



Issues, Principles and Practice in the Improvement of Productive Skills

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One area of research I am interested in is helping students improve production skills. This session description for a panel discussion at TESOL 2013 summarizes my interest in this area.

Session Description

While speaking and writing are substantially different in many ways, they both are used for the same purpose – to communicate. In many ways, writing is one of the most difficult skills, requiring a greater degree of accuracy. When speaking, any misunderstandings can be cleared up ‘on the spot’, whereas this is not possible with writing. Speaking, on the other hand, requires a greater degree of fluency as the speaker will rarely have time to think and plan an answer. Communication between people is a very complex and ever changing thing. But there are generalizations that we can make which have particular relevance for the teaching and learning of languages.

Speaking is considered by learners as one of the most difficult skills as it involves real-time processing which means that learners don't have much time to formulate what they want to say and how to say it. As a result students often avoid speaking and therefore never get the opportunity to build up confidence through practice. A further reason that students avoid speaking is that they are afraid to make mistakes because of poor pronunciation. This poor pronunciation often stems from previous learning experiences where there has been an emphasis on written accuracy with little chance to develop oral skills. Students may also, in many cases, have little opportunity to practice their English speaking outside of the classroom environment.

Written texts, on the other hand, have quite a number of differences that separate them from speaking. Not only are there differences in grammar (for example usage of contracted forms in speaking are often not applied in writing), and vocabulary (usually more formal in written English) there are also the added factors of spelling, handwriting, layout and punctuation. Despite these differences many of the same factors relevant to teaching speaking are also relevant to teaching writing.

The focus of my research interests and this academic session for TESOL is to present the issues and challenges involved in improving speaking and writing skills with Higher Education students, and evaluate different ways to address these. The session will help develop understanding of the skills of speaking, pronunciation and writing in the relevant teaching contexts, and will also address teacher confidence to teach these skills by demonstrating a range of practical classroom activities that support the development of productive skills.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Survey of Faculty, Administration and GTA Interests for 2013 The Complete Results

1. What is your current position at the AEC?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Faculty (e.g., pool lecturer, multi-term lecturer, permanent lecturer, language specialist)	90.0%	45
Administrator	6.0%	3
GTA	4.0%	2
	answered question	50
	skipped question	0

2. How many total years have you worked at the AEC?

	Response Percent	Response Count
0-3 years	36.0%	18
4-7 years	20.0%	10
8-11 years	10.0%	5
12-15 years	10.0%	5
16-19 years	6.0%	3
20+ years	18.0%	9
	answered question	50
	skipped question	0

3. Have you held different positions within the AEC?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	54.0%	27
No	46.0%	23
answered question		50
skipped question		0

4. If so, for how many years have you held each position below?

	0-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16-19	20+	Not applicable	Rating Count
Pool Lecturer	60.0% (12)	10.0% (2)	15.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.0% (3)	20
Multi-Term Lecturer	30.0% (3)	40.0% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	30.0% (3)	10
Permanent Lecturer	15.4% (2)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	38.5% (5)	13
Language Specialist	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	11.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	9
Administrator	25.0% (2)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	37.5% (3)	8
GTA	53.8% (7)	30.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	13
answered question								25
skipped question								25

5. How many years have you been in the field of TESL/TEFL?

	Response Percent	Response Count
0-5	14.3%	7
6-10	18.4%	9
11-15	10.2%	5
16-20	10.2%	5
21+	46.9%	23
answered question		49
skipped question		1

6. How many years of graduate school do you have beyond your (first) Master's degree?

	Response Percent	Response Count
0-2	63.3%	31
3-6	26.5%	13
7-10	4.1%	2
10+	6.1%	3
answered question		49
skipped question		1

7. Do you have an ABD?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	12.2%	6
No	87.8%	43
	answered question	49
	skipped question	1

8. Do you have a Ph.D. or equivalent?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	18.4%	9
No	81.6%	40
	answered question	49
	skipped question	1

9. Did you study abroad?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	57.1%	28
No	42.9%	21
	answered question	49
	skipped question	1

10. For approximately how long did you study abroad?

	Response Percent	Response Count
1-6 Weeks	7.1%	2
1 Semester	35.7%	10
1 Year	32.1%	9
More than 1 Year	25.0%	7
answered question		28
skipped question		22

