TEACHING OCCUPATIONAL SPEAKING SKILLS TO WORKERS OF A HERITAGE MUSEUM

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Abstract. *This paper describes a study program of teaching the English language for a specific purpose, to workers employed in a Heritage Museum in South India. The need for the program arose from the requests of the management as the workers were involved in showcasing the museum, its activities and artifacts, largely using the English language to visitors and tourists from varied language-speaking states within India and abroad. This paper examines the effectiveness of 'show and tell' and related activities at facilitating a group of skilled artisans and workers' production of English sentence structures. Seven learners employed in the heritage museum carried out monologue and dialogue activities designed to enhance speaking skills, particularly related to their profession. Pre- and post-intervention test activities were recorded and analyzed to examine if 'show and tell' and related activities facilitated the learners' speaking skills. Activities were video-recorded and transcribed to determine the fluency of the learners. Fluency was interpreted in terms of the number of pauses, false starts, repetitions that occurred within the speech. The results showed that the learners produced more fluent sentences on the post-intervention activity. Implications of the use of monologue and dialogue activities using the situated learning approach on fluency are discussed.*

Key words: *'show and tell' activity, situated learning, skilled artisans, speaking fluency*

1. INTRODUCTION

The four South Indian States of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu, and Andra Pradesh, with its wealth of art, architecture, culture, and heritage are aesthetically represented in this South Indian heritage museum located in Coastal Tamilnadu. It exhibits local artisans and their artifacts, some of which are in danger of becoming extinct. Aimed at promoting and preserving interest in our cultural heritage, this museum undertakes various projects and activities which include tourists from all over India and abroad. The English language is the sole medium of communication between the museum workers and the tourists, particularly those who cannot speak Tamizh, which is the language of the state of Tamilnadu. Hence, learning to understand and speak in English is crucial for these workers.

This research paper deals with a part of a larger project that was undertaken to enhance the English speaking skills of a heterogeneous, skilled group of artisans who work in this cultural and heritage museum of art, architecture, crafts and performing arts. The primary focus of the study is to enhance the speaking skills for specific profession-related purposes.

Oral communication, describing and explaining products and procedures to tourists and visitors form an important part of their profession. They are required to interact with hundreds of students, visitors, and tourists from abroad and within India on a daily basis making the English language an important requirement. The study aims to measure the effectiveness of the activity-based teaching incorporated during the intervention and the development in terms of the occupational speaking skills of the artisans. The small sampling 't-test' is used to analyse and project the performance difference.

The overarching objective of the program is at improving the learner's English language speaking skills in order to converse and communicate in work-related situations. To derive the maximum effectiveness of the learning program, this researcher tried to identify the learning requirements based on the needs of the learners. An exclusive course was designed with the aim of providing maximum exposure to the learners to speak the target language particularly in situations relating to their profession. The program involved teaching vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, although the focus was on speaking. The classes were conducted in the evening for one hour, four days a week for two months. The classroom facilities included a whiteboard, laptop, projector, and audio-video equipment. This training, it is believed, would hone the English speaking ability of the learners whose primary assignment as employees of the heritage center was to expose and present their expertise in English.

The premise of this paper is based on one such segment of teaching the production of basic speaking structures in English using 'show and tell' as the primary activity. This was followed by other related activities such as 'choose and tell', 'guess the object' and role-play. The 'show and tell' activity was recorded for eliciting pre and post-intervention scores. These activities provide an environment that contains the real-time exchange of communication, collaborative work, learner participation, and shared knowledge and hence, was thought to have an impact on the learning outcome.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Situated activity-based learning was chosen as the method of intervention to find out if the learners improved in their speaking fluency. 'Choose and tell' and related activities were selected as they closely resemble the line of work performed by these learners. The following research questions were defined to implement the study.

1. How does the 'show and tell' and similar activities help in improving the fluency of spoken English in the current context?

