

Impromptu Speaking Exercises and Their Influence on Language Learners' Oral Fluency

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Abstract: Given that speaking spontaneously and coherently in English often poses significant challenges for learners, the article explores the potential benefits of regular impromptu speaking practice. The article reviews the existing literature on the effectiveness of impromptu speaking exercises and suggests five different exercises that teachers can use to help learners practice speaking spontaneously in English. The article also discusses the difficulties learners may face when participating in impromptu speaking activities and provides suggestions for addressing these challenges. The article concludes by highlighting the importance of carefully considering learners' needs and preferences, the instructional context, and the design and implementation of the activities when incorporating impromptu speaking exercises into language learning programs.

Keywords: Impromptu Speaking, Oral Fluency, English Learners, Speaking Exercises.

Background

English is widely regarded as the global language of communication, and its importance continues to grow across the world. As a result, there is an increasing demand for English language learning programs, particularly among non-native speakers. Oral fluency is a crucial component of English language proficiency.

However, learners often struggle with speaking in English spontaneously and coherently. This can be attributed to several factors, including limited exposure to English speaking environments, a lack of confidence, inadequate vocabulary range, and limited opportunities for speaking practice in the classroom.

To address this challenge, educators and researchers have explored various teaching methodologies and strategies that can enhance oral fluency in language learners. One such strategy is impromptu speaking exercises, which provide learners with the opportunity to practice speaking spontaneously and coherently on various topics in English.

The study aims to identify effective teaching strategies that can be used to support learners in improving their oral fluency in English.

Literature Review

Impromptu speaking exercises have been identified as a potential strategy for improving oral fluency in English language learners.

Several studies have suggested that impromptu speaking activities can significantly enhance learners' oral fluency (Wood, 2006). By engaging in real-time

language production, learners are encouraged to organize their thoughts quickly and express them in English without significant pauses or hesitations.

Impromptu speaking exercises can also enhance learners' confidence in their speaking abilities (Rossiter, 2009). By engaging in regular practice and receiving constructive feedback, learners' apprehension about speaking can be reduced, leading to greater participation and risk-taking in language use (Peng, 2014).

Additionally, impromptu speaking exercises can improve learners' pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns (Derwing et al., 2004). With immediate feedback, learners can correct their pronunciation errors and improve their comprehensibility.

Furthermore, impromptu speaking exercises can help learners expand their active vocabulary (Laufer, 2005). By attempting to express a wide range of ideas, learners are encouraged to use new words and phrases, thereby broadening their vocabulary knowledge.

While the primary focus of impromptu speaking is fluency, such activities can also indirectly improve learners' grammar. They provide opportunities for learners to use grammar in meaningful contexts, thus leading to improved grammatical accuracy over time (Ellis, 2005).

Apart from these language learning benefits, impromptu speaking exercises can also develop learners' critical thinking skills (Davidson, 1995). Finally, by selecting topics from different cultures or global issues, these activities can foster learners'

intercultural competence (Byram, 1997).

Suggested impromptu speaking exercises

1. Role Play: Divide learners into pairs or small groups and provide them with a specific scenario, such as ordering food at a restaurant or making a phone call to a colleague.

- Scenario: You are a customer in a coffee shop, and you want to order a coffee.

- Objectives: Practice ordering food and beverages in English, using polite language and correct pronunciation.

- Role Assignments: One learner is the customer, and the other is the barista.

- Prompts: “What can I get for you today?” “Would you like that hot or iced?” “Would you like any milk or sugar in your coffee?”

- Feedback: After the exercise, learners can provide feedback on their partner’s pronunciation, clarity, and use of polite language.

2. Picture Prompt: Provide learners with a picture prompt and ask them to describe what they see in English. The picture could be a photograph, a painting, or a cartoon.

- Picture: A photograph of a city skyline.

- Objective: Practice describing visuals in English, using adjectives and descriptive language.

- Instructions: Show learners the picture and allow them to observe it for 1-2 minutes. Then, ask learners to describe what they see in the picture, using adjectives and descriptive language. For example, “I see a tall, modern building with glass windows and a reflective surface. The building looks very sleek and futuristic.”

- Feedback: After the exercise, learners can provide feedback on their partner’s use of descriptive language, pronunciation, and clarity.

3. News Headlines: Provide learners with a selection of news headlines and ask them to choose one and speak about it for 1-2 minutes. This exercise helps learners practice summarizing information, expressing opinions, and developing arguments.

- Headline: “New Study Finds Link Between Social Media Use and Depression”

- Objective: Practice summarizing information, expressing opinions, and developing arguments.

- Instructions: Provide learners with a short period to read the article related to the headline. Then, ask learners to present their thoughts and opinions on the topic for 1-2 minutes. For example, “I think that social media can be a useful tool for staying connected with friends and family, but it can also be very addictive and distracting. The study found that excessive social

media use can contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression.”

