

Teaching of English Speaking to Young EFL Learners

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1. Introduction

Young learners, defined in this study as primary school students aged 7 to 12 (Ellis, 2014) require guidance on grammar, vocabulary and discourse structuring to organise their articulations. They need to acquire the ability to bring together their ideas and deliver them clearly for sharing and exchange. However, given the demands speaking places on the orator to think fast on his feet to convey meaning, the vocalising of one's conceptions may be viewed by some learners as an arduous undertaking.

The environment in Malaysia creates a conducive platform for the learning of English very easily. The students can easily learn the language via the many forms of media – radio, TV, newspapers, movies, brochures etc. Everywhere they go, English is being spoken. In Malaysia, English language is being taught in schools every day. Sometimes English is taught in two periods in a day. In addition, science and Mathematics are also taught in English. Therefore, during the week, students have many hours of exposure to the English language. With this background, young learners in Malaysia are going to be able to improve their speaking abilities of second language.

The attitude of the students towards learning English is very important. They should be responsible for their learning. Students in Penang Japanese School are similar to their counterparts in Japan; their shy personalities and their fear of making language mistakes hampers their progress. This is the most serious and unresolved problem for the ESL teachers who are always trying their best to make the students speak English.

Instruction on language, skills and strategies can alleviate the stress on students as they make oral presentations and motivate them to participate in classroom activities to develop their speaking abilities.

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2. Research Framework

This study examines the instructional practices of three teachers Aiko, Risa and Kenji (pseudonyms) to improve their young learners' speaking quality. They teach English as a curriculum subject to students from Grade 1 to Grade 5 (ages between 7 to 12 years) in a private elementary school in Japan.

Data collected in October 2017 from a total of ten classroom observations made by the first two authors was content-analysed using Goh and Burns' (2012) methodological framework for teaching speaking.

The framework comprises the following dimensions:

1. Quality of speech: accuracy, fluency and complexity
2. Components of speaking competence: language, skills and strategies
3. Role of metacognition
4. Organisation of learning activities

The emphasis in *Dimension 1* for new learners is on producing utterances with few hesitations or false starts. As they become more proficient, students will acquire fluency through careful attention to grammar, discourse and pronunciation to ensure accuracy as well as appropriateness of messages.

Dimension 2 describes the language, skills and strategies necessary for a high quality of verbal output.

Dimension 3 focuses on the importance of metacognition, or one's active reflection on the content and manner of his learning (Wenden, 1991) in enhancing his cognizance and use of approaches for effective speaking.

Dimension 4 exemplifies the principles for designing activities to hone students' abilities through task-based learning and repetitive practice.

3. Results

This section presents key findings of the teachers' classroom actions to carry out oral instruction of their young learners from Grades 1 to 5.

3.1 Case 1: Teacher Aiko

3.1.1 Grade 1 Lesson on vocabulary

Aiko reviews with students the vocabulary for the parts of the body. She verbalises actions to help students learn the meanings of the phrases. For example, *Touch your head*. The students mirror her actions. Having established sufficient practice, Aiko challenges them by giving an instruction but acts out something different. For example, she says *touch your head*, but tests their comprehension by proceeding with a purposeful mistake, by pointing to her *knees*. Some students follow

suit and do likewise. They realise their mistake and break into laughter, quickly correcting themselves. A few students receive guidance from Aiko and their peers to reinforce their grasp of the vocabulary.

3.1.2 Grade 4 Lesson on adjectives

Aiko gets students to act out the words *worried*, *surprised*, *excited* to depict feelings. She illustrates the use of the words in context. For example, by getting students to listen and chant along with the audio to sentences like *He is worried and so are we. Our teacher gave a test today*. Students are actively engaged in listening, remembering and improving their command of language through practice.

3.1.3 Grade 5 Lesson on prepositions

Aiko explains the meanings of various prepositions and gets students to participate in role playing which demonstrates proper use of the prepositions e.g. *in* (*in my bag*) and *on* (*on the table*). She checks for understanding by inviting them to offer their examples to describe the positioning of the objects in class. They move on to working on their individual written assignments where they identify errors and correct them. Next, they each write a sentence about themselves using the prepositions and draw a picture next to it. Finally, Aiko gets them to share their answers with their groupmates. She uses a bell to help them manage their time. She writes on the board: *very good*, *great job* and *nice*, and encourages them to use these expressions to acknowledge their partners' sharing.

