

# Improving English Speaking Fluency in Rwandan TTC's: A case study of TTC Kirambo, Burera District, Rwanda.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the findings of an inquiry into the nature of communication skills weaknesses inherent among TTC students in Rwanda, using TTC Kirambo, as a case study. One hundred and twenty-one students and four lecturers constituted the sample. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collecting instruments. Results were presented and discussed qualitatively. The paper will present some effective ways to help learners either build the better ability in English speaking or lead themselves toward better communication skills in English language. Additionally, the paper will demonstrate some interesting speaking activities related to daily life communication as well as classroom activities. These will be helpful to both non-native learners and teachers of English as Foreign Language. Most learners of English as a Foreign Language find it difficult to deal with English Productive Skills—Speaking and Writing in effective ways. Because of the poor level ability in speaking and writing, students are failed to make an effective communication in English language. Some learners feel shy, even shameful, to speak in English as they are afraid of making mistakes. Instead, they usually use their own language while working in pair or group. It is noticed that many learners lack the confidence to speak in English, so we need to find ways of developing their communicative competence and motivate them through fun, stimulating, non-threatening activities. English Speaking is not too easy, not really difficult though.

**Keywords:** nonnative speakers, productive skills, stimulating, speaking activities

## INTRODUCTION

English is the language which connects people from different regions, cultures, religions, and nations. Brown and Lee (2015) claim that “English is increasingly being used as a tool for interaction among nonnative speakers”. Among the four language skills, speaking seems to play more important role in communication (Zaremba, 2006). Amirnejad (2015) views speaking “as one important element in developing each language skill and conveying culture knowledge”. Considering the significance of accuracy, more attention is drawn to fluency in achieving communicative purposes in conversations. Richards (2006) points out that fluency is the use of naturally occurring language when a speaker engages and maintains in meaningful communication. This communication would be comprehensible and ongoing in spite of limitations in one’s communicative competence. To Bahrani (2011), a fluent speaker knows what to say and how to say without frequent pauses to think. In addition, Harmer (2015) mentions that fluency refers to focusing on the content of speech to communicate as effectively as possible. Furthermore, Hughes (2013) defines fluency as using language quickly and confidently, with limited hesitations, unnatural pauses, etc.

## Research Questions

1. How do communication skill activities improve learners’ fluency and prepare them for real life communication?

## Effective ways used in teaching speaking

To provide students more opportunity to fluently use language skills taught so far, skill-practice lessons should be employed. These include pre-speaking tasks, main-speaking tasks, and post-speaking tasks. All the four skills are used to interact with each other so that students have chance to practice all skills, not only speaking. Receptive skills (listening and reading) are used to improve Productive skills (speaking and writing). (Iriantara,2013)

1. Pre-speaking tasks (Before): Before the speaking tasks, it is to make sure that students are ready first. It can start from listening tasks or reading tasks. Thus, students have ideas or feel focused on the topics from the listening or reading.
2. Main-speaking tasks (During): During the speaking tasks, students are encouraged to actively involve in the speaking activities. They will speak or do tasks related to what they hear or read in the first stage.
3. Post-speaking tasks (After): It is also called following-up tasks with aim to produce their language in another skill such as writing. Students will be asked to do other activities which are not speaking.

## Communicative Language Teaching

Teaching productive skill aims to enable students to create communicative language in effective way. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. (Nakatani,2010). This way it enables students to have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. Therefore, ESL/ EFL teachers should create a classroom environment which students are interested in and are given more chance to practice real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. The interaction among students is important to make them more active and to build cooperative learning environment for them. Students should be strongly encouraged to work in pair, small group, and large group. To create an effective learning environment in the classroom, we need to provide three essential conditions: the provision of exposure to the target language; the provision of opportunities for learners to use the target language for real communication; and the promotion of motivation for learners to engage in the learning process. (Orebiyi and Orebiyi, 2011).

## Principles of Communicative Approach

To be successful in teaching English for Communication, the teacher should follow the principles and trends of teaching and learning. Morrow (1988) expresses five principles of communicative approach which are:

1. Students being aware of the objectives of the lesson. These objectives should be performed for something such as reading for understanding a set of instructions.
2. The teacher must realize that the process of communication deals with strings of sentences, ideas and oral performances. The management of language cannot be produced in individual elements but in the context of a whole.
3. There are three important elements in communication that is information gap, choice of performances and feedback.
4. The student must be provided with a lot of practice in doing something or learning by doing.
5. The teacher should not always criticize unimportant mistakes during the communicative activities. Rausch (2015) states that teachers should establish English as the main language of the classroom by using interesting topics and stimulating activities which take the learners mind off the language a little and encourage learners in their efforts to communicate their ideas instead of trying to control what they say and interrupting them to correct their language mistakes. One would conclude by saying that in each learning unit, students have to be told the learning objectives and should have sufficient

opportunities to practice using language for communication. Interaction between the speaker and the listener are very important components of communication.

