

The Hidden Curriculum : Open Days For Constructing Positive Attitudes Towards Learning Speaking Skill In English

Asst . prof . Muayyad Mohammed Sa'id , ph.D.

Introduction :

Nowadays , EFL teachers focus a lot on objectives , timetables , syllabuses standards and technological devices which are all important issues . However , these form the overt or formal part of curriculum .

Learners of English Still encounter difficulties mastering the speaking skill in the FL since they no longer consider such a skill an essential goal of their course . This means that the speaking skill hard to foster as a habit in the minds of EFL learners . It is , consequently , believed , in this study , that such a gap in the teaching and learning of English calls for EFL teachers to deal with the hidden curriculum (henceforth HC) to create learning of the speaking skill that goes beyond the formal classroom environment , deciding activities and requirements to include in order to achieve a real improvement in mastery over speech in English .

Specifically , the HC , in this study , involves allotting days outside the formal curriculum , where learners meet freely in order days are called " Open Days " which can highly be regarded throughout the overt or formal curriculum , and through which a learner of English can construct the most desirable attitudes for learning the speaking skill . They comprise many informal advantages that stimulate EFL learners to use the language orally .

The Concept of Hc

The term HC was originally coined by Brian Jackson (life in classrooms , 1968) to draw attention to the idea that schools do more than simply aid in the transmission of Knowledge between one generation and the next . Jackson (Ibid) argues that we need to understand education as a socialization process , i.e. the way the

teaching – learning process is socially constructed . According to him , If learners are to succeed within the education system , they have to learn how to learn , i.e. they have to learn how to conform not just to the rules of the school , but also to the informal rules , beliefs and attitudes perpetuated through the socialization process .

Synder (1970 : xii) first described the HC as the way the various participants played the game , read the cues , adapted to their immediate educational circumstances . He was the key influence in bringing the term , HC , to the attention of the higher education community .

According to Hedge (2000 : 83) He refers to the learning which goes on in covert ways beneath the surface of what the teachers set to teach . It encompasses the shaping of learners , perception about learning then own role in it , the nature of the subject they are studying their teachers also on, and then attitudes towards all class .

On the other hand , Sambell and McDowell (1998 : 391) look at the HC as an opposite metaphor to describe the shadowy , ill – defined and amorphous nature of that which is implicit and embedded in educational experiences , in contrast with formal statements about curricula and the surface features of educational interaction . Accordingly , the HC is expressed in terms of the distinction between what is meant to happen , i.e. the curriculum stated by the educational system or institution , and what teachers and learners do and experience .

Gair and Mullins (2001 : 23) refer to the HC as hiding in a plain site . They (Ibid) argue that we must look behind or around to detect ; in most cases , the HC is plainly in sight . This means that sometimes , the best place to hide something is in a plain site where we are not looking for it .

As a result , the basic idea behind the concept of the HC is that learners learn things that are actually taught in the formal curriculum and , in this respect , the concept of the HC refers to the way the learning process is organized :

- 1- Consciously , for example :-
 - in terms of the physical organization of the school itself – a place separate from the home , the workplace and the like .
 - the organization of the classroom – the teacher standing at the front , learners seated and arranged in rows .
- 2- Unconsciously , for example :-

- the way individual teachers interpret the behavior of learners .
- the way teachers have different expectations of learners based on interpretations of behaviour in class .

Learners' Attitudes

Attitudes influence learning either positively or negatively in terms of learners ' attention towards the necessity of engaging learners in active language learning out side class atmosphere . Also , they may guide us to the fact that textbooks and teachers ' guides , for example , lack a lot in instilling in learners the desirable attitudes for mastering the FL.

To Oskamp (1977: 10) , attitudes can have three components :

- 1- Cognitive, involving ideas and beliefs which the attitude holder has about an object .
- 2- Affective (emotional) , referring to the feelings and emotions one has towards an object .
- 3- Behavioural , consisting of one 's action tendencies towards an object .

The value of attitudes as seen by Evans (1965 : 3) , depends on the importance of the object to learners and their learning of the FL . So , learners ' attitudes constitute a powerful guide to the success of the teaching process .

Conversely , learners may feel , as Cripper and Widdowson (1975 : 194) state , that the FL they are going to speak is imposed on them , whose interests run counter to their own . The kinds of attitudes they acquire at home may be quite different from those that are being taught academically ; their parents ' motivation may be different . Consequently , learners may have no motivation to adopt English for their speech behaviour . it is more likely , therefore , that a learner's so – called inability to use the FL orally can be attributed to the different kinds of attitudes he holds and , hence , to the different Kinds of identification he makes .

