

TEACHING SPEAKING IN AN EFL CLASSROOM WITH INNOVATIVE METHODS

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Abstract: Speaking is an essential component of teaching and learning a second language. For students to express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural norms acceptable in each communicative context, the purpose of teaching speaking today must be to increase students' communicative abilities. To use speaking effectively, students must master several critical skills. They must possess the ability to generalize, influence others, and ask and respond to questions. This study involved 24 first-year students from the Dental Technicians study program within the George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures, during the 2020–2021 academic year and was intended to emphasize the positive effects of using Canva to increase their speaking abilities through project-based learning. Students were asked to create a leaflet and a brochure on a dental subject, device, and/or problem, publish it on Canva and present it to the teacher and their colleagues.

Keywords: project-based learning, EFL, speaking skills, Canva, dental medicine

Introduction

English has become a vital part of everyday life. It is now a widely used form of communication worldwide. As a result, people learn English to interact socially with others and to maintain connections with individuals around the world. Moreover, English is the most often used language for communication in a variety of fields, and it has become the official language of the virtual world (Ananiadou, 2011). The development of the other communication skills (reading and writing) is thought to follow the development of the speaking competency. This is in line with Linse's (2005) assertion that speaking is the first skill that young English language learners need to master before they can read and write in the language they are learning.

Speaking is the act of conveying thoughts, ideas, and feelings using auditory symbols or obvious bodily movements with the expectation that the listener will understand the meaning of the message that we are trying to convey. The speaker can instruct others, answer inquiries, and make generalizations. Speaking as a skill requires a lot of practice and exercise. According to Brown, H.D. (1994), anxiety is one of the difficulties students have when speaking since they are terrified of making mistakes. Therefore, it might be inferred that some students are reluctant to talk because they are concerned about speaking incorrectly.

Speaking is a communicative activity that comprises receiving, producing, and processing information (Brown, H.D, 2001). Students can convey their ideas and opinions by speaking to others, which is a skill that is employed in all social interactions. As a result, it is critical to encourage them to talk to help them

communicate effectively in a variety of settings. To speak English effectively and accurately, students should practice speaking it as much as they can. According to Fauziati (2008) “teaching of speaking skill should be figured as central in foreign language pedagogy”. Thus, language teachers have the role to find suitable methods to teach and stimulate students to be active speakers.

It is expected that teachers would play a noteworthy role in changing the classroom environment to improve students' English-speaking abilities. Latha and Ramesh (2012) pointed out that to stimulate and motivate students to study, teachers should develop engaging activities, and methods, and create good relationships with their students. Teachers need to adjust their duties and teaching strategies to encourage speaking among their students. They should emphasize active learning techniques that allow students to create lessons, act independently, generate ideas from scratch, and collaborate with others.

Project-based learning – an innovative method

Project-based learning (PBL) is one of the teaching strategies that many teachers believe might encourage students to become active learners. This approach to training differs from conventional instruction because it emphasizes learning through student-centred learning techniques that incorporate real-world situations. As Patton states (2012) PBL is a method which allows “students to design, plan, and carry out an extended project that produces a publicly exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation”. Through PBL, students accomplish authentic projects while engaging in purposeful communication, giving them the chance to use the language in a situation that feels close to natural. This allows students to engage in meaningful activities that call for the use of authentic language (Fragoulis, 2009).

Based on my personal experiences with students, there are a few problems that may contribute to students' inability to speak English well.

1. the teacher spends too much time teaching grammar structure and reading, thus students do not have enough opportunity to practice speaking;
2. students' limited vocabulary. Students must gain a wide range of practical terminology.
3. some students do not think the language has any real-world use. They cannot apply the academic material to their condition in real life.

Many other types of strategies, methods, and approaches can be used while teaching speaking to get around the issues mentioned above. For these reasons, I have chosen to experiment with the project-based learning method as an alternative to teaching speaking because many study findings show that this method is successful.

