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PROBLEMS OF TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE NEPALESE ELT CLASSES

ARUN KUMAR KSHETREE, *Ph.D.*

Lecturer, Butwal M Campus, Butwal, Nepal

Email:arunkshetree@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

This article aims at exploring the problems of teaching speaking encountered by secondary level English teachers. It also focuses on solutions to the problems for changing the situation of English speaking skills development. As research participants, I selected eight English teachers (two teachers from each school) teaching speaking skills in grade X in community and institutional schools of Rupandehi district. The study found that the teaching of English speaking was seriously neglected, not only by the students but also by the teachers, basically due to the examination system that mainly focuses on reading and writing skills. Furthermore, it also showed that teachers had problems in teaching speaking since they lacked resources and competency in speaking English. In addition, it showed revealed that the teachers were not familiar with the principles of teaching speaking, and mostly the teaching of speaking was not getting proper space or almost neglected. The article recommends some suggestions to incorporate some cooperative speaking skills to solve the problems. The study is expected to have a great significance in improving the 21<sup>st</sup> century language pedagogy in general and in addressing the problems in teaching speaking in particular.

Keywords: speaking skills, mother tongue, jigsaw activity, principles of teaching speaking skills, cooperative learning etc.

English language teaching and learning starts normally with reading and writing, and the listening and speaking like skills are not emphasized much in Nepal and many other parts of the world. The teachers never feel the need of making their students good at speaking and listening skills mainly because the decisive examinations are basically reading and writing based. There are reading comprehension tests, some grammatical items, some vocabulary related items and many kinds of writing skills items in the normal English tests in Nepal. Though one of the most important examinations in Nepal, Secondary Education Examination (SEE), does have some listening and speaking tests with 25% of the marks, the teaching of English in Nepal does not have sufficient time for teaching the listening and speaking skills.

Language is primarily speech. A very large number of languages in the world are only spoken with no writing script. Majority of languages in the world even with writing scripts use their spoken forms more than the written ones. It is an agreed fact that language is learnt by speaking it first after a lot of

listening to the sounds, words, phrases and sentences from the surroundings (Anuradha, Raman & Hemamalini, 2014).

**Language is a means of communication.** The purpose of teaching a language is to enable the students to communicate in that language. It is quite essential that every second of every language class is directed to equip students with the language skill they really need. Language begins from listening. Listening is the pre-requisite for speaking. Usually, the deaf people are dumb because of the fact that they could not learn to speak due to the lack of listening. Children can only speak after they listen for a long time after they are born. The students need to be able to listen to a variety of things in a number of different ways. In the first place, they need to be able to recognize paralinguistic clues such as intonation in order to understand mood and meaning. They also need to be able to listen for specific information, and sometimes for mere general understanding (when they are listening to a story or interacting in a social conversation). A lot will depend on the particular genres they are working with.

To be competent in any language, the speaker needs to have command over the language skills and the aspects of the language. Language skills refer to those skills which make communication perfect by the use of language. We know that language is a means of communication. Communication is possible in two mediums in language; spoken medium and written medium. In spoken medium listening and speaking go side by side. These two skills, i.e. listening and speaking, are thus called the basic or primary skills of language in the sense that even an illiterate person can communicate using these two skills. In other words, communication is possible only through the spoken medium. In written medium reading and writing skills are essential skills. Reading and writing are the intellectual tasks. Only the literate person can practise them. Therefore, these two skills, viz. reading and writing, can be considered as the secondary skills in language teaching and learning. These four language skills should be integrated while practising a language.

Speaking, in simple words, is the utterance of intelligible speech or seeming to be capable of speech. It is the process of orally expressing thought and feelings of reflecting and shaping experience, and sharing information. Speaking is a complex process, which involves thinking language and social skills. The speaker combines words to sentences and paragraphs and use a language style that is appropriate to a social context. Speaking is development for the relationships between a speaker and her hearer. In addition, speaking is determining which logical linguistic, psychological and physical rules that should be applied in a given communicative situation. In teaching speaking, teachers should teach the students some steps in order to make the speaking itself properly. The teachers need to be familiar with speaking skills before they start teaching any language. Heaton (1988) describes four components of speaking skill every teacher needs to be familiar with. They are discussed below.

