

# My students do not get Engaged in Speaking Activities in the Classroom

Mahesh Singh Saud

English Teacher

<b>Article Detail:</b>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p><i>Received: 13 Feb 2023;</i> <i>Received in revised form: 10 Mar 2023;</i> <i>Accepted: 17 Mar 2023;</i> <i>Available online: 25 Mar 2023</i></p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> <i>less engagement, vocabulary strategies, pronunciation strategies, one-student-one-strateg</i></p>	<p><i>Being a teacher I have been coming across many classroom issues as real problems. Among them, I dealt with students' less engagement in speaking activities aiming to identify the issues of students' less engagement in speaking activities and to increase students' participation actively in speaking activities. For that I conducted the interview with head teacher for getting permission and the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with students where I found some issues such as mispronunciation of words, nervousness about making mistakes, weak English, lack of vocabulary, and weak sentence construction, hesitant of being wrong in their activities because of which they were unable to engage themselves in speaking activities. And classroom activities/intervention and observation were further used for data to be analysed. I used pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies, presentation and role play activities to increase their active participation in speaking activities. In this study, I found that pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies were just effective to develop pronunciation and word-meaning skills for speaking. While presentation and role play activities were found more meaningful for developing students' speaking skills.</i></p>

## 1. Background of the study

I have been teaching secondary-level students. Classroom teaching is a two-way process in which a teacher and students are involved in prescribed curricular content. Teaching is not only the delivery of prescribed content by a teacher but also a process in which students take an active part in various classroom activities. However, students in remote and underdeveloped areas are found to be less active in classroom activities. So, I have been dealing with or facing many classroom issues which motivate me to explore further for remedying them.

Being a teacher I have been coming across many classroom issues as real problems. Among

them, I planned to deal with students' less engagement in speaking activities. The topic of my action research was my students don't want to engage in speaking activities. I found that my students were shy and didn't express themselves properly in the assigned activities. This issue triggered me to think about how to engage them in speaking activities. I also asked and talked to my other teachers about the case; they also noticed the same situation.

I have been facing students' inactiveness and less engagement in speaking activities in the classroom as a core issue for my action research. To explore the issue, I planned to ask my students about their inactiveness in speaking activities. When I asked

about their problems in speaking after being close to them with the help of FGD, they replied with various issues because of which they were unable to engage themselves in speaking activities. The issues such as mispronunciation of words, nervousness about making mistakes, weak English, hesitant of being wrong in their activities, etc. were the core issues which demotivate them to take part in speaking activities.

### 1.1 Purpose of the study

- a) To identify the issues of students' less engagement in speaking activities.
- b) To increase students' participation actively in speaking activities.

### 1.2 Research question

#### For exploration;

- a) What do the students say about speaking activities in the classroom?
- b) How do I engage my students in speaking activities?

### 1.3 Literature review

Upadhyay (2019) conducted action research with aiming to identify the reasons behind students' less engagement in speaking activities and to find out effective techniques to overcome. She designed a questionnaire to locate the problems of students because of which they did not engage in speaking activities. With the help of the responses of the students, she located the problems and developed some techniques to overcome the problems. She developed vocabulary and pronunciation-related techniques with the help of language games, role play, pair/group works and reinforcing strategies. She found that the use of student-centred strategies and practice-oriented strategies as mentioned earlier was very helpful for engaging students in different speaking activities.

Acharya (2019) carried out action research to identify effective techniques to develop students' speaking skills. He used a questionnaire to find out the problems of the students because of which they did not speak English in the classroom activities. He engaged them in the discussion. He behaved friendly with students, used vocabulary-related activities, pair/group works, and used of mother tongue to understand the content. These strategies were found more effective to engage students in speaking activities in the classroom.

