve this by making use of some techniques, which help to bring students’ outside worlds alive in the classroom? The following four techniques are given in the activity “show me your shoes”.

TEACHER MODELLING

This involves the students observing their teacher doing an achievable task that they themselves are about to do. Focusing on the teacher reassures students about what is expected of them and gives them ideas about the kind of content to include. There is an important distinction to be made between substitution drilling and modeling.

VISUALIZATION

The term visualization suggests focusing on visual images in the mind’s eye. Visualizing a moment, scene or event whether real or imagined is extremely effective and powerful way in to extend personal speaking.

SETTING PEER LISTENING TASKS

It is inhibiting for students speaking in pairs and groups when their classmates appear to show little interest in what they say. Sometime when students are uninterested they pretend to listen, they might be thinking about something unrelated to the lesson. While setting up a speaking activity, it is important for teachers to set simple and interesting peer listening tasks which focus students on what their partner say.
SHARING CLASSMATES’ REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

Drama techniques can make the difference between simply hearing about another student’s life and having a real sense of sharing in that student’s life experience.

Example Activity

Show me your shoes

Level: elementary to advanced/all ages

The teacher tells them

“You are going to describe one of your pairs of shoes to someone who doesn’t know about them.”

What kind of shoes have you brought here today?

What size are they?

What are they made of?

What do they feel like to wear?

When do you wear them? Why?

How do they make you feel?

How did you get them?

How old are they?

What sort of condition are they in?

Is there any kind of problem with them?

Is there an interesting story you can tell?

The important result of using such techniques in the language classroom is telling each other about their thoughts, feelings and experiences in greater depth and detail. The more one tells, the more the other tells, so leading to deep interpersonal sharing.
5.2.14 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

A popular approach used by teachers to encourage students to speak is to assign a topic and require them to discuss it or come up with a short talk. Presentations are a great way to have students practice all language systems areas and skills. They also build confidence, and presenting is a skill that most people will need in the world of work. I found that students who are good presenters are better communicators all around.

- Presentation skills are extremely useful both in and outside the classroom. A presentation is a channel for students to share with others what they have learned. It is also a chance to challenge and expand on their understanding of the topic by having others ask questions.

- Presentations can also form a natural part of task based learning. By focusing on a particular language point or skill, the presentation is a very practical way to revise and extend book, pair and group work.

3. THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR A MIXED ABILITY CLASS

In lights of the mentioned problems, this study proposes a model that can assist teachers to meet the needs of all levels of learners in a mixed ability class.

Stage 3:
Participating Stage

Stage 2:
Ice-breaking Stage

Stage 1:
Observing Stage

The proposed model for teaching

Spoken English to a mixed-ability class
This model facilitates the learning and teaching process in a mixed ability class. This model comprises three stages—the observing stage, the ice-breaking stage, and the participating stage.

At (stage 1), teachers’ dominancy is at the strongest. This is because students are not yet able to speak and many of them are shy at this primary stage. At this stage, the teachers speak and demonstrate the use of spoken English. Firstly, students are asked to listen and observe the teacher and try to memorize the sentences. Observation is the simplest way to learn and then try to do. For teachers, it is important to observe students interaction with one another, the way they speak, the topics they discuss and their responses towards others’ comments.

At (stage 2), teachers devise lessons to suit students’ interests, personality and capabilities. Teachers make decisions about the topics to focus on and organization of activities. This is the most complicated stage for teachers and they have to do something to break the ice. The teachers ask easy questions and make the students speak. They motivate, prompt and encourage the students.

At (stage 3), teachers’ dominancy is at the minimum and they are free to talk to each other, discuss the matters freely. The teachers are very much friendly and the students are participating vigorously. This is the stage where teacher is silent and the students are speaking.

5.4 THE ADVANTAGES OF USING THE MODEL

The following benefits are expected:

a) It helps teachers to work along the students with different levels of ability and at the same time not burdening teachers with individual lesson plan.

b) It explains how teachers can use information about students to discover their specialties.

c) It represents a methodology that explains reduced teachers’ dominancy in teaching.
d) It provides freedom to the students to participate maximum and improve their speaking ability.

e) Every conversation in the model, however fluent or halting it may be, is a success because students are asking and answering something real about their lives.

