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MECHANISMS OF PROMOTING PROFICIENCY OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE RA HIGH SCHOOLS

In this day and age, English is a dominant international language and correspondingly is the indispensable inkling to the ever–changing world of science. Yet from this perspective, it becomes paramount to promote speaking skill for better employability. Speaking English is extremely important to all, especially for EFL learners since they must make sure first that the hearer understands what is being said or delivered before speaking. During speaking activities, students confront some difficulties and to solve these problems the researchers of this article have determined to explore the efficient mechanisms to improve the pupils' speaking proficiency and identify the favorable atmosphere in the process of implementing games and activities in the scope of the teaching and learning process, particularly in high schools of the Republic of Armenia. In order to minimize the learners' problem, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has been applied to improve EFL pupils' speaking skills undertaken during classes.

Key words: Mechanisms, speaking skills, challenges, CLT method.

Introduction

In recent years, applied researchers have become extensively engaged in boosting learners' communicative competence in the English language teaching and learning. Therefore, a myriad of scholars have taken learners' speaking participation as their research and have tried to find a strategy how to improve the learners' speaking skills. . Consequently, this point of view has gained a considerable support worldwide. According to Zhang (2009) learners' speaking ability is a key skill to be improved to make the learners conduct communication directly. In the same vein, Boonkit reveals that the teacher's effort in proposing learners to articulate their ideas and opinions are highly anticipated. Therefore, communicative ability becomes a crucial goal in the teaching and learning process (Boonkit, 2010:54).

In this respect, Bueno, Madrid, and McLaren state that "speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners have to face. In spite of this, it has traditionally been forced into the background while, teachers of English, have spent all classroom time trying to teach pupils how to write, to read, and sometimes even to listen in an L2 because grammar has a long written tradition." (BuenoA., D. Madrid and N. McLaren, 2006, p. 321) Accordingly, speaking is generally thought to be the most important of the four skills because in Ur 's (1996) view people who possess a certain language skill are considered speakers of the language. The speaking skill appears to be problematic for many Armenian students as well. The problem is exacerbated when the language is only heard in the classroom and not practiced, moreover the matter is also intensified when there is no support for its use outside the classroom. This fact appears to be logical, however, there are a considerable number of factors which can elucidate this matter. Ur (1996) attributes the difficulties to factors such as inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Littlewood (1981) relates the difficulties in speaking to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. The students' inability to communicate in English is due to the use of the first language in classroom management (Littlewood, 1981). In such a situation learners are deprived of the opportunity to speak in English. Hence, EFL teachers should be able to create an English–speaking environment where pupils have real–life communication, various activities, and meaningful topics that promote communicative competence. It is essential that language teachers focus on teaching strategies providing pupils with various speaking activities that can contribute tremendously on students' competences in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These engaging activities might enable pupils to be more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and engaging. Hence, in order to minimize the learners' concerns and challenges, we have implemented teaching techniques based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method to improve EFL pupils' speaking skills.

The aim of the research is to explore efficient mechanisms to improve the

pupils' speaking proficiency, identify the atmosphere in the process of implementing games and activities in the scope of the teaching and learning process and to clarify impeding obstacles while teaching speaking skills.

Theoretical Review
The Concept of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching is a bundle of principles about the aims of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate the learning and roles of the teachers and learners in the classroom (Richards, 2006, p. 2). Accordingly, Harmer (2007, p. 84) pinpoints that communicative language teaching is a set of belief which comprises not only re–examination of what aspects of language to teach that focuses the prominence of language functions, as well as a shift in emphasis in how to teach that is related to the idea that language learning will take care of itself and that plentiful exposure to language in application and plentiful opportunities to incorporate it are vitally important to students' development of knowledge and skills. Communicative Language Teaching aims at broadly implementing the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication. The goal of CLT is to enable students to communicate in the target language fluently and accurately. Therefore, CLT tends to be learner-centered rather than teacher–centered. It requires the students to acknowledge the language forms, meaning, and functions. Consequently, it leads students to communicate in meaningful ways in certain situations. (Brown, 2001, p. 46). Hence, the integration of CLT in the English language subject is believed to enhance speaking skills among students in a TESL environment since with the help of this approach all the tasks and activities in the classroom therefore have to equip students with the important and relevant skills of communication. CLT can best be implemented in the Armenian context through applying adequate activities in the classroom to boost EFL learners' speaking skills. Accordingly, CLT can be productive in dealing with Armenian students' insufficiencies in spoken communication in English since it will enable them to express themselves and their views through collaborative activities, undertaken during classes. Subjectively, CLT is the best option to stimulate Armenian learners' interests in learning by infusing the learning environment with new types of activities and materials that are both interactive and authentic.

