

## DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN ESL OR EFL SETTINGS

**PARUPALLI SRINIVAS RAO**

Lecturer in English

English Language Centre, King Faisal University

Al-Hasa, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



PARUPALLI SRINIVAS  
RAO

### ABSTRACT

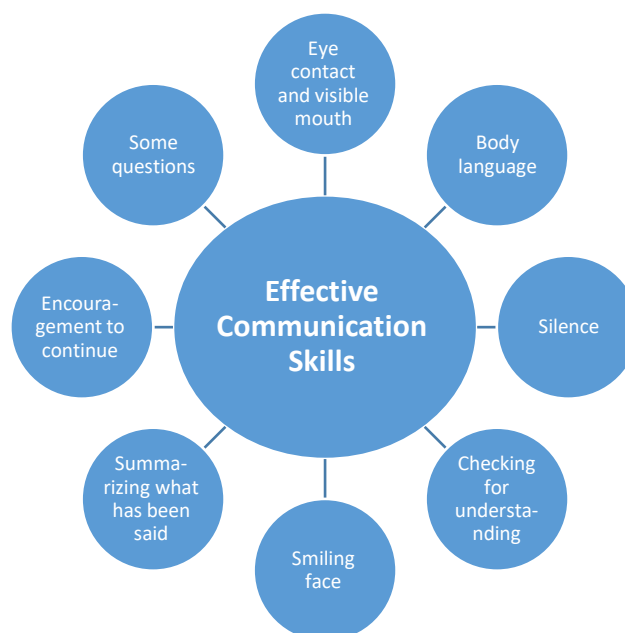
In this modern, communicative and technological era, English plays a prominent role in the development of global education and business. In recent years, one of the major problems related to English language learning (ELL) is to develop learners to use the language effectively and proficiently. To overcome the hindrances in ELL, teachers have to make the classroom instruction strong and dynamic. Classroom interaction must be encouraged because it is a useful strategy to enhance learners' communicative competence since it plays a significant role in learning English as a foreign language or second language by giving ample opportunities to learners to be able to communicate with others without any hesitation or phobia. Undoubtedly, the learners can acquire the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary that is useful in improving speaking skills when they can interact with others in language learning activities in a dynamic way in English classrooms. Eventually, it leads them to improve their communication skills. It is a well-known fact that communication skills are highly useful in getting jobs and developing the career of learners.

This paper brings to light the importance of communication skills, especially speaking skills of English, in all spheres of life. Moreover, the benefits or advantages of speaking skills in grabbing the opportunities in global market are discussed comprehensively. It also focuses on developing speaking skills among the learners in EFL/ESL classroom environment. This paper emphasizes the role of a teacher in enhancing learners' speaking skills by applying various methods, techniques and approaches in English language classrooms since communication skills play a vital role in getting employment opportunities in any sector. Finally, some suggestions and recommendations are given to improve the learners' speaking skills to prepare them for any challenges they face in their career.

**Key words:** career, classroom interaction, communication skills, EFL/ESL, ELL, employment opportunities, learners, speaking skills, teachers.

### Introduction

In the process of language learning, the main aim of the learner is to acquire the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among these, listening and reading are receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are productive skills. These skills must be focused in the classroom by teachers because the soul of language learning lies in language skills. The main objective of all these four language skills is to develop the learners' learning abilities in producing oral discourses.



For effective communication in English, first of all, learners need to acquire the knowledge of both grammar and vocabulary which are the two basic and important components of a language. Once the learners learn some basic structures of English and some vocabulary, they can practise speaking skills under the guidance of their teachers. In this regard, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain(2000) point out,“In some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire as it requires command of speech production sub-skills like vocabulary retrieval, choice of grammatical patterns, and sociocultural competence”. As there is a huge demand for speaking skills in the present job market, learners are now struggling to obtain these skills. Moreover, all the organizations are recruiting the people who have excellent communication skills, as they believe that these skills may promote their business. These skills are required in almost all the fields like software, business, sales, teaching, law, administration, reception, management, marketing, tourism and so on. Due to the demand of these speaking skills in various fields, it is high time for the learners to get a mastery over these skills. At this juncture, it is appropriate to quote the comment of Khamkhien (2010) who says,“Speaking skill is the most important in a second language. Mostly people, who learn English Language, have in their minds that they like to master the goal of developing the proficiency in speaking skill though it is a difficult task”.