According to Ridley (1997 : 21) , EFL teachers can construct positive attitudes in teaching the speaking skill in two ways :

- 1- Asking the learners : let them talk , give them the time to write in order to say something , listen to them , and provide them with opportunities to gain insights into thoughts and feelings .

- 2- Using Observation : By Looking at our actions , at what we actually do before and during conversations , we can infer a lot of things . We can go back to our decisions , then back to our attitudes , and finally get at our beliefs .

The EFL Teacher as a Model Speaker

Fontana (1981 : 144) agrees that the model teacher of the FL should be able to provide his learners with materials and expressions , and initiate activities which instill in them interest , comment , questioning and communication . Such a teacher encounters during ODS various Kinds of problems related to the improvement of the speech skill of his learners , which directly affects their participation and interaction .

If the teacher finds that his learners lack experience with expressing themselves orally , means that they need gradual and patient introduction to speech participation , It is the task of the teacher , being an effective speaker of the FL , to bring any shy or weak learner into oral contact with the learners who are friendly to him . The model speaker should facilitate the process of self – expression that matches that matches learners' levels, goals and interests (Brown and Race , 1997 :102) .

To elicit speech in learners , the model teacher has to give his learners the appropriate confidence by providing them with opportunities for success , encouraging rather than interrupting or censuring them , and by demonstrating personal belief in their capacity of speaking the FL .(Savova and Donato , 1991 : 14)

Before teaching the suggested activities that can build in EFL learners positive attitudes for using the FL orally during the ODS , it is worthy to uncover some significant elements related to the role of listening comprehension , free speaking and interview in reinforcing the learners' attitudes for mastering speech in English .

Listening Comprehension

The skill of listening comprehension requires Learners to be proficient in three main areas : discrimination , retention and comprehension . the main object of a listening comprehension exercise is to let learners comprehend in the FL . This degree of comprehension depends on their ability to discriminate phonemes , to

recognize stress and intonation patterns , and to retain what they have heard . In conversation , understanding the FL requires Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar may be acquired orally .

A marked comprehension problem for the language arises from the difference between natural and stylized speech . For example , newscasters in particular , employ a highly stylized delivery . Movies and television programmes in the FL are often hard to understand . However , taped – radio broadcasts and FL films can provide a basis for listening comprehension exercises in order to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable pronunciation . EFL learners can profit from laboratory sessions during which they make and play back recordings of their own voices .

A wide variety of oral exercises may be adopted during the ODS so that learners can practice comprehension of Key lexical terms :

1- Listening comprehension and body movement .

- a. simple commands
- b. discrimination of commands

2- Listening comprehension and drawing

- a. simple version
- b. complex version

3- Comprehension ease

- a. true – false : verbal
- b. true – false : pictures
- c. telling the time
- d. numbers

4- Key word comprehension

- a. brief dialogue
- b. situation
- c. question – answer
- d. statement – rejoinder
- e. completion

5- False Cognates . Learners are asked to discriminate among words with similar forms in both the native and target languages but with different meanings .

Free Speaking

One of the main objectives of the EFL teacher during the ODS is to encourage their learners to communicate orally and fluently . The focus , here , is on the using of the spoken English rather than use of any grammatical structures or any specific vocabulary items . The type of speech required in producing description or telling a story is essentially an account of fixed relationships . For example , in expressing an opinion , there tends to be a different set of relationships between one part of what is being talked about and the next . Such aspects of task types can be summarized below :

- 1- Static Relationships
 - describing an object or a photograph
 - instructing someone to draw a diagram
 - instructing someone to assemble a piece of equipment
 - describing how a number of objects to be arranged
 - giving route direction
- 2- Dynamic Relationships
 - story – telling
 - giving an eye – witness account
- 3- Abstract Relationships
 - opinion expressing
 - justifying a course of action

However . to elicit speech in our learners during the ODS, we , generally speaking , focus on two types of responses :

- 1- Picture . The teacher can provide a picture or a series of pictures so that even those learners who suddenly can think of nothing to say will have in front of them a topic for conversation . The learner can describe the objects or the action taking place in the picture . Also , he might tell a story merely suggested by the pictorial aid .
- 2- Conversation , It is very common that the most credible and natural type free speaking is a free conversation with the teacher or with other colleagues in the learning atmosphere , It is better for the teacher to have learners talk or converse with each other , while his role is to remain as unobtrusive as possible .