2. How do these activities affect the learner's participation and motivation to learn English in classrooms and beyond?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of English is recognised the world over to such an extent that even non-English speaking, developed countries like China and Japan have implemented several strategies and plans to promote the language (Munezane 2013; Peng 2014). Where learning a foreign language is concerned, speaking is considered the most difficult of the four language skills (Martinez-Flor, Uso-Juan, & Soler 2006; Nunan 2003). In addition, it is observed that L2 learners reveal considerable anxiety while speaking the language

(Woodrow 2006). Fluency and accuracy are the two approaches to teaching speaking. The focus of this study is to promote speaking fluency through monologue and dialogue activities using the situated learning approach. Several researchers have recognised the difficulty in defining fluency as a term (Chambers 1997; Guillot 1999; Wood 2001). Here, fluency is determined in terms of the number of pauses, false starts, and repetitions that occur during the speech. The importance of interaction and practice opportunities for language development is recognised by several scholars (Loewen & Sato 2017; Philp, Adams, & Iwashita 2014; Sato & Ballinger 2016). Similarly, others stress the importance of task-repetition in second language learning (Bygate 2013). This research makes use of activities such as 'show and tell', 'choose and tell', guessing the object, and role-play to enhance the speaking skills of the learners.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is placed within the theoretical framework of situated learning, a theory of learning first proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). Situated learning focuses on "the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs" (Hanks 1991, p.14) Lave and Wenger situated learning as a social process asking "what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place" (Hanks 1991, p.14). Lave (1991) argues that learning is "a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world, through legitimate peripheral participation in ongoing social practice" (p. 64). According to Lave (1991) situated learning or situated social practice "emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing. It emphasizes the inherently socially negotiated quality of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons engaged in activity" (p. 67). He further adds that "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity *in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world*" (p. 67). Lave (1991) affirms that learning takes place when it is implemented into functional activity, context, and culture that is related to the topic discussed.

James. P. Gee (2004) believes that "if any variety of language is to be learned and used, it has to be *situated*. That is, it has to be brought down to concrete exemplifications in experiences learners have had (repeatedly, since learning is partly a practice effect)" (p. 106). Gee also maintains that learners form "mental simulations based on their experiences - simulations that are useful for guiding future thought and action in the world, both individually and collaboratively" (p. 106). In situated learning, the learner is not "gaining a discrete body of abstract knowledge which s(he) will then transport and reapply in later contexts. Instead, s(he) acquires the skills to perform by actually engaging in the process" (Hanks, 1991, p.15).

5. METHODOLOGY

The methodology was designed to mainly accommodate for situated and needs-based communication. The idea was to make the students participate in the classroom activities, to encourage them to speak in English to overcome inhibitions. Studies reveal that frequent speaking tasks play a significant role in the improvement of students' fluency (Tam 1997).

5.1. Participants and instructional setting

There were 7 members (3 female, 5 male) participants in the program. The learners were in a mixed age group and ranged in age from 23 to 47 years, with a mean of 35.71 years (SD = 6.735). They were all L1 speakers of Tamizh, a language predominantly spoken in Tamilnadu, a state in Southern India. Four of them have completed under-graduation and the rest have completed their secondary education. However, not all of them have had English as the medium of instruction. The total mean years of English as a medium of instruction is 6 years (SD = 6.98). One participant had previously travelled to the US on a scholarship/ exchange program for 3 months. Another had traveled to Singapore and Dubai.

All learners work in the heritage museum and are skilled workers by profession. They conduct art and craft activities for children as well as adults. Some of the other activities they are engaged in are glass blowing demonstrations, traditional leather puppet shows, traditional sooth-saying, and contextual exhibitions. In addition, they also conduct workshops on Kalamkari (an art of painting on fabric with vegetable dyes), painting, wheel pottery, and ceramic sculpture making. In addition, one of them functions as a storekeeper and another as an in-house electrician. These learners had limited opportunities to learn the language and hence their ability to speak in English was quite limited.

Communication is an important tool for these learners, particularly the ability to speak in English, because of their profession. They interact with hundreds of tourists and visitors on a daily basis. This formed their motivation to learn the English language. They all believe that to be successful professionally, it is important to upgrade your knowledge on a regular basis. This is one of the reasons to attend the learning program. All the participants have put in considerable effort to attend these classes as it was conducted in the evening, after a day's work. So, it certainly required commitment and enthusiasm from their side.

