

DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS OF ESP STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Peer- and self-assessment have been brought into the classroom due to the demand for altering the notions of teaching and learning. This paper presents the challenges teachers have to face while preparing the assessment process for the ESP classroom, with a special emphasis on developing ESP students' speaking skills.

Key words: peer-assessment, self-assessment, speaking skills, teacher training, assessment criteria

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Teaching assessment is essential in helping students gain the strategies necessary for developing their speaking and oral presentation skills. The role of teachers in training the learners in speaking skills is crucial in English classrooms. According to Vilar (2003), "Teachers have two primary functions in education: the managerial and the instructional functions. The latter refers to the conditions that teachers create for learning to take place and the other is the knowledge that the teachers impart in the classrooms. Teachers should carry out these functions simultaneously for efficient language instruction because they cannot be separated".

Likewise, learners should be actively involved and play an active role in the process of learning and assessment. In order for the assessment tasks to be meaningful and authentic, students should also participate in their development, as well as document their learning through reflections.

In developing speaking skills, formative or continuous assessment can assist students in identifying their weaknesses and strengths. In contrast to summative assessment in which the teacher or institution judge the achievement in its totality, formative assessment allows the learner to judge their own learning achievement. Formative assessment is administered throughout the learning process as an effort to continually inform both teacher and student during the learning process.

Teachers have to learn more about the pedagogy and implement it in classes. They need to do a lot of research and then put it in practice, needing a variety of examples of implementation. They have to give up control in their classrooms disregarding their own fear (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001) and need to start getting involved in a different relationship with students. The changes also imply moderating the classroom dialogue and using feedback to a greater extent.

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In order to be able to deliver a good oral presentation, students need to become aware of the assessment criteria, or significant oral presentation factors, that, if fulfilled, will lead to a wanted outcome. One of the problems teachers and educators are faced with is which significant factors to choose out of a relatively wide range offered by different authors and researchers. Since most teachers use criterion-referenced assessment rather than just give a single grade for a presentation as a whole, their first task is to find available criteria, test them in classes, and establish the best possible one for their students. The difficulty of criteria selection is further expanded by knowing that each generation of students is different and that they all have to find the criteria suitable for self- and peer- assessment. Only then should the teacher focus their training on different competencies that comprise the assessment tasks at hand.

There are a few things you can do to help your young ESL students speaking more:

1. Reduce teacher talking time. Teachers are a talkative bunch, we get it.
2. Create a safe environment. ...
3. Make it fun! ...
4. Focus on their interests. ...
5. Ask questions. ...
6. Don't put them on the spot. ...
7. Let them correct you. ...
8. Always be speaking!

In addition to the separately graded competences, there is also a global achievement grade for the candidates' overall performance. However, neither one of the sets of criteria listed above pays due attention to nonverbal presentation factors, i.e. involving the audience and using visual aids and prompts. On the other hand, teachers try to strike a balance between the content and delivery focused factors, as well as between the linguistic expression and nonverbal aspects of any presentation. Therefore, a list of eight most significant presentation factors was devised to facilitate both the training and assessment processes. These are: content, structure, grammar, coherence, vocabulary, speaking skills, involving the audience and self-presentation. The use of visual aids was not listed as a separated category, since their use should not be made mandatory when considering the quality of a presentation. However, it could be placed within the „involving the audience' category under which it was presented to the students.

The topic should be discussed in more detail and interesting examples should be offered. To be able to present the content successfully, students are advised to use notes rather than a full script, since their use allows the speaker to be prepared, yet still appear spontaneous. Likewise, students should learn the basic introduction-body-conclusion organizational pattern. They have to be familiarized with thesis/topic sentences, introduction and supporting sentences, as well as coherence. As it has already been pointed out, one of the main problems speakers encounter is a lack of coherence, or the inability to make a presentation sound right as a whole. Therefore, a well ordered and logical flow of ideas presented should also be brought to students' attention, as well as the need for the repetition, re-wording and summarization in individual organization units.

Assessment plays an important role in the classroom. With a number of benefits and a number of challenges, it has been embraced in classes where

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students are intellectually challenged, where groups are large and teachers need a shift in grading and perspective on students' outcomes. The paper has tried to present the benefits of peer- and self-assessment in ESP classes, stressing the important issues to be considered throughout the process of introducing, training and delivering assessments.

Special attention has been attributed to the teachers' workload. Even though the grading burden has been diversified and removed from the classroom, the teacher is left with a lot of tasks to be considered and fulfilled. Beginning with the idea of self- and peer- assessment, teachers need training in the change of their perspectives on grading and their perspective on students and their obligations. They need knowledge of psychology to be able to cope with parents and all the possible situations with students' private observations. They need to know how to encourage students to share their beliefs and opinions, and present their progress in learning.

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