Interview

An interview is seen during the ODs as a Process of oral interaction between the teacher and his learners or among learners themselves , In this regard , we emphasize the idea of using stimulating and interesting learning atmosphere to let conversations on any EFL topic continue to the end of the interview period . The core of the interview , here , is to use the FL fluently through exchanging talks related to different topics . Thus , the first step in carrying out oral interaction is to establish a friendly and encouraging atmosphere between the interviewers and the interviewees who both feel no interruption of any kind .

Why ODs ?

Learners of English are given some motivating atmosphere when they are free to meet their teachers during informal days . Such days are allotted to help both teachers and learners to achieve positive and interactive use of the FL . Being outside the obligations and routine procedures of the formal curriculum , they can easily and freely exchange talks related to discipline , syllabus , topics , learning situation , etc .

Such public occasions , i.e. ODs should be exploited according to their hidden functions as well as their acknowledged purposes . for instance , open talks may tackle how learners can overcome the difficulties concerning fluency of their speech , pronunciation , how to juncture , how to clearly differentiate word and sentence stress Moreover , during such days , teachers and learners exchange trust and responsiveness in accepting a compromise between what the educational system requires, what learners want to learn about , and what the teacher feels capable to teach .

Accordingly , teachers and learners move unintentionally through the message of some HC . Once the EFL teacher opens the speech learning channels in his learners , they can demonstrate effective exchange talks in the FL . (Rowntree , 1981 :24) .

In such informal atmosphere , EFL learners are let free to set their own objectives and choices , negotiate their programmes , assess their own work , have a break when they need it , work in pairs or groups , etc . the main pre – requisite in such free days is to achieve talk exchange through so many activities as games , conversations ,

conferences , telephone – calls , language clubs , etc . As a result , the learners can increase a considerable degree of participation and range of interaction , encourage corporate responsibility and outcomes , share and rotate roles and functions , and develop their aural – oral abilities . this will finally increase the effectiveness and fluency of their speech production in the FL. Thus , many stimulating and interesting practices can be conducted as shown below .

Language Games

Games are directed at ODs to the teaching of the speaking skill in English . They are considerable devices that can reinforce EFL learning and create for learners a loveable atmosphere . Also , they provide learners with conditions that are as close as possible to those of normal communication , involving information gap , choice and feedback .

Psychologically speaking , games stimulate learners' interests and increase their desire to learn by combining both verbal and physical activities . They help create situations where learners find themselves obliged to make the utmost exchange of their linguistic resources .

Finally , they produce an unpredictable variety of language functions through the interaction of players . (Larsen – freeman , 1986 : 129)

There are certain requirements as stated by Dobson (1974 :56ff) , that help a lot in choosing language games :

- They allow as many learners to participate as possible .
- They are within learners' abilities .
- They can easily be understood and played .
- They are well – guided by the teacher .
- The teams should be matched equally .
- The winner should finally be rewarded .

As a result language games create an atmosphere of enjoyment and have learners overcome shyness and anxiety . To sum up , games are an admirable way for practicing the FL sine they place speech in social contexts and encourage learners to use all their linguistic Knowledge effectively .

(Hill and Fielden , 1979 :iv)

Use of Humour

The use of humour during the ODs makes the EFL learning atmosphere more meaningful and enjoyable , and increases interaction among all participants . It is a useful tool to get learners' attention , motivation and pleasure . Hence , there are many ways that help make an activity fun . The element of surprise , for instance , frequently adds joy to learning . Well- chosen pictures , cards and other visual aids as well as realia , in general , are usually of great help for EFL learners to speak the FL . Also , using songs in different rhythm or tones of voice , changing seating arrangements , working in groups , and completing short activities can make the FL speech more dynamic and more fun .

Furthermore , EFL teachers should try to create humorous situations for role – plays and dialogues . Changing the context of that tedious role – play in the textbook to a fun one that allows the same structure to be practiced orally will make quite a difference in the end product of learning .

EFL learners may have to change the tone of their voices and dress differently , reinventing the character while role – playing . Another nice and useful technique is to attribute learners' names to the characters in role – plays and skills .

Teachers can always throw in one or two intelligent jokes every now and then . Although EFL teachers should not miss a chance to make their learning more pleasurable and meaningful , they have to select and plan their activities carefully . (Tosta , 2001:36ff) .