### **Communicative Speaking**

Tavakoli et al (2016) states that speakers have to interact while they are talking, sharing information and following social rules. He further suggests that speakers should use or choose content that is appropriate to their listeners. With communication being the goal of second language acquisition, emphasis is on the development of correct speech habits. Speaking involves more than pronunciation and intonation as Krashen et al (1983) states that competent speaking is integrated with listening. Speaking fluently in a second language occurs after speakers have been given effective and comprehensive input. One would summarize by saying that competent speaking comes from the speaker's ability to communicate by sharing information fluently and accurately including appropriate selection and use of vocabulary and structures. However, to communicate perfectly, teachers and learners must consider other components of speaking as well.

### **Components of speaking**

(Orebiyi and Orebiyi, 2011) state that the components of an oral English activity should emphasize the nature of communication. The three most important components are fluency, appropriateness and accuracy. Fluency conveys the meaning smoothly in each situation. While appropriateness refers to degree of politeness, suitable timing in turn taking, suitability of language used in requesting clarification and expressing disagreement. On the other hand accuracy implies correct use of structure and grammar as well as vocabulary and pronunciation.

### **Suggestions For Teachers in Teaching Speaking**

There are some suggestions (from Channey, 1998) for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

- 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. Step back and observe students.
- Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response. ü Ask eliciting questions such as "What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to prompt students to speak more.
- Provide written feedback like "Your presentation was really great. It was a good job. I really appreciated your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice..."
- 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.
- Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.
- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.
- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language

### **Ways to Improve Speaking Skill**

Are there any ways to help students learn better in speaking skill? Sure, there are. It needs the involvement

of teachers and learners/ students to actively build the communicative environment in and out of classroom. (Zarei, 2018). Students/ learners should be aware that speaking skill needs the knowledge of:

- Vocabulary (words, collocation and their meaning) • Parts of speech (noun, verb, adverb ...)
- Pronunciation (tone of voice, stress, intonation) • Expression and sentence structures
- Tense (past, present and future)
- Other skills- listening, reading and writing
- Non-verbal communication (eye-contact, gesture, facial expression and body language). Be careful, Body language may have different meaning in different culture. Awareness of other cultures...

Additionally, other requirements are self-motivation, self-confidence and own learning styles and strategies. Although we do not live in an English-speaking country, to improve our English, we can find the available resources where can be reached easily. (Wijaya and Mbato,2020).

- Talk with friends in English about everyday life, studying or working • Find partners for conversation (in the class and out of the class)
- Watch TV or film and read books or news in English, then start discussion • Set the scene which you like, then act it out in own language
- Listen to radio (online), then try to summarize in your own words and speak out • Offer help to other with English work, then you can talk in English
- Take English class and try to use English as much as possible
- Use yahoo messenger or skype to chat with voice with friends or other people with good command of English.
- Search for online conversation. You will talk with English native speakers. • Practice where and when you can.
- Be confident to talk with other. Don't be shy or afraid of making mistakes

Before you start a conversation or speaking, please be sure that you are ready for it by preparing some useful phrases and expression, words related to the topic and sentence structures, planning what to say, and preparing yourself with good feeling and smiling face. Another key point is to remember that good speaker is good listener and reader. The more you listen and read, the better you can speak.

## ENGLISH SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN ESL CLASSROOM

### Drills

Drilling is a controlled practice activity. It is useful in the early stages of a lesson when presenting or practicing new language, when preparing for an impending exam or to hammer out bad habits. By repeating set patterns, input-response becomes automatic. The drills can be picture drill, choral drills, interactive drills, substitution drills, transformation drills and drilling using flash cards. Usually, they are most appropriate for beginner or elementary level of students.

### Songs and Chants

Songs and chants are speaking activities for young students. They are used to give the children a chance to listen to songs and reproduce the language they hear. They are working on the sounds, rhythm and intonation. The children can learn to pronounce words and to speak out in controlled ways. The language in

the songs should be simple enough and natural.

### **Information gaps**

Information gap activities are the controlled practice that serves many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Students are asked to work in pairs. Student A have information which student B do not. Then they ask some questions to get information to complete the gaps. Keep them talking and teacher should monitor carefully because they may copy from each other without talking.

