

## ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH PEER TEAM TEACHING: A STUDENT CENTERED APPROACH

By

V. VIJAYA VANI

*Assistant Professor, VNR Vignan Jyothi Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, India.*

### ABSTRACT

*The present paper attempts to establish that peer team teaching of a prescribed English lesson of 1<sup>st</sup> year B.Tech course by the students will provide more opportunities to enhance their public speaking skills. This kind of classroom activity will also help them to develop their vocabulary, reading skills, team working skills, etc. It is assumed that the students attain reasonable proficiency in reading and writing when they enter into tertiary level education, but they lack proficiency in speaking skills. In this context, the researcher endeavors to conduct teaching sessions by the students' teams to know whether such classroom activities help students to enhance their public speaking skills. The students' teaching sessions will be facilitated and observed by the researcher. To conduct the sessions, first year B.Tech students will be taken for the sample study and a lesson from the prescribed textbook will be provided to the students to read, explain/ present their own views in front of faculty members and entire class. The study will be covered in 3 hours ELCS lab session followed by feedback session. To collect students' feedback, questionnaires will be generated and used.*

*The main objective of this paper is to provide insight/idea to teachers of English to approach activity based peer language teaching in ESL classrooms. It aspires to establish the fact that students' speaking skills can be improved more if they are motivated and given autonomy to speak in the given context.*

*Keywords: Team Preparation, Peer Discussion, Team Presentation, Peer Teaching, Feedback.*

### INTRODUCTION

Just a Minute sessions, group discussion sessions are part of the syllabus of Engineering academic courses, where students will be asked to give presentations by selecting topics of their choice or given by their teachers. At the end of every semester, students need to give seminars and on the completion of their entire course, they need to give presentation on their respective projects. Thus, evaluation of presentations is part of engineering course curricula. Hence, enhancing students' presentation skills/speaking skills hold vital significance.

These skills are highly required for the students as they ought to give seminar presentations in their course of study and giving technical seminar presentations help them to participate in group discussion, which is one of the parameters that the recruiters of the hiring companies approach. After entering into profession also, students need to address several gatherings, which are of utmost importance to retain and get promotions in their careers.

Thus the importance for English language communication skills has been growing, but the students still lack these skills. According to a report of Saakshi newspaper (Telugu) dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, "as many as 97% engineering graduates in the country cannot speak English, which is required for jobs in corporate sales or business consulting, revealed a new survey. Engineering remains one of the most popular choices among aspirants for under-graduate courses. The survey also found that 51% of them are not employable based on their spoken English scores and of the 6 lakh engineers that graduate annually, only 2.9% candidates are fluent while speaking English. Pronunciation and fluency were found to be major barriers in effective spoken English".

In spite of several efforts by teaching fraternity, policy makers and system, to provide required language proficiency to the students by the time they complete their academics, still many students suffer from low proficiency of English communication. This is an eye opener for all the

students to focus on it and grab the opportunity provided by their teachers and come forward, participate actively in English language communication sessions.

As per the news item published in Hindu newspaper on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016, Aspiring Minds has stated that "less than one out of four engineering graduates is employable in the country." The study further shows that "of the 1.2 lakh candidates surveyed across multiple states, 91.82% lack programming and algorithm skills, 71.23% lack soft and cognitive skills, 60% lack domain skills, 73.63% lack English speaking and comprehension skills, and 57.96% have poor analytical and quantitative skills."

The reports mentioned above and research so far done in the field of ELT put forth the challenges to the teachers. In this context, the researcher attempted to conduct a team teaching session by the students as a classroom activity to enhance students' speaking skills. Providing students practice in peer team teaching of a prescribed English lesson of 1<sup>st</sup> year B.Tech course is an effort to examine whether these kinds of activities help them to enhance their speaking skills. In the traditional method of teaching where teacher explains and students receive, may not provide more opportunities to the students to participate and express their views. Therefore, to ensure more participation from the learners, activity based/task based learning should be focused. Nunan has rightly described Activity Based Learning as "A range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple or brief exercise to more complex or lengthy activities". (Nunan, p. 55, 1989).

## 1. Review of Literature

Enhancing students' communication skills is the main objective of ELT. It comprises the development of communicative abilities both in speech and writing. But the course as such seems to be inadequate in catering to the required language needs of the students.

What further is necessary for the students to enhance their communication skills is adopting different orientation comprising a set of innovative activities for classroom teaching. The teachers of the professional courses are in pursuit of finding suitable innovative classroom activities for their respective classes. Various techniques should be used

in the classroom in order to endorse the communication skills of the students. In this context, the paper has made sincere efforts to study regarding the material used in English language teaching classrooms and tutoring, particularly in the teaching of speaking skills. Effective learning begins with the learner centered approach of teaching and for this, the intrinsic knowledge of the students needs to be tapped and used in second language teaching/ learning setting to make students confident of their content and help them overcome their inhibitions when they participate in speaking activities.