5.2 Choosing appropriate tasks for learning

'Show and tell', 'Choose and tell', guessing the object and role-play tasks were chosen as these activities resembled closely their professional situation, i.e their day-to-day occupation. The participant's profession demanded that they demonstrate their skill to an audience and at times converse with a guest or a visitor. Memorising accurate sentence structures helps in improving fluency; however, repetition and active participation contribute to creating a relevant learning environment for the students. With this aim, the following speaking activities were conducted.

5.2.1 'Show and Tell' Activity

'Show and tell', as a speaking activity is usually used at the elementary level with younger children learning a new language. However, this activity proved to be useful and interesting with this group as well and served its purpose of making the learners participate enthusiastically in the speaking tasks.

Each learner was asked to bring an object to class and speak about it for a minimum of two minutes. The teacher then gave some ideas on the objects that could be brought to class. For instance, objects that they were fond of, that they wanted to show their friends in the class, objects related to their profession, hobbies, etc., were encouraged. To make it interesting, on some days the objects were theme-specific, like objects from their childhood.

They also were asked to talk about an object from their profession. This also acted as a rehearsal of sorts for what they were doing in real life.

Learners had to introduce themselves before starting each activity. They had to say what they liked about the object and usefulness, if any, of the object. Learners were asked to use descriptive words while speaking about their objects. The others in the class were asked to listen attentively in order to be able to ask questions at the end of every 'show and tell' activity. This encouraged the learners to frame appropriate questions based on what they had heard about the object.

5.2.2 'Choose and Tell' Activity

'Show and Tell' eventually progressed to a more challenging task of 'Choose and Tell'. Here, the learners were asked to choose from a pool of objects collected by the facilitator such as a flower vase, pencil box, seashells, a comb, a handbag, etc. In this activity, the learners did not have preparation time as they had during the 'show and tell' activity. Instead, a brief preparation time of 10 minutes was given to each learner before they were asked to come and speak in front of the class.

5.2.3 Role Play

Learners also participated in role-plays where the audience would ask questions about the object that was presented. This helped them to replicate the role of the tourist/visitor interacting with the artisans and the 'teller' had to explain. This activity was carried out in order to create a real-life situation within the classroom. The participants took on the roles of visitors, tourists, and artisans and interacted with their partners. The learners were encouraged to question each other about their craft. Preparation for the task was done outside of class.

5.2.4 Guessing the Object

This activity has two segments: the learner hides the object in a paper bag and uses five descriptive words to help others guess the object. If they are unable to guess the object, they go to the second segment. Here, the learners are allowed to ask up to five questions and the presenter can answer only 'yes' or 'no'. Whoever guesses right is the winner. Specifications on choosing the object are given to the learners to help with the guessing. For instance, the objects can be limited to fruits, stationery items, etc., on a particular day. This activity strengthens the listening skills and questioning and answering techniques of the learners, thus creating a situational learning experience.

5.3 Procedure

Each class was structured uniquely. The classes began with the leaner recapitulating what was done in the previous class. Then, three of the participants would read out five words they had chosen along with their meanings and also present how the word could be used in a sentence. Most of the words chosen by the learners were domain-specific like a rod, cane, airbrush, canvas, etc. That is, they mostly chose words that were related to their profession. The facilitator then intervened and encouraged the participants to also choose words that were non-related to their profession and see how they can be meaningfully used.

While speaking, the learners were directed to look at their audience, make eye contact, mind their body language, gestures, postures, and to be clear in their speech. A framework was given which necessitated a sequential order of a beginning, middle, and an end. The learners started by introducing themselves, spoke about the object and finally thanked the audience for their time and patience for listening.

For all the activities the time limit was fixed at 2 minutes. However, it was not strictly adhered to in order to give the learners the freedom to exceed their speaking time if they wanted to. Since it was a small group of learners, time was not a constraint in engaging in these activities. At the end of each activity, others in the class were encouraged to ask questions based on what they had heard. This helped them learn 'turn-taking' with questions. The learners were guided to ask varied question types like 'Wh' questions, and those beginning with 'are, is, am, was, were, do, does, did' etc.

