Developing Speaking Skills Using Two Classroom Techniques: A Case Study of Non-English Major Second-Year Students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

From the fact that students are often reluctant to spend time practicing speaking because oral English is not examined in the final exams for English 1, English 2, and English 3 at HUFI, the author believes that lecturers need to provide encouraging activities to boost the students' speaking skill. The purposes of this research were to study and compare speaking skills of Non-English Major Second-Year students before and after using two classroom techniques, and to study the students' attitude towards teaching English speaking skills using the three classroom techniques. The sample group is a English 2 class consisting of 42 students, 26 males and 16 females, classified by high, medium, and low according to their abilities of English speaking proficiency level. The author's research tools were 4 units from Life Student's Book Intermediate, an English-speaking ability test, and an attitude survey. The quantitative data were acquired from the speaking test and the students' attitude towards English speaking class survey. The study's findings were quite positive. Firstly, 40 out of 42 students passed the speaking examination with marks from 3.5 marks to the maximum marks of 5. Secondly, data from the attitude questionnaire showed that students' significant improvement in their enthusiasm for speaking English and their higher confidence in their English ability. Last but not least, the learners' attitudes toward English speaking class using the three techniques were rated as satisfied. In the light of the study, it could be inferred that applying two techniques of telling story and drama – dialogue fully facilitate both the male and female students to develop their speaking skills in a more motivated way.

Keywords: Storytelling strategy, drama-dialogue technique, HUFI .

1   Introduction

Language is what we use to move ideas from one person to another. The most common way of doing this is by speech. Pratima Dave Shastri stated that most of the communication that takes place in real life situation is oral i.e. either face to face or telephonic. Learners need to develop this skill of speaking for their existence. It is definitely true how important it is for language learners to learn all the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students need English outside school, as well as inside school and outside school requires the use of all four skills. In other words, all of them should be taught. Furthermore, English is considered as a universal language used as a means of communication, especially in the internet world.

One of the important institutions for the South that trains technical employees in the industry (with a focus on agricultural and food processing technologies) is Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI). The institution offers 20 majors in business administration, accounting, tourism, and technology. For the first two years of school, all students must take English. After 3 courses, namely English 1, English 2 and English 3, students are supposed to interact with foreigners in their fields, read basic English papers, and converse in English. However, at HUFI oral English is not tested in the examination at the end of each semester. So students tend to become passive and avoid practising speaking English in class and begin to be reluctant to spend time on speaking skill which is not in the examination. As a result, the majority of HUFI students have admitted to feeling anxious, tense, or stressed when having a conversation in English.

Teachers must employ language that enables students to understand the connection between grammatical elements and the situations in which they are used in order to avoid such poor performance. (Nunan, 1998) supports it when he says that teachers should steer clear of exercises that only allow pupils to use the language formally rather than giving them chances to explore it in context. According to Harmer, (2001), speaking instruction should be centered on the actual language use that students are capable of performing as a result of their language learning accomplishments. There might not be a single best method for teaching a language. Various approaches can improve language acquisition and raise students' expectations. Speaking skills can be developed through brainstorming, conversation, story-telling, roleplays, simulations, interviews, card games, drawing, language games, photo identification, and story-completion approaches. Language acquisition depends on the methods and tactics employed while teaching a foreign language. In the teaching of languages, it is crucial to put an emphasis on active learning.

This study is considered as important for English lecturers because they are provided some basic techniques helping improve their students' English-speaking skills.

2 Literature review

There are a lot of activities that get most students involved in speaking tasks. Those ways may be derived from many techniques, including storytelling, drama and dialogue, etc.

2.1 Storytelling

There is a quick, easy game called "story sharing" that assesses students' storytelling and listening skills. According to Cameron, (2001), students may be asked to share with a partner an amusing, frightening, odd, or unforgettable story by their lecturer. This may be included in a larger series of courses centered around autobiography or scary stories, for instance. Then, each student takes a turn retelling their partner's tale. Some learners will condense the story into two or three phrases; thus they are given time limits for doing this. The lecturer must emphasize the need of retelling the tale in an engaging manner that includes both setting the scene and imparting information.

Besides, the four communication skills are integrated into each session of the storytelling technique, and each activity includes nearly two of the four communication abilities. As a learner-centered method, storytelling takes into account the qualities of the students, including their age and conceptual level, their needs and interests, their language proficiency, and their prior language-learning experience (Murray & MaryAnn, 2010). When delivering a story, it's important to grab the audience's attention by introducing them to some prior vocabulary-building, pronunciation-practicing, body-language-using, and vocalization-training exercises. As the plot progresses, there are a few dramatic pauses along with voice changes and body motions to act out particular characters and special situations.

Particularly, teachers must use learning tactics in the storytelling process, such as warm-up activities, games, films, and images relevant to the story to engage learners and make them aware of the main goal of a tale, in order to motivate students to produce orally. As a result, speaking ability instruction receives more active engagement. The relevance of earlier activities is that they exposed students to vocabulary, context, expressions, and pronunciation used in oral production. Later, students were taught body language techniques, vocalization, and overstated pronunciation to increase students' level of focus when telling stories. Moreover, the development of listening, reading, and writing abilities is just as vital as the development of speaking skills.