Even the research so far done in the field of ELT and empirical studies conducted by researchers established that the traditional method of teaching, evaluation is not adequate to enhance students' English communication proficiency. The activity-based learning approach through peer team teaching will enhance student participation and makes learning and teaching more enjoyable and easier to understand and apply. Research has shown that the teachers play active/dominant role at tertiary level educational institutions until relatively recently. According to Johnson & Smith "Having the instructor provide all the materials to the passive student is the old paradigm. The new paradigm is to actively engage students with the material and one another formats that provide students with a more active and engaged learning environment which results in deeper learning" (Cited in Ahlfeldt, Mehta & Sellnow, 2005, p.52). Chickering & Gamson also expressed their ideas which are reflected in the seven principles of good teaching practice in undergraduate education and they are,

- Encourages student-faculty contact.
- Encourages cooperation among students.
- Encourages active learning.
- Gives prompt feedback.
- Emphasises time on task.
- Communicates high expectations.
- Respects diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson 1999, p.76).

According to Chickering & Gamson cited in Bonwell & Eison, 'students must do more than just listen. They must

read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems' (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p.78). Bonwell & Eison further precisely define active learning as 'instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing' (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p.83).

Fallows & Ahmet state that "learning is most effective when student involvement, participation and interaction is maximized" (Fallows & Ahmet, 1999, p.34). Gleason sketches out some activities which can be functional in the classroom even to develop speaking skills of the students in language classrooms such as student presentations. Students are given a topic that they must research and then present to the class. They can work in groups or as individuals. This is where the students become the lecturers. To increase the involvement of the class, they can be asked to provide peer assessment (Gleason, et al., 2011, p.67).

## 2. Background

To find out the significant role of peer team teaching in enhancing speaking skills of the students, an empirical study was conducted. For this study, peer team teaching session was carried out by the 1<sup>st</sup> year B.Tech students of CMR Engineering College, Hyderabad. The students were divided into two batches and each batch is further divided into 6 groups and each group had to teach the given lesson while the rest of the batch listens to them.

### 2.1 Collection of Data and Tools

The data has been collected through personal observation and interaction with the students. For collecting the data, classroom activities have been generated and implemented in the classroom. To collect students' feedback on the activity, questionnaires are developed and administered at the end of the activity and the same has been analyzed and presented in the paper.

### 2.2 Activities

The students (30 members of a batch) were divided into 6 teams consisting of 5 members in each team. Each team were asked to take 2 to 3 paragraphs of the lesson for explanation. They were provided some instructions on how to deal with the textbook. The Lesson, Sports and Health was given for teaching.

### 2.3 Group Discussion

After dividing the teams, they were provided with 20 minutes time for discussing their respective roles for team teaching. As the students finished their discussion, they were asked to initiate the teaching session.

### 2.4 Sample Team Teaching

The teams initiated their teaching session by planning different activities from the lesson like reading, explaining the gist, writer point of view, answering the queries, etc. The sample activity has been mentioned in Table 1.

## 3. Findings of the Observation

The researcher observed all the roles played by the students in the classroom and noted down their proficiency levels under 5 criteria such as fluency, coherence, accuracy, pronunciation, and body language.

It was found that the knowledge/concentration of the students is tapped well. All the participants prepared well and performed their activities. Even some of the students expressed their views beyond the text. The session helped them to overcome their inhibitions too. The activity involved every student and it had more effect on them than simply listening to their teachers. These types of speaking activities will get hold of students' attention and engage them throughout the activity. However, some of them did not follow proper organization/sequence of presentation and some of them were not fluent and could not maintain

Name of the student	Activity	Good	Average	Poor	Remarks
V. Sripada Rao	Read the text	-	Average	-	Need to develop correct pronunciation focusing on stress
Shreya	Explained the meaning	-	Average	-	Need to develop proper eye contact while explaining
Saiteja	Wrote meanings of hard words on the board	Good	-	-	Try to give the list of antonyms also,
Vamshi	Expressed his views in the given context	-	Average	-	Need more preparation to express views effectively
Prasanna lakshmi	Answered the questions posed by the class	Good	-	-	Keep it up. Well prepared

Table 1. Sample Activity

proper eye contact. All the students were given immediate feedback by the teacher accordingly.

### 3.1 Feedback Analysis

The feedback from the team teaching session was collected. To find out its impact on the students, their views are collected. Most of the students expressed that peer teaching and feedback helped them to know how to give effective presentations and the feedback session followed by team teaching helped them to observe and identify the skills such as language proficiency/ competence, method/approach/technique used for presentation, interaction patterns, appropriate use of teaching aids and materials, etc. They also expressed that the activity enabled them to enhance their presentation skills as they came to know what areas should be focused while giving presentation. It is observed from the obtained data that students were found more comfortable, while giving their presentations before their peer group than giving in front of their teachers as they maintained proper eye contact and were audacious in their performance.

### 3.2 Discussion of Findings

The outcome of this paper agreed to a great extent of the research outlined in the literature review regarding the benefits of classroom activity based/practical approach to learning. Such benefit was noticed by the researcher by comparing the previous lecture centered classroom teaching with the peer team teaching by the students and its positive effects on them. It is evident in the following feedback from the students.

