share their experiences regarding teaching young learners.

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Book Review

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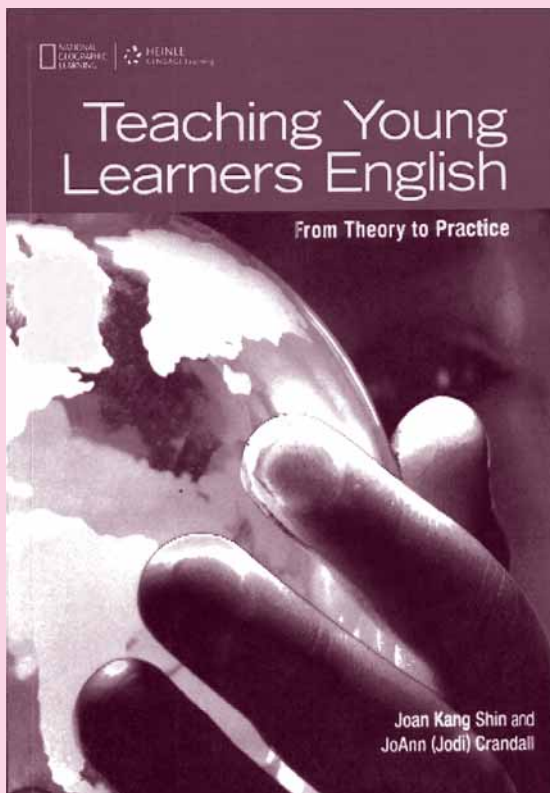
Shin, J. K., & Crandall, J. (2014). *Teaching Young Learners English from Theory to Practice. 403pp.*

In the preface to *Teaching Young Learners English*, the authors state that while in some countries around the world teaching English still begins at the secondary school many countries are lowering the age of learning English to primary schools. This, as the authors state, requires both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs to familiarize teachers with the concept of teaching English to young learners. The aim of the book is to help teachers develop activities appropriate for young learners across different ages from five to twelve years. The book begins with general considerations regarding teaching English to young learners and draws on the advantages of early language learning. Other chapters include tips for teaching language skills as well as instructions on characteristics of the learners. The authors have been quite successful in integrating theory and practice since all chapters provide both theoretical and practical information regarding teaching young learners. Each chapter includes a sample lesson plan that can have a leading role in educating teachers in their profession. The book focuses on the role of teachers in teaching young learners because, as stated by the authors, teachers are the most important factor in any child's education, and thus should have appropriate training. In fact, teachers who teach young learners should remember what it was like to be a child and how differently they think and learn. In addition, teachers should be able to teach in a developmentally appropriate manner; that is, they should be able to consider the children's physical, social, emotional, and mental growth. This makes teaching to young learners different from adults and adolescents. The highlight of each chapter is the *Teacher to Teacher* section in which the ideas of teachers regarding teaching young learners have been presented. This section connects teachers from different parts of the world who intend to

similarly effective. However, as shown in Table 2 breaking down the data into two rounds of evaluation revealed that, overall, students made some progress in terms of speaking ability.

English classes. The results specifically lend support to Demircioglu's (2010) assertion that students benefit from role play activities in different ways.

Language teachers who attempt to share

Table 2: Students' mean scores in two rounds of evaluation

	First round		Second round	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Role play	21.20	3/73	22/77	2/58
Prepared talk	20/80	2/84	20/77	2/54
Picture description	19/57	3/15	20/73	2/30
Total	20/52	3/24	21/42	2/47

Our analysis of the data collected during the 25-session long intervention showed that we could achieve our educational objectives. Our primary purpose was to help our students understand that speaking English is both an important and realistic goal. The organization of our step-by-step process of intervention could effectively motivate our students and encourage them to make extraordinary efforts for developing their conversation skills, because they were provided with real chances to see that speaking in English was actually an attainable aim. The results suggest that students need actual opportunities to practice speaking and that developing a meta-cognitive understanding on the importance of English alone is not enough to motivate them. Moreover, our findings point to the significance of employing a regular assessment procedure in motivating reluctant learners to practice with greater focus (Azra, Ikezawa, Rowlett, & Vannieuwenhuyse, 2005). In addition, our action research helped us evaluate the relative effects of the three teaching techniques that can be easily used in

their research experiences allow other teachers who work in different situations to compare and contrast what is happening in similar classrooms (Farrell, 2007). While classroom situations may differ, some general lessons can still be learnt and applied. We hope this brief account of our practical research experience in getting high school students to speak will encourage other Iranian teachers to critically reflect on their professional contexts in productive ways.