To argue , more EFL teachers do not utilize humour owing to the following reasons :

- Some believe that humour is too personal for the learning atmosphere where there is a group of individuals with differing beliefs and attitudes . Thus , they fear they might easily offend someone .
- Others see the use of humour as something that could lead to discipline problems and , as a consequence , to the teacher's loss of control over learning .
- Some argue that humour is time consuming , increases teacher's talking time , may increase learners' dependence .
- The last reason involves the disbelief in the seriousness of humour .

All these concerns are true and they must be taken into consideration . Too often , however , preconceived attitudes against using humour prevent both teachers and learners from having a more pleasant and meaningful learning experience which we , as teachers of English , search for in our daily practice .

Permissive Regime

One may raise such a question : Is it true that a repressive and boring teaching regime prepares the less able for repressive relationships and boring work in later life ? To respond frankly , one should easily relate to the values and attitudes adopted and practiced by the teaching staff members of English . The effect of the kind of regime , whether authoritarian or permissive , repressive or encouraging , on the learners' use of the FL at or outside the formal academic atmosphere is a critical element in the EFL teaching – learning situation Once we control such an element , we can create in learners the willingness and , then , the capacity to express themselves orally .

The permissive regime practiced during the ODs gives the EFL learners the freedom to learn what they need to know , and to do in their own ways . (Orlosky and Smith , 1978 :71) Accordingly , specialists in education include , here , feelings about what the learners learn , their , their intuitive reactions to it , the ways in which it fits into purposes of life , etc . Hence , the EFL teacher should always feel that he is very close to learners in their own thinking , actions , educational backgrounds, their needs , their interests , etc .

Positive Learning

Every EFL learner feels during the ODs that his teacher and study mates deal with him as a person of worth , i.e. his opinions , questions, answers, and suggestions are welcomed and regarded . As a result, learners are not reluctant in using the FL orally . So , harmony in such a learning environment depends on the mutual respect among all learners . It is believed , here , that positive learning is secured in expressing one's self in English since learners face no criticism , have good attention and informal seating . This denotes that at ODs every learner has a word to say , an opinion to expose , a story to tell , a situation to describe , a problem to solve , etc . Such free activities

give learners high motivation in the oral use of the language (Brown , 2000 : 150)

Informal Style of Teaching

Informal teaching is organized at ODs to improve learners' readiness and communication in English . In this regard , EFL learners can choose their preferable style of teaching : an approach , a technique or a device can be selected by the learners since it suits their competence and performance in the FL . Also , if there is more than one teacher available , learners are let free to choose the one that suits their learning readiness and achievement . Again , lessons in English may be based on discussions , a question – and – answer technique , a cloze procedure technique , brainstorming , etc . Moreover , learners focus on one FL skill , i.e. speaking , rather than others since they feel the need or the gap in such a skill . In all , informal styles of teaching let both the EFL teachers and their learners free to choose any device , syllabus , technique , etc , that stimulates them to achieve high success in mastering the speaking skill in English (Doll , 1965 :400)

Flexible Time Schedules

The distribution of syllabus items at ODs is not something rigid ; it has a lot of transparency . EFL teachers and learners can adopt and adopt the learning periods according to their benefits , i.e. to achieve informal but effective learning . The time allotted , here , is of a remedial kind ; we may add , delete or modify minutes according to learners' needs for better mastery over the speech skills in English . Once the teacher feels learners' weakness in pronunciation , stress distribution , juncture or fluency , he allots extra minutes or periods to the activity concerned . This means that the operational time is allotted by doing not only by planning . While teachers are carrying out the syllabus items , each speaking activity will prove practically how much time they really need to allot .

Peer Teaching

One important practice at ODs is that EFL learners personally and freely respond in a spoken form to the ideas elicited not only by their teacher but also by their peers and other colleagues . This implies that the learners master the various activities of the speaking skill

through practicing it freely with their peers ; both sides take opportunities to master speech from each other's special Knowledge and skills in the EFL speech .

Sequencing Procedure

Sequencing means that learners in the group are not free whether or not to utter a word or a phrase in the FL at will , since under such conditions , some of them may speak up little or none of the time , while others monopolize the speech period (Stein, 1975 :269) . When sequencing is carefully applied during the ODs , each EFL learner has his turn to say a word , to make a suggestion , to ask a question , to give an answer or to comment . when the learner has done so , the second learner can offer something verbally until everyone in the group has his turn . Then , the cycle is began again , If a learner has nothing to say , he is always encouraged to have another turn .

