

ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS AND SPEAKERS TOWARD PRE-SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

One of the common goals of foreign language teaching is that students should speak the language (they are learning) clearly and accurately enough. The teaching of speaking, just like the teaching of other language skills, comprises three stages. These are pre-speaking, during-speaking and post-speaking activities. This study examines the attitudes of teachers and students towards the pre-speaking activities. To do this, an attitudinal questionnaire was administered to both teachers and students at the prep-school at METU. As a result of this study, teachers and students, sharing the same opinion, think that the most important pre-speaking activities are introducing the topic and arousing interest (giving the title and leading a discussion, teacher's questioning the students to access students'

knowledge about and familiarity with the topic, focusing on the new vocabulary that will be necessary to understand a speech and providing students with extra material (a reading text or a listening task) about the topic. On the other hand, it is also observed that teachers and students are of different opinions for some activities. For instance, students report that focusing on the new vocabulary that will be necessary to understand a speech is the least important.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, speaking skill, pre-speaking activities, attitude

ÖĞRETMEN VE ÖĞRENCİLERİN KONUŞMA ÖNCESİ ETKİNLİKLERE KARŞI TUTUMU

Özet

Yabancı dil öğretiminin genel amaçlarından biri, öğrencilerin öğrendikleri dili açık ve anlaşılır bir şekilde konuşmalarınıdır. Konuşma öğretimi, diğer becerilerin öğretiminde olduğu gibi üç aşamadan oluşmaktadır. Bunlar konuşma öncesi, konuşma dönemi ve konuşma sonrası etkinlikleridir. Bu çalışma yabancı dil öğreniminde konuşma becerilerinin geliştirilmesinde konuşma öncesi etkinliklere karşı olan öğretmen ve öğrenci tutumlarını irdelemektedir. Bu amaçla ODTÜ hazırlık okulu öğrencilerine ve öğretmenlerine konu ile ilgili bir tutum ölçeği verilmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda öğretmen ve öğrenciler; konuşma öncesinde öğrencilere konunun tanıtılması ve konuyla ilgi çekilmesi, öğrencinin konuya karşı yakınlığını sağlamak için soru-cevap etkinliğine yer verilmesi, konunun daha iyi anlaşılması için yeni sözcükler üzerinde titizlikle durulması ve konuyla ilgili ek malzemelerin de kullanılmasının önemli olduğu konusunda aynı görüşü paylaşmışlardır. Diğer taraftan, öğretmen ve öğrencilerin bazı konularda farklı düşündükleri de ortaya çıkmıştır. Örneğin, öğrenciler konuşma öncesi sözcük çalışmalarına odaklanmanın çok önemli olmadığını ifade etmişlerdir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yabancı dil öğretimi, konuşma becerisi, konuşma öncesi etkinlikler, tutum.

1. Introduction

Oral communication is a vital component of the English language curriculum and provides the base for growth in reading, writing, and listening abilities. As

learning and applying the skills of oral English are so closely related to each other, the classroom should be a place where the use of spoken language is sensitively supported and where active listening is developed and valued. Talk enables students to make connections between what they know and what they are learning, and listening helps them to acquire knowledge and explore ideas.

Talk can be immediate and spontaneous, or planned and deliberate (Byrne 1976). Confidence and enthusiasm are critical factors in oral language development, and because much oral language is immediate, it involves taking risks. Student learning is most effective when there is a relationship of mutual trust, when students' oral language is accepted and a variety of communication styles are accommodated in the classroom, and when students have frequent opportunities to talk in formal and informal situations (Byrne 1976 & Brown 1992).

Talk serves two important functions in the classroom: the social and the intellectual. Students' oral language skills develop in conjunction with their expanding social awareness and their ability to reflect upon and reconstruct experience. As a social function, talk helps students adjust to ideas and ideas are reformulated to facilitate student understanding. Within this function, students share information and ideas with listeners by speaking informally and sharing through conversation. Talk is also used to form relationships through language.