According to Haines (1989), PBL gives students the chance to engage in learning activities with their group and use their prior knowledge and talents to continue their education.

As stated by Bell (2010), there are a variety of advantages to using PBL while teaching English as a foreign language:

1. students learn contextually and meaningfully;

2. they can practice English-speaking skills in a pleasant environment;
3. they feel motivated and engaged in the given activity when using PBL;
4. they actively take part in project learning;
5. they can improve their teamwork abilities.

By using PBL in teaching English as a foreign language the teacher's role shifted from that of a simple lecturer to that of a leader who guides students. New roles in learning were also taken up by the students. Instead of just being passive knowledge recipients, they started working together and taking an active role in the teaching-learning process. The focus of the class shifted from the teacher to the students. Following these adjustments, most class time was given over to the students, allowing for more extensive and varied language practice.

As described by Larmer, Mergendoller, and Boss (2015) there are four main stages of project-based learning:

1. project launch;
2. inquiry;
3. development (which includes criticism and revision);
4. presentations.

Throughout each phase, teachers act as both facilitators and instructors to assist students in creating genuine and visible results. The learning objectives and course materials are explained and students are encouraged to actively participate in problem-solving during the learning process. The teacher works with the students to clarify and arrange the assignments that are connected to the problem. Students are urged by the teacher to gather facts and information, conduct experiments, and offer a clear solution to the issue. Though the middle two phases of project-based learning are introduced by ideation and inquiry, these elements can occur concurrently. Students will change their process and final output as they continue their inquiry.

Marx (1997) outlined the following concerns teachers may have to deal with while using the PBL technique:

1. time management: tasks frequently take longer than expected;
2. classroom management;
3. support for students in the learning process;
4. the technology used in the classroom which can sometimes be challenging for teachers and/or students, especially for using it as a cognitive aid;
5. assessment: teachers could find it challenging to create assessment patterns that demand students to properly demonstrate their speaking abilities.

Research Methodology

Context

George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures is a multicultural university that offers Bachelor's, Masters' programs and PhD courses in a variety of fields such as medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, engineering, sciences and letters and economics and law. English is taught as a foreign language and lecturers are constantly updating and adapting new teaching strategies

and instructional materials to make it interesting for their students. The present study was performed during the 2020-2021 academic year when courses were held online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants

The study is a qualitative research based on descriptive data and excludes the use of statistical analysis. It involves 24 first-year students from the Dental Technicians study program within the Faculty of Dental Medicine. They struggle with speaking skills in English-language classes because they lack the vocabulary, grammar, conversational topics, and the capacity to fully communicate their views to the listener.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to examine Canva as a teaching and learning tool to promote speaking ability in project-based learning. For seven weeks, 24 students took part in the experiment where they had to create two presentations, a brochure and a leaflet on a dental subject, device, and/or problem, publish it on Canva and present it to the teacher and their colleagues. The study wanted to shed light on the positive effects of the PBL technique in enhancing students' speaking abilities. To create the assignments, students had to make use of their vocabulary knowledge specific to the field of dental medicine.

Results and discussions

Anuradha et al. (2014) assert that teachers have a vital role in encouraging interaction and fostering speaking abilities. The roles are:

1. the teacher must be accurate and proficient in spoken language to serve as an example for the students;
2. the teacher motivates students to use the target language by asking questions. One kind of oral drill is asking questions and forcing people to respond.

The study was conducted in four cycles. In the first cycle, students were given the necessary instructions on how to use Canva. Canva is an online design and publishing platform that was introduced in 2013 to enable anybody in the world to design anything and publish anywhere. Additionally, they were explained the tasks they need to accomplish. The teacher, who became the instructor, quizzed the class about their knowledge of brochures and leaflets and taught them the steps they need to follow to create the two assignments. As students had two classes per week (4 hours), two were used for other activities (grammar, reading, vocabulary practices) and two for designing and presenting the outcome of their project.

