

Speak Your Thought Out (SYTO): A Project Initiative for Communicating in English

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to present the objectives, strategies and outcome of an initiative taken up by the department of English, TBAK College, Kilakarai, Tamil Nadu on the topic SYTO to train the students to speak in English fluently without any inhibition. The objectives of the project are to create recreational and consolidating opportunity for students to learn and practice oral English, and to trigger students' creative talents by to provide encouraging atmosphere. The criteria for analysing the speaking skill are: their ability to choose the topic on their own; preparation; flow of thoughts and ideas with illustrations; delivery mechanism; and pronunciation. The concluding part of the paper discusses the success rate of students' effort to speak in English, the outcome and plan for its future improvement.

English is the official language in a large number of countries and it is also considered to be the dominant business and social language. Tejshree Auckle stated in his article, "...it will examine the way(s) in which convert language policy and planning construct English as a valuable social, cultural and linguistic resource" (80). Hence it is very much necessary for people to speak English if they are to face the global workforce. Much of the world's top films, books and music are published and produced in English. By learning English therefore, one will have access to a great wealth of entertainment and a greater cultural availability. Hence, a major priority of higher education should be to provide the

highest possible quality in English language teaching.

Many students who enter college are unprepared for the demands career platform places on them. The understanding of education in the modern context, is not exclusive in academic terms alone. Higher education's role is also to produce graduates who are prepared for the workforce. Education should provide its learners skill to strike a balance between academic and practical experience.

Effective Communication is one such skill. It plays a vital role especially in domains where democracy prevails. As mentioned by Dr. C A Lal in his article on "Theme Centred

Interaction – Towards a Democratic Pedagogy in the English Language Classroom,” ‘Democratic Life’ constitutes another name for a life of inquiring, communicating, and learning.” (23). So democracy is a mode of associated living making possible the very process of interactive learning and understanding.

To relate and express their experience, knowledge and academic credentials, graduates need to possess communicating in English as their primary skill. One of the productive ways to improve speaking skill is “good listening.” Good listening plays a vital role in improving the communication skills. But people do not listen carefully. Ferguson states it as, “we hear only one quarter of what’s being said. The rest of the time we’re daydreaming or just tuned out completely”(3). Among all the four skills of language, listening and speaking are interdependent. One’s ability to speak well depends on his ability to listen well.

Higher educational institutions find it as a challenge and are prepared to train students in this art of spoken English and Communicating skills through listening. It is one of the prime factors for success. This pertinent issue and requirement in the current world of job market, employability and maintaining of relationships has been under constant debate, analysis and study. Though many observations and practice have been arrived at, a further attempt of experiential and experimental study was undertaken among the college students of TBAK college.

This paper discusses the need for students to speak in English and analyses their problems and impediments that hinder them from exercising the skill. The following observations were made: Young learners appear psychologically, emotionally and socially sensitive and vulnerable while talking in English in front of peers and they are called ‘fragile learners’ by Nothan Thomas in his article on “Attachment in the Young Learners’ Classroom: Overcoming Silence and Reticence.” They are often labelled shy, quiet and introverted. As such attempts were made to find ways to encourage the young learners to improve their speaking ability by overcoming these obstacles.

The outcome of one such initiative taken up by the department of English, TBAK College, Kilakarai is – SYTO Speak Your Thought Out, to train the students to speak in English fluently without any inhibition, to get practice in speaking and seek opportunities to speak in front of others.

The objectives of the project are:

- (i) to create recreational and consolidating opportunity for students to learn and practice oral English
- (ii) to trigger students’ creative talents by providing encouraging atmosphere

The criteria for analysing the speaking skills are:

- (i) their ability to choose the topic on their own preparation
- (ii) flow of thoughts and ideas with illustration

(iii) delivery mechanism; and pronunciation

This is implemented for all the students from Undergraduate level (See Table 1) from the year 2014-15 to 2016-17. It is made mandatory that five students from each class come and speak for 3-5 minutes to any teacher they preferred in English. Students are chosen by a system of lots. Marks are allotted by the staff they converse with. A record of the same is maintained by

the students for reference. This is a routine assignment they perform in rotation throughout their study.

