

VIRTUAL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES TO TEACH SPEAKING TO LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CASE DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The following article gives description of the speaking skills in English. Furthermore, the article analyzes the issues that teachers come across while teaching speaking to learners. The article suggests a set of virtual instructional strategies to apply in remote education.

Keywords: Strategies, training, speaking, foreign language, comprehensive input, sentence frames

INTRODUCTION

Teaching speaking has always been a challenge for teachers of English language. It is challenging to observe to what extent your pupils are making progress as well. Speaking allows us to communicate with others and express our thoughts and feelings. Speaking skills can be separated into formal and informal speaking skills, and we use both types in a variety of contexts throughout life. Informal speaking skills are important for conversations with friends and family. Speakers need to master complex grammatical studies to express ideas, utilize appropriate phonology (from phonemes to intonation and thought groups), and to do all this spontaneously, fluently and respectfully. And listeners, the silent team players in a conversation,

need to mirror each and every one of these sub-skills, along with also applying 'active' listening skills and reacting empathetically [Rhona Snelling, 2021, p. 2]

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

It is known to all that all students are the same and reaching and teaching all students in the same way, proves to be difficult. English learners have particular educational needs. It gives us clue to the fact that we have to analyze needs, wants and desires of our students. For example, they are learning the English language and the grade-level content at the same time. Due to this fact, teachers need the best practices for teaching English learners during all the time including remote learning.

English Learners' teachers' lessons must ensure a balance of all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The four basic skills are related to each other by two parameters: the mode of communication: oral or written and the direction of communication: receiving or producing the message. Listening comprehension is the receptive skill in the oral mode. When we speak of listening what we really mean is listening and understanding what we hear. Listening comprehension is the receptive skill in the oral mode. When we speak of listening what we really mean is listening and understanding what we hear. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It, like the other skills, is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words [Aydogan, 2014, p. 1] Keeping the balance is to be most effective. Out of these skills speaking is the hardest one to plan and implement virtually. Speaking skill is one of the most necessary skill in English to communicate in our daily life (Tuyen, 2021, p. 1).

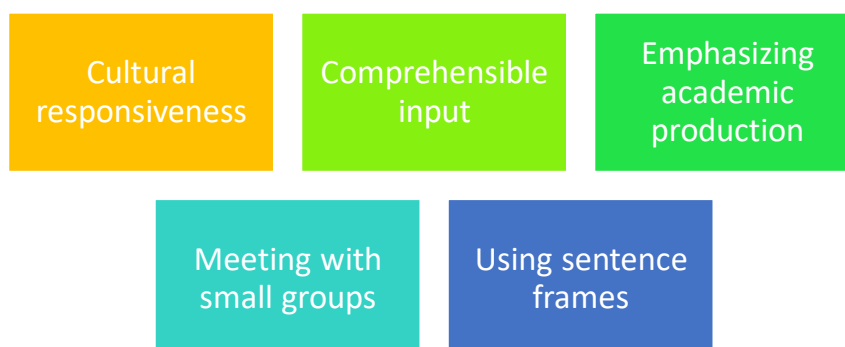


Illustration 1. Five main virtual instructional strategies to teach speaking skills

- **Building relationships and being culturally responsive**

To achieve English language development in learners, teachers need to talk about building rapport with students. Cultivating positive relationships with students

has always been meaningful. The importance of virtual instruction, social-emotional learning is at the forefront. Teachers care about the students, but at times, the students don't realize that is the case. Many of our English learners' lives are in turmoil as they arrive in our education system and leave everything they know behind. Add the global pandemic to it, and there is even more urgency to ensure the students feel safe. As educators, we need to provide safety and security before we can provide educational support. If these conditions are not created for students, they are unlikely to be ready to study. The goal is to make sure the students feel comfortable, confident, and content. As an educator, fostering a positive student-teacher relationship is critical, especially in distance learning settings, because they allow for educators to:

- look for clues to students' home life that may impact their access to learning
- plan effective instruction
- maximize student engagement
- recognize students' interests and strengths
- create a comfortable environment so students can practice their new language skills
- connect the content taught to students' life experiences through meaningful instructions

It could be as simple as asking English Learners how they are feeling. They can rate their feelings based on a number, an emoji, or a picture, depending on their language level.






| | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 5 | Rage, Furious |  |
| 4 | Angry, Mad |  |
| 3 | Frustrated, Confused, Annoyed, Sad |  |
| 2 | Nervous, Worried, Anxious |  |
| 1 | Happy, Calm, Satisfied, Pleased, Okay |  |

Illustration 2. Emotions thermometer

Teachers should start the day by answering a warm-up question. The teacher will call on a student to answer a question. That student unmutes the microphone and answers the question. Now that student has the power to call on another student. So on and so forth until they have talked to 3 to 5 students. Teachers should let students to speak about something they are comfortable speaking about and is important to them. English learners can present their pet, their favorite toy, or an important artifact in their home. They can also explain the meaning of their name or show a meaningful picture.

Teachers will provide sentence frames as necessary or encourage English Learners to share in their home language, if possible. Teachers may also use breakout rooms. Using a breakout room may provide emotional safety to English Learners as they would show and tell a handful of students versus the entire class. Then they can choose to report to the whole class.