3.2 Case 2: Teacher Risa

3.2.1 Grade 1 Lesson on adjectives

Risa introduces students to adjectives to describe nouns, for example, *size*, *shape* and *colour*. She plays a videoclip and invites them to chant along and respond to the questions displayed on the screen: *Is it a big box? Yes, it is. Is it a round box? No, it isn't. It's square*. She models the pronunciation of the words *big*, *round*, *heavy* etc and students repeat after her. Finally, she asks them to use appropriate adjectives to describe boxes and containers at the back of the class. She builds rapport with learners by joking with them about how talking about the grocery boxes has made them all hungry. They join in too, by describing the boxes according to the food items they had contained previously, by volunteering *It's a cheese box* etc.

3.2.2 Grade 4 Conversational practice

Risa enters the classroom and introduces the visitors (the first and second authors) to the class. Students rise and greet the teacher and each other, before turning to the visitors and acknowledging them with *How are you?* She engages

students in a short conversation to elicit from them different ways of responding to openings, for example, *I'm fine, and you?* and *I'm pretty good*. In equipping them with formulaic language (Bygate, 1998), she helps them use these meaningful set phrases characteristic of typical interactions to make small talk and exchange general pleasantries. The variations in her greetings create opportunities for them to respond naturally to engage their fellow conversationalists.

3.2.3 Grade 4 Lesson on vocabulary

Risa raises students' knowledge of *parts of the face* through a game. They have to go around the class and find a partner to play *rock paper scissors* with. The winner gets to ask his partner to point to his *eyes, nose, head, ears* etc. The students respond with much laughter and excitement as they carry out the activity. After the activity, Risa consolidates the learning by reviewing the vocabulary. She then asks the pairs to tally up their scores and gives out stickers to the winners, as well as those who did not win, as a means of motivating them to keep practicing.

3.3 Case 3: Teacher Kenji

3.3.1 Grade 1 Lesson on prepositions

Kenji draws images on the board to illustrate the meaning of prepositions *on*, *in*, *under*, *by* as shown in Figure 1:

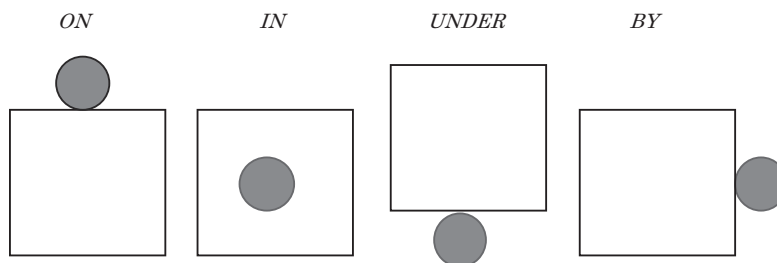


Figure 1. Teacher's illustrations to represent prepositions

He next goes through a series of turns displayed on the screen (Excerpt 1):

Excerpt 1

T Where are the bugs?

S They are *on* the flower.

T Good. Class, repeat. They are *on* the flower.

S ((Repeat sentence after T))

After role modelling the pronunciation and using actions to depict the meaning of the turns in the short exchange above, he engages students in an activity to see, listen and repeat. They look at the screen, identify the location of the nouns in question and respond in complete sentences. He reinforces their understanding by getting them to mimic his actions to represent the prepositions. Students then move on to individual seat work. Kenji goes around the class to draw their attention to areas of inaccurate language and guides them to correct their answers.

3.3.2 Grade 2 Conversational practice

Kenji writes on the board *Where do you live? I live in _____*. He asks the students to go up to the front of the class in pairs, with one taking the role of information seeker and the other taking the role of responder of the above question-and-answer routine. Before they begin the activity, he opens up the floor to invite more students to share their replies to the question of where they live to check their understanding. Next, he involves the class in a game. They are to go around the room playing *rock paper scissors*, and one member of the pair is to ask the other where he lives and elicit an answer. Each response enables them to receive a signature. Students who have collected six signatures get stickers as prizes.

3.3.3 Grade 4 Lesson on prepositions

Kenji gives the class a grid worksheet with the prepositions *around, though, over, under, into* and *out of* on the vertical column and the nouns *mall, woods, hill, tunnel, school, town* and *street* on the horizontal column. The objective of the game is to form sentences using the words in both the vertical and horizontal columns and saying them aloud to their partners. They play the game in pairs, taking turns to articulate their answers to demonstrate the correct use of propositions. Kenji instructs the members of each pair to write their answers using different coloured pens and ensure that they and their partners speak only in English. He walks around the class to clarify the requirements of their task and monitor their progress.

4. Summary of practices mapped against research framework

The teachers' practices were mapped against the research framework to depict the four dimensions of teaching speaking. Table 1 compares the practices of Aiko, Risa and Kenji with respect to instruction to improve learners' speaking quality, attention to the components of oral competence, raising of metacognition and design of tasks.