11. Have you ever worked abroad?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	71.4%	35
No	28.6%	14
answered question		49
skipped question		1

12. For approximately how long did you work abroad?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 Year	17.1%	6
1-2 Years	31.4%	11
More than 2 Years	51.4%	18
answered question		35
skipped question		15

13. Do you know a language other than English?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	85.7%	42
No	14.3%	7
answered question		49
skipped question		1

14. Answer the following questions about the language you know best other than English. On an AEC scale, comment on your ability in the other language. (If you know two or more additional languages equally well, please choose one language.) NR = Beyond AEC level 5. "My ability is roughly equivalent to":

	1	2	3	4	5	NR	Rating Count
Speaking/Listening Level	7.1% (3)	23.8% (10)	26.2% (11)	19.0% (8)	14.3% (6)	9.5% (4)	42
Reading/Writing Level	12.2% (5)	22.0% (9)	31.7% (13)	14.6% (6)	12.2% (5)	7.3% (3)	41
Grammar for Communication Level	7.3% (3)	19.5% (8)	34.1% (14)	19.5% (8)	12.2% (5)	7.3% (3)	41
answered question							42
skipped question							8

15. General Professional Interests On a scale of 1-5, rate your professional interest in the following. One is the lowest and 5 is the highest. 'DK' refers to 'I don't know.'

	1	2	3	4	5	DK	Rating Count
Teaching Methodologies or Approaches (e.g., communicative, content-based, skill-based, corpus-based, task-based, immersion, CALL, etc.)	4.1% (2)	2.0% (1)	22.4% (11)	24.5% (12)	46.9% (23)	0.0% (0)	49
Assessment	0.0% (0)	12.2% (6)	40.8% (20)	34.7% (17)	12.2% (6)	0.0% (0)	49
Curriculum Design	2.1% (1)	6.3% (3)	22.9% (11)	25.0% (12)	43.8% (21)	0.0% (0)	48
Materials Writing	8.3% (4)	4.2% (2)	10.4% (5)	33.3% (16)	39.6% (19)	4.2% (2)	48
Intercultural Communication	0.0% (0)	8.2% (4)	12.2% (6)	38.8% (19)	38.8% (19)	2.0% (1)	49
Second Language Acquisition	0.0% (0)	14.6% (7)	22.9% (11)	29.2% (14)	33.3% (16)	0.0% (0)	48
Administration	16.3% (8)	28.6% (14)	22.4% (11)	16.3% (8)	14.3% (7)	2.0% (1)	49
English for Academic Purposes	2.0% (1)	4.1% (2)	14.3% (7)	34.7% (17)	42.9% (21)	2.0% (1)	49
Application of Theory to TESL/TEFL (e.g., Cognitive Linguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Academic literacies, Complex Systems theory, etc.)	16.3% (8)	22.4% (11)	20.4% (10)	20.4% (10)	18.4% (9)	2.0% (1)	49
Advancing the field (e.g., holding office in professional organization, presenting at professional conferences, publishing your work, etc.)	6.3% (3)	10.4% (5)	31.3% (15)	27.1% (13)	22.9% (11)	2.1% (1)	48
					answered question		49
					skipped question		1

	1	2	3	4	5	DK	Rating Count
Level 1	16.3% (8)	12.2% (6)	26.5% (13)	18.4% (9)	18.4% (9)	8.2% (4)	49
Level 2	14.3% (7)	8.2% (4)	18.4% (9)	26.5% (13)	28.6% (14)	4.1% (2)	49
Level 3	6.1% (3)	6.1% (3)	18.4% (9)	30.6% (15)	32.7% (16)	6.1% (3)	49
Level 4	4.2% (2)	6.3% (3)	12.5% (6)	29.2% (14)	43.8% (21)	4.2% (2)	48
Level 5 (ESLP 110)	10.6% (5)	4.3% (2)	19.1% (9)	36.2% (17)	21.3% (10)	8.5% (4)	47
Special Studies (e.g., ESLP 122; ESLP 126; ESLP 128)	8.5% (4)	8.5% (4)	12.8% (6)	23.4% (11)	38.3% (18)	8.5% (4)	47
Speaking/Listening	10.2% (5)	16.3% (8)	22.4% (11)	14.3% (7)	32.1% (16)	4.1% (2)	49
Reading/Writing	12.2% (6)	4.1% (2)	12.2% (6)	20.4% (10)	49.0% (24)	2.0% (1)	49
Grammar for Communication	10.6% (5)	6.4% (3)	12.8% (6)	27.7% (13)	40.4% (19)	2.1% (1)	47
Short-term Programs	4.1% (2)	2.0% (1)	12.2% (6)	26.5% (13)	42.9% (21)	12.2% (6)	49
The Graduate Writing Program	28.6% (14)	18.4% (9)	14.3% (7)	16.3% (8)	14.3% (7)	8.2% (4)	49
					answered question		49
					skipped question		1

