

SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS

Akhmad Sutiyono

ABSTRACT

The main objective of teaching English as a Foreign Language is enables students to use English for communication in real-life situations. However, it is a fact that many students find difficulties in mastering English. They cannot speak English well although they have learned English for years. It is the teachers' responsibility to encourage students to practice their English at least in the classroom hours. The English teachers should apply various teaching techniques and teaching media that offer higher and wider opportunities to use English in real-life situations.

All kinds of instructional activities and exercises provided by the English teachers should offer and challenge students to use English orally so that they will not be afraid of making mistakes in their speaking.

Key terms: *Exposure, Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language, Social Pressure.*

THE BACKGROUND OF PROBLEM

Language plays an important role in the world. It is considered as a means of communication. It is used by people to communicate and interact with the others to fulfill their needs. Through language people can exchange their ideas, feelings, and thoughts. We also need language for acquiring knowledge and skills, taking education and establishing relationship with other people from other countries.

English is one of international language in the world which is widely used in many countries either as a native language, a second language, or a foreign language. So if we want to learn about science and technology we have to master English first, because most of literatures are written in English. and hundred millions of people are now using or learning English for the purpose of communication. This is due to the fact that English has been established as a language of science, technology, and international communication.

It is clear, then, that we should master English well if we want to gain science and modern technology in developing our beloved country. English is also needed for developing mutual relationships among countries in the world either as bilateral or multilateral relationships.

In Indonesia English is regarded as a foreign language and taught from junior high school up to university. English is taught as a compulsory subject

**SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS
(Akhmad Sutyono)**

in junior and senior high schools. Nowadays many elementary schools have started introducing English to their students as a local content subject.

It is a fact that so many graduated students of senior high schools who cannot use English for the purpose of real communication. The writer assumes that they cannot use English for communication properly because they did not practice their English in real-life situations. It happened because of the limited opportunities for students to practice their English in the classroom with their teachers and their classmates or outside the classrooms with their surroundings as they used to learn English most of the time in isolation. It is supported by Lado (1965) that the more frequently a response is practiced the better it is learned and the better it is remembered. On the other hand, when a response is not practiced it tends to be forgotten.

Based on the statement above, the writer assumes that English teachers should teach the language skills and the language components integratively, not separately. It is expected that when the students have mastered certain grammatical patterns and supported by their limited vocabulary, they will be able to apply their grammar and vocabulary mastery for real communication both oral and written.

The Communicative Approach as it is applied in the current curriculum for senior high school is an approach of foreign language teaching which emphasizes on the use of the foreign language itself for the purpose of communication. Concerning to the Communicative Approach, Littlewood (1981) that: "A Communicative approach opens up a wider perspective on language. In particular, it makes us consider language not only in terms of its structure, but also in terms of communicative functions that is performed.

It is clear that in teaching English to the students, the English teachers should focus their teaching on the function of language that is for communication. It is expected that the teachers able to help the students use English for the purpose of communication in real-life situations, that is by providing the students with ample opportunities to practice their English for communicative purposes both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

FOCUSING ON SPEAKING SKILL

In order to be able to communicate in English, students should have good communicative competence so that they can practice their English for real communication. Brumfit (1979) states that there are four factors of communicative competence that should be mastered by students in communication. The four factors are as follows:

1. Possibility

**SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS
(Akhmad Sutiyono)**

It concerns whether a sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical, cultural or communicative.

2. Feasibility

It concerns whether a sentence has a meaning or not.

3. Appropriateness in context

It concerns whether a sentence is appropriate or not for a certain situation.

4. Acceptability

It concerns whether or not something is in actual done.

Based on the statement above, the writer assumes that in order to be able to communicate in English communicatively and appropriately, students should have adequate personal vocabulary and master English grammar that is supported by good pronunciation and their understanding of English culture. However, it does not mean that the English teacher may not provide students any opportunities to practice their English for communicative purposes until they have mastered the English grammar fully, adequate personal vocabulary, and appropriate English pronunciation.

Some aspects of language learning take place only through natural processes which operate when students are involved in practicing or using the language for communication. The English teachers should create communicative activities both inside and outside of the classroom, because it is an important part of total learning process. Communicative activities will provide opportunities for positive personal relationship to develop among students and between students and teacher. These relationships can create an environment that supports the individual in the students' effort to learn English.

By providing communicative activities the teacher can give guidance and help the students about grammatical rules that should be used and the words that should be chosen in expressing certain ideas, feelings and thoughts. The teacher's presence in this case may be an important psychological supports for many students, especially for students who are slow to develop their speaking ability.