Informal Group Setting

Informal study groups are organized to improve the EFL participants' communication and interaction during the ODs . In such forms of groups , learners feel free , no interruption , and no embarrassment in orally uncovering what they have in their minds through question – and – answer , discussion , conversation and suggestion techniques . Learners can have notes , taken or made , that help them a lot in the aural – oral application of English . Their free choice may extend to include the teaching methods or techniques , topics , study periods , schedules , the teacher , place of study , etc .

At ODs , a group of learners all work together as they verbally express various ideas relating to items of grammar reading texts , oral skills , etc . such a group setting has the following merits for mastering the speaking skill :

- Each learner can bolster anther's morale in using the FL orally .
- A learner as a member of a group finds himself in the group's acceptance sufficient security to take risks and offer ideas that he might not offer alone .
- A group composed of learners of varying levels in using the FL makes its members encourage each other in dealing with various situations .

- A group of learners who , for example , participates in the development of certain of certain thoughts have greater comprehension of these thoughts . If a learner . If a learner arrives individually at certain thoughts , he must , then , communicate them to these who have to carry them out, which entail danger of communication failure . (Stein , 1971 : 16ff) .

However , one may argue against these possibilities by saying that a learner working alone would not be confused by others' ideas . A learner , as an individual thinker , does not need to waste effort by being competitive . He may be able to express himself fully without being interrupted from others .

But this has more value in rearranging the information he makes than in using them orally . In addition , some learners prefer to work alone than with others . They feel under pressure to conform in group situations . They are likely to Keep their agreements to themselves in order to arrive at a concensus . Confronted with the force of majority opinion , they are likely to accept it regardless of its soundness .

Learner's Image

While learners are using the FL orally , self – image is enhanced for they see that their words, phrases , sentences , ideas , pronunciation , stress , juncture , fluency , etc . are highly regarded (Dunn and Dunn , 1978 : 72) Also , enthusiasm , pride and cohesiveness among the group increase as learners begin to feel part of the subgroup that recognizes , produces , and comments on various situations in English . The learners can easily exploit their Knowledge , skills and attitudes by using various audio – visual aids and devices that play a vital role in letting them speak the FL .

Seating Arrangement

During ODs , EFL learners have an informal seating arrangement , often in circular . In this case , all learners will have equal opportunities to various spoken language language kills and activities and be in sight of each other . They can , easily , be encouraged to listen attentively and respond orally to various thoughts , put it differently , the EFL teacher is let free to arrange the seating of

learners in any way , place or form that motivates learners to use English orally and fluently .

Diversion of Thoughts

At ODs , EFL learners are highly motivated to adopt the idea diversion technique when using the FL orally . This encourages in them creative thinking and novelty responses . The learners are let free to give so many alternative answers to many educational linguistic problems . They can orally and freely express themselves in terms of their reflection , judgment , criticism , creation or evaluation of various matters in the FL . Although conversion of thoughts is not something undesirable , it can be dealt with by shy or weak learners who do not possess the capacity to differ and give scientific reasons for being different in their orientations, i.e. those who cannot create imaginative and novelty thoughts to be applied to real – life situations . (Pratt , 1980 : 455)

During the ODs , it is the task of the EFL teacher to invent his creative means and techniques that affect learners' attitudes towards speaking English fluently . He always sets up the positive learning atmosphere and lets his learners saturate themselves with meanings , imagery and concepts that lead to imaginative thinking and novelty ideas and suggestions . Creativity here means , specifically , the ability of learners to create novelty answers to questions related to various real – life situations . It may denote how to take and make notes that help them in their oral demonstration of new and imaginative suggestions that may , then , be modified and used in new situations .

Conclusion

Despite the vital role played by the formal curriculum elements in teaching and learning English specialists in education, particularly EFL teachers, should consider the HC elements that build in learners the positive attitudes such as readiness, interest , motivation , attention and effective action for mastering the speaking skill . The learning atmosphere built up during the ODs , suggested in this study , can motivate the learners to speak English fluently . In such days , the learners operate orally , freely and effectively through some elements of the HC , i.e. language games , humour , permissive regime , positive learning , informal style of teaching , flexible time schedules ,

peer teaching , sequencing procedure ,informal group setting , image building , seating arrangement and diversion of thoughts .

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