# TYPES OF PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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*ABSTRACT*

*This article is about types of practical activities for improving students communicative skills in teaching foreign languages. Using these activities students can greatly improve their communicative skills. By encouraging interaction through discussions, role-plays, simulations, and other engaging methods, teachers can create a rich environment to prepare students for real-world communication challenges.*

*Key words: Communicative skills, Teaching foreign languages, Discussions, Role play, Encouragement, Brainstorming, storytelling.*

Effective communication is essential in both educational and professional environments. To boost students' communicative abilities, teachers can incorporate various practical activities that encourage interaction, collaboration, and self-expression. Speaking is described as "the process of creating and conveying meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in diverse contexts" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). The main objective of teaching speaking should be to enhance students' communicative skills, allowing them to articulate their thoughts and navigate the social and cultural norms relevant to each situation.

In order to teach second language learners how to speak in the best way possible, some speaking activities are provided is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching.

As we know students learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. It is based on real-life situations that require communication. While using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in target language.

Here are some effective types of activities: Discussions, Role play, Simulations, Information gap, Brainstorming, storytelling, Interviews, Story completion, Find difference and Picture describing.

### *Discussions.*

Students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like "people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel". Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way.

Discussion activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision making. In this way students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others.

### *Role play.*

In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and…" (Harmer, 1984)

Role-play is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interest of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive (Ding, 2009). It is one of effective method to teach speaking (Hamzah, 2023)

Role play provides children with opportunities to practice using new words and phrases and to develop their vocabulary and grammar skills and children learn to use language to express their thoughts and ideas, learn to listen and respond to others.

### *Simulations.*

Simulations are similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment.

For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages.

➢ since they are entertaining, they motivate the students.

➢ as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students.

In role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

### *Information Gap.*

An information gap activity is an activity where learners are missing the information they need to complete a task and need to talk to each other to find it. In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. These activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. They are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language. Typical types of information gap activities you might find include; describe and draw, spot the difference, jigsaw readings and listening and split dictations.

### *Brainstorming.*

Students can produce ideas on a given topic in a limited time. Brainstorming activity is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas. That's why they will be open to sharing new ideas.

Brainstorming is a creative thinking technique for coming up with new ideas and solving problems. Teams use this ideation method to encourage new ways of thinking and collectively generate solutions. It encourages free thinking and allows for all ideas to be voiced without judgement, fostering an open and innovative environment. This process involves a group of people and it can be done individually as well.

Brainstorming usually takes place in a group setting where people get together to creatively solve problems and come up with ideas. It also useful for individuals who need to explore novel solutions to a problem. Sitting down by yourself and writing down solutions to potential problem is a great way to brainstorm individually.

### *Storytelling.*

*Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination.*

Storytelling is interactive and involves a two-way interaction between a storyteller and one or more listeners. The responses of the listeners influence the telling of the story. In fact, storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience.

In particular, storytelling does not create an imaginary barrier between the speaker and the listeners. This is part of what distinguishes storytelling from the forms of theatre that use an imaginary "fourth wall." Different cultures and situations create different expectations for the exact roles of storyteller and listener – who speaks how often and when, for example – and therefore create different forms of interaction. The interactive nature of storytelling partially accounts for its immediacy and impact. At its best, storytelling can directly and tightly connect the teller and audience. Storytelling uses language, whether it be a spoken language or a manual

language such as American Sign Language. The use of language distinguishes storytelling from most forms of dance and mime. Storytelling uses actions such as vocalization, physical movement and/or gesture. These actions are the parts of spoken or manual language other than words. Their use distinguishes storytelling from writing and text-based computer interactions. Not all nonverbal language behaviors need to be present in storytelling. Some storytellers use body movement extensively, for example, whereas others use little or none.

Storytelling presents a story and always involves the presentation of a story—a narrative. Many other art forms also present story, but storytelling presents it with the other four components. Every culture has its own definition of story. What is recognized as a story in one situation may not be accepted as one in another. Some situations call for spontaneity and playful digression, for example; others call for near-exact repetition of a revered text. Art forms such as poetry recitation and stand-up comedy sometimes present stories and sometimes don't. Since they generally involve the other four components, they can be regarded as forms of storytelling whenever they also present stories. Storytelling encourages the active imagination of the listeners.

In storytelling, the listener imagines the story. In most traditional theatre or in a typical dramatic film, on the other hand, the listener enjoys the illusion that the listener is actually witnessing the character or events described in the story.

The storytelling listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events—the reality—of the story in his or her mind, based on the performance by the teller and on the listener's own past experiences, beliefs, and understandings. The completed story happens in the mind of the listener, a unique and personalized individual. The listener becomes, therefore, a co-creator of the story as experienced. Storytelling can be combined with other art forms. The fruit born by the vital, contemporary storytelling movement includes the development of ways to combine storytelling with drama, music, dance, comedy, puppetry, and numerous other forms of expression. Yet, even as it blends imperceptibly into other

arts, the essence of storytelling remains recognizable as the intersection of the five components included in the above definition.

Storytelling happens in many situations, from kitchen-table conversation to religious ritual, from telling in the course of other work to performances for thousands of paying listeners. Some storytelling situations demand informality; others are highly formal. Some demand certain themes, attitudes, and artistic approaches. As noted above, the expectations about listener interaction and the nature of the story itself vary widely.

There are many cultures on earth, each with rich traditions, customs and opportunities for storytelling. All these forms of storytelling are valuable. All are equal citizens in the diverse world of storytelling.

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates.

Story telling fosters creative thinking and helps students to express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have.

### *Story Completion*.

This is a very interesting, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

Story completion, involves participants telling a story, or stories, in response to a pre-determined 'stem' or 'cue' they have been given. The story stem consists of an opening sentence, or several opening sentences, created by the researcher, and usually presents a hypothetical scenario involving one or several characters. The participant is then asked to continue or complete the story, either unconstrained or following some guidelines. Most qualitative story completion to date involves written

story-telling (but see here for a paper that combines written story-telling and visual methods).

Story completion offers a radically different way of collecting data from human participants for qualitative research, which has typically involved asking people to speak or write about what they think, feel, believe, know and do (as in an interview, focus group, qualitative survey or diary study). This is one of the reasons why we are so passionate about the use of story completion as a qualitative method, because it expands the possibilities for qualitative research, and the sorts of information we can get access to.

### *Picture Describing.*

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

Suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

➢ Teacher should provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

➢ Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.

➢ Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time.

➢ Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.

➢ Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.

➢ Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class; contact parents and other people who can help.

➤    Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

To sum up that, incorporating these activities into the classroom can greatly improve students' communicative skills. By encouraging interaction through discussions, role plays, simulations, and other engaging methods, educators can create a rich environment that prepares students for real-world communication challenges. These experiences not only enhance language proficiency but also build confidence and social awareness among learners.

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