

## SOLVING LIMITED SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS EFL

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**Abstract:** One of the key challenges in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is providing students with sufficient opportunities to practice speaking the language. In many EFL contexts, students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and classroom time is often dominated by grammar instruction and written exercises. This can result in students struggling to develop their speaking skills and confidence. Addressing this issue is critical for helping EFL students become effective communicators in English.

**Key words:** *EFL, discussions, role-plays, information gap exercises, presentation, feedback, lexical range.*

There are several strategies EFL teachers can employ to increase their students' speaking practice and improve their oral communication abilities:

Firstly, Maximize communicative activities. EFL teachers should dedicate a significant portion of class time to interactive, communicative activities that get students speaking in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class. This could include discussions, role-plays, information gap exercises, and other task-based activities. Using real-world English materials like news articles, videos, podcasts, and websites can expose students to natural, conversational language and provide relevant topics for discussion. Having students take on more active, student-centered roles, such as leading discussions, giving presentations, or teaching mini-lessons, forces them to generate their own speech. EFL teachers should monitor student conversations, provide feedback, and strategically correct errors to help students improve their spoken English over time. Teachers can motivate students to practice English through extracurricular activities, language partners, or online exchanges with other EFL learners.

As English language teachers, one of our primary goals is to help students become confident, capable speakers. However, this is often easier said than done, especially for EFL learners who may feel self-conscious or intimidated by the prospect of conversing in a non-native language.

This is where the power of specific, actionable feedback comes into play. Rather than relying on vague praise or overly critical corrections, teachers can provide students with clear, constructive guidance that gives them a roadmap for steady improvement.

Consider the area of pronunciation, for instance. A common challenge for many

EFL learners is mastering the 'th' sound, which can be tricky for speakers of languages that don't have this phoneme. Rather than simply telling a student 'Your pronunciation needs work,' a teacher could offer this type of specific feedback: 'I noticed you're having trouble pronouncing the 'th' sound. Try bringing your tongue a bit closer to your top teeth when you say words like 'think' and 'breathe'. 'This not only identifies the issue, but provides a concrete strategy the student can practice to correct it.

Similarly, with grammar, a teacher might point out: 'Great job using the past tense consistently. Just watch out for subject-verb agreement - try 'I went to the store yesterday' instead of 'I go to the store yesterday.' This isolates a specific grammar point the student can focus on, rather than just noting that their grammar needs improvement.

Vocabulary is another area ripe for actionable feedback. Perhaps a student used some good descriptive words, but could expand their lexical range. The teacher might say, "You used some really vivid adjectives to describe the scenery. To add even more detail, you could try words like 'breathtaking', 'serene', or 'picturesque'." This not only praises the student's existing skills, but provides concrete suggestions for how to build on them.

And when it comes to fluency, a teacher could point out: "I noticed you paused a lot to think of the right words. Try not to worry so much about perfection - just keep the conversation flowing by using simpler language if you get stuck." This feedback acknowledges the student's challenge, but gives them a productive strategy to focus on rather than just telling them to "speak more fluently."

The key in all of these examples is that the feedback is specific, actionable, and focused on empowering students to take concrete steps to improve. Rather than simply being told what they're doing wrong, learners are given clear guidance on what to work on and how to go about it. This fosters a growth mindset, builds confidence, and gives students a roadmap for steady, measurable progress in their speaking abilities.

Ultimately, developing confident, capable EFL speakers is no small feat. But by providing students with focused, constructive feedback - the kind that identifies specific areas for improvement and offers actionable strategies to address them - teachers can give learners the tools and the motivation they need to keep enhancing their oral communication skills over time.

The key is providing ample opportunities for students to actively use the language, while scaffolding the activities to make the speaking practice feel purposeful and not overly intimidating. Rotating through different formats and grouping structures also keeps things dynamic and engaging.

Additionally, teachers should model and encourage the use of target vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in these speaking activities. Providing feedback and allowing for multiple attempts further reinforces students' progress. With a diverse array of structured speaking practice built into lesson plans, teachers can steadily build

students' confidence and fluency over time.

#### Communicative Pair/Group Work

Having students work in pairs or small groups to complete information gap activities, role plays, or open-ended discussions is incredibly valuable. The lower-pressure, collaborative environment encourages more spontaneous, authentic speaking practice.

#### Student-Led Presentations

Assigning prepared presentations on topics of the students' choosing builds confidence and fluency. Providing detailed rubrics and feedback helps students improve their delivery over time.

#### Debate and Discussion

Structured debates or Socratic-style discussions on thought-provoking topics push students to organize their thoughts, formulate opinions, and engage in persuasive, back-and-forth dialogue.

#### Storytelling and Narration

Having students recount personal anecdotes, describe images, or narrate short stories taps into their creativity and gets them comfortable speaking at length.

#### Communication Strategy Practice

Explicitly teaching and practicing communication strategies like paraphrasing, circumlocution, and clarification questions helps students develop the tools to keep conversations flowing.

#### Pronunciation Drills and Feedback

Targeted practice with minimal pairs, tongue twisters, and other pronunciation activities - combined with individualized feedback - can significantly improve students' clarity of speech.

#### Multimodal Approaches

Incorporating visual aids, gestures, role play, and other modes of expression engages different learning styles and makes speaking practice more dynamic and enjoyable.

The common thread across these techniques is that they provide ample opportunity for students to actively use the language in authentic, meaningful contexts. The role of the teacher is to skillfully scaffold and facilitate these speaking activities in a way that builds confidence and skill over time. Of course, the specific techniques that work best will depend on the proficiency level, learning styles, and needs of a given group of students. But incorporating a diverse array of speaking-focused activities is key to helping EFL/ESL learners develop their oral communication abilities.

Conclusion, addressing the challenge of limited speaking opportunities is crucial for helping EFL students develop strong communicative competence in English. By implementing strategies that maximize in-class speaking practice, utilize authentic materials, foster student engagement, and promote English use beyond the

classroom, EFL teachers can better equip their students to become confident and capable English speakers.

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