17. Non-teaching Interests On a scale of 1-5, rate your professional interest in the following. One is the lowest and 5 is the highest. 'DK' stands for 'don't know.'

	1	2	3	4	5	DK	Rating Count
Being an AEC counselor/academic advisor	33.3% (16)	18.8% (9)	20.8% (10)	8.3% (4)	16.7% (8)	2.1% (1)	48
Grading SPEAK tests	31.3% (15)	22.9% (11)	10.4% (5)	18.8% (9)	12.5% (6)	4.2% (2)	48
Working in LEO Lab	43.8% (21)	22.9% (11)	12.5% (6)	6.3% (3)	8.3% (4)	6.3% (3)	48
Working at The Point	8.3% (4)	20.8% (10)	33.3% (16)	20.8% (10)	12.5% (6)	4.2% (2)	48
Writing grants	24.5% (12)	22.4% (11)	14.3% (7)	14.3% (7)	14.3% (7)	10.2% (5)	49
Being a coordinator of a class	12.5% (6)	6.3% (3)	20.8% (10)	22.9% (11)	33.3% (16)	4.2% (2)	48
Participating on committees	4.3% (2)	10.9% (5)	23.9% (11)	30.4% (14)	26.1% (12)	4.3% (2)	46
Helping others with AEC technology issues	25.0% (12)	14.6% (7)	20.8% (10)	27.1% (13)	10.4% (5)	2.1% (1)	48
Offering in-house workshops, presentations; facilitating brownbag discussions, etc.	2.0% (1)	6.1% (3)	32.7% (16)	22.4% (11)	32.7% (16)	4.1% (2)	49
Submitting to ILI@AEC	6.3% (3)	4.2% (2)	25.0% (12)	37.5% (18)	20.8% (10)	6.3% (3)	48
Interacting with visiting scholars	0.0% (0)	8.3% (4)	12.5% (6)	35.4% (17)	39.6% (19)	4.2% (2)	48
Participating in a practicum with a graduate student	8.3% (4)	10.4% (5)	18.8% (9)	39.6% (19)	18.8% (9)	4.2% (2)	48
Participating in AEC out-of-class activities (e.g., conversation groups, trips, events, etc.)	10.4% (5)	29.2% (14)	31.3% (15)	14.6% (7)	12.5% (6)	2.1% (1)	48

Observing colleagues/other classes	0.0% (0)	10.2% (5)	14.3% (7)	40.8% (20)	30.6% (15)	4.1% (2)	49
Curriculum Review/Revision							
Materials Development	2.1% (1)	6.4% (3)	14.9% (7)	27.7% (13)	44.7% (21)	4.3% (2)	47
Assessment (e.g., improving the Proficiency Test)	8.2% (4)	10.2% (5)	24.5% (12)	26.5% (13)	28.6% (14)	2.0% (1)	49
AEC Mission Development and Review	10.6% (5)	27.7% (13)	29.8% (14)	10.6% (5)	10.6% (5)	10.6% (5)	47
Decision-making Processes	8.2% (4)	20.4% (10)	18.4% (9)	20.4% (10)	22.4% (11)	10.2% (5)	49
Strategic planning	10.4% (5)	14.6% (7)	18.8% (9)	18.8% (9)	27.1% (13)	10.4% (5)	48
New student orientation	8.5% (4)	21.3% (10)	27.7% (13)	19.1% (9)	17.0% (8)	6.4% (3)	47
					answered question		49
					skipped question		1

[Back to Table of Contents](#)