Vocabulary is the most important aspect of language that should be mastered by students in order to be able to communicate in English communicatively and appropriately. However, it seems that it is very difficult for English teachers to achieve the curricular objectives of English language teaching in both junior and senior high schools.

Being faced by students' incompetence in using English for communication, the teachers should find out better teaching strategies in conducting learning-teaching process. Realizing the limited time available for

**SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS
(Akhmad Sutiyono)**

the English teachers in teaching English at schools, they should motivate their students to learn English more intensively that is by paying great attention to the teachers' explanations, doing exercises or assignments given, listening to the English programs in radios or televisions, or by subscribing English newspapers or magazines that available in our country.

Learning English as a foreign language needs a lot of practicing. Students should practice their English regularly and intensively outside of the school hours. They will have great opportunities to develop their English when they are active practicing their English for reading, speaking, listening and writing. By using English for real communication their vocabulary can increase rapidly since they will get some more new English vocabulary every time they practice their English. it is a fact, however, that students still find difficulties in using their English for communication because their personal vocabulary is inadequate. Concerning to the inadequacy of students' vocabulary, Allen (1983:5) states that in many English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, even where teachers have devoted much time to vocabulary teaching the results have been disappointing. Sometimes after months even years of English teaching, many of the words most needed have never been learned.

The writer assumes, then, that the only way to master English vocabulary is through practices. Students should practice their English for real communication so that their vocabulary can develop rapidly.

The new emphasis on language skills as it is recommended by the 2006 Curriculum for senior high schools is entirely consistent with the overall educational objective of learning English as a foreign language. The materials and methods in teaching English as a foreign language, therefore, are designed to give practical command of English. it is relevant with the statement stated by Fries (1973: 7) that the goal of learning a foreign language is defined as the ability to use the target language and culture, and the ability to understand the speech and writing of the target language and culture in terms their meanings as well as ideas and achievements.

Based on the statement above, the writer assumes learning a foreign language is not merely learning the language forms, but learning how to use it for the purpose of communication. It is a matter of developing and maintaining a skill through practice. It is not appropriate for us to say that we have learned a foreign language if cannot use it for communication in real-life situations, and we shall never learn the language if we spend all our time outside of classroom speaking our won native language.

**SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS
(Akhmad Sutiyono)**

Concerning to the purpose of teaching a foreign language, Lim (1975) states that the purpose of teaching a foreign language is to enable the students to use the language for communication. This means that in teaching English as a foreign language the English teachers should concentrate on the use of the language that is for communication in real-life situations, and not on the usage or form of the language that is on grammar. It is very difficult, of course, to motivate the students learn the language they are learning and try to use it for real communication. Then motivation plays an important role in learning English as a foreign language because the limited time and opportunities for the students to practice their English.

In line with the motivation for the students who are learning English as a foreign language, Lim (1975: 133) says that in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language situation there is a little or no exposure to the language outside the classroom and since the language is not used in the communication there is no social pressure to learn the language. The problem of motivation becomes even greater if English is a compulsory subject for every one in Teaching English as a Foreign Language situation. Teachers in such situations need to pay more attention to motivation.

In conducting instructional activities, therefore, the teachers should give their students a practical command of English that is by providing them great opportunities to practice their English in the classroom hours. The English teachers should also attract students' interests so that they will be interested in learning English. The students will be interested in learning English if the English teachers teach English in appropriate ways. It means that they should apply various teaching techniques or language games where the students can use their English for real communication.

In attracting students' interests in learning English, the English teachers should be very creative in applying various teaching techniques or teaching media and provide the students a great deal opportunities to practice their English in the classroom, so that the students do not feel afraid of making mistakes when they are practicing or using their English for real communication.

The conducive conditions can be attained when the English teachers have been successful in motivating students to take part actively in any instructional activities created by the English teachers so that the class situation will be attractive and is not dominated by the teachers.

**SPEAKING SKILL IS THE FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AT ALL LEVELS
(Akhmad Sutyono)**

CONCLUSION

The main objective of teaching English as a Foreign Language is enables students to use English for communication in real-life situations. However, it is a fact that many students find difficulties in mastering English. it is the teachers' responsibility to encourage students to practice their English at least in the classroom hours. The English teachers should apply various teaching techniques and teaching media for attracting students' interests in learning English, for example, the teachers can use language games for avoiding students' boredom in learning English.

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