- **Provision of comprehensible input for English learners**

Comprehensible input is also an essential part of making sure our English Learners understand the language and the content. Teachers present a lesson via listening or reading, or both. The gist of the content and language that the students are receiving must be understood. Therefore, explicit and targeted Comprehensible Input is essential for English learners since it allows them to use the information they already know to comprehend and use new linguistic concepts in speaking.

Comprehensible input in English is English language that you can understand. Language inputs are things that you hear (like podcasts, the radio, conversations, and so on) as well as things you read (like books, articles, English blog articles) (Ramsay Lewis, 2020, p. 2).

We still have to provide comprehensible input during remote learning, but it's different from when we do so in person. Virtual live sessions are probably the best opportunity for comprehensible input because the teacher can communicate in the target language at the English Learners' language level. In virtual live sessions, the idea is to design various activities that do not drill vocabulary and grammar but use them in context.

Equally important is to choose quality of input over quantity. It is difficult to provide the same amount of comprehensible input as when teaching in person. Remember that your English learners, and you may not have the technology, Internet bandwidth, or time to watch hours of teacher-created video and audio content. Lastly, English learners cannot provide output such as speaking if the language has not been

introduced, modeled and broken down into understandable chunks of information. This is truly what comprehensible input is all about. Engaging students with a picture as a way to provide enough relevant background information is also provided. Of course, students have to be in context to what teachers are about to teach. The idea is that the teacher will provide questions or statements about the picture and students will have to answer the questions. The questions or statements they provide will guide the students to practice, learn or discover the vocabulary that you want to present.

- **Emphasizing academic language production**

We are trying to help students practice speaking the academic language that is typically used in the classroom. Some students struggle with this, even during face-to-face instruction. Educators have to be savvy since it is critical that teachers build in activities that require students to share their thinking in English. Teachers should constantly be looking for ways to build interaction within lessons. Students can post messages via audio or video and respond to each other. Recordings that English learners make should be as short as three to five minutes in general. Many platforms can be used in order to have students respond to each other, to texts, or to the different content areas. Some strategies that teachers have found useful for emphasizing academic language production include the following: Assigning English learners to regularly summarize what they learned an effective way to increase comprehension and retention of new materials. The student will record a podcast or podcast using an app on a smartphone or tablet. The assignment will be to summarize the key concepts from one or more lessons. A variation of this assignment is to have students hear their classmates podcast and allow for oral feedback or questions. Students who excel in a strategy get to record themselves teaching it. The teacher saves them and uses them as peer tutoring. Teachers should have English learners record a video. Their task will be to explain, and teach a vocabulary word, a topic, a story, a math problem. Allowing students to do this will let them feel connected to their classmates. They are also practicing academic English language in safe and fun way. Teachers can select the best videos to keep as a way to help other students struggling with a certain concept. It's a virtual adaptation to peer instruction and student output.

Activity called "Picture it" has always been a sound teaching practice to use visual representations like graphic organizers and concept maps when working with English learners. Visual illustrations allow English learners to understand the content

better while learning essential vocabulary. These graphic organizers can also be utilized as a formative assessment during remote learning.

After a unit in any content area, the English learners are tasked to create a visual or symbolic representation; this can be a graphic organizer, a web, or a concept map, of information and vocabulary learned. Once the students have created their visual representation, they can prepare to explain their graphic.

- **Meeting with small group**

There is nothing better than meeting with a small group of students to better engage them in discussion during remote learning. The affective filter is lowered, and students feel comfortable to speak in front of 5 versus 25 students. Having 25 students on the screen all at once can get overwhelming for students and teachers as well. When working with smaller groups that are leveled by language levels, students may feel more comfortable with asking and answering questions even with limited English-speaking skills.

Here are the following examples:

- Practice academic vocabulary and fluency with chants and songs
- Read aloud to the students.
- During the read aloud model thinking aloud, ask comprehension questions
- Remember the wait time is longer during remote learning so make sure you leave time for students to think and respond
- Frontload vocabulary or concepts

- **Using sentence frames**

The struggle to communicate can potentially hurt content and language mastery for English learners. In turn, this can widen the achievement gap between them and their monolingual peers. Improving outcomes for our English learners is always the goal. One very important scaffold that is easy to use during remote learning is to use sentence frames. If it is used consistently, English learners will learn to communicate more clearly and confidently.

A sentence frame is a framework that helps English learners respond to questions posed in the classroom. Sentence frames provide a starting point for English learners to attempt to form their own answers. By using a sentence frame, they don't have to think about how to correctly phrase an answer which allows them to focus all of their cognitive effort on the academic content.

Benefits to using Language Frames:

- ✓ Sentence frames give English Learners a better idea of the response you are expecting
- ✓ English learners can focus on learning the content rather than shape
- ✓ Students can learn English sentence structure and grammar easier
- ✓ Classroom oral discussion can be enriched

CONCLUSION

As we have undergone distance learning as the main mode of teaching while pandemic, lots of strategies have been worked out to teach in distance in easier and more effective conditions. We have seen five of them above in detailed manner. They are cultural responsibility of teachers, creation of comprehensive input, high emphasis on academic production, teaching in small groups and last but not least introducing students sentence frames.

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