The need to speak

Growth in oral communication revolves around increasing fluency and effectiveness. Students need to be able to speak clearly, using appropriate volume. They need to be able to give directions, follow directions, negotiate, ask questions, suggest answers, and organize and present information (Sarıçoban 2001). They need to adapt their speaking for different audiences, purposes, formats, and topics. Learners use language for a variety of functions (Byrne 1976). Some of them are:

Interact socially

- To use language and ideas appropriate to the situation
- To respond to listeners' verbal and nonverbal cues, restate ideas, and ask questions to clarify understandings
- To use language to create images and to produce an emotional response
- To acknowledge and be sensitive to others' viewpoints.

Develop Self-awareness

- To examine and explore personal points of view
- To identify flaws in their own and others' reasoning
- To determine what it is they need to know
- To find effective ways of supporting their own opinions.
- To read the setbacks in fluency.

Inform

- To use key language patterns, proper sequencing, nonverbal cues, and appropriate intonation
- To provide essential information
- To determine the type of presentation necessary in order for the listeners to benefit and learn
- To reflect to determine if their language is appropriate to their listeners.

Finally, it should be mentioned that speakers should talk to express ideas, emotions, and opinions, and to share information for communication. Therefore, students must ask themselves 'What is my purpose for speaking?' Then, speakers must ask themselves 'Who is my intended audience?'

2. The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to look into pre-speaking activities at Department of Foreign Languages at METU and to discover both teachers' and students' attitudes toward them. The results of the both group of subjects will be compared to each

other, to see whether there are similarities or differences between their attitudes toward pre-speaking activities or not. To do this, the subjects were asked to rate pre-speaking activities in the questionnaire in order of importance. The questions were prepared after making a 'review of literature' about pre-speaking activities.

1. The teacher introduces the topic (talks a bit about it) and arouses interest.

The teacher utters the title of the presentation (or that day's topic) and leads a small discussion about it.

2. The teacher provides some language material to use in pre-speaking. (a grammar topic that may be useful while talking about a specific topic)

3. The teacher questions the students to assess student's knowledge and familiarity with the topic.

4. The teacher asks a question or gives another reason before talking about a topic.

(There is a sample of this kind of a pre-speaking activity included in the Appendix.)

5. The teacher focuses on some speaking strategies (like starting a discussion or ending a speech) before the discussion.

6. The teacher brings some visual materials to the class and students comment on them.

7. The teacher focuses on the new vocabulary that will be necessary to understand a speech.

8. The teacher sets a scene that will be helpful for students to imagine the setting related with the topic.

9. The teacher tells a joke, an anecdote or a real life event to introduce the topic.

10. Students watch a related movie, a cartoon or a documentary before talking about the topic.

The above-mentioned items (1-10) also indicate that the teacher should know what s/he is doing with the teaching materials and he has control over them.

3. Methodology

The scope of this study was on pre-speaking activities and the teachers' and students' attitudes toward them. In order to be able to make a comparison between the attitudes of the teachers and students, the same questionnaire was distributed to both the teachers and students and they were asked to rank the items in the order of importance.

The questionnaire includes 10 items and the subjects ranked them in the order of importance by using the 'Likert Scale' as indicated below:

Always important: 5 Sometimes important: 3 Never important: 1

Usually important: 4 Rarely important: 2

Questionnaire items were written in a simple language, not demanding too much knowledge in ELT field on the part of the students for clarity since the same questionnaire would be given to the students, too.

There were two groups of subjects in this study. One group consisted of ten teachers who work at the Department of Modern Languages at METU. Second group consisted of fifteen students who are from the Department of Civil Engineering at METU. They have a 2nd year compulsory speaking course called Oral Communication.