In addition to the activities mentioned, this group of learners was persuaded to learn new vocabulary (five words a day) and use them in their day-to-day conversation. This is done to support their vocabulary selection and sentence formation that is required for explaining their products and art. Making one-minute speeches, and listening and viewing relevant audio-video files were conducted on a daily basis.

The subject-verb concord in a sentence was practiced in the class. Sentence structures such as 'this is a wire, these are the tools', etc., are repeated. Such activities along with the guided repetition of sentence structures and pronunciation of words in the classroom, which is a controlled situation, help them perform in independent situations. Eventually, the learners should be able to switch from conscious use of language structures to natural use.

Spoken exchanges were encouraged outside the classroom as well. For instance, learners were persuaded to practice what they learned in the classroom in real work situations while conversing with a tourist or a visitor. The learners also gave feedback about these exchanges in the next class which served as reinforcement not only for the individual but also for the entire group. In addition, the learners were prompted to use only the target language instead of their mother tongue in the classroom.

The researcher consciously decided to reduce the teacher speaking time and increase the learner speaking time. Besides, the learners' mispronunciation of words, mistakes in grammar, etc., was not corrected during the speaking activities as this might act as a distraction and deterrent. Instead, it was done after the activity was completed during the general feedback time. In order to involve all the learners in the speaking activities, they were asked to listen attentively and give constructive feedback. Since Tamizh is the mother tongue for all the learners, when their friends stopped at any point while speaking, they would extend support by prompting whatever they could.

In order to develop active listening skills, once the activity concluded, the learners were instructed to ask questions. For instance, after a presenter spoke about the restoration of an old photograph, the learners wanted to know the various steps involved in restoration, the time duration to restore a photograph, etc. Turn-taking while asking questions is encouraged.

The researcher-teacher almost always gave positive feedback for every speaking activity. Learners were appreciated for their participation and performance at the end of the task, in front of their peers. This acts as an incentive and reinforces the learner to perform future tasks with confidence.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Qualitative data were obtained in the form of classroom and work-place observation notes, interview transcripts, video recordings, and transcription of the activities, results, and analysis of the questionnaire.

6.1 Questionnaire

At the end of the course, a questionnaire was administered to capture the demographic data of the learners. The learners were asked about their personal, educational and professional background and the effectiveness of the program. The questionnaire contained Likert-type questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to understand the effectiveness of the program. Although open-ended questions are generally difficult to analyze, these questions helped the respondents elaborate their answers and write freely. The questionnaire also proved useful in understanding the improvement of the student's speaking-learning process after the implementation of these activities.

All seven learners agreed that the course was useful. The real work-like situation practice instilled in them a sense of confidence. Although none of them had received any negative remarks about their English speaking skills, all of them had enrolled in this course in order to improve their speaking skills.

6.2 Classroom and workplace observation notes

Using English in meaningful situation-based activities helped learners progress to using language in less controlled situations. Practice within the classroom instilled confidence in the learners to use English in work situations outside the classroom. They were able to guide visitors to appreciate and demonstrate their craftsmanship, and describe places and things within the museum. In several instances, while describing their trade and related objects, they did not seem to be anxious or nervous about making mistakes in front of their peers or tourists. In summary, learners were able to demonstrate an increase in vocabulary, correctness of sentences and speaking fluency compared to their earlier levels as seen in Table 2.

6.3 Test Data

The pre-test and post-test data of 'show and tell' activity were analysed using the following parameters.

Table 1 Parameters and Marks

Sl. No	Parameters	Marks Assigned
1.	Use of greetings and courtesies	1
2.	Appropriate vocabulary	2
3.	Correct use of SVO	1
4.	Use of descriptive words	2
5.	Fluency	2
6.	Content	2

1. Use of salutations like good morning, hello, thank you, etc.
2. Use of appropriate and technical vocabulary: Ex: chromolithography, inpainting, etc.
3. Correctness in sentence formation particularly with the subject-verb agreement.
4. Use of descriptors for their objects.
5. The use of hesitation markers is taken as the index for fluency.
6. Content of the presentation.