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were collaborating and making an effort. The analysis of the bodies of the data we collected showed that students' level of classroom participation and engagement drastically increased throughout the process. Overall, our diary notes revealed that students' reactions were largely positive but their level of interest was more pronounced when they were assigned a role to play. When looking at the students' responses to the questionnaire prompts, which were specifically designed to ask the students' attitudes toward the techniques, we obtained more or less similar results. While students' attitudes were mostly positive regarding the classroom approach, they claimed that they found role play technique more effective in improving their speaking ability. Although the statistical differences in their views toward various techniques do not seem to be statistically significant, the ratings given to role play (as shown in Figure 1) was the highest. This was followed by prepared talk technique which also received relatively high scores. From the students' point of view, however, picture description was the least effective technique.
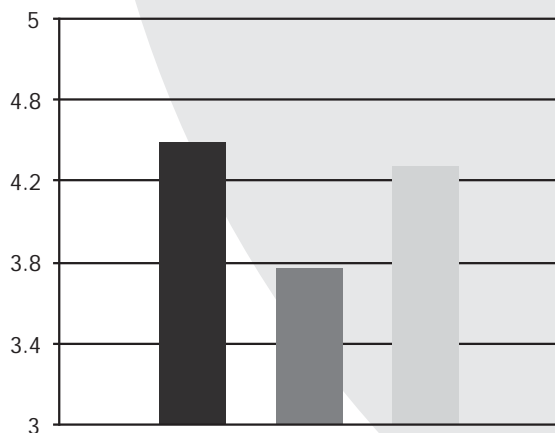
Language teachers who attempt to share their research experiences allow other teachers who work in different situations to compare and contrast what is happening in similar classrooms (Farrell, 2007).

To address the next concern of the study (i.e. evaluating the effect of the intervention on the students' speaking skill) we tabulated students' scores and compared their performances across the six oral tests. The findings showed that although some fluctuations were observed in the scores, especially in the first round of evaluation, the majority of the students obtained relatively similar scores across the three techniques, indicating that all techniques (role play, picture description and prepared talk) were more or less

Figure1. The popularity of each technique from the student's perspectives
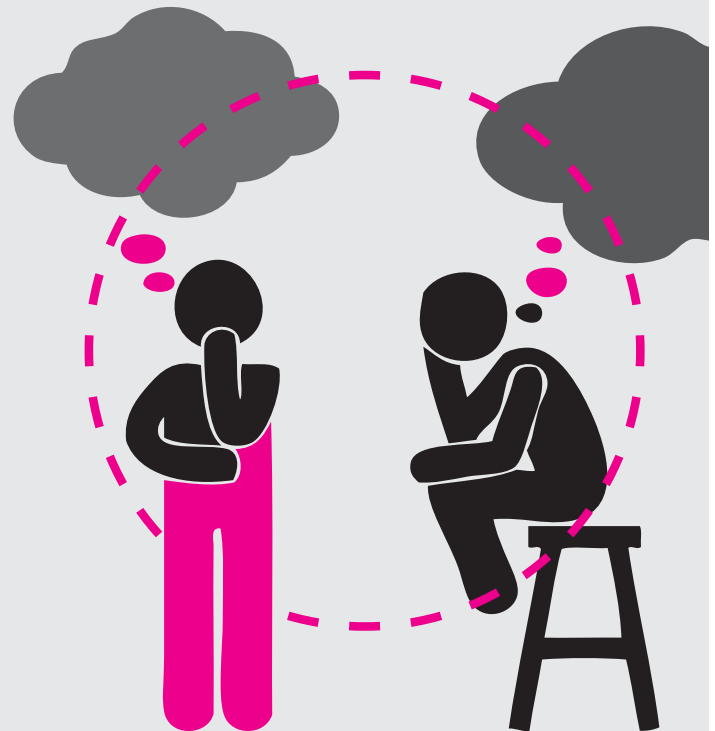
final session (session 25) a researcher-developed survey questionnaire was administered among the students for receiving their feedback on the class procedure and also their attitudes on all techniques. The following diagram schematically represents the process of action research.