This exercise is added as a main activity of the literary association apart from the routine task; interested students may purchase more number of tokens and speak to score points for award during the valediction of the association. Finally the students who have more tokens will be selected to be rewarded.

Table 1

S.No.	Class	No. of Students	Year	Involvement Intermediate Level	Involvement Advanced Level	Best Performers
1	I BA (3 Sections)	180	2015-16	10	7	3
2	II BA (3 Sections)	170	2016-17	63	3	5
3	III BA (2 Sections)	120	—	—	—	—

Among 470 students involved, all the 470 had attempted to speak out at least once. In the year 2015-16 three students were given best performer awards, seven students were given certificates for their involvement by taking special efforts to speak apart from their routine using extra lots and gained marks, ten students reached the intermediate level and the rest used only the minimum tokens which was made compulsory for them.

A special attempt was taken in the name of SFS (Start from the Scratch) as an extension of SFS to guide and encourage the slow learners by selecting one from each class to speak on a topic with continuous guidance for a period of three months. Given below is

the content of the format of SFS given to each student with guidelines and time frame for them to follow. Analysis of the year 2016-17 is given in Table 2.

- They have to communicate to two of their own department teachers and one teacher from another department in English
- The next step is to go to a higher level by communicating with the deans, vice principal and principal of the college
- Each section has a box for remark
- The final opportunity is to speak before an audience
- Teachers award marks in the column

- given
- Dates to be covered are printed in a format drafted by the purpose
 - Final remarks will be given by the staff-in-charge

The prime selection criteria to identify for SFS project are: Students who

- (i) have the eagerness to learn and speak fluently but feeling shy or not confident
- (ii) never speaks or utters a single word in English
- (iii) feel they have no potentials
- (iv) afraid of people making fun of them

Table 2

S. No	Class	No. of students	Positive Remarks	Suggestions for improvement
1	I BA	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved • Rigorous practice will help to improve better • Clarity in language • Proper pronunciation • Confidence improved • Good language flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to body language • Improve pronunciation • Be slow • Improve eye contact • Improve language flow • Needs more training • Given few words to practice pronunciation • Be clear and audible • Pause and stress can be improved • Needs refinement in delivery • Cope with your nerves • Listen to recording of your speeches
2	II BA	3		
3	III BA	3		

Few problems identified as a result of this project initiative are their (i) poor listening skill (ii) vocabulary (iii) pronunciation (iv) confidence. After practicing speaking through these assignments students started paying attention to what others say. They became conscious and started to think before they speak. In response to the remark given by the teachers from the format, students were given guidance to practice listening to audios in English

everyday, to prepare list of words with definitions and memorize them, to listen more and to practice pronunciation and to communicate effectively, keep a positive attitude. Ultimately, English as Foreign Language teachers need to develop their own corpus by providing relevant and high-frequency vocabularies to the learners which may be more beneficial to them to have a lists for their learning from the custom corpus.

Stage 1



- Unreflective Speaker**
They are unaware of the significant problems in their speaking
- Challenged Speaker**
They face the problems
- Beginning Speaker**
They try to improve

Stage 2



- Practicing Speaker**
They regularly practice and advance accordingly
- Advanced Speaker**
They are committed to lifelong practice and are beginning to internalize intellectual virtues
- Accomplished Speaker**
Intellectual skills and virtues have become second nature in our lives

Expected outcome of this project initiative:

- i. Formulating a theme of writing clearly and precisely to practice speaking
- ii. Gathers and assesses relevant information
- iii. Thinks open-mindedly and communicates effectively with others

This project is, in short, a self-directed practice. It requires rigorous exercise and mindful command of the use of language. It entails effective communication and the commitment to overcoming shyness in speaking.

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