There is a high demand for English language in global market because of the global status of English language that is widely used in all fields by most of the countries around the world. English language learning is promoted everywhere as EFL and ESL. In both settings, language skills are given more importance in the process of teaching and learning. In order to train the learners in language skills, teachers of English language use different techniques and strategies with the help of technology in classrooms as well as language labs. As mentioned earlier, there are four language skills in English – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening skill is used very often among all the other skills. Underwood (1989) says, “Listening is an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. It involves understanding the speaker’s accent and pronunciation, his/her grammar and vocabulary and grasping the meaning. For successful communication, listening skill is essential, so it should be taught to students”. It is undeniable that learners use listening more often than any other language skill. It means learning of a language mainly depends on listening as most of the language learners spend much time on listening to a foreign language than producing it themselves. Listening helps the learners in language acquisition and enables them to interact with others in spoken communication. Therefore, learners are able to participate in classroom activities effectively with good listening skills. Besides this, learners can learn how to speak, read and write by listening to others attentively. According to Nation and Newton, “listening is the way of learning a language”. Listening is an essential for oral communication and it influences the development of reading and writing. Thus, it plays a key role in academic success since learners understand and learn the language through listening.

Speaking is a productive skill which learners should develop to communicate fluently. Iqbal (2012) says, "Speaking, therefore, as a skill is defined as the oral mode or the productive skill which is more complicated and which involves more than just pronouncing words". In the acquisition of a foreign language or a second language, speaking plays a dominant role. Usually teachers focus on speaking skill to make their students communicate well. Speaking builds people's link, personality and character. Speaking skills are needed for expressing one's ideas and opinions as well as impressing the others. Good speakers can win lakhs of hearts with their impressive, attractive and attentive talk. It is not enough to face the challenges today and the teachers have to realize that they need to focus more on this skill to prepare the learners for employment, interaction with others and perform well at work places.

Reading is a receptive skill that enables the learners to understand and analyze the written text. It should be developed among the learners at all stages of their learning. Reading is one of the good habits that should be inculcated into the minds of the learners by the teacher in classrooms. C. Wallace (2001) regards, "Reading as practice, product or process with regard to the field of study". Reading enhances the comprehensive power of learners and consequently, they can analyze the text what it is intended for. Therefore, teachers focus on reading skills in classroom to improve the ability of learners' understanding the text given.

Writing is one of the important language skills in English as it is a productive skill and it enables the learners to communicate their ideas, thoughts, expressions and feelings in the form of writing. It facilitates communication between individuals in different aspects, such as education, business, science and technology and so on. Hence, it is considered an important tool of communication. Nunan (1989. p.36) also pointed out that "writing is an extremely complex, cognitive skill for everyone because in this activity the writer has to show control of some variables simultaneously".

Though these four skills are interlinked, speaking or oral communication is essential at interviews, at work places, in presentations, seminars, conferences, workshops and general communication. Teachers need to focus more on training the learners in speaking skills while teaching other skills. The importance of speaking skills in English will be explained with relevant examples in the following chapter.

### **Speaking Skills in EFL/ESL Settings**

In this present advanced world, modern learners have to master good speaking skills, as they are the most important skills to prove themselves in every field. Advances in electronic and digital media, a high competition in colleges, universities and workplaces and changing career landscapes have made learners' speaking skills a compulsion. One of the most fundamental and essential factors of communication is conversation. It enables learners to share ideas, thoughts and opinions, and receive them from others in turn. On the surface level, conversation seems to be very simple, but effective conversations include a give-and-take exchange that consists of elements such as eye contact, body language, responding, paraphrasing and summarizing. Among all the four language skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important one and it is a crucial part of a foreign language or a second language teaching and learning. According to Chaney (1998, 13), "Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts". Despite the importance of speaking skills for many years, teaching of speaking skills has been ignored and has been given a least importance and the EFL/ESL teachers have been teaching speaking skills just like memorization of dialogues, repetition of drills and recite memorized textbook dialogues. Nevertheless, today's modern society demands the importance of developing learners' speaking skills as the learners can settle down well in their professional career. Improving speaking skills consume a lot of classroom practice, motivation to both speaking and various activities.