Paudel (2021) conducted an exploratory action research aiming to identify the reasons

responsible for his students' unwillingness in using English and to find out some of the efficient ways to encourage his students in speaking in English. To conduct his study, he made use of a questionnaire including open and close-ended questions for collecting data from the students. Moreover, he also used informal group discussions with the students for this study. He used interactive classroom strategies providing more time to practise English in the classroom. He also used learner-centred techniques such as group work, solo work, group presentation, etc. He also used ICT materials such as audio-visual materials, PowerPoint slides and internet resources in the classroom. He also maximized the student talking time (STT) and minimized the teacher talking time (TTT) and provided more practice time to the students. He found that the exploited strategies were more effective and meaningful to engage students in speaking in English.

## 2. Methods

Five students of a secondary school in the Baitadi district were the participants of this study. I have used both primary and secondary sources of data to conduct this study. The primary data was collected from the students of a secondary school and the secondary data was collected from the action research articles. The tools of data collection for this study were the interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for exploring the causes behind students' inactiveness and less engagement in speaking activities, and classroom activities and intervention and observation were further used for data to be analysed.

## 3. Cycle 1

### 3.1 Plan and action for exploration

I planned to explore the issues or causes behind students' less engagement in speaking activities. So, for that, I talked to the head teacher of the school and asked him to sign the permission letter for the interview. I took his interview for taking his permission to take some students in a focus group discussion for my study or research purpose. Then, I conducted a focused group discussion for locating the real causes behind the problem that I chose for the exploration.

### 3.2 Analysis of the action

After taking permission from the head teacher, I conducted FGD with selected students. The

students' responses show that students are undesired to engage in speaking activities because of the issues such as weak English, hesitation, nervousness, mispronunciation, lack of vocabulary, and weak sentence construction.

#### 4. 4. Cycle 2

##### 4.1 Plan

Taking insights from my teaching staff and also using my judgements, I designed the following strategies to be used in the classroom for remedying the issue selected. The strategies were:

- Use of pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies to engage their participation in speaking activities;
- For improving pronunciation, I used the modelling technique
- Guessing and consulting mini dictionaries or glossaries for word-meaning
- Pair works for negotiating meanings
- Speak out at least two sentences using the dealt words

##### 4.2 Action/intervention

Considering the planned strategies, I converted them into practice for improving students' speaking habits in class. I used pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies thinking that these strategies built their confidence in speaking. So, I asked one student to read the given text and others to locate the difficult words which they felt were difficult to pronounce. They collected words from the text and I asked other students to pronounce the words voluntarily exploiting one student-one word strategy. For the first time, they were not so active to participate in this activity. I encouraged them saying that errors are a good sign of improving your learning and don't worry about your mistakes just try them out yourself. Then, some of them attempted to do that. If they didn't pronounce the words correctly, I pronounced the words for their ease asking them to repeat the pronunciation just following me.

By involving one student in reading, the others were asked to highlight the difficult words from the text. Then, I encouraged them to guess the meaning of the given words. After that, I asked them to consult mini dictionaries or glossaries to confirm or find out the proper meanings. They were given 5 minutes to consult the resources and then asked one student to spell out the word and another to tell the meaning of that word in a pair. Then, I provided

them with some texts to read out in pairs and find out difficult words with their meanings consulting the mini dictionaries and glossaries after reading they were asked to tell the word and the meaning of that word as a pair work activity. Then, I asked them to construct some sentences and speak out at least two sentences expressing their desires, likes, dislikes, etc by asking them randomly. I supported them when they needed my assistance. I exploited these strategies for 5 days to see some changes in their behaviours.

##### 4.3 Observation

After the intervention of the specified strategies, I and my peer teacher found that these activities were just effective to develop pronunciation and word-meaning skills for speaking. Students were found active in taking participation in classroom activities than before. On the following days of the first and second intervention days, they participated in the tasks with more encouragement. They did not hesitate to speak or perform the assigned work. They felt more confident to speak although their expressions were erroneous. I ignored their mistakes for the first time thinking that if I made them aware of their mistakes then they lose their confidence and did not participate in the assigned tasks. I just corrected them using a gentle correction technique. After observing the interventions, my peer observer also asked me to use presentation and role-play strategies in the next plan along with the strategies that I exploited for the second cycle.