### **Stimulations**

In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. A student can act as a teacher, dancer, singer, news reader and so on. They also need to bring what they will use to make the activity more interesting. The activity is entertaining, motivates the students, and increase self-confidence. Students may find it more interesting than roleplay activities.

### **Describing things (pictures/ real situation)**

In this activity, students are given pictures which teacher prepare what to get students practice. Students can work pair or group with different pictures. They are supposed to take turn to describe about the picture with language they have already learned. Finally, one student representing the pair or group describes it to the class.

### **Brainstorming**

At first, the topic is set by the teacher. Then teacher asks students express their ideas on the topic. There should be judgment on what they say, but encourage them to say it again or help them with leading questions so that they will openly talk.

### **Jigsaw activities**

These activities are like a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces of information fit together to make one picture in the end. Before starting, the students should be given reasons to communicate. Teacher can prepare two similar copies of a text whose information is missing. Then students have to ask their partners to fill in the blank. In another way, teacher also can ask them to find if there is similarity or difference between their worksheet by asking each other.

### **Role-plays**

The teacher sets the situation for students and asks them to pretend to be actors or actresses or someone who acts in the story. Students are not given any script for speaking, but they use their own language. If the scene is about hospital, actors are doctor, nurse, patient, and others. They can set their own topic about which they can talk.

### **Story telling/ story retelling (Narration)**

After listening to a story, the students are asked to summarize the story in their own word. Otherwise, they can also create their own stories. Then ask them to tell their group or classmates. Story telling also helps students with creative thinking skill. (Richards,2006)

| Sequencing words for story telling   | A. Giving your opinions  | B. Agreeing in English   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>First of all, ...</p> <p>Secondly, ...</p> <p>Previously (before that) .... Then...</p> <p>Later (on)...</p> <p>But before all that ...</p> <p>Finally...</p>   | <p>“I think...”</p> <p>“I feel that...”</p> <p>“In my opinion...”</p> <p>“As I see it...”</p> <p>“In my view...”</p> <p>“I tend to think that...”</p> <p>“I’m sure that...”</p> <p>“I strongly believe that...” “What do you think?” “What’s your view?”</p> | <p>“I think you’re right.”</p> <p>“I agree with you.”</p> <p>“You’re absolutely right.”</p> <p>“I totally agree.”</p> <p>“I agree with you up to a point, but...”</p> <p>“That’s quite true, but...”</p> <p>“I agree with you in principle, but...”</p>  |
| Disagreeing  | C. Giving advice in English  | D. Making requests   |
| <p>I’m not sure I agree with you.” “(I’m afraid) I don’t agree.” “(I’m afraid) I can’t agree with you.”</p> <p>“I don’t agree at all.”</p> <p>“I totally disagree.”</p> <p>“I couldn’t agree with you less.”</p> | <p>“If I were you, I would...”</p> <p>“Have you thought about...”</p> <p>“Why don’t you...”</p> <p>“In your position, I would...”</p> <p>“You should perhaps...”</p> <p>“You could always...”</p>  | <p>Could you pass me some the pen?</p> <p>Can you help me please?</p> <p>Will you explain this exercise to me?</p> <p>Would you open the window please?</p> <p>I’d like you to speak slowly.</p> <p>I want you to send to me back as soon as you can.</p> <p>Would you mind possibly turning down the radio?</p> |

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Improving speaking skills among students involves a combination of theoretical understanding and practical application. Here’s a conceptual framework that can be applied to enhance speaking skills:

**Communication model** (Shannon and Weaver, 1949):



- **Sender message -channel receiver:** Introduce students to the basic communication model. Emphasize the importance of encoding and decoding messages, considering the audience, and selecting appropriate channels.

- **Four skills approach:**

**Listening, speaking, reading and writing:** Highlight the interconnected nature of language skills. Develop speaking skills in tandem with listening and reading comprehension. Encourage students to practice speaking through discussions, presentations, and debates.

- **Interactive learning:**

**Task -based learning:** Engage students in real-life communicative tasks. This could include role-plays, problem-solving scenarios, and collaborative projects. This helps them apply language skills in practical situations. (Willis and Willis,2007).

- **Language input and output:**

**Input hypothesis and output hypothesis:** Encourage students to receive language input through exposure to diverse content and then produce output through speaking. Provide a rich linguistic environment that includes reading materials, audiovisual resources, and interactive discussions.

- **Fluency vs accuracy**

Focus on fluency: Initially, prioritize fluency over accuracy. Encourage students to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. As they gain confidence, shift towards refining accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. (Ellis,2003).

