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## Persuasion is better than force

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### Abstract

Having Turkish learners speak English has always been painful in language classes. Teachers keep trying to have their students speak, but somehow, they find themselves speaking all the time. Finally all this effort ends up letting it go. In order not to lose their passion, as the popular proverb, ‘Persuasion is better than force’ suggests, teachers can activate learners’ participation in classes not pulling them away but convincing. Through this session, the participants will be enlightened with the tips and tricks of how to prompt students by raising their level of confidence and decreasing anxiety. By the end of this workshop, given modeling and practical exercises, participants should be able to successfully increase the students’ motivation and adapt these activities into their classes.

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### 1. Introduction

Due to the increasing global importance of international communication, learning a second and even third and fourth language becomes crucial. It is obvious that English has already been an international language. Because the level of proficiency in foreign languages, particularly in English, is positively influential on political, social, technological, and intellectual benefits in the society, using a foreign language or languages effectively has become more essential (Curtain, 1990). Considering the importance attributed to the learning and teaching of English, the recent studies mostly focus on language learners and their perspectives about the language learning process.

It is clear that any teaching and learning is affected by factors which are effective in motivation of the learners and their attitudes towards learning English. As a result, foreign language teaching recently aims at providing students with anxiety free classroom environment to help them become more successful language learners.

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## 2. Anxiety in speaking classes

“Anxiety” is such a complex issue that researchers have been unable to agree on a concise definition (Zhanibek, 2001). It can be defined as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in Horwitz et al., p. 27). Similarly, Scovel defines anxiety as an emotional state of “apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (Scovel, 1978, as cited in Cheng, 2005, p. 8).

The definitions of anxiety proposed by several scholars have some common characteristics: the state of apprehension, fear, tension and feelings of uneasiness (Brown, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1991; Scovel, 1991). Ehrman (1996) states that these characteristics are associated with individuals’ negative evaluations of their actions. For some reason, they become failure oriented, feel inhibited and avoid performing tasks such as doing homework, taking an exam and even speaking in class.

Richards (2008) states that learners evaluate their success in language learning and the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how competent they are in communication. He adds that one of the important problems of foreign language teaching is to prepare learners to use the language, and thus enable them to enhance their speaking skills. How this preparation is done and how successful it is depend very much on teachers’ performance in the lessons.

Nunan (2000) points out that for most people mastering the speaking skill is the most vital issue of learning a foreign or second language. He adds that learners’ success is evaluated by their consideration as to how they can carry out a conversation in the target language. However, as it is very difficult to enhance students’ speaking skills, it is crucial for teachers to encourage students to participate in speaking lessons. To enable this, teachers may provide opportunities to practice speaking in the class.

Research has shown that learners feel rather anxious when they are supposed to speak in front of the teacher and the class, and the majority of learners find giving presentations anxiety-provoking (Aydın, 2001; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1991). Therefore, instead of forcing learners to give presentations, students can be convinced to engage in a meaningful communication with each other and practice conversation skills with various kinds of activities because “persuasion is better than force”.

## 3. Activities for speaking classes

The aim of this study is to provide teachers several different speaking activities promoting learners’ conversational skills to address issues of anxiety and confidence to assist language learners.

The activities that can be used to persuade learners actively participate in speaking classes are:

- **Paper plane:**

Here's a fun 1<sup>st</sup> day ice breaker that warms up a group and enables participants to get to know each other quickly. Everyone makes a paper plane and writes their names and something they like/ dislike on it. Right on cue, everybody throws their planes around the room. Then, each participant picks one paper plane, finds the person written on the plane and discovers more about him /her.

- **Lucky penny:**

Lucky penny is a fun icebreaker that works like a charm to break the ice in a speaking class. It is known that the best way to begin speaking is to talk about a familiar subject. In this activity, each participant is asked to take a coin out of their pocket and look at the date. Then, recall something spectacular happened that year and talk about it.

- **Never have I ever:**

As the name suggest, in this ice-breaker, participants are asked to tell interesting things they have never done before. Participants are asked to get into a circle and take turns saying interesting things they have never done. They start with 10 fingers open and drop one finger when something they have done is said. This activity warms up the group interacting with each other and laughing together.

- **My secret picture:**

It is obvious that uncertainty and mystery are energies of life, so if something is secret, everybody wants to know and discover more about it. “My secret Picture” is an amusing speaking activity increasing the effectiveness of speaking classes .The activity consistsof two parts and two participants (A & B). In the first part, participant A is asked to take a piece of paper and turn back and B is shown an interesting picture. Not seeing the picture, A is required to ask as many “yes/no questions” as possible in 1 minute and B is asked to say “yes” or “no”. In the second part, B is asked to describe the picture as quick as possible and A tries to draw it.

- **Just a minute:**

Just a minute is an on-going comedy contest where participants are asked to find a pair (one listener & one speaker) and speak for 1 minute on a topic given without repetition, intervention, interruption or deviation. If the listener hears any of these s/he interrupts, scores a point and continues speaking on the same topic. At the end, the speaker gets two points if s/he speaks without hesitation, repetition or deviation.

- **New identities:**

How many times can a person share her/his thoughts about the same topics to the same group of people? It is a lot more fun to practice talking if s/he can create a new identity. In speaking classes, participants are always asked to compare the advantages and disadvantages of specific things. In this activity, participants are provided with a picture and each of them is required to assume a new identity in the picture. On cue, they are asked to share their ideas. One participant starts talking about the advantages and disadvantages and the others work together to discover the identity. By this way, participants are encouraged to think over a new identity while fostering their creativity.

- **Emergency kit:**

It is clear that not only students but also teachers sometimes feel stuck in speaking classes. Therefore, teachers can have a pack of various kinds of activities to increase the language learners’ interests and engagement as well as decreasing their anxiety in speaking classes. Emergency kit supplies learners with extra activities such as pictures, information-gap activities, songs, problem-solving activities, role-play cards, etc.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Keeping those activities in mind, the purpose of this study was to provide learners with meaningful activities promoting a deep sense of enjoyment, creativity, self-confidence and motivation. As it is stated by Wilson (2006) for many learners speaking is one of the sources of anxiety in language learning. That is, to some extent, many learners suffer from a certain amount of anxiety while speaking a foreign language, which can simply be defined as the fear of using the language orally. Therefore, in order to provide learners assistance in overcoming their anxiety and persuade them to positively participate in oral activities, learners should be provided with meaningful activities that encourage the communicative use of language.

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