The present action research has been conducted to underpin the effectiveness of the CLT approach in an EFL classroom in Armenia. The below mentioned section highlights the goal of carrying out this research.

Identification of the Problem

Over the years, some methods, approaches, procedures, techniques and various strategies have been made to the teaching learning English as a second language. All these have contributed to the process of teaching but more efforts were required because the process is ongoing and permanent. Thus, the teaching learning demands the acquisition of communication skills (speaking) and interactive learning. Yet Communicative Language teaching in a way to provide opportunities to implement a methodology to promote learning and interaction between professor and student. (Brown 2006). Teachers and learners have important roles which contribute to the success of CLT in the classroom. On the one hand, EFL learners play the role of negotiators with one another in cooperative rather than individualistic tasks. Instead of relying entirely on the teacher as the source of knowledge, learners feel more comfortable listening to their peers in pair or group tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Learners can learn best through listening to their classmates making mistakes and correcting themselves. Therefore, in CLT, learners are encouraged to be more confident about following their peers' steps in improving their speaking skills. On the other hand, teachers play the role of monitors and facilitators of the learning process instead of models of correct, error–free speech (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As a result, anxious learners are encouraged to start learning how to predict their own mistakes and correct them accordingly through relying on the teacher as a facilitator of the learning process in the classroom. Therefore, the researchers of this article justifiably claim that CLT is the prevailing language teaching approach worldwide and the latter will strengthen teaching and learning processes of speaking skill particularly in the Armenian EFL settings due to its focus on the power of communication.

Research Questions

The current study was conducted within the framework of high schools of the Republic of Armenia, particularly Eurasia International College and Vardenik's high school in the Gegharkunik region. The results of data analyses attempt to supply the struggling EFL learners with some effective strategies to support them to overcome speaking challenges and barriers. Herein, to account for this query, we posed two sub–questions, namely:

1) What are the productive mechanisms for EFL students to promote proficiency of speaking skill?

2) To what extent CLT method can increase communicative competences of EFL learners?

The outcomes of the research are anticipated to significantly foster the advancement of the participants' speaking performance as well to enable teachers with more insight into supplementary activities to boost productive skills for EFL learners.

Research Methods

This research is designed as a qualitative descriptive study applying a survey method that was carried out for high schools teachers and students. In this qualitative research, the data has been collected through questionnaires and observations particularly done by teachers during the teaching–learning process. The observation has been conducted by note–taking assuming the implemented mechanisms.

The current study has been limited for middle schools teachers and pupils since it is not sufficient to carry out research adequately in the teaching–learning process in the RA schools. Furthermore, the study has been chiefly conducted on an online platform, thus includes results of the online survey only.

Research Participants

The participants involved in this action research comprised two groups of 40 pupils from Eurasia college and Vardenik college (25 females and 15 males), aged 14 to 16 and 28 teachers working at the same institutions. All in all, the learners' proficiency level is similar (A2), otherwise it would trigger difficulties to arrive at reliable results. The contents they studied were packed with daily routine topics including shopping, food, hobbies and sport.

Implemented Strategies to Promote Speaking Skills in High Schools

Interactive forms of learning help to alleviate the difficulties that arise when using the traditional approach to teaching speaking. Typical difficulties include constraint in front of the public and unpreparedness for speech activity, fear of mistakes, fear of not finding the right words, unpreparedness to discuss the proposed topic. An important aspect of applying interactive strategies to teaching speaking are not only the development of already known material, but also the acquisition of new knowledge in the process of communication. These mechanisms comprise the use of various forms in teaching speaking. Due to the large number of forms and methods of interactive learning, it is impossible to classify them. In our research we have applied a considerable number of interactive activities with reference to CLT method.