#### 5. Cycle 3

##### 5.1 Plan

In the third cycle, I decided to continue the same strategies by adding two more strategies as considering the suggestion of my peer observer. I designed pronunciation and vocabulary-improving strategies and presentation and role-play strategies in the third cycle for remedying the issue selected. The strategies were:

- For improving pronunciation, I used the modelling technique
- Consulting mini dictionaries or glossaries for word-meaning
- Pair works for negotiating meanings
- Speak out at least two sentences using the dealt words
- Presentation

- Role-play

## 5.2 Action/intervention

In the third cycle, I continued the previously designed strategies and also added two more strategies considering the peer suggestion. I used both pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies along with two additional strategies such as presentation and role play. I did the same as I had done in the second cycle for pronunciation and vocabulary improvement strategies. I asked one student to read the given text and others to locate the difficult words which they felt difficult to pronounce. They collected words from the text and I asked other students to pronounce the words voluntarily with the help of one student-one-word strategy. They did those words which they knew and they asked me the pronunciation of the other words and I also asked them to follow my pronunciation of those words. At the same time, I also asked them to find out the difficult words from the text and negotiate the meaning of those words as a pair work by consulting the mini dictionaries. For that task, they were given 5 minutes and I asked one student to spell out the word and another student to tell the meaning of that word as a pair work. Then, I provided them with some texts to read out in pairs and find out difficult words with their meanings consulting the mini dictionaries and glossaries after reading they were asked to tell the word and the meaning of that word as a pair work activity. Then, I asked them to construct some sentences and speak out at least two sentences expressing their desires, likes, dislikes, etc by asking them randomly. I supported them when they needed my assistance.

Then, I asked them to prepare short presentations on any topic of their interest and in the next day's class, they were encouraged to present. For the first time, they become nervous to go and present in front of their friends. But I used this strategy for some days, then, they become more confident to present on the topic of their interest. Then, I also asked them to play the role of different personalities such as doctor, patient, teacher, student, headteacher, parent, etc. and asked them to make a short conversation. I asked them to feel free for choosing their counterparts with whom they feel more comfortable for conversation. I also provided some clues for the conversation.

## 5.3 Observation

After the intervention of the specified strategies, I and my peer teacher found that the

continued activities were just effective to develop pronunciation and word-meaning skills for speaking. The added strategies such as presentation and role play were found more meaningful for developing students' speaking skills. In the initial phase of these strategies, the students were found nervous but in the subsequent days, they were more active in the activities. Students were found more active in taking participation in classroom activities than before. They were found to be encouraged and confident to perform the assigned tasks. They felt more confident to speak although their expressions were erroneous. I used gentle correction techniques to correct students if they committed any mistakes.

## 6. Reflection: lesson learned

The thing that I learned from my action research is that students should not be blamed for not doing something in class because they only do whatever we put them into. They are habituated to the teacher's lectures and some assignments. This has been in practice for a long time so they want their teacher to continue the same things. So, it is the teacher who has to engage students in different kinds of activities so that they can be motivated to do things properly. During my intervention, I encouraged them to take part in different pronunciation and vocabulary-related activities and also in presentation and role-play activities. After some days of action, they saw their interests and engagements in speaking activities as assigned. So, my recommendation after going through this study is that the teacher and school administration should create a positive environment for students and encourage them for developing their autonomy in their learning.

## References

- [1] Negi, J.N. (Ed.). (2019). *Exploring for action, acting for change: stories of exploratory action research in Nepal*. <https://www.supportsocietynepal.org.np/publication/>
- [2] Gnawali, L., Laudari, S. & Shrestha, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Exploratory action research: stories of Nepalese EFL teachers*. NELTA