of classroom teaching and take notes about special or meaningful teaching experiences. For example, we recorded students' reactions, partnership and level of interest in the topics. Moreover, throughout the study, every fourth session, we took an oral test (6 oral tests in total) which served as platforms for measuring

Table 1: The process of action research

Session 1-3	Using role play for improving students' speaking skill
Session 4	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Sessions 5-7	Using picture description for improving students' speaking skill
Session 8	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Sessions 9 -11	Using prepared talk for improving students' speaking skill
Session 12	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Session 13-15	Using role play for improving students' speaking skill
Sessions 16	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Sessions 17-29	Using picture description for improving students' speaking skill
Session 20	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Sessions 21-23	Using prepared talk for improving students' speaking skill
Session 24	Testing students' performance through an oral test
Session 25	Asking students for feedback through a survey questionnaire

Observation

According to Burns (1999), the purpose of action research is to bring about changes and improvement in classroom practice, based on the collection of data which provides the impetus for change. In the present study, we relied on multiple sources of data in order to both increase the reliability of the collected data and also to evaluate the action research process from different perspectives. In particular, we kept diaries for each session to reflect on the process

five sub-skills of speaking, including comprehension, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In addition, we developed a survey questionnaire to investigate the participants' attitude toward the class procedure and the use of different techniques.

5. Reflection

We began the process of data analysis as we went along with our data collection and continued to do so as we collected further data. Through the entire process we were particularly interested in students' level of engagement and the way they were reacting to the intervention. Because we predicted that providing a simple, easy-to-follow program for improving the students' conversation skills would result in success as long as students

Action

To help our students improve their speaking skill, we devised a framework featuring the above speaking techniques. One of our primary purposes was to facilitate students' active participation in the classroom procedure based on an approach we hoped the students would find more appealing and relevant. In addition, we put emphasis on raising students' motivation through incorporating a speaking component in our educational instruction. Examining the relative effects of various teaching techniques was also of primary interest to us. Thus, we implemented our action research in 25 consecutive sessions through a two-phase cyclical framework for using prepared talk, picture description and role play techniques.

A "presentation – practice – test" procedure was followed in the present study, and the study was conducted as part of the regular instruction. Speaking instruction, in each session, lasted on average about 30 minutes. In the first 3 sessions, the teacher worked with the students by instructing them to take a role and practice in pairs. The students were then asked to come to front of the class, and play their roles in a conversation.

According to Richards (1985) role play activities improve students' conversational skill and enable learners to become more flexible in different types of situations they are likely to encounter in the future

The fourth session was devoted to the evaluation of the effect of the role play technique. Throughout sessions 5 to 7, the focus of the classroom instruction shifted toward picture description, where the students were instructed on how to provide a description about various pictures. The pictures that were used for this activity were collaboratively supplied by the teacher and the students, and consisted of photos of celebrities, ceremonies and comic strips. Session 8 was devoted to the evaluation of the effect of picture description technique. During session 9 to 11 the students were asked to prepare a mini talk and deliver it to class members. Although the teacher suggested some topics for students' talks, there was room for flexibility so that students could choose a topic of their own interest. The third round of evaluation was conducted during session 12, where the researchers examined the effectiveness of the prepared talk technique. As shown in Table 1, the whole procedure described above was repeated again in the next 12 sessions, so that each technique was evaluated 2 times during 6 sessions. In the

pictures, cue cards, photographs, projected slides, etc.