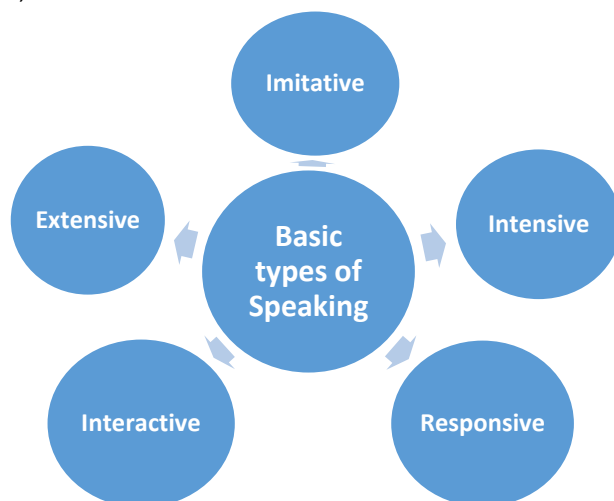
Speaking skill is learned in two contexts, namely; foreign language and second language situations. In a foreign language context, the target language is not the language of communication in the society, for example, studying German in the USA or learning Arabic in Canada. Learning speaking skills is a challenging task for learners as they get very less opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom. In a second language context, the target language is the communication in the society, for example, English in the UK or Spanish in Mexico. Here the second language learners are immigrants, international students and refugees. Even among the second language learners, young children can achieve very good speaking skills, whereas most of the others get the proficiency of these speaking skills to a certain extent and there onwards

they do not proceed further. As a result, they make many mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and so on and it is clearly observed while they speak the target language.

In a foreign language or a second language classroom, the learners should have some main important factors. They should clearly understand the content when speaking and they should have the ability to use effective oral communication skills. They also need a real-time exposure that is implemented by the teachers with a set of classroom activities developed in a dynamic interactive learning environment where both teachers and learners collaborate and cooperate with one another to create a comfortable, relaxed and safe atmosphere for a perfect productive talk in the classroom environment. The process of learning and applying speaking skills in English are very closely related. Since this technique enables the learners to connect them what they learn and what they apply while speaking in the classroom. To achieve this goal, the foreign language or second language teachers should develop their learners' communicative competence through a diversity of classroom activities that include various styles and types of expressions, situational as well as contextualized expressions (Airport, Train Station, jargon, business English, etc.), acquainting students with the different language discourses, and the different accents and dialects of native speakers. It is the responsibility of a teacher to select and adopt the suitable activity and strategy, to meet the needs, goals and interests of the learners. As stated by Harmer (2001, 271) in the Oral expression course, the most widely speaking activities should: "fall at or near the communicative end of the communication continuum". The teacher should create interaction by exchanging information and expressing ideas with utmost care about the correct grammar (accuracy), adequate vocabulary, a good pronunciation as well as acceptable fluency to convey a meaningful speech that sounds like a native speakers' own by following the classroom activities such as role-plays, simulation, talking circles, discussions, debates, role cards, information gap activities, storytelling-based activities and so on.

### Teaching Speaking Skills

In the modern classroom, English teachers apply various methods and techniques in the classroom to teach speaking skills. Predominantly, they focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) and collaborative learning because CLT is based on real-life situations and it is more useful in developing communication skills among the learners. Collaborative learning is also encouraged by teachers to involve the learners in various task-based activities. It is applicable to both EFL/ESL settings. While teaching speaking skills to the learners, teachers need to focus on speech sounds, sound patterns, stress and intonation patterns, the selection of appropriate words and sentences; according to the audience, social setting, subject matter and situations. The teachers help the learners organize their thoughts and ideas logically and meaningfully in order to use their language to express with values and judgments. Since speaking is considered one of the language productive skills, according to the intention of the speaker, Brown (2004) has classified them into five types: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive and extensive.