2.2 Drama and dialogue

As the author has mentioned above, in the teaching of languages, it is crucial to put an emphasis on active learning. Creative drama is one of them. Drama in education uses a variety of strategies, including creative

drama. Improvisation processes enable it to be changeable and creative (San, 1990). With students playing active roles, talking more freely, and creating a more comfortable setting, creative drama has a huge impact on language teaching. Using methods like improvisation and role playing, creative theater in education acts out any subject. Individuals' actions are influenced by their upbringing and life experiences. It can be flexible and innovative thanks to improvisation methods (San, 1990). Language instruction benefits greatly from creative play because students take active roles, communicate more freely, and create a more relaxed environment.

Dramatic exercises in language learning help students improve their speaking, cooperation, motivation, and teamwork, according to (Rastelli, 2006). Students improve their intonation and diction. Activities involving creative drama are enjoyed by all students. drama activities involve physical activity and emotional involvement which can lead to improved retention of language structures and vocabulary, as examined by Liu (2002). Students find it simpler to talk in the target language in creative theater exercises because of the relaxed and enjoyable environment.

Oral practice through narrative improves speech and oral communication abilities related to enunciation and articulation, according to Harriot and Martin (2004). Students have their own inner worlds that they might construct through theater exercises while they learn new languages. They can converse fluently in a foreign language because they feel protected. They become more motivated as the theatrical technique is applied. Dramatic creativity has a significant impact on language learning. It allows one to express oneself, expand vocabulary, pay attention to stress, intonation, and speed while speaking, and it aids in the development of listening, speaking, and understanding skills.

3   Materials and Methods/ Methodology

3.1   Participants and instruments.

The sample group is an English 2 class consisting of 42 students, 26 males and 16 females, classified by high, medium, and low according to their abilities of English-speaking proficiency level. The author's research tools were 4 units from Life Student's Book Intermediate and an attitude questionnaire.

Storytelling

The main purpose of storytelling is to enhance student's awareness of living healthily and usefully. The author took some interesting topics from Life book in pre-Intermediate.

- Unit 1b – Secrets of long life. Students were divided into 7 groups. They were asked to tell a famous story about a person who has had a long life – above the age of 90. After each story, the other groups had to note some significant factors which helped people live healthily for such a long time as well as their own lessons.

- Unit 2c – An interesting sport game. Students still worked in groups. They imagined they were commentators and took turn to describe action in a sport dramatically and lively.

- Unit 4d – A true story. Students were required to retell a bad journey they had. They made a list of events and said if they had a happy ending. They told their stories to 2 different partners.

Drama and dialogue

The author used methods like improvisation and role playing, creative theater for students to acts out some subjects. The teacher gave the dialogue as an assignment. Students had a week to get ready for both roles in each dialogue given. In the following class, students worked in pairs, took turn to be one of roles in the situation. As the conversations are in progress, the teacher just moved around and did not step in. When the class had finished talking, the lecturer provided some feedback and invited some pairs to front to perform their dialogue. Everyone in the class was urged to take part in the activity.

Unit 1: Dialogue 1 - MEDICAL PROBLEMS (A patient vs a doctor)

You have some problems with your throat. You have tried some ways to relieve your pain, but they didn't work. Tell your doctor what you have done and ask him for help

Unit 2: Dialogue 2 – BEFORE A FOOTBALL MATCH. (a coach vs a football player)

You are a skillful attacker in HUFI football team. Your team are taking part in a football competition for universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Your team has beaten 5 teams and entered the final match. However, your coach decided to let you be a substitute. You are quite upset and decide to have a conversation with your coach.

Unit 3: Dialogue 3 – BATTLE OF THE TAXIS (A taxi driver vs a commuter)

You are a traditional taxi driver. You see a commuter using their mobile to book a private hire taxi. Invite him/her to take a ride with your taxi by providing as many persuasive reasons as possible.

3.2   Attitude Survey.

The researcher created a questionnaire for the study with a five-point Likert-type rating scale to find out what actual students thought about two classroom techniques: Telling Story and Drama – Dialogue. The questionnaire had two parts and scores between 1 and 5 were given to them: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The survey was conducted in class after Unit 4.

ATTITUDE SURVEY OF TELLING STORY AND DRAMA-DIALOGUE IMPLEMENTATION

Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), and Strongly agree (5)

Table 1: *Percentage for students' attitude toward telling story and drama-dialogue.*

No.	Questions	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	Instructions were clear and easy to carry them out.					
2.	The activities were appropriate to your ability.					
3.	You were interested in taking part in the activities.					
4.	You have learned a lot more vocabulary when preparing the performance.					
5.	You felt comfortable to talk in pairs when joining the activities.					
6.	You have learned a lot from your friends.					
7.	You had more opportunities to practise English speaking.					
8.	You had more fun in the English speaking classes with Telling Story and Drama – Dialogue.					
9.	Your listening skill has improved					
10.	Your communication skills have been better when you had to improvise to your partner's response.					

