

# ATTITUDES OF ESL STUDENTS TOWARDS ENGLISH SPEAKING ACTIVITIES USED IN THE CLASSROOM

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## **Introduction**

English language plays a major role in connecting persons in different countries, societies and cultures. Today, excellent communication skills in English have become an essential requirement for people to succeed both in their professional and personal career development.

This study was carried out among the students of the University College of Kuliyaipitiya who follow the National Diploma Courses for the NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) level 5 and 6 in different fields of Technology. The study group consists of 25 students who have been studying Construction Technology in the first semester at NVQ level 5. Even though the majority of students were at the pre-intermediate English proficiency level, they expressed the need to further improve their proficiency in spoken English since it is imperative for their studies at the University College. This study was therefore carried out with the objectives of investigating the effectiveness of speaking activities in English practiced during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of NVQ level 5.

According to Thornbury and Slade (2006, p.17), speaking is social in feature and so it establishes rapport and mutual agreement in society. It also maintains and modifies social identity using interpersonal skills, wishes, feelings, attitudes, opinions and judgments. Speaking is a multi-sensory activity because it involves paralinguistic features such as eye-contact, facial expressions, body language, tempo, pauses, voice quality changes, and pitch variation.

In the acquisition of a language, most learners identify the speaking ability to be the most important language skill to be perfected. According to Burnkart (1998)<sup>2</sup>, in the teaching and learning process of oral communication, there are three areas of knowledge that teachers and students should be aware of. They are; mechanics, functions and social and cultural rules and norms.

Scott (1981)<sup>3</sup> stresses the need to follow three significant guidelines when teaching speaking to young learners;

- a. Identifying the needs of the learners
- b. Identifying the learning objectives of the learners
- c. Providing them with required materials (vocabulary, grammatical structures and other language items)

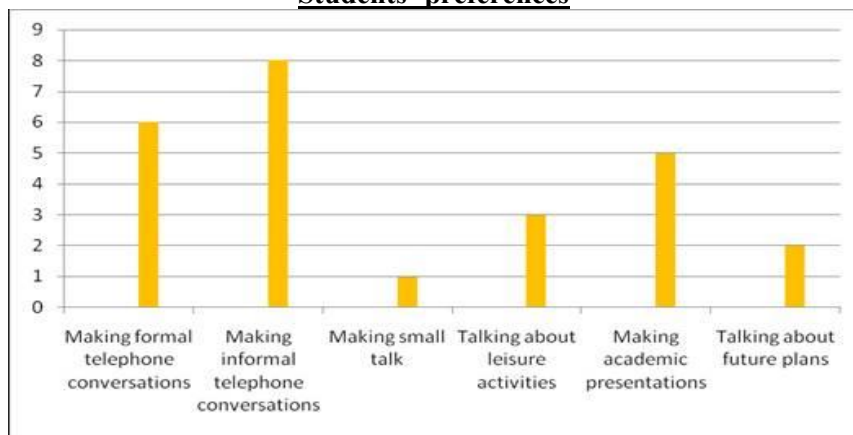
### **Methodology**

This study was based on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were gathered through a questionnaire that was distributed among students and qualitative data were obtained through informal interviews with students. The questionnaire was distributed among students at the end of the semester.

### **Results and discussion**

Amongst the varied speaking activities practised in classrooms during the semester, the researcher found that most of the students were particularly interested in three specific speaking activities which according to them are useful in their future search for well-paid jobs in both the local and global job market.: making informal telephone conversations, making formal telephone conversations and talking about future plans.

#### **Students' preferences**



### **Conclusion**

According to the findings of the study, the majority of students agree that the number of speaking activities practiced during the course was adequate and that they improved their English speaking abilities through

them. Moreover, they believe that during the course, they participated actively in both pair activities and group discussions. The majority of the students accept that they were able to build up their confidence in speaking in English at the end of the semester.

### **References**

Thornbury, S. and Slade, D. (2006). *Conversation: from description to pedagogy*, Cambridge University Press, p. 807-837.

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