The results of the pre-test which was done before the commencement of the program and post-test which was done at the end of the program reveal that the intervention of the mentioned activities results in improved English speaking fluency for the group. The small sampling *t*-test was used for calculating the difference in performance. First, the mean and SD for the pre-test and post-test were calculated. Then, the *t*-value was determined using the table and compared with the calculated *t*-value. This showed the value of post-test marks superior to the pre-test marks.

The following calculation was used:
H0: Both the pre-test and post test marks are equal
H1: The post-test marks are greater than pre test marks

$$\text{Mean (x)}=2.45 \text{ Mean (y)}=6.208 \text{ SD (x)}=0.2696 \text{ SD (y)}=0.6709$$

$$X=2.45 \quad y= 6.208$$

$$S_1=\sigma_x =0.2696 \quad S_2 =\sigma_Y =0.6709$$

$$S=\surd(n1s1^2+n2s2^2)/(n1+n2-2)$$

$$t(\text{cal})=(\text{mean(x)}-\text{mean(y)})/S\surd(n1^{-1}+n2^{-1}) = 11.5968$$

$$\text{degrees of freedom} = n1+n2-2 =10$$

t table value for 10 % level of significance 10 degrees of freedom=1.812

calculated *t* value=11.5968

calculated *t* value > *t* table value. So, H1 is accepted. This shows that there is improvement in the post-test marks.

Table 2 Pre-test and Post-test Marks

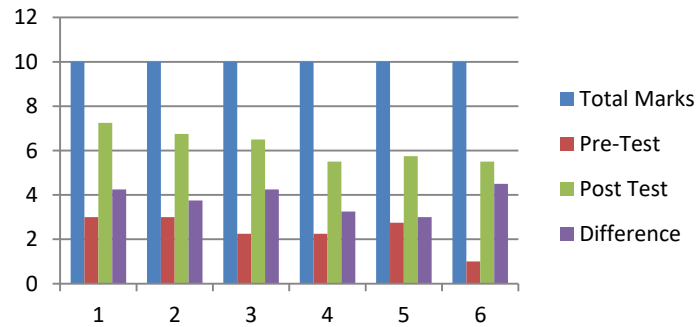| Learner	Total Marks	Pre-Test	Post –Test	Difference
1	10	3	7.25	4.25
2	10	3	6.75	3.75
3	10	2.25	6.5	4.25
4	10	2.25	5.5	3.25
5	10	2.75	5.75	3
6	10	1	5.5	4.5

Fig.1 Graphic Representation of the total marks assigned and the pre and post-intervention marks attained by the learners and the projection of difference.

7. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

It is difficult for the teacher to foresee and provide the learners with all types of work-related situations. Sometimes, it may be outside the purview of practice and the learner will have to come up with creative answers or explanations during work-situation to satisfy the visitor.

Follow up teaching-learning could benefit the learners to keep practicing their skills. If the intervention lasted for a longer period instead of the present short term practice intervention, perhaps the impact would have been greater. Similarly, this type of intervention for other skills like reading, listening, and writing could also be extended for overall development.

8. OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM AND CONCLUSION

The success of this teaching program can be used as a model for similar establishments in other states within India as well as other countries where traditional arts and crafts are exhibited. As language plays a vital role in communication when the workers are fluent in the language that is used for communication, it paves a way for better exposure of the products, sales thereby contributing to economic uplift. This study paves the way for replicating English language teaching for other such specific purposes which can be tailor-made to suit individual programs and purposes.

In summary, the program was beneficial in promoting basic communication skills for the purpose of interaction. Since the activities used for intervention were situation based, it is believed that it fostered vocabulary building, particularly profession-related unique vocabulary and appropriate subject-verb-object sentence structure, thereby facilitating appropriate language use. It helped reduce anxiety associated with speaking in English and helped promote oral interaction. These activities also aid learner participation and motivation to learn English in classrooms and beyond. The areas in which the learners showed improvement are self-expression, overcoming the fear of speaking in front of others and the fear of being judged, and improvement in speaking fluency.

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