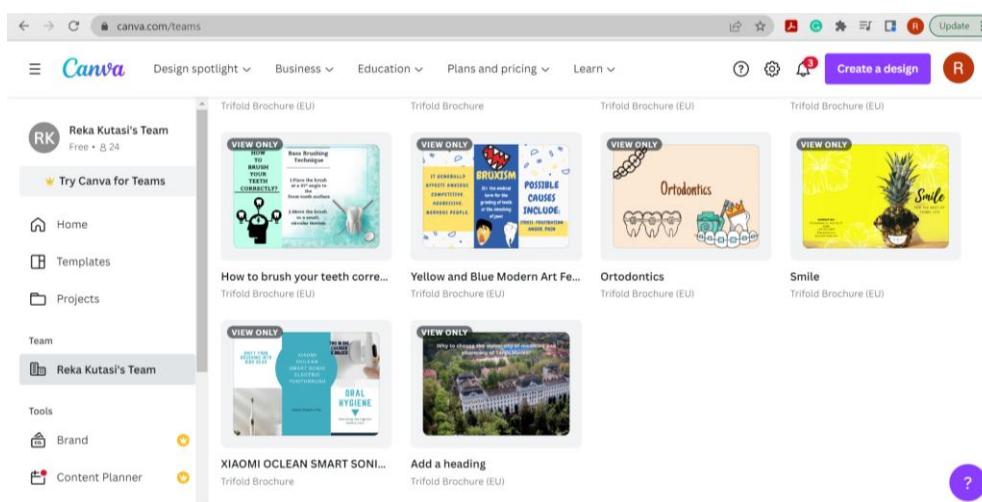


Image 1. Canva team.

In the second cycle, the teacher showed examples of brochures and leaflets, helped students to choose the topics they wanted to write about and gave additional information by sending them articles, and presentations on the topics they had selected. Based on the information they had gathered, the students created their presentations. Students were also instructed that plagiarism is not accepted and were asked to design original works on the chosen topic.

The teacher allowed the students to plan their project activities, timeframe, and schedule according to their own needs. Three weeks (6 hours) were given to complete the job. Every week, students gave an update on the status of their project so that the teacher could effectively manage any problems that might have arisen. The teacher-reviewed each student's projects and offered support as needed. The chosen themes were varied, starting with 'How to brush your teeth correctly?' to subjects related to pediatric dentistry, illnesses like bruxism and others.

The third cycle consisted in publishing the results. The students created a brochure and a leaflet by using Canva. They were allowed to add short videos or animations to make them more captivating so that their followers would watch, like, and comment on them.

The last cycle was the one where students had to present their works to the teacher and their classmates. The teacher and the students both provided feedback, criticism, and suggestions for the products.

The teacher interviewed the students regarding the challenges and roadblocks of the project and questioned them on the advantages and disadvantages of the learning process. The students discussed their project-related experiences. They also developed ideas to properly improve the project to be used for the subsequent instruction of speaking in EFL classrooms based on their experiences.

Using Canva as a tool to teach speaking has had positive effects on the development of first-year students' speaking skills. Every activity encouraged students to learn more, it stimulated their curiosity and ability to organize and assess their work. Applying project-based learning with Canva showed that the students were enthusiastic

to actively engage in creating the assignments. In addition, this was the very first time they had used Canva for project-based learning. As part of the learning process, the students searched for information to design their tasks and could practice pronunciation and intonation as well. The research has also shown that students learned new terminology, phrases, and idioms thus being able to expand their vocabulary through the projects created on Canva.