- a) **Accuracy:** Accuracy in speaking means when someone can produce correct sentences in pronunciation, grammar and word choice so it can be understood. There are three components of accuracy. They are pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.
- b) **Fluency:** Stovall in Asni (2007) defined fluency as the ability to converse with others much more than the ability to read, write or comprehend oral language. In Fluency can simply be defined as the features that give speech the qualities of being natural and normal. Meanwhile, Simon and Schuster in Amin (2006) defined fluency as the quality of flowing, smoothness, freedom from harshness and the ability to write or to speak easily, smoothly, expressively, readiness or smoothness of speech.
- c) **Comprehensibility:** Comprehensibility is the process of understanding of the utterances sent by the speaker done by the listener. Also comprehensibility in speaking means that people can understand what we say and we can understand what they say. Harmer (1998) says that if two people want to make communication to each other, they have to speak because they have different information. If there is a 'gap' between them, it is not a good communication if the people still confuse with what they say.
- d) **Content:** Jacob (1981) explains that content should be clear to the listener so that they can understand what the messages convey and gain information from it. Content refers to how suitable or

substantive the explanation toward the object to be explained. To have a good content in speaking, the contents should be well unified and completed.

### Principles of Teaching Speaking Skills

Teaching of speaking skills in different levels requires a well-qualified and well trained teacher who is familiar with the methods and techniques of teaching speaking with the knowledge of the principles of teaching speaking skills. Various experts and writers have presented different principles of teaching speaking skill. In this article some sets of principles are presented for the analysis of the problems of teaching speaking skills.

According to Anuradha et al (2014), following are the principles of teaching speaking skills:

1. Encourage students to speak right from the first day. If not, as early as possible and not to wait till she teaches them a stock of words, phrases or sentences.
2. Tolerate the students if some of them simply repeat what they say.
3. If a student gives one word answer to any question, bear it for the time being.
4. Let the learners speak actively with whatever English knowledge they have.
5. Propose structures/phrases/words and let the learners use it in different situation and drill as much as possible.
6. Encourage back-chaining or tail-forwarding technique to make long sentences by combining more than ten sentences.
7. Organize role play and pair-work as much as possible and supervise the learners to correct the active ones and activate the passive ones.
8. Be well prepared in advance in terms of lesson planning, activities and tasks.
9. Let the learners commit errors and mistakes at the primary stage. Interruption and correction hinder fluency and discourage the learner.
10. Individual weaknesses should be taken into account and the teacher should be sympathetic in outlook for individual attention.

In the same way, Brown (2004) on his book "Teaching by Principles" presents the following principles for teaching speaking skill:

- 1) Focusing on fluency and accuracy which considering the learning objective;
- 2) Preparing intrinsically techniques to motivate the students in learning;
- 3) Authenticating language use in an appropriate contexts;
- 4) Providing appropriate feedback and correction;
- 5) Capitalizing on the natural link between speaking and listening;
- 6) Giving students opportunities to communicate in learning process as much as possible, and
- 7) Encouraging them to develop their speaking strategy and style.

The teaching of the speaking English needs to follow the principles which are stated here or some other established set of principles. The principles are not established randomly and these are proposed with sufficient research base and much experiment in the actual field. Westwood, Peter and Oliver, 1979, cited in Tahir (2011) describe that the principles of teaching speaking skills should be based on the following concepts:

1. Create an enjoyable, entertaining social learning situation which gives pleasure to the students. Teacher personality is a vital vector.

2. Keep the small group, not more than five or six students.
3. Arrange for fragment, intensive sessions in two or three short sessions daily.
4. Ensure active participation remembering that it is what a student practices saying, not what he hears, that improves communicating ability.
5. Have clearly defined, short term goals for each sessions: teaching a certain adjective, adverb, or conjunction: 'and' and 'but'.
6. Use material such as practices and games to hold attention as the basis for language simulation
7. Observe the slow learner and give some degree of repetition in teaching if necessary
8. Use pleasure and praise as reinforces.

