

**BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN IMPROVING YOUNG
LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION**

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Abstract: This article deals with the effectiveness of implementing communicative activities in teaching speaking in English to young learners. Teaching English in primary education is one of the most demanding, at the same time, challenging and rewarding jobs, as using different types of communicative, interactive activities offers an effective way of practising a new language in a meaningful and memorable context, as well as it enables primary school children to use a foreign language in different communicative situations and work together in groups.

Key words: young learners, primary classes, language acquisition, communicative activities, teaching speaking, language skills, communicative language teaching (CLT), interaction, learner autonomy, real-life tasks, motivation.

Teaching a foreign language to young learners requires a lot of theoretical background and a prepared, well-informed teacher, since children do not consider language learning as a mere intellectual activity. According to Sarah Phillips *“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”*. That is why the main emphasis from children’s perspective should be placed on practice; the language learning process should have a practical and meaningful aim. Teachers can help children learn English more effectively, if what they 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 younger 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.

Speaking is one of language skills learned by the pupils in a foreign language. It involves a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of language orally. By learning speaking, pupils will know the way to express language communicatively, as well as they learn how to express utterances meaningfully.

The aim of teaching speaking in the classroom is to maintain pupils’ ability to speak well and to improve their ability in oral communication, and English teachers have a responsibility to improve pupils’ English speaking skills, therefore the teachers must have a good teaching method in order to solve the problems faced by the learners in learning English, as well as they need appropriate techniques in teaching speaking to make them capable of being active and creative in the learning process in the classroom. In order to create effective learning activities in the classroom, teachers should focus on the learners’ participation during the process of learning. According to Harmer, the aim of teaching speaking is to train students for communication. To do that, the teacher should be able to develop activities which promote students to use language in

real communication, as well as 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.

Communicative language teaching is a popular approach in language education that emphasizes interaction and real-life communication. This method encourages pupils to use the target language in meaningful real life contexts, enhancing their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners. Moreover, these activities have real purposes: *to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture*. Thus, learners' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics and the teachers in communicative classrooms will find themselves talking less, listening more, becoming active facilitators of their pupils' learning. A classroom informed by communicative language teaching principles include the use of communicative activities at each lesson stage. If an activity is a short warm up to introduce a lesson, it is a pre-task. That means pupils do the task in order to prepare for learning or review previously learned content. During a lesson a communicative activity mainly involves the practice of new language and in a post task activity learners are expected to perform, to communicate with greater self-confidence. According to David Courtney, any communicative activity should be designed, implemented and evaluated according to 4 criteria, which is connected to the balance of L2 development, learner autonomy and motivation. They are:

- ✦ *Fun activities* – these activities reduce stress and may help learners remember content, increase learners' integrative motivation and include topics that learners know;
- ✦ *Meaningful activities* – these activities give pupils a chance to share ideas and solve problems, as well as they promote fluency;
- ✦ *Interactive activities* – these activities require learners to use their L2 to complete a shared task, thus interaction helps to improve accuracy and explicit attention to language learning;
- ✦ *Routine or frequent activities* – these activities help better understand the direction for each task, which may lead to easier implementation and improved on-task behavior;

From my teaching experience I have noticed that in order to conduct English lessons effectively in primary education and to teach speaking to young learners through communicative activities teachers should know above-mentioned 4 criteria and should follow the following rules:

- ✦ the language activities presented in class should be accompanied by the kinesthetic movement including as many senses as possible;
- ✦ children love experiments and they want to try new things, that is why when teachers present the language they should take into account the activities which help pupils play with language and practice the language;
- ✦ young learners keep their enthusiasm in learning the language by being involved in variety of tasks, therefore teachers should know how to design different communicative tasks according to their learners' needs and interest;
- ✦ a tentative routine of interesting activities should be prepared before class, as young learners are motivated by completing language tasks and activities;

In conclusion, we want to say that the lesson structure depends on goals, contents, target audience, and using communicative activities is not an objective, but it is a means of creating necessary conditions for communicatively effective learning. It encourages individuals' cooperation, self-development, improves both skills of foreign language communication and personality traits. Developing young learners' speaking skills through communicative activities has many

advantages for both language teachers and learners, because using these activities in teaching speaking to young learners:

- lowers affective filter;
- encourages creative and spontaneous use of language;
- promotes communicative competence;
- motivates, fosters whole class participation;
- reinforces vocabulary/ grammar and focuses on them communicatively;
- builds class cohesion;
- promotes healthy competition;
- utilizes all four skills and requires minimum preparation after development.

So, communicative activities provide a great pedagogical value for language teachers with many advantages when they are introduced in foreign language classrooms. The review of the studies related to teaching speaking in English through communicative activities indicates that these activities play a crucial role in foreign language teaching and learning contexts in a variety of areas, as they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners are not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing the target language freely, as well as they create a successful and positive classroom environment where learners and their learning are central.

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