- Feedback: After the exercise, learners can provide feedback on their partner’s use of persuasive language, organization, and coherence.

4. Debate: Divide learners into two groups and assign them opposing positions on a specific topic, such as the benefits of social media or the impact of climate change.

- Topic: “Should Junk Food Be Banned in Schools?”

- Objective: Practice persuasive language, critical thinking, and public speaking skills.

- Instructions: Divide learners into two groups, with one group arguing for the ban and the other against it. Each group should prepare a set of arguments and rebuttals. For example, the group arguing for the ban might say, “Junk food is unhealthy and contributes to childhood obesity. Schools should provide healthy food options to promote good health and well-being.” The group arguing against the ban might say, “Banning junk food would be too restrictive and limit students’ freedom of choice.”

- Feedback: After the exercise, learners can provide feedback on their partner’s use of persuasive language, organization, and coherence.

5. Storytelling: Ask learners to tell a short personal story related to a specific topic, such as a memorable holiday or a favorite childhood memory. This exercise allows learners to practice narrating events, using storytelling techniques, and expressing emotions in English.

- Topic: “A Memorable Vacation”

- Objective: Practice storytelling techniques, vivid language, and pronunciation.

- Instructions: Allow each learner to present their story to the group for 1-2 minutes. For example, a learner might say, “I went on a trip to Hawaii with my family last summer. We had a great time exploring the beaches and trying new foods. One day, we went on a snorkeling trip and saw all kinds of colorful fish and sea creatures.”

- Feedback: After the exercise, learners can provide feedback on their partner’s use of storytelling techniques, vivid language, and pronunciation.

These are just a few examples of impromptu speaking exercises that. These activities provide opportunities for learners to practice speaking spontaneously in English, develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and improve their pronunciation and grammar.

Difficulties learners may face when participating in impromptu speaking activities

1. Anxiety: Many learners may experience anxiety or nervousness when asked to speak spontaneously. This can lead to hesitation, self-doubt, and poor performance.

2. Limited Vocabulary: Learners with limited vocabulary may struggle to find the right words to express their ideas effectively. This can result in repetitive language and lack of clarity.

3. Grammar Errors: Learners may make grammatical errors when speaking spontaneously, especially if they are not given time to plan or prepare their speech.

4. Lack of Ideas: Some learners may struggle to generate ideas or arguments on the spot, which can lead to a lack of coherence and organization in their speech.

5. Pronunciation and Intonation: Learners may have difficulty with pronunciation and intonation when speaking spontaneously, which can affect their clarity and fluency.

To address these difficulties, teachers can provide learners with opportunities to practice impromptu speaking activities in a supportive and low-pressure environment. Teachers can also provide feedback and guidance on vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and encourage learners to use varied sentence structures and rhetorical devices.

Suggestions for implementing impromptu speaking activities

1. Topic Selection: Selecting appropriate and engaging topics is essential to ensure that learners are motivated to participate in impromptu speaking exercises. Teachers can choose topics that are relevant to learners' interests, such as current events, personal experiences, and popular culture. Additionally, topics that involve problem-solving, decision-making, or critical thinking can help develop learners' cognitive skills.

2. Feedback Provision: Providing constructive feedback is crucial in helping learners improve their oral fluency. Teachers can give immediate feedback on learners' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and coherence. Additionally, peer feedback can be encouraged, as it provides an opportunity for learners to reflect on their performance and receive feedback from their peers.

3. Repeated Practice: Consistent and repeated practice is essential in enhancing learners' oral fluency. Teachers can integrate impromptu speaking exercises into their regular lesson plans, providing learners

with regular opportunities to practice speaking spontaneously in English.

4. Supportive Learning Environment: Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment is crucial in motivating learners to participate in impromptu speaking exercises. Teachers can encourage learners to support and encourage each other during these activities, ensuring that all learners feel safe and comfortable participating.

5. Language Support: Providing learners with relevant language support tools can enhance their oral fluency. These tools can include dictionaries, thesauruses, or language-learning apps, which learners can use to check their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Overall, these strategies can be used to implement impromptu speaking exercises effectively, leading to improved oral fluency and other language learning benefits for English learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, impromptu speaking exercises can be a valuable tool for enhancing oral fluency and other language learning outcomes for English learners. These exercises provide learners with opportunities to practice speaking spontaneously, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and expand their vocabulary and grammar. Implementing impromptu speaking exercises requires careful consideration of learners' needs and preferences, the instructional context, and the design and implementation of the activities. By incorporating impromptu speaking exercises into regular lesson plans, teachers can help learners improve their oral fluency and become more confident and effective communicators in English. However, their effectiveness may depend on various factors, including learners' individual differences, the instructional context, and the way the activities are designed and implemented (Nunan, 1991). This highlights the need for further research to explore the specific needs and responses of learners to these exercises and refine their implementation strategies accordingly.

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