The successful communication can be seen when mutual understanding between speaker and listener in exchanging ideas work as their wishes. Teacher should know the characteristic of successful speaking activity. Penny Ur (1996) who states the characteristics of successful speaking activities as below:

1. **Learners talk a lot.** As much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk. This may seem obvious, but often most time is taken up with teacher talk or pauses;
2. **Participation is even.** Classroom discussion is dominated by a minority of talk active participants: all get a chance to speak and contributions are fairly distributed;
3. **Motivation is high.** Learners are eager to speak; because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want to contribute to achieving a talk objective;
4. **Language is an acceptable level.** Learner express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easy comprehensible to each other, and an acceptable level language accuracy. The teacher should also know some problems in getting learners to talk in the classroom.

Though the teaching of speaking is supposed to be not much important in Nepal like countries where everything about a person's capabilities is decided on the basis of the marks or grades secured in the written examinations, the teaching of speaking is important and it is based on the principles given by some experts in the area. Many studies have taken place in the issues of teaching of speaking skill. These studies have concluded in different ways and suggested some principles and characteristics of speaking skill. Not only this, different problems of teaching speaking activities and possible solutions have also been given by the researchers and experts of this area. Various problems faced by different English teachers have been summarized by Tahir (2011) and the solutions to the problems have been listed by Ur ((1996).

### **Problem with Speaking Activities**

There are different problems of teaching speaking skills in ELT. Tahir (2011) summarizes the problems as below:

1. **Inhibition.** Unlike reading, writing and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real time expose to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of critics or losing face, or simply shy of the attention to their speech attracts.
2. **Nothing to say.** Even if they are not inhibited, you often hear learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say: they have no motivation to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking.
3. **Low or uneven participation.** Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is heard: and in large group this means that each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.
4. **Mother tongue use.** In classes, a number of the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it: because it is easier, because it feels less 'exposed' if they are speaking their mother tongue.

The possible solutions to the problems of teaching speaking skills have been presented by Ur (1996) in the name of the things the teacher can do to solve the problems in speaking activities. These are listed as below:

- a) **Monologue.** In monologue when one speaker uses spoken language for the long of time, as in speeches, lectures, readings, language broadcasts, and the like, the hearer must process long stretches of speech without interruption the stream of speech will go on whether or not the hearer comprehends.
- b) **Dialogue.** Dialogues involve two or more speakers can be subdivided into those exchanges that promote social relationship (interpersonal) and those for which purpose is to convey proportional or factual information (transactional). In each case participants may have a good deal of shared knowledge (background information or Schemata).
- c) **Questions and answer drills.** The teacher can begin these by simply questioning to the learners. But the learners have mastered the question patterns; they should practice questioning one another. After the numbers of questions have been mastered, questions and answer drills can be used in wide variety of topics. There are many topics can be asked, question about learners themselves, their surroundings, well-known events (recent and historical), and stories which everyone has read.
- d) **Speaking game.** It is a very interesting activity of speaking games for making relax of the students while speaking. It can increase motivation of the students to speak English, like guessing games, speech through action (look and say, and do and say drill, or sing a song).
- e) **Group work.** This increases the sheer amount of learner talk in a limited period of time and also the inhibitions of learners who are not willing to speak in front of the full class. In this case, the teacher cannot supervise all learner's speech, because the best way to keep students speaking the target language is simply to be themselves, there is no substitutes for nagging. In speaking class, the students are hoped to express their ideas, information, and feeling. Practice to use language is very important to develop the students' ability in speaking. The students will not be able speak fluently if they do not practice the language in good, correct, and accurate language.

### Methodology

With the situation of Nepalese ELT classes regarding teaching of speaking skills, this study was conducted with the main objective of finding out the problems of teaching speaking skills and solutions to the problems.