The suggestions above are not exhaustive and neither they are absolute. The actual designing of lessons still has to depend upon particular groups of learners. Teachers should try out different teaching techniques so that the chances for every student to develop individually.

SUGGESTIONS AND FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

Both the teachers and students gave the following suggestions for further improvement.

1. The material for spoken English class should be selected carefully and it needs to prepare the students for interaction at various levels.

2. Body language should be used for a better expression and the students be guided to get relaxed while speaking.

3. As for as teaching methodology is concerned, the teachers should make the students speak and interesting topics should be included and teachers should be friendly with the students. To get them speak “ice-breakers” should be used to remove the shyness of the uncommunicative learners.

4. Audio video aids must be used to keep the students attentive and this is expected to improve their listening skills.

5. Material should be arranged according to the modern needs of the time and strange topics should be avoided.

6. Students should not be divided according to their level of ability. Mixing good students with bad students can be very useful to get the bad students speak and raise their confidence.
7. Teachers should take less time in the class and chances should be provided to students to speak.

8. There should be a variety of homework tasks; easy for bad learners and difficult for good learners.

9. Courses are made but not executed and boys and girls are not mixed, in future this practice shouldn’t be repeated.

10. Placement or diagnostic test should be held to place the students according to their levels of ability and to use material accordingly.

11. Extra material should be used for advanced learners as they finish their task faster than others and teachers should keep them busy.

12. The teachers should give students a varied set of activities to fit the different learning styles and to keep the learners motivated.

6. CONCLUSION

The study appraises opinions and perceptions of teachers and students involved in teaching and learning of spoken English. On the whole, it emerges from the survey that there is a potential for further improvements in the spoken English classes. There stands a need for greater efforts by the teachers involved in spoken English classes where students come with different backgrounds. The results of the survey contain important implications for further research and the findings of the study are expected to serve as a starting point for further analysis.

To reinforce their significance, the major ones are recapitulated below.

1. The result of the study implies that the teaching of the spoken English classes where students are with different levels of abilities needs to be more effective in a way that it helps the students to improve their speaking skills.
2. The results of the study lead to the implication that both material for spoken English and teaching methodology needs to be more tilted towards improving the speaking skill of the students.

3. In terms of listening skills, the result leads to the conclusion that students do get help from their teachers in their listening skills. It might be due to the fact that students remain attentive to their teachers in the class. Teachers should bear one thing in mind that their aim is not to speak all the time but get the students to speak.

4. Findings of the research also imply that teachers should avoid on-the-spot correction of the learners because it blocks the way to progress and students are discouraged in this way.

5. Teachers should provide texts suitable for the age of the group.

6. Let students interview one another, talk to each other and to you.

7. Ask open-ended questions and encourage creativity without limiting the students to single “no” or “yes “answer.

8. In terms of giving assignments to students, the study reveals that this trend needs to continue and such assignments should be given to students that improve their spoken English. Therefore, given that there is no “magic answer” we have come to the conclusion that a combination of strategies has to be put into practice if we as teachers want to succeed in creating a classroom environment where all the students have the chance to develop and achieve success in their learning.

7. AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present research fulfills objective of providing a basic framework of analysis of the material used and teaching methodology in a mixed ability class. An attempt has been made to fill the existing gap in literature on spoken English classes in Multan. As much as possible, an attempt has been made to make the study comprehensive, in terms of scope of the study and breadth of the analysis. However, both the material constraints and the lack of existing
research on the subject either restricted or precluded the discussion of some of the issues in this research. Of the particular mention is the issue of surveying the students and teachers learning and teaching in mixed ability classes at various institutes in Multan city. This is expected to help in understanding the application of the spoken English in their practical life. The researcher tried his best to point out the problems in a mixed ability class and possible solutions have been put forward. Suitable material to meet the needs in a mixed ability class according to the levels of ability and homework tasks are yet to be explored. However, this would be a meaningful task to be put on the agenda for future research.
REFERENCES