4. Analysis of data

Item Analysis for the Questionnaire Given to the Teachers and Students at Department of Modern Languages (METU)

In this part the data collected from teachers and students about the attitudes of the teachers toward pre-speaking activities will be presented and analyzed.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	8	80	9	60
Usually Important	1	10	5	33.3
Sometimes Important	1	10	0	0
Rarely Important	0	0	1	6.66
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 1. The teacher introduces the topic and arouses interest (giving the title and leading a discussion)

According to the results, the first item gets the highest percentage among the language teachers and students. 90% of the teachers and 93.3% of the students think that introducing the topic and leading a small discussion about it is always important.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	4	40	4	26.6
Usually Important	2	20	5	33.3
Sometimes Important	3	30	4	26.6
Rarely Important	1	10	2	13.3
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 2. The teacher provides some language material to use in pre-speaking (a grammar topic that may be useful while talking about a specific topic)

The results obtained from the study about the second item in the questionnaire indicate that there is no difference between students' and teachers' attitudes about providing language material to use while speaking. They both believe that providing material (especially for grammar) to use in speaking activities (teachers 60% and students 60%).

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	3	30	4	26.6
Usually Important	7	70	9	60
Sometimes Important	0	0	2	13.3
Rarely Important	0	0	0	0
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 3. The teacher questions the students to access students' knowledge about and familiarity with the topic.

An analysis of Table 3 shows that it is really important that teachers should questions the students in order to access students' knowledge about and familiarity with the topic (teachers 100% and students 87%).

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	6	60	5	33.3
Usually Important	2	20	5	33.3
Sometimes Important	2	20	4	26.6
Rarely Important	0	0	1	6.6
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 4. The teacher provides students with extra material (a reading text or a listening task) about the topic.

The result indicates that there is a slight difference between the teachers and the students. According to the results this item gets the third place in order of importance. 80% of the teachers think that providing the students with extra material is important, whereas 66.6 percent of the students view this as important.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	2	20	6	40
Usually Important	3	30	4	26.6
Sometimes Important	5	50	3	20
Rarely Important	0	0	2	13.3
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 5. The teacher focuses on some speaking strategies (like starting a discussion) before the discussion.

The finding about Item 5 is really interesting in that half of the teachers believe that the teacher should focus on some speaking strategies before the discussion, whereas the other half seems neutral. As for the students, the result is not surprising enough because they believe the importance of speaking strategies (like starting or ending a discussion) before the discussion starts. They need to develop speaking strategies before getting to speak, and must also be noted that the student-centered teaching strategies act this way positively for the further benefit of the students. In that case teachers should not interrupt with the ongoing process of communication in class and use delayed correction techniques.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	4	40	4	26.6
Usually Important	4	40	5	33.3
Sometimes Important	2	20	4	26.6
Rarely Important	0	0	2	13.3
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 6. The teacher brings some visual materials to the class and the students comment on them.

As for the importance of visual materials for pre-speaking activities, 80% of the teachers are aware of the issue. Surprisingly enough only 9 students out of 15 view this fact as important. However, there are 26.6% of students still neutral about the issue. Therefore, the need to raise students' awareness about the effectiveness of the use of visuals during pre-speaking activities should be raised.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	7	70	2	13.3
Usually Important	1	10	7	46.6
Sometimes Important	2	20	6	40
Rarely Important	0	0	0	0
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 7. The teacher focuses on the new vocabulary that will be necessary to understand a speech.

The responses to this item reveal that 80% of the teachers think that focusing on the new vocabulary to understand a speech is one of the most important pre-speaking activities among others, while 60% of the students think that it is important. The rest of the students (40%) are neutral about the issue. The findings indicate that both the teachers and the students believe that the new vocabulary should be focused in the pre-speaking activity to understand a speech.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	4	40	3	20
Usually Important	4	40	7	46.6
Sometimes Important	2	20	3	20
Rarely Important	0	0	2	13.3
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 8. The teacher sets a scene that will be helpful for students to imagine the setting related with the topic.