> **Nunan (1991) claims that the achievement of an ELT program is often measured in terms of how well students are able to carry out a conversation in the foreign language**

● *Role Play*

In a role play activity, students pretend they are in different social contexts and have various social roles. Emphasizing on the importance of role play, Demircioglu (2010) argues that it is very difficult to teach language meaningfully without employing role play in language classes. This activity encourages students to speak, increases their self-expression skills and motivates them to use language confidently and creatively. Role play activities enable students to use their language skills and learn lifestyles through real life activities (Savela, 2009). According to Richards (1985) role play activities improve students' conversational skill and enable learners to become more flexible in different types of situations they are likely to encounter in the future. The literature also supports the use of role play in language classes because it is one of the best communicative techniques which fosters students' fluency, and results in the promotion of interaction and enhancement of motivation in the classroom.
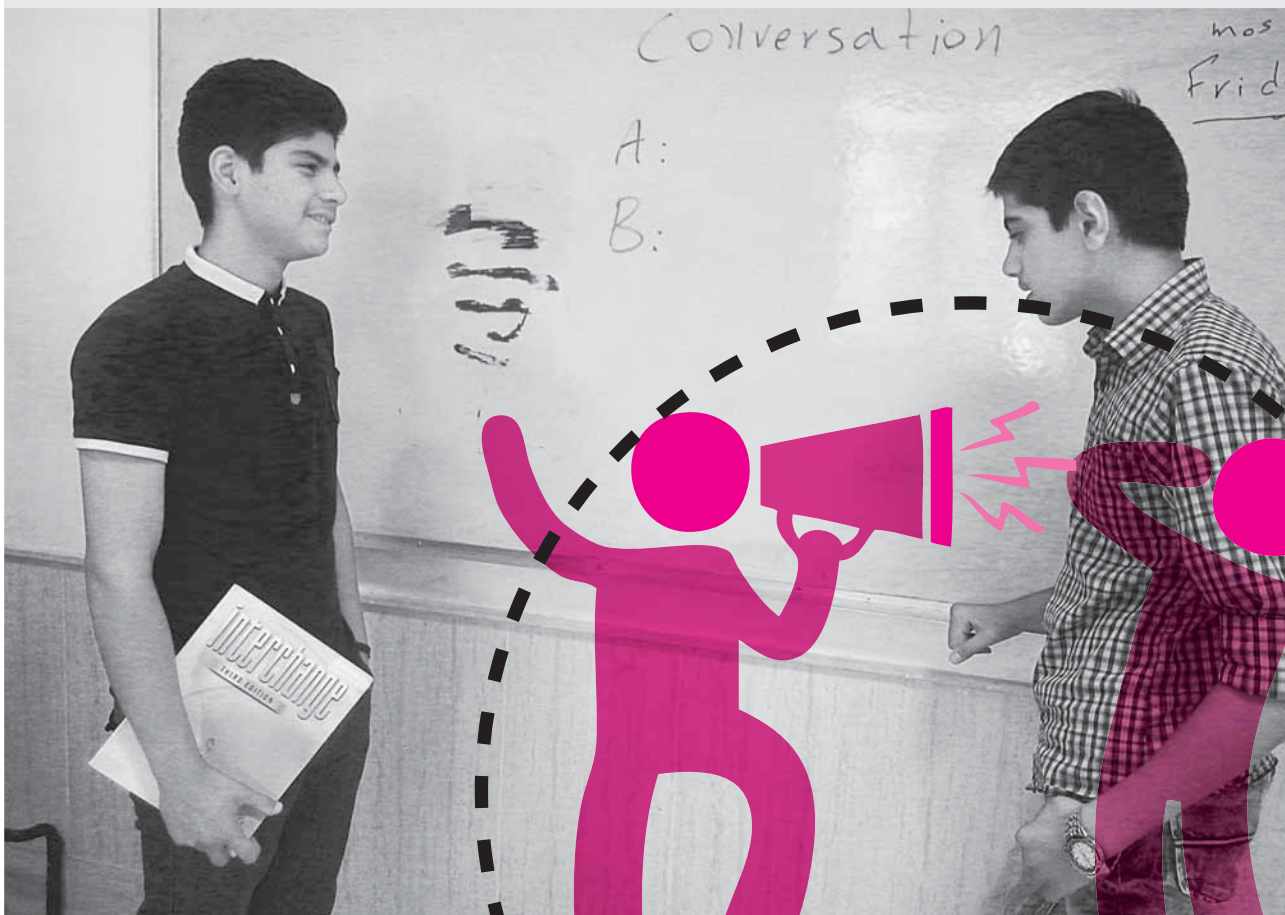