Table 1. *Mapping of teachers' practices against research framework for teaching speaking*

Dimensions of speaking	Aiko's practices	Risa's practices	Kenji's practices
Dimension 1 Quality of speech: accuracy, fluency and complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of purposeful mistakes to reinforce conceptual understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive practice to increase familiarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing of attention to language to raise accuracy and fluency
Dimension 2 Components of oral competence: language, skills and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of good spoken models as reference for students' pronunciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of input of language and discourse from typical oral genres for students' use in interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of students in noticing, listening and repeating to heighten oral proficiency
Dimension 3 Role of metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement of students in thinking about their learning • Facilitation of knowledge transformation through students' incorporation of experiences in their utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapport building with students to promote speaking • Help for students to connect learning with examples from their own lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of students' errors in language use and corrective actions • Guidance on unpacking requirements of tasks and monitoring of progress
Dimension 4 Organisation of learning activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of group and individual work to create opportunities for practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of games to motivate students and encourage participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of tokens to reward successful completion of task-based activities

5. Discussion

Aiko's practices illustrate her actions to reinforce students' grasp of the language and skills for speaking. In role modelling accurate pronunciation, she provided them with a standard to follow. Her actions to transform knowledge in ways they could easily internalise depicts Thornbury's (2005) notion of assimilation, in which students could be gradually moved towards independent speaking with teacher scaffolding.

Risa's ability to tap her understanding of students saw her to favourably shape their affect for speaking. Her use of conversations is reminiscent of Burns, Joyce and Gollin's (1996) contextualisation of speaking lessons in oral genres. She guided learners to notice the features of day-to-day interactions and helped them incorporate important facets into their own utterances. Her creation of light moments in class reflects Copland and Garton's (2014) views of the merits of having fun collaborative opportunities to improve children's oral mastery.

Kenji raised students' awareness of the requirements of their assignments and intended outcomes. In successfully integrating movement and friendly challenges into

his assignments, he was able to cater to his students' different learning styles. His use of interactive task-based activities aligns with Enever, Moon and Raman's (2009) perspective of the importance of developing young learners' social skills for communication.

Collectively, Aiko, Risa and Kenji's practices demonstrate their capacities to form bonds with their learners and carry out engaging lessons. Their content knowledge enabled them to improve students' language, punctuation skills and communication strategies. The teachers facilitated the production of utterances that were well constructed in standard English, easily understood by fellow interlocutors and appropriate for their respective audiences. In carefully selecting materials and deploying authentic contexts, they effectively connected classroom lessons with students' experiences. Their actions to create stress-free settings, provide guidance and introduce effective approaches instilled in their young learners a positive view about delivering verbal performances and managing their speaking progress.

6. Contributions and Implications

The study sheds light on the practices of three English teachers to develop their young EFL learners' oral abilities. It offers an analysis of the nature of their processes to extend students' communicative competence. The examination of the teachers' approaches to create opportunities for participation, design engaging tasks and provide scaffolding reiterates aspects important and valued in teaching, as identified by Fives and Buehl (2008). It explicates the teachers' knowledge to hone learners' speaking proficiencies.

The results of this small-scale examination can be useful in other contexts for English education. Researchers can avail of the study's portrayal of teachers' instruction and students' learning in their natural environments to enhance their understanding of the teaching of speaking their own settings.

Illuminating teachers' actions to enhance students' strengths in speaking can deepen our understanding of their capacities to enrich the learning of English. These approaches, derived from actual classrooms, offer important insights to contend with challenges in speaking instruction (Baker, 2014; Cohen and Fass, 2001). Finally, pedagogical practices such as those identified in this study may also serve as invaluable inputs for professional development.

7. Limitations

The authors sought to mitigate the limitations of observer's paradox, in which teachers may opt to demonstrate instruction in a manner they perceive would be well-

regarded by viewers. In this connection, they made efforts to remain unobtrusive and non-participatory throughout the lessons.

8. Future Directions for Research

A close view of teachers' practices can add to the literature on oral instruction to develop young learners' mastery. More empirical research can explicate the factors undergirding the teaching and learning of speaking to advance students' competence in English.

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外国語として英語を学ぶ子供へのスピーキング指導

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要旨

本論文は、日本の私立小学校に勤務する3名の教員の英語指導を観察、分析し、小学校児童に対する効果的な英語スピーキング指導について考察したものである。

まず、Goh and Burns (2012)の方法論的枠組み (1. Quality of speech: accuracy, fluency and complexity, 2. Components of speaking competence: language, skills and strategies, 3. Role of metacognition, 4. Organisation of learning activities) を使って、3名の教員の英語指導を分析し、表にまとめた。つぎに、それぞれの教員の指導の特筆すべき点を記述した。最後に、今回の研究によって得られた結果から、今後の小学校児童に対する英語スピーキング指導について考察した。