As a result of the analysis of Table 8, it can be claimed that 80% of the teachers and 67% of the students believe the importance of setting a scene that will be helpful for students during pre-speaking activities.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	3	30	7	46.6
Usually Important	4	40	6	40
Sometimes Important	3	30	2	13.3
Rarely Important	0	0	0	0
Never Important	0	0	0	0

Table 9. The teacher tells a joke, an anecdote or a real-life event to introduce the topic.

Table 9 shows that it is really important both for teachers (70%) and students (87%) that the teacher tell a joke, an anecdote or a real-life event to introduce the topic. This will help motivate the learners about the topic.

	Teachers		Students	
	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %	Frequency (n=15)	Percentage %
Always Important	2	20	3	20
Usually Important	1	10	2	13.3
Sometimes Important	6	60	7	46.6
Rarely Important	1	10	2	13.3
Never Important	0	0	1	6.6

Table 10. The students watch a related movie, a cartoon or a documentary before talking about the topic.

A surprising result was obtained by the analysis of the results in terms of both teachers' (30%) and students' (33.3%) beliefs on the importance of watching a related movie, a cartoon or a documentary before talking about the topic. It can be said that half of the students are neutral and almost 20% of them do not seem to need such an activity to prepare themselves to discuss about the topic in the further stages of speaking.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The primary aim of pre-speaking activities is to motivate students, to give them a reason for both speaking and listening to someone who is speaking. The purpose of this study was to investigate the students' and teachers' attitudes toward these activities.

As a result of this study, it was seen that the majority of the teachers (90%) and students (93.3%) think that **the most important pre-speaking activities** are:

- a. introducing the topic and arousing interest (giving the title and leading a discussion),*
- b. teacher's questioning the students to access students' knowledge about and familiarity with the topic,*
- c. focusing on the new vocabulary that will be necessary to understand a speech,*
- d. providing students with extra material (a reading text or a listening task) about the topic.*

Another important result of this study is that 93.3% of the students think that **the most important pre-speaking activities** are:

- a. introducing the topic and arousing interest (giving the title and leading a discussion),*
- b. telling a joke, an anecdote or a real life event to introduce the topic,*
- c. focusing on some speaking strategies (like starting a discussion) before the discussion,*

As for **the least important** activities according to teachers, they are:

- a. focusing on some speaking strategies (like starting a discussion) before the discussion.*
- b. watching a related movie, a cartoon or a documentary before talking about the topic.*

The least important activities according to students are:

- a. setting a scene that will be helpful for students to imagine the setting related with the topic.*
- b. watching a related movie, a cartoon or a documentary before talking about the topic.*

It is really surprising that the items ‘a’ and ‘b’ given above come up as ‘least of importance’ in the evaluation of the students, which, in fact, from the teachers’ viewpoint they are of prime importance.

The results of the analyses show that the attitudes of students toward these activities aren’t very different from that of teachers. However, we cannot say that these results are representative of all EFL learners and teachers. It is hard to make generalizations from these findings since the number of subjects is limited for making a generalization.

As to the least important activities, which are actually gravely important, they do not seem to carry much importance in this research. In fact, ‘setting’ and ‘watching a related movie’ are cornerstones in grasping the real intention mentioned in the message. As a matter of fact, it is these activities that lead to the internalization of the topic of the passage.

Relying on the findings of this research the followings can be recommended for the foreign language teachers to consider using in the pre-speaking activities:

Teachers should;

1. motivate (warm up),
2. help students to become familiar with the topic,
3. try to introduce the topic orally and arouse interest. To do so, teachers should utter the title of the presentation (or that day’s topic) and lead a small discussion about it,
4. focus on the new vocabulary by brainstorming the related words, expressions and structures (the teacher may use pictures, blackboard drawings and mime),
5. tell an anecdote or a real-life event to help students to guess the topic,
6. provide some language materials as stated in Item 3 above,
7. set the scene by introducing the characters and describing the setting,

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