4   Results and Discussion

The attitude questionnaire almost captured all participants" concerned. One hundred percent of students consisting 26 males and 16 females join to show their feedback.

ATTITUDE QUESTIONAIRE OF TELLING STORY AND DRAMA-DIALOGUE IMPLEMENTATION

Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), and Strongly agree (5)

Table 2: *Percentage for students' attitude toward telling story and drama-dialogue.*

No.	Questions	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	Instructions were clear and easy to carry them out.			19 %	52,4%	28,6%
2.	The activities were appropriate to the your ability.	7,1%	16,7%	28,6%	47,6%	
3.	You were interested in taking part in the activities.	2,4%	4,8%	11,9%	54,8%	26,2%
4.	You have learned a lot more vocabulary when preparing the performance.		2,4%	19 %	76,2%	2,4%
5.	You felt comfortable to talk in pairs and groups when joining the activities.	7,1%	4,8%	19 %	54,8%	14,3%
6.	You have learned a lot from your friends.	11,9%	19 %	23,8%	40,5%	4,8%
7.	You had more opportunities to practise English speaking.		4,8%	28,6%	47,6%	19 %
8.	You had more fun in the English speaking classes with Telling Story and Drama – Dialogue.	2,4%	7,1%	11,9%	59,5%	19 %
9.	Your listening skill has improved		4,8%	21,4%	45,2%	28,6%
10.	Your communication skills have been better when you had to improvise to your partner's response.	4,8%	4,8%	16,7%	52,4%	21,4%

The table 2 shows the participants' attitude to two classroom techniques. It can easily be seen that most students agree on the benefits they obtain from storytelling and drama – dialogue.

More than 50% of students appreciate the instructions which are considered clear and easy to carry them out. Nearly a half agree that their ability can meet the requirements of the assignment. This is the first time they are assigned these kinds of activities. So more than two third students are excited to participate in storytelling and dialogues. Thanks to the implementation of storytelling and drama -dialogues, according to the participants, more than a half of them boost their enthusiasm and reduce concerns and they could converse more easily. It is also clear that more than 70% students have had chances to use a wide range of vocabulary and learned new ones from their friends when they work in groups. In addition, more than two third of students take advantages of these activities to develop their speaking, listening and communication skills.

This research's special findings can be understood in the phrase "applying and picking a story or a dialogue is a tough undertaking since it needs organization, effort, and preparation. However, it amuses learners in students-centered classes. The responses to items 3 and 10 demonstrate this. These two techniques can assist learners to maintain attention and entertain all of the learners in class.

5   Discussion and Suggestions

Unquestionably, Hufi students should practice more and give themselves more time to work on their spoken English. Speaking English out loud is crucial to acquiring the language. And the ultimate goal of studying English is to have a high degree of communicative skill. The key concern now is how to develop and enhance the learners' spoken English proficiency. The student can accomplish his ideal aims by employing these techniques of storytelling and drama –dialogue.

Obviously, by actively participating in what has to be finished, learning occurs. All students, including those who speak little or not at all, are encouraged to speak during creative drama -dialogue activities since they

have roles that require them to say in order to portray a person or object. As part of this job, vocabulary training is necessary. The impulse to talk might also rise with a significant improvement in vocabulary. Furthermore, findings of the current study indicates that the students' speaking attitudes greatly enhanced with the creative storytelling and drama - dialogue activities in comparison with their abilities at the start of the course. Another outcome of the exercises was a positive shift in the students' attitudes regarding the subject which matches with what Rastelli, (2006) stated, he indicated that dramatic exercises in language learning help students improve their speaking, cooperation, motivation, and teamwork.

Based to these findings, the author can conclude that learners' positive perspectives toward the course have significantly increased, and their unfavourable attitudes toward the English subject and studying English have changed in the expected way. In other words, it may be said that after engaging in creative improvision of drama - dialogue, students' views toward English speaking classes have improved.

Although the findings of this study imply that creative storytelling and drama –dialogue techniques can be employed to enhance English speaking abilities and these techniques can be used by instructors to help students speak English confidently and fluently, the fact that the 42 surveyors are from various majors can be considered one of the research's shortcomings. They are unable to stand for all students in their majors. Further study should confirm the exactitude to what extend students in different faculties appreciate the two techniques.

6   Conclusions

The results acquired by this study demonstrate that by using storytelling and drama -dialogue techniques in the classroom, language acquisition can be made more engaging, enjoyable, and upbeat. Because the learners will share their own experiences, ideas, and expressions during the learning process, as well as respond to and inquire about the story or the opinion that their partner is expressing, the two techniques can make the students more engaging in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Moreover, English teachers can motivate learners to learn English. As a result, the four language skills—particularly speaking ability—can be enhanced through storytelling and drama –dialogue approaches.

Furthermore, the goal of this study was to determine how storytelling may be modified for use in   English 2 classes in order to improve the teaching of speaking as a communicative language. The use of storytelling and drama –dialogue as a language-learning approach improves communicative instruction. In addition to making speaking more engaging, educational, challenging, and creative, the two techniques also help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn enables teachers to provide the necessary support so that students can reach their language acquisition potential to the fullest.

7   Publisher's Note

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