- A round table discussions and debates.
- Brainstorming
- Role–playing games
- Case studies
- Film watching
- Songs
- Picture games
- Storytelling

The interactive activities in teaching students to speak English are of great importance, since they encourage students to take active part in the educational
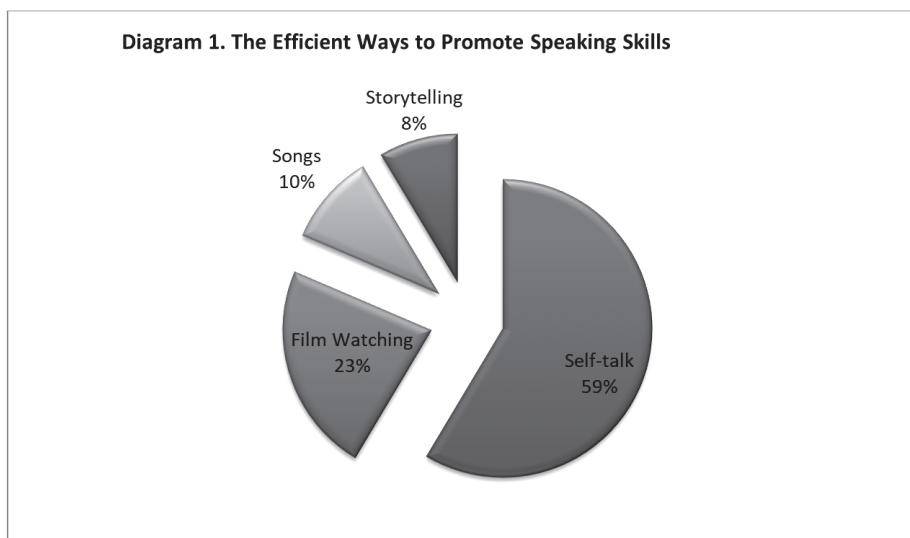
process.

Results and Discussion

Based on questionnaires from teachers and students and classroom observations, the activities employed by teachers of English language in their lessons included chiefly round table discussions, film watching, debating, storytelling, role plays and songs. What differed was the mode of delivery and preferences as shown by frequency of use of the class activities. Below, we have presented some of the data acquired during the observations.

Pupils' responses:

The responses delivered by pupils have revealed that the teachers are well aware of most engaging activities, moreover, the pupils also named the same sources which have been underpinned by the teachers for the enrichment of vocabulary. What makes other risen questions more imposing is the question "Which are the efficient ways to improve your speaking skills?" 60% of pupils contemplate that it is self–talk and for the rest 35% implementation of the app can be the most productive way.

Diagram 1. The Efficient Ways to Promote Speaking Skills

- Storytelling 8%
- Songs 10%
- Film Watching 23%
- Self-talk 59%

Teachers' responses

The reflection from the teachers on their lesson objectives and students' performances shows progress in terms of interest in speaking skill. Hence, eighteen teachers (64.3%) have pinpointed that they start their lessons with ice breakers, which promote mobile English environment creation (60.7%). The most preferred classroom tool among the teachers was teamwork applied by 71.4% of teachers.
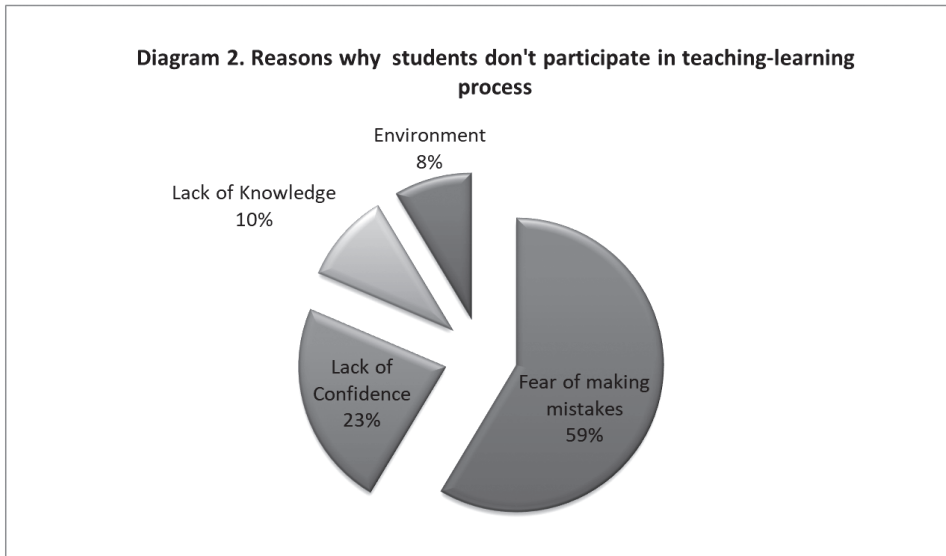
To another question when teachers have been asked about pupils' most welcomed activities 39.3% were their favorite songs whilst role–plays and film watching were equally valued (35.7%). This issue highlighted the fact that during speaking lessons teachers enabled pupils to increase their speaking competences through songs, role plays, film watching, and other activities.

