



THE ROLE OF THEME-BASED APPROACH IN ENHANCING YOUNG LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article highlights the effectiveness of implementing theme-based model of CBI (content-based instruction) in developing young learners' speaking skills, as well as it offers an effective way of practising a new language in a meaningful and memorable context. We know that teaching speaking in English in primary education is one of the most demanding, at the same time challenging and rewarding jobs, and young learners are “me”-focused learners, respond emotionally to learning activities. Therefore, teachers should know how to create a warm, friendly English atmosphere in the classroom, how to use different types of activities and how to set up activities in order to enable primary school children to work together in groups. Moreover, this article is based on the study conducted with primary school children to identify the effectiveness of using theme-based CBI in teaching speaking, as well as enhancing young learners' speaking skills.

INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language and its range of functions is increasing everywhere, including Uzbekistan, because dynamic processes in all spheres and successive reforming need acquiring one or two foreign languages even in primary education. Therefore, the goal of language education recently has shifted from teaching linguistic competence to communicative competence in teaching English in primary classes and it demanded to develop language learners' communicative skills, competency and culture using different effective innovative ways of teaching English. Teaching

a foreign language to young learners requires a lot of theoretical background and a prepared and well-informed teacher, children do not consider language learning as a mere intellectual activity. Sarah Phillips argues that "As a general rule, it can be assumed that the younger the children are, the more holistic learners they will be. Younger learners respond to language according to what it does or what they can do with it, rather than treating it as an intellectual game or abstract system." The main emphasis from children's perspective should be placed on practice; the language learning process should have a practical and meaningful aim. We can help children learn English more effectively, if what we do with them is meaningful, purposeful and enjoyable. Most activities for the younger learners should include plenty of movement and involve the senses. The teacher needs to involve a lot of visuals, pictures, objects and posters. Playfulness should be the key word when describing the teacher's approach. Playing with the language is a natural way of learning a foreign language for young learners. Since concentration and attention spans are short, especially at the early stages of language learning, a variety is a must – a variety of activities, a variety of classroom organization, a variety of space, and of course a variety of innovative, learner-centered techniques and methods. The use of innovative, learner-centred methods in the Primary English classroom offers an effective way of practising a new language in a meaningful and memorable context. One of the most innovative approaches to teaching speaking to young learners is implementing a theme-based model of content-based instruction, which plays a significant role in language learning process and enhancing speaking skills. Implementing a theme-based CBI (content-based instruction) in the classroom is one of the most effective ways of teaching speaking in English to young learners. It is fun, as they create a motivating and challenging atmosphere in the classroom and help children enhance a positive attitude towards English. These classes can be taught by EFL teachers who create content material based on the needs and interests of the learners. According to this approach, selected topics or theme provide the content for learners to learn. Based on these topics and themes, language teachers extract language activities and engage learners in language practice and content learning simultaneously.

METHODS

Content-based teaching differs from traditional language classes because language comes second to the content. It is a communicative approach to second language teaching in which teaching program is organized around the content rather than a linguistic syllabus. It draws on the principles of communicative language teaching. As Krankhe mentions, "It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught". In addition, language teachers should have such responsibility as to keep context and comprehensibility foremost in their instruction, to select and adapt authentic materials for use in class, to provide scaffolding for pupils' linguistic content learning, and to create learner-centered classrooms. CBI provides the opportunity for teachers to match pupils' interests and needs with interesting, comprehensible, and meaningful content.

Theme-based teaching model is derived from content-based instruction, which has been implemented worldwide to teach subject matters instead of teaching the language structures in isolation. According to Cameron, in theme-based teaching, learners can practice the language through content that is connected to their real context. This teaching approach provides realistic and motivating uses of the language with meaning and purpose as learners learn content that they can use in their real lives. In addition, Cameron also states that theme-based teaching facilitates learners to become more proficient in a language as it allows them to strengthen language skills because they learn the language in context and not in isolation, but in context through various themes or topics that learners are interested in. The

focus of theme-based instruction is to increase learners interest, engagement, and motivation, as well as it moves away from traditional language learning (translations and rote memorization) and focuses on different topics or "content" to practice language skills. Content may be described as the subject matter, ideas, skills or substance of what is taught. Content comprises an integral part of curriculum and include academic subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Languages, Social Studies, Creative Art, Business Education and recreational activities such as drama and sports. According to Spady and Kotze content involves knowledge derived from significant problems, and the challenges and opportunities people are likely to face after leaving school. Brinton et al proposed that the theme-based model is where language courses are embedded around themes and topics, which are included into teaching all skills. The teacher arranges language-learning activities based on these topics or themes, which are different from traditional courses in which the topics are particularly used for a single activity, while Snow reports that the theme-based model has been widely used in language courses for students who have different backgrounds. However, they share the same common goal of academic English skills. So, theme-based approach is beneficial for teaching a range of skills and content by integrating curriculum areas around a topic, as well as it provides lots of linked activities that allow learners to participate actively in teaching and learning process. Hence, by using this approach, teacher can invent various linked activities which offer lots of opportunities to speak up in the classroom as their primary source of language learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme-based teaching is a vehicle for teaching the language and content, which creates a sense of learners' interest and enthusiastic participation as they are talking about themes of their interest. In a theme-based approach different teaching activities are integrated by their content, the teaching of different skills areas is incorporated into the theme and the theme acts as a connecting thread. It provides young learners with motivating and meaningful uses of the language. According to Scott and Ytrberg, implementing theme-based approach to teach speaking to young learners includes the following:

- ✦ *when a teacher is concentrating on a particular theme, the content of the lesson becomes more important than the language itself;*
- ✦ *working on themes can help the learning process;*
- ✦ *it allows a teacher to go into a subject in depth and brings out reactions and feelings;*
- ✦ *working on a theme allows the teacher to rearrange the material to suit what is happening generally;*
- ✦ *the work in the classroom naturally includes all the language skills as well as guided and free activities*

So, implementing theme-based approach in teaching speaking to primary schoolchildren is beneficial and productive, as following:

- ✦ *Easier acquisition. Natural language acquisition occurs in context, making it easier for learners.*
- ✦ *Concrete goals. It is concrete, not abstract.*
- ✦ *Cooperative learning. Learners interact regularly, improving lesson retention and class atmosphere.*
- ✦ *Variety. It can focus on any topic and use endless real-world content.*
- ✦ *Language learning becomes more interesting and motivating;*
- ✦ *It offers a wide educational knowledge to learners in the form of the different topics instructed;*

✦ *It helps learners develop valuable studyskills such as note taking, summarizing and extracting key information from texts;*

✦ *Developing collaborative skills, especially when using group work, which can have great social value.*

Therefore, Harmer states that, English teachers should be able to create the exposures of using English in the classroom through interesting activities in order to involve learners within something rather than keep silent and listen to teacher's explanation.

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, we can state that the implementation of theme-based CBI in teaching speaking to young learners has more strengths than weaknesses. It increases learners' participation in the speaking class by the practical and interesting content. It is very flexible and can accommodate various types of activities which are motivating the learners to participate in the speaking task, and it adjusts them work in individual, in pair and in groups according to the content. Pair and group works are found to eliminate learners' psychological barriers and increase their self-confidence. These multifunctional activities are related to eliciting knowledge of content, acquisition of thinking skills, and development of English language abilities. In addition, theme-based CBI becomes a useful approach when developing communicative competence in young learners, basically because it focuses on using the language on specific culturally determined situations and paraphrasing as well.

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