*Student 1:* I enjoyed the group discussion and interaction in the classroom activity. The session was a welcome change of scene from the regular three hours, sit and listen lectures.

*Student 2:* Yes, obviously it was the most interesting thing as it was something different to that of regular classes.

*Student 3:* Peer team teaching was one of the best idea and it reduces stage fear.

The feedback forms are collected from the students and some samples (scanned copies) have been provided in the Appendix.

### 4. Recommendations

The outcome of the paper is an evidence of a stimulus for

students to motivate and elicit spoken form of language from them, just it is a small idea that researcher stumble upon and attempted to give a concrete shape. It is recommended to all ESL teachers to explore for the specific and suitable student centered approaches for classroom teaching out of their experience and careful analysis of their students' particular language needs at the given context.

### Conclusion

Peer team teaching followed by feedback ensures more participation of students and they feel more interested and comfortable to present themselves as they get new stage where they are judged by their peer. Peer observation group also feel more responsible and interested to give feedback. This study will help ESL teachers to know the weak points of students from students' perspective and get opportunity to train them accordingly. Getting feedback from different sources would help teachers to know the specific language training needs of the students. Thus, it helps in reducing the inconsistency between existing understanding and expected aims of teaching.

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## Appendix

### Students' Feedback Forms

Write your comments for the following statements

1) Peer Team Teaching helped in overcoming stage fear.

Yes, ofcourse Peer Team Teaching helps everyone of us to

2) It was a nice idea. But I felt that in our group there were only a few who did well and others could not explain.

the matter is not about who give their best its about the participation and the stage fear.

3) Peer Team Teaching was quite interesting than regular class room teaching by the teacher

yes obviously it was quite interesting because it was something different compare to the regular classes.

4) Good idea to make students learn from peers.

yes, I appreciate

5) It helped me to develop my Communication skills

6) Asking questions and answering them gave us confidence. True

7) Groups were well prepared and helpful in developing speaking skills.

obviously groups were well prepared and helpful in developing speaking skills.

8) Well conducted; good for ground collaboration.

yes it is good for ground collaboration

9) Running the classes this way (by the students) encouraged participation and helped re-enforce our knowledge.

It improved my concentration skills and knowledge

10) It was very good and the explanations of the students were very helpful in remembering content for long time.

It is like a story telling so it is easy to remember the lessons for a long time.

Write your comments for the following statements

1) Peer Team Teaching helped in overcoming stage fear.

Yes, Obviously Peer team teaching helped everyone of us to  
 2) It was a nice idea. But I felt that in our group there were only a few who did well and others could not explain.

everyone attempted it so that's the great thing compare to <sup>over</sup> <sup>Stage</sup>  
 who did well and who didn't

3) Peer Team Teaching was quite interesting than regular class room teaching by the teacher

Yes, It was most interesting teaching compare to all regular ~~class~~ boxing classes as we discuss & speak there

4) Good idea to make students learn from peers.

Yes, It one of the best idea to make students learn from peers as it reduces our stage fear

5) It helped me to develop my

Speaking skills, Stage fear, communication skills

6) Asking questions and answering them gave us confidence.

Yes, By these we even got to know things which we never heard before

7) Groups were well prepared and helpful in developing speaking skills.

Yes, groups were well prepared & given their best to show their talents

8) Well conducted; good for ground collaboration.

Being one of the student, I personally appreciate all the faculty who brought up with such a nice idea.

9) Running the classes this way (by the students) encouraged participation and helped re-enforce our knowledge.

conducting classes of this type encourages all students to show interest ~~at~~ regarding the subject

10) It was very good and the explanations of the students were very helpful in remembering content for long time.

Yes, It was really good to bring out all communication skills, talents, pronunciation & capability of all the students

# RESEARCH PAPERS

Write your comments for the following statements

1) Peer Team Teaching helped in overcoming stage fear. YES, VERY MUCH

2) It was a nice idea. But I felt that in our group there were only a few who did well and others could not explain.

NO, I DISAGREE, EVERYONE WERE EQUALLY INTERESTED

3) Peer Team Teaching was quite interesting than regular class room teaching by the teacher

YES, It was very much interesting

4) Good idea to make students learn from peers.

Yes

5) It helped me to develop my confidence levels

6) Asking questions and answering them gave us confidence.

Yes, indeed!

7) Groups were well prepared and helpful in developing speaking skills.

Yes, There was unity in the group

8) Well conducted; good for ground collaboration.

Yes.

9) Running the classes this way (by the students) encouraged participation and helped re-enforce our knowledge.

Yes.

10) It was very good and the explanations of the students were very helpful in remembering content for long time.

Yes, very much!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Dr. Vijaya Vani Vemula is currently working as an Assistant Professor at VNR Vignan Jyothi Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, India. She teaches Communicative English and conducts Advanced English Language Communication Skills lab and Gender Sensitization lab to Undergraduate students. She has attended several National and International Conferences and has 11 research papers and 10 publications to her credit.*