To the question "What instructional strategies do you use to engage all students in the learning process?" 75% of teachers chose the option "Students' interest", 39.3% application of technology which is of paramount avail for supplying pupils learning with creative and innovative ways. Technology usage can be a good and creative method for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). From the results of the questionnaire, it has become apparent that 57.1% of Armenian teachers frequently utilize technology during their class activities and only 42.9% use them seldom. Therefore, the options "Interactive methods" and "debate" were equally (3.6%) chosen by the teachers.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is a misleading idea that Armenian schools focus mainly on traditional methods during classes, 89.3% of the respondents have highlighted innovative methods for better teaching.

Indeed pupils need an impetus and motivation to get enrolled in the teaching–learning process and 60.7% of the teachers make efforts to motivate their pupils, such as including the hot topics, 28.6% of the classmates. The majority of the pupils (42.5%) claimed that much depends on the teacher's motivation to engage learners in–class activities. Hot topic (30%) and classmates (friends, 27.5%) are in second place as a motivation to take part in learning speaking.

The other question from the survey (What is the main reason your students don't participate in the teaching–learning process?) explains that the teachers exactly know the reasons why pupils don't take part in the teaching–learning process. 50% of the teachers mention fear factor as the main reason. Some pupils are simply more concerned about making mistakes in public than others. And 39.3% state that the main reason is the fear of making mistakes. From the other answers added by the teachers can be observed that the lack of confidence was one of the key reasons for pupils not to get engaged in the learning process. Pupils have been asked also about the ways of overcoming the confidence and 65% finds that it is the practice (65%) which is the most important component in teaching–learning process, 42.5% of pupils agreed that the way to overcome the confidence is the enrichment of the vocabulary and only 15% answered "environment".

Diagram 2. Reasons why students don't participate in teaching-learning process

Environment
8%

Lack of Knowledge
10%

Lack of Confidence
23%

Fear of making mistakes
59%

The teachers play an important role in imparting quality education in EFL settings, especially in teaching speaking skills. To achieve this quality, teachers should use their skills, knowledge, and various techniques to motivate the learners towards the learning of spoken production. In this context, teachers should act as facilitators, motivators, organizers, participants, assessors, observers, and so on. Hence, teachers have mapped out various strategies to create a relaxed speaking environment, such as keeping pupils connected (67.9%) and for the second effective mechanism, the choice is on the open–air classes (21.4%). So, the reflection of teachers have also shown that incorporation of CLT approach was considered highly. Its effectiveness towards improving students speaking skills in a fun and interactive way was of great avail. Moreover, teachers also stated the importance of freedom and the use of HOTS in the lesson that could enlarge students' creativity through learning English, where activities could elicit their creative thinking and provide a platform for the teachers to adopt and adapt many of the activities to comprise communicative activities.

Difficulties Pupils Face in Speaking.

Participants of the research group were administered a questionnaire about the difficulties that the pupils encounter during speaking skills. According to 82,1% of the teachers, the main issue is the lack of confidence, but only 17.5% of pupils chose the lack of confidence as the chief challenge during the speaking.

It is commonly understood that pupils' lack of confidence usually occurs when pupils realize that their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers.

It is quintessential to mention the fact that 32.5% of pupils feel embarrassed

of being corrected by the teacher, some pupils do not feel comfortable being corrected before their classmates (15%) which is also one of the troubling issues for pupils to face during the speaking. However, albeit most pupils feel embarrassed of being corrected, to the questions "With whom do you discuss your mistakes?" and "Whom do you ask to help you improve your speaking skills?' pupils marked the option "teacher" (65% and 72.5%).

To the mentioned question 89.3% of teachers answered that they seldom interrupt to correct pupils' mistakes since they believe that they should not criticize any mistakes made by pupils particularly in vocabulary enunciation but instead praise pupils for their progress.

Challenges Teachers Confront During Teaching Speaking Skills

To this survey question teachers have been asked also about the challenges of teaching speaking skills. The majority of the teachers claim that diversity of students (gender, socio–economic class and at times intra–cultural factors) is the biggest challenge. Indeed this is challenging not only for teachers but also for pupils. Pupils go to school to be prepared for their future careers, so teaching must effectively address and embrace the realities that come with living and working in a diverse school, community, and country. But the diversity of students has advantages in the learning processes such as building better thinkers, involving more students, improvement of academic outcomes. Another challenging issue for some teachers (17.9%) is classroom size. They clarify the point by adding the fact that it is not an easy commitment to draw all learner's attention, to apply strategies effectively and moreover to make them all participate in the communication process.