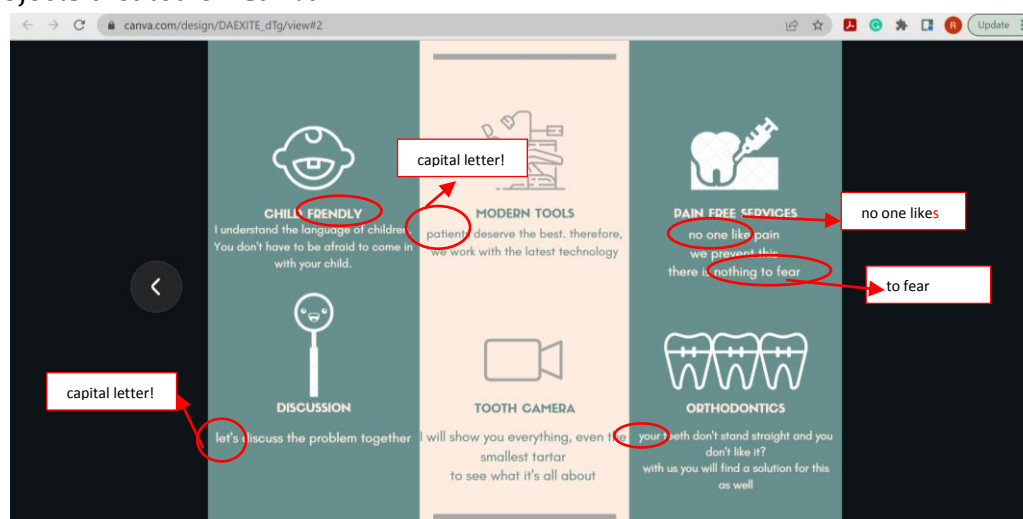


Image 2. Canva project.

It was a great opportunity for the teacher to assess students' speaking, grammar and vocabulary knowledge and correct mistakes.

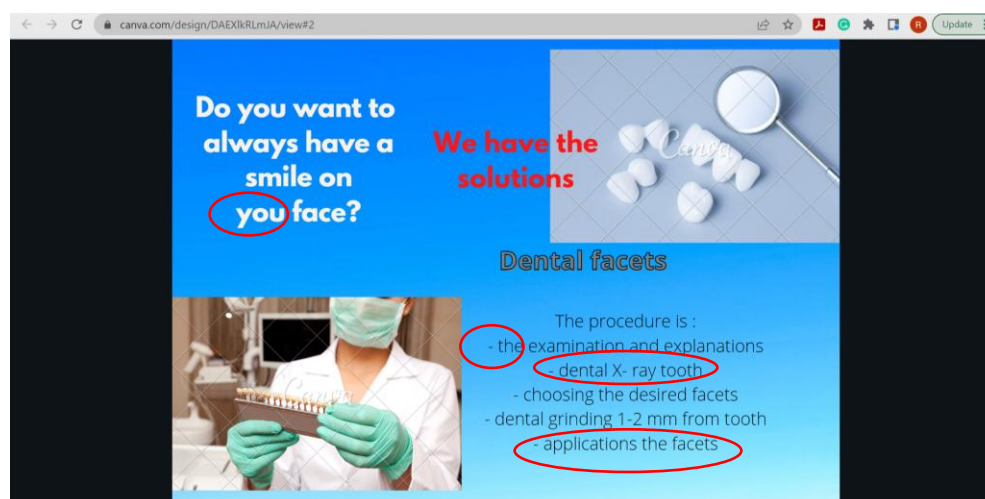


Image 3. Canva project.

Students' involvement in their speaking lessons increased noticeably because of the assignments. When students were evaluated individually, the overall findings showed some progress in their speech. Therefore, if the PBL technique is well prepared to teach speaking skills among students, it could have important educational implications and be a useful technique.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Canva provides a useful speaking skill learning tool. Students can improve their speaking, but also their writing abilities. This study shows how students can use online tools as key sources for idea generation while learning to speak English. Additionally, during the teaching-learning activity, the students showed more courage, confidence, and motivation in learning to speak.

This study, however, provides EFL teachers and students with fresh perspectives on teaching and learning speaking through project-based learning. Since education coexists with the age of technology and communication, it would be interesting to conduct further research on in-depth observations made in an EFL-speaking classroom about the usage of Canva as a speaking tool.

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