

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract

Teaching speaking to adult learners presents a variety of challenges, including lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, cultural differences, pronunciation difficulties, limited opportunities for practice, motivation, and balancing fluency and accuracy. Overcoming these challenges requires creating a supportive environment, providing vocabulary building and pronunciation practice, encouraging a positive attitude towards making errors, addressing cultural differences in communication styles, finding opportunities for practice outside the classroom, and maintaining motivation through slow progress and other demands on their time and energy. Balancing fluency and accuracy is also important in teaching speaking to adults.

Key words: *Confidence, vocabulary, cultural differences, pronunciation, supportive environment, practice opportunities, fluency, accuracy, communication skills, adult learners*

Introduction

Teaching speaking to adult learners comes with its own set of challenges that educators must address in order to effectively help their students improve their communication skills. From lack of confidence and limited vocabulary to cultural differences and pronunciation difficulties, there are many obstacles that can hinder adult learners' speaking abilities. In this article, we will explore these challenges and discuss strategies for overcoming them, including creating a supportive environment, providing opportunities for practice, and finding the right balance between fluency and accuracy. By understanding and addressing these challenges, educators can better equip adult learners with the skills they need to communicate confidently and effectively.

Lack of confidence: Many adults may feel self-conscious or nervous about speaking in a new language, especially if they have had negative experiences in the past. Building their confidence and creating a supportive environment is crucial. Confidence factor, as an important aspect of the affective factors, is generally assumed to have a significant role in successful learning. Self-confidence 'provides learners with

the motivation and energy to become positive about their own learning. It also creates the drive in them to acquire the targeted language, enjoy the learning process, and experience real communication... Moreover, it is widely believed that once students gain self-confidence, it progressively expands, in conjunction with experiencing success and satisfaction as well as good relationships’.

Vocabulary: Vocabulary is vital to reading comprehension in at least two ways. Oral vocabulary is the first key connection. When learning to read, adult learns to connect printed words with words in his/her oral vocabulary. One way to make that connection is through decoding. Using letter sounds, the new reader in effect "translates" the printed symbols into meaningful words. But decoding is useful only if the words are already in the reader's oral vocabulary. Oral vocabulary is the basis for meaningful reading. The second link between vocabulary and reading is an obvious one for learners at all levels: readers can't understand a writer's message unless they understand the meanings of most of the words in the text. As developing readers begin to read nonfiction in varied subject-matter areas, they often encounter words that are not in their oral vocabularies. For this reason teachers have long recognized the need to build vocabulary to allow readers to comprehend a variety of materials.

Fear of making mistakes: Of the four language skills, speaking is one that requires practice in the classroom in order to develop fluency. Unfortunately, students often fear making mistakes in front of their classmates and teachers. More specifically, we can say that the “Fear of negative evaluation is the apprehension about other people’s evaluations”. This fear of negative evaluation leads to a speaking anxiety that makes students scared to speak in class. When they are scared to speak, they have difficulties developing the fluency that is needed to improve their English speaking skills. Moreover, when students are given no preparation time before speaking, they often encounter speaking anxiety. This typically occurs when a teacher calls upon a student to answer a question without time for them to think. This has devastating effects on students as they instantly feel nervous and have trouble thinking due to this apprehension. For instance, in her research, Mak found that “speaking in front of the class in a second/foreign language classroom without preparation is the most speaking-in-class anxiety-provoking factor”. Students have a fear of making mistakes, and this adds to the speaking anxiety levels. Thus, singling out students in the classroom often has devastating effects on speaking development and should be avoided.

Pronunciation difficulties: The main problem that second language learners have with pronunciation has to do with their need to change a conceptual pattern appropriate for their first language that they have internalized in childhood. It is not the case that learners are best helped if they are able to ‘see’ speech, whether in articulate or acoustic form. Learners need help in categorizing or conceptualizing sounds in a way appropriate to English. Simply seeing a speech-wave or a diagram of the

articulation of a sound, however 'animated' and however accurate, will not help them unless they are also helped to understand what features of the sound are significant and given appropriate ways of thinking about the sound so that they can reproduce it. In fact it will be difficult for most learners - indeed for most teachers - to relate a speech wave or articulate diagram to the auditory quality of the sounds - for exactly the same reason that instruction in terms of the detailed physiology of required shoulder movements is unlikely to help an aspiring tennis player perfect her stroke. In the case of the tennis player, what helps is instruction in how to think about the actions, e.g. 'think about hitting it beyond the baseline', 'keep your eye on the ball'. Since people generally think about sounds in terms of their auditory quality, rather than directly in terms of their articulation or acoustics, the key is to find ways of describing the auditory quality of sounds that makes sense to the learner.

Motivation: Any teacher knows that motivated students will work more effectively towards their language goals. Motivation is particularly important in the adult classroom, to which learners arrive with their own goals, prior experience of study, and fears about returning to the role of 'student.' Adults also have busy lives, careers, families, and a multitude of other commitments vying for time in their day. To dedicate precious time to learning a language, learners need to feel that a) they want to succeed, and b) they can succeed. A warm smile and patient approach can go a long way, but after that first lesson, motivation needs to be grounded in more than good rapport. Adult learners need to know explicitly how their English training will help them for the same reason they need skills to practice during class time and targeted content: they are time-poor. They need English for greater career opportunities or to access higher education. They need each lesson to be targeted at delivering specific knowledge with practical outcomes

Teachers' Roles: In a language classroom 'In the production of speech, however, each speaker needs to speak. He needs to speak individually and ideally he needs someone to listen to him and to respond to him'. So, teachers should create a comfortable and flexible atmosphere using both theoretical and practical experience as it is very important to provide learners such environments where learners have the opportunities to use English at ease and which are supportive to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. 'Therefore, teachers should spare no efforts to create conditions that can be conducive to students' self-confidence' While designing the tasks for non-native speakers, teachers should take care of the course contents so that learners can use the language effectively in their real life situation. At the same time, 'Teachers have to accept that learners have a right to have their views incorporated into the selection of content and learning experience, and need to provide learners with the appropriate opportunities for them to make choices'. These attempts will improve learners' confidence in choosing and applying proper strategies in communication.

Teachers can use games because among learners, 'one possible way to reduce anxiety and increase confidence and motivation is to utilize drama in the ELL classroom'. Teachers can also exercise activities like role play, debate etc. forming pairs and groups in spoken classrooms considering the essential aspects such as learners' age, characteristics, learning styles, social and cultural contexts etc. as these types of activities encourage learners with positive motivation and also provide proper settings to speak. That is to say, teachers should create negotiating classroom environments which can promote co-operative learning because students in comperative environment have more positive attitudes towards learning and develop higher self-esteem and self confidence than in other classroom structures.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, teaching speaking to adult learners can be challenging due to a variety of factors such as motivation, anxiety, and lack of opportunities for practice. However, by understanding these difficulties and implementing effective teaching strategies, instructors can help adult learners improve their speaking skills and overcome these obstacles. It is important to create a supportive and encouraging learning environment, provide ample opportunities for practice and feedback, and tailor instruction to the individual needs and interests of the learners. With patience, understanding, and effective teaching methods, adult learners can develop their speaking abilities and become more confident and proficient communicators.

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