Conclusion

To infer, it can be stated that the very action research was qualitatively carried out to explore the efficient mechanisms promoting the proficiency of speaking skill of Armenian EFL learners. According to the data (questionnaires addressed to both students and teachers), it is detectable that albeit speaking competence is challenging and needs ongoing improvement, the latter can be perfectly refined with interactive practice in classroom by means of various mechanisms through CLT approach which stimulates interaction among pupils in real life situations. In this action research Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been greatly approved by course participants in the result of which data collection gained a new range to the increasing body of research relating to the positive feedback. These acclaimed responses underline learners' productively increased interaction and encouragement to take part in speaking activities during teaching and learning process.

This study entails an essential insight to the EFL teachers for a better realization of English speaking impediments and the conducive strategies that the successful

teacher should apply for a more proficient speaking performance. Furthermore, the aforementioned mechanisms raise students' creative thinking and becomes a scaffold for the teachers to adopt and adapt a considerable number of means for improving language learning skills. Hereafter, the above–suggested approach and mechanisms for teaching speaking skill are extremely imperative in the contemporary educational scenario, since they serve as an incentive to increase proficiency of speaking competence or interwoven–skill pedagogy in EFL or other language learning contexts.

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Իրինա Մխիթարյան
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ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆԻ ԽՈՍՔԱՅԻՆ ՀՄՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԶԱՐԳԱՑՄԱՆ ՄԵԹՈԴՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ ԴՐԱՆՑ ԱՐԴՅՈՒՆԱՎԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԲԱՐՁՐԱՑՄԱՆ ՈՒՂԻՆԵՐԸ ՀՀ ԱՎԱԳ ԴՊՐՈՑՆԵՐՈՒՄ

Մեր օրերում անգլերեն լեզվով հաղորդակցվելը դարձել է խիստ անհրա– ժեշտ պայման ոչ միայն տոսկ տվյալ լեզվով հաղորդակցվելու տեսանկյունց այլն` բարձր աշխատունակություն ապահովելու: Անգլերենը որպես օտար լեզու սովորող աշակերտները հաճախ բախվում են մի շարք խնդիրների և մարտահրավերների: Հետևաբար, այդ հաղորդակցական խոչընդոտները լուծելու համար այս համատեքստում անգլերեն լեզվի դասավանդման մեջ առաջնային են դառնում հենց բանավոր խոսքի հմտությունների զարգացումը ճշգրիտ մոտեցումներով: Սույն մեթոդական աշխատության մեջ շեշտադրվում է լեզվի հաղորդակցական մոտեցումը , որը հենքային է անգլելերենը որպես օտար լեզու սովորողների հաղորդակցական ունակությունները բարելավելու և արդյունավետ մեխանիզմները մշակելու գործընթացում: Հետազոտության ուսումնասիրության համար թիրախային են Հայաստանի Հանրապետության ավագ դպրոցները` մասնավորապես Եվրասիա միջազգային քոլեջը և Վարդենիքի ավագ դպրոցը:

Հիմնաբառեր. անգլերենը որպես օտար լեզու սովորող աշակերտներ, տարատեսակ վարժանքներ, մեթոդներ, բանավոր խոսքի հմտություններ:

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МЕТОДЫ РАЗВИТИЯ НАВЫКОВ ВЛАДЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ И СПОСОБЫ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ ИХ ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТИ В СРЕДНИХ ШКОЛАХ АРМЕНИИ

В настоящее время общение на английском языке стало необходимым условием не только для общения на этом языке, но и для обеспечения высокой работоспособности. Студенты, изучающие английский как иностран–ный, часто сталкиваются с рядом проблем. Следовательно, чтобы преодолеть эти коммуникативные барьеры, приоритетом обучения английскому языку в данном контексте становится развитие навыков устной речи точными подходами. Эта методическая работа подчеркивает коммуникативный подход языка, который является основополагающим для улучшения коммуникативных способностей и разработки эффективных механизмов в процессе изучения английского языка как иностранного. Целевыми школами для исследования являются средние школы Республики Армения, в частности Международный колледж Евразия и средняя школа в Варденике.

Ключевые слова: студенты, изучающие английский язык как иностран–ный; различные упражнения, методы, навыки устной речи.