- **Cultural awareness**

Intercultural communicative competence: Incorporate cultural elements into speaking activities to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in diverse contexts. This includes understanding cultural nuances, body language, and appropriate expressions. (Byram,1997)

- **Feedback and reflection**

Peer and self-assessment: Establish a feedback loop where students can evaluate each other's speaking performances constructively. Additionally, encourage self-reflection, helping students identify areas for improvement and set personal speaking goals. (Brookhart,2008).

- **Technology Integration**

Digital tools for speaking practice: Integrate technology tools such as language learning apps, video conferencing, and online platforms that facilitate speaking practice. Virtual communication experiences can enhance students' confidence and versatility in spoken language. (Warschauer,2006)

- **Motivation and engagement**

Intrinsic motivation: Foster a positive and supportive learning environment. Recognize and celebrate students' progress. Use motivational strategies to keep them engaged, such as incorporating interesting topics, real-world applications, and relevant cultural references. (Dörnyei,2001).

- Progressive challenges

Scaffolded tasks: Design speaking activities that gradually increase in complexity. Begin with simple conversations and progress to more challenging tasks like debates or presentations. This scaffolding approach helps students build confidence incrementally. (Vygotsky,1978).

The effectiveness of this conceptual framework depends on adapting it to the specific needs and proficiency levels of the students. Regular assessment and feedback are crucial for monitoring progress and refining teaching strategies.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

English learners find it difficult to learn English and they face a lot of difficulties, odds and obstacles, thus learning and acquiring English language require a lot of strategies. Thus, this study will shed light on practical ways to foster English language communication activities, in order to make this study as a bridge for students leading and guiding them toward easiness to learning it.

### **The Significance of the Study**

This study demonstrates its significance in being a bridge for the students that find English difficult to learn. They try to acquire English language by being provided with practical ways in order to foster the learning of English language. So, it is significant for teacher and students of English to have various ways to learn English and promote it to higher level of practicality and easiness of learning English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A case study design was used in this research. Since a case study is a technique for learning about complicated phenomena in a context, it is a good choice for this research because it allowed for an exhaustive exploration of a single unit, a detailed evaluation of a single location, a single topic, or a particular occurrence Meltem (2007). Because colleges vary and have diverse communication skills curricula, the researcher narrowed her emphasis to one particular institution

### **Population**

500 students at TTC Kirambo and 33 lecturers constituted the population for the study.

### **Sample**

Twenty (20) students from first and second-year college students were randomly selected from all subject areas on the basis of the students' doing English. All lecturers who taught these students were selected from ELCPE (Early Childhood Primary Education), LE (Language Education), SSE (Social Science Education) and Science Mathematics Education (SME).

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

## **FINDINGS**

The research aimed at studying the following objective:

1. *How do communication skills activities improve learners' fluency and prepare them for real life communication?*



According to students' opinions, it was found that students are satisfied with communicative activities. Communicative activities help them improve pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and also improve their English-speaking ability. These assigned activities also have benefits for them like having fun in the given activities. Learners felt that their speaking abilities have improved because they can speak English more fluently and correctly. It could be concluded that communicative activities provide students with better speaking and they are really satisfied with the given activities.

## DISCUSSION

There are research areas in this study that need to be discussed concerning students' development in their speaking abilities, students learning behavior and students' opinions towards communicative activities. Students practiced speaking in varied situations such as ordering food, shopping, asking and answering information in order for students to see that English is important for them and they could use it in real life situations. Students are expected to understand that they can communicate in English and stop being shy. This made students to become more confident about what to say and how to use language in a situation. Having students practice in real life situations is supported by the findings of Richards (2006). These researchers point out that in teaching English for communication, teachers should emphasize not only language competence but also the ability to communicate in real situations. Iriantara (2013) states that the success of communicative approach depends on how well teachers can make their students use language in meaningful contexts and in authentic real-life situations. Similarly, Klanit (2010) state that developing activities to help students really communicate in English is the main goal of English course but teachers must help their students to communicate effectively in English outside the classroom for studying, working and leisure activities. The research re-confirms that activities designed to imitate real life situations can improve students speaking ability.

The researcher observed that students who were shy are becoming more confident because of the conducive classroom environment where learners are at ease when learning. This atmosphere is better for teaching and learning. The classroom should differ from the traditional classroom in which teachers totally control the learning situations while students are quiet. Students should be vocal and more active to learn. Students can develop a good attitude towards English. The reason why students feel bad about English is because the teaching is boring and not meaningful to them. Teachers should therefore the use of communicative activities in the classroom to build up a good attitude through English. Students agreed that communicative activities provided them with many benefits.

## CONCLUSION

In summary students could improve their English-speaking abilities significantly because communicative provided them with speaking skills.

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