Source: Brown, D. (2004)

Imitative speaking is the learners' ability to parrot back or repeat the others' speech as a word, a phrase or a sentence. This type of repetition involves grammar and lexis which are useful to interact in a conversation or

to convey the meaning. Intensive speaking is the product of short discourses where the learners have to complete the tasks like reading aloud and completing sentences and dialogues. Responsive speaking involves two persons or two groups in short conversations, small talk and simple requests to make them authentic. Interactive speaking involves transactional language and interpersonal language. Transactional language is meant for exchanging information whereas interpersonal language for social relationships. Extensive speaking is more deliberative and formal for extensive tasks and it involves speeches, oral presentations and story-telling.

The role of teachers in training the learners in speaking skills is crucial in English classrooms. According to Vilar (2003), "Teachers have two primary functions in education: the managerial and the instructional functions. The latter refers to the conditions that teachers create for learning to take place and the other is the knowledge that the teachers impart in the classrooms. Teachers should carry out these functions simultaneously for efficient language instruction because they cannot be separated".

The teachers are expected to play a key role in imparting quality education in ELT classrooms, both in ESL/EFL settings, especially in teaching language skills. To achieve this quality, teachers should use their skills, knowledge and various techniques to motivate the learners towards the learning of language skills. In this context, teachers should act as facilitators, motivators, organizers, monitors, participants, assessors, models, observers, and so on. When it comes to teaching speaking skills, the role of teachers is essential because speaking skills can be taught effectively by teachers applying various techniques such as interaction, motivation and encouragement.

In order to develop the speaking skills of the learners, the English language teachers have to put their focus mainly on vocabulary and grammar and then on speech sounds, stress, intonation patterns and finally on patterns of sentences. To enable the learners to enrich good vocabulary and to have a good command over grammar, the teachers should concentrate more on speech sounds, stress and intonation patterns which are the fundamental elements required for speaking skills. After proper training in these areas, the teachers have to provide the learners with a number of opportunities to make use of them in their speaking practice sessions. Moreover, the teachers are supposed to conduct some learner-focused activities like activity-based or task-based activities that involve the learners to develop their speaking skills in the real classroom environment. Here the teachers can implement innumerable activities such as JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, role-plays, group discussions, preparing for both interviews and presentations and preparing the learners to present papers in conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. The role of teachers is very crucial here to prepare the learners for their future career and prepare them to be competent in their speaking skills as the classroom is the main platform for learners to perform these tasks.

Harmer (2007, pp. 58-59) says, "The role of a teacher is related to organize learners in the classroom when doing different tasks, this means grouping students and providing them with information about the way they are going to do such activity in a limited time. The teacher, when plays this role in the classroom, has to be aware of making learners understand what they are going to do in order to make them involved and benefit from the activity they are practising". The teachers should organize his students in terms of group work and pair work and involve them in their activities because they cannot be successful without their active participation in speaking activities. The teachers should guide the learners in their activities by giving them instructions, instruct and monitor the tasks and give them their feedback at the end. Furthermore, Harmer shows the role of a teacher as an organizer in the following way:

**Engage → instruct (demonstrate) → initiate → organize → feedback.**

Speaking skills help learners in getting success in all fields of life. A good knowledge of vocabulary and a wide range of English language skills help learners in getting better opportunities in their future career. Once the learners attain good command over both grammar and vocabulary, they can perform well in their speaking skills. Having talent in expressing their own ideas with good speaking skills is a passport for success in their life. Good speaking skills even widen the options in selecting a suitable job. With excellent speaking skills, they can advance in their professions or jobs in the fields of business, sales, communications, computers, teaching, information technology, law, administration, management, marketing, reception, software industry, pharmaceutical industry, hospitality industry, tourism, government jobs, doctorates, customer service, and

what not. Moreover, Freeman and Freeman (1994, p. 153) state that “language develops in context of functional use”, teachers should “create situations in which all their students use language for a variety of purposes and with a variety of people” (As quoted in Mc Cafferty et al, 2006, p. 21). From this quotation, we can deduce that doing a group work in the classroom increases the learner-learner interaction since working in groups provides learners with opportunities to speak with one another, give suggestions and so on.

Therefore, English language teachers need to conduct various activities in the classrooms and language labs such as JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, role-plays, discussions, interviews, presentations, seminars and so on in the process of developing speaking skills among the learners by adopting activity-based or task-based approach. Without the active participation of learners, it is not possible for teachers to train them in speaking skills. Thus, both teachers and learners have to engage themselves in various activities of speaking.

#### Assessment of Speaking Skill

Teachers assess the performance of learners in speaking through continuous evaluation and guide them to improve their speaking skills. In this context, the meaning and importance of assessment in the process of language learning is pointed out clearly by Rost (2002,p.169), “Assessment is an integral part of instruction, in that, it suggests appropriate starting points for instructional design and allows for feedback on learner performance”. In this regard, Black and William state, “Assessment refers to the activities that are used either by the teacher in classroom or by the students to assess themselves in order to provide feedback about the teaching and learning activities” (As stated in Jackson, 2009, p.125).

Thornbury (2005, pp. 124-125) also, in his book **How to Teach Speaking**, claimed that testing takes place at the beginning and at the end of the most language courses, or during the course itself. At placement, assessment of speaking skill can be done by using interview that involves many oral tasks, this placement test used as the basis for assessing speaking skill whether it aims at testing progress during the course or achievement at the end of that course. A test of speaking differs from a written test of grammar in terms of time-efficiency and easiness because making a written test of grammar is relatively easy and the time allocated to it is limited unlike the speaking test, which is difficult and it requires a long duration of time. For example, doing a speaking test as interview is difficult because he has to interview all the students of a class individually. Thus, it requires a long period of time if it is done so in the classroom.

It means doing a speaking test as interview for example, is difficult because the tester is going to interview all the students of a class individually, and in doing so, it requires a long period of time.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, there are some language policies that specify what learners do at certain levels in speaking and teachers have to follow them as guidelines to teach speaking skills. The CEF explains the different levels that learners can obtain in speaking activities and strategies (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), and these levels guide the students what they do.

The following table shows these levels in Spoken Interaction and Spoken Production.

<b>S P E A K I N G</b>	<b>Spoken Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say.</li> <li>• I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities.</li> <li>• I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken.</li> <li>• I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).</li> </ul>
	<b>Spoken Production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions.</li> <li>• I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</li> <li>• I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.</li> </ul>

In the above given table, the differences between spoken interaction and spoken production have been clearly given. In spoken interaction, a person interacts with others on any familiar topic pertinent to everyday life. Here the speaker conveys whatever he/she wants and the other person or persons respond in the form of questions and answers. In this interaction, short social exchanges are included and the focus is on direct exchange of information.

In spoken production, the speaker uses simple phrases or sentences to describe his/her family background, experiences and events, hopes, ambitions, dreams, etc. Moreover, he/she gives reasons and explanations for his/her plans and activities.

In this research paper, a thorough discussion on the importance of communication skills in the modern world, particularly speaking skills, the role of teachers and learners in the process of teaching and learning speaking skills, the assessment of speaking skills among the learners and various aspects related to speaking skills has been done. Hence it is found that speaking is an art that enhances a person's character and behaviour in the society. So the responsibility of teachers is to educate the learners how to speak and behave by training them systematically. As far as ELT is concerned, English teachers have to train the learners in speaking skills besides regular curriculum and the learners have to focus more on speaking skills to expose themselves what they are. Thus, this paper emphasizes the role of teachers in teaching speaking skills and the role of learners in learning and using them at right place.

### Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to focus on the importance of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing and emphasize the importance of speaking skills in personal and professional growth. Moreover, the role and responsibility of English teachers in teaching speaking skills in ESL and EFL classrooms has been thoroughly analyzed. The assessment of speaking skills among the learners has been explained clearly.

In research findings, the need of teaching speaking skills in English classrooms has been identified and stressed. More importance has to be given to speaking skills in order to make the learners communicate effectively at all places. Moreover, the focus has been on the assessment of speaking skills in a systematic way.

As communication skills are playing a key role in the modern society, the responsibility is more on the teachers to train the learners in those skills. Speaking or oral communication is important in personal and professional life. Therefore, English teachers have to give importance to speaking skills in classrooms and encourage the learners to communicate in English not only in the classrooms but also in social life as far as ELT is concerned.

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