For the present study I selected the observation of the teaching and learning of speaking skills mainly on the basis of different principles of teaching speaking skills. The case study also covers the views and attitudes of eight English teachers and teaching English in grade X from four schools of Sainamaina Municipality; two community and two institutional schools. The required information was gathered from the observation of the English classes designed to teach speaking skills and an interview with the teachers to know their views regarding the problems of teaching speaking skills.

For the data gathering process, I visited the purposively sampled schools to build rapport with the English teachers and the head teachers. Then I went to observe the classes of the teachers on the days they were planning to teach speaking skills. After the observation, I interviewed them focusing on the problems of teaching speaking and following the principles of teaching speaking.

### Findings and Discussion

The gathered data was systematized and grouped to make them easy to understand and interpret. The observation of the classes of eight English teachers teaching speaking skills I came to know the fact that the teachers normally didn't teach speaking skills as I observed the responses of the students there. They were completely puzzled when a teacher told them that she was going to teach them speaking. In a school the teacher told them that he was going to teach speaking skills as he long ago told them to teach one day and the students were happy. In another school the teacher told them that they need to learn to speak English as they have to appear listening speaking test in their SEE English practical test and he told them about how to speak

with the examiner that time and how to answer things in English without being afraid. The students discussed the matter for a long time in the class in Nepali and the teacher suggested them to learn to give their introduction in English. With such experiences in the class observation of teaching speaking skills, I came to know that the teachers were not giving sufficient time to develop speaking skills in the students. Not only this, the teachers were found to be just suggesting the tricks of facing the listening speaking test of the SEE English practical exam. The principles of teaching and developing speaking skills were nowhere followed in any of the classes I observed. This may be just the coincidence that the teachers didn't care of the principles of teaching speaking skills. But the students being not able to speak English even after getting master degree examinations majoring English is the evidence that the speaking skills in Nepali English classes is neglected. The teachers were unaware of the aims and objectives of teaching English; one of the major goals is to make the students able to communicate orally in English.

On the other hand, the interview with the English teachers also revealed many things related to the attitudes of English teachers about the teaching of English speaking skills and the problems they faced in teaching and developing speaking skills. The table no 1 below shows the views of English teachers regarding teaching speaking skills.

Table 1. Teachers' views regarding teaching speaking skills.

S. N.	Particular	Yes	No	Remarks
1.	Necessity of teaching speaking skills	3	5	
2.	Speaking skills important for exam	2	6	
3.	Knowledge of the principles of teaching speaking skills	3	5	
4.	Giving due importance for speaking skills	0	8	
5.	Support from school management for teaching listening-speaking activities	3	5	
6.	Students interested in speaking skills	1	7	
7.	Students participating in speaking activities	2	6	
8.	Enjoy teaching speaking skills	1	7	

The table 1 above shows the teachers' views related to teaching speaking skills. It shows that only three out of eight teachers felt that it was important and necessary to teach speaking skills and those who thought that it was not necessary were in the view that the students could learn to speak if they had some English vocabulary and content in them. The six teachers who said that the teaching of speaking skills was not important were in the view that the practical marks in the SEE were not based on what they spoke there but on the evaluation of the school authority. In the same way only three teachers were found to have the knowledge of the principles of teaching speaking skills and they said they were not using the principles in the classes. All the teachers in my sample at least realized that they were not giving due importance for teaching and developing speaking skills and only three teachers among them said that they were getting some support to teach listening speaking skills from their school management side. Only one among eight teachers in my sample said that the students were interested in studying speaking skills in the class. In the same way, only two teachers reported that the students wanted to participate in the speaking activities. Unfortunately, only one teacher said that she enjoyed teaching speaking skills in the class.

The study was mainly focused on the problems of teaching speaking skills which are listed below:

1. The teachers said that they themselves were not much perfect in teaching speaking skills, which is the major problem of developing speaking skills.
2. The teachers reported that the resources for teaching listening speaking skills were not appropriate.

3. The environment in the schools was also not positive to make students practice speaking English.
4. The classroom setting was also not reported to be appropriate for conducting different speaking skills.
5. The students were reported to be not much interested in practicing speaking skills in the classes as they thought that the examinations didn't emphasize listening speaking skills.
6. The teachers said that the students were shy in speaking English due to the fear of making mistakes while practising speaking English.
7. The teachers complained that the students were so weak that they were teaching English in Nepali and thus they were unable to make students speak English or practise speaking English.

The list of the problems can be longer if individual teacher's problems were listed here. But these are the most common problems the sample teachers expressed. This list is similar to some extent with the list of problems presented by Tahir (2011) but there are some more different problems of teaching speaking skills in the context of Nepal. . The infrastructure of the classes and the shy students thinking that speaking was not as important as reading and writing from examination viewpoint. Not only this, the problems the teachers face in Nepal are different because of the lack of resources for teaching listening and speaking skills and the teachers are not much trained to teach the skills.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

From the discussions and findings above, simple conclusions can be easily drawn. The teaching of English in Nepal is still not satisfactory due to the dominance of mother tongue while teaching in the class. Not only this, the psychological order of the development of language skills is not followed and the teaching of English starts with the teaching of reading writing skills. The listening and speaking skills which are the primary skills of any language are never given any importance though the course of study for English tries to give equal importance to all language skills. The teachers themselves are not competent in English and they feel shy in speaking English and in such situation how can anyone expect them teaching speaking skills properly.

Thus, the situation needs to be changed so that the students will be eager to practice speaking English, and they get favorable situation in learning listening and speaking skills in the classes. Not only this, the examination system itself needs to be slightly changed in such a way that the students will be encouraged to learn the oral communication skills as well. The solutions to the problems can be similar to the solutions provided by Ur (1996). In the same way, to improve the situation of listening speaking skills in Nepal can be really improved by the use of the suggestions given by David & Johnson (2001) who recommended following class activities to be used as cooperative learning in teaching speaking.

- 1) Jigsaw is grouping students into groups consist of five students in a group, each member of the group was given the task to study a topic and then teach it to members of the group, to help students work together in learning, and to determine what is important and how to teach.
- 2) Think-Pair-Share includes three steps of cooperative structures, during the first stage, each individual think quietly about the questions posed by the structure, the second step, each individual pair up and exchange ideas, and the third step, the pair share the responses with their group.
- 3) Numbered Head is a form of cooperative in which each member of the group is assigned the number 1,2,3,4, and then the teacher asked a question to the group. Each group works together to answer the question so that all group members may verbally answer the question. Then the teacher called the number (example: two) and each member of the group numbered two were asked to give an answer.
- 4) Round-Robin Brainstorming is class divided into small groups, with one person appointed as a recorder, the questions require a lot of answers and students give time to think the answer is, after the "think time", each member of the group requested answers and responses another group with Round-Robin style, then the recorder write down the answers of the group members.
- 5) Three-step Interview is each group member chooses another member to become a partner. In the first step, each student interviewed their partners by asking clarifying questions, in a second step, partners

exchange the interviewing roles, and in the last step, each member of the group share the responses with their partner in the group.

- 6) Team-Pair-Solo which students work on tasks given by the teacher as a team, then with a partner, and in the end, the task was done individually. It is designed to motivate students to solve problems that initially are beyond their capabilities so that students are able to do more things with the help of others on issues that they can do themselves, first as a team and then in pairs and individually.

In this way, the study is helpful in the improvement of the ELT in general and teaching speaking skills in Nepalese contexts in particular. The problems of teaching speaking skills can be solved by encouraging the teachers in teaching speaking skills using different kinds of activities that can be easily conducted in the classes with limited resources as well. I expect to make students and teachers aware of teaching and learning of speaking skills in ELT classes of Nepal and elsewhere.

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**Author's Bio:** Dr. Arun Kumar Kshetree is assistant professor in Butwal Multiple Campus, Butwal, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He is active in research works related to teachers' professional development. He has published many articles and presented papers in national and international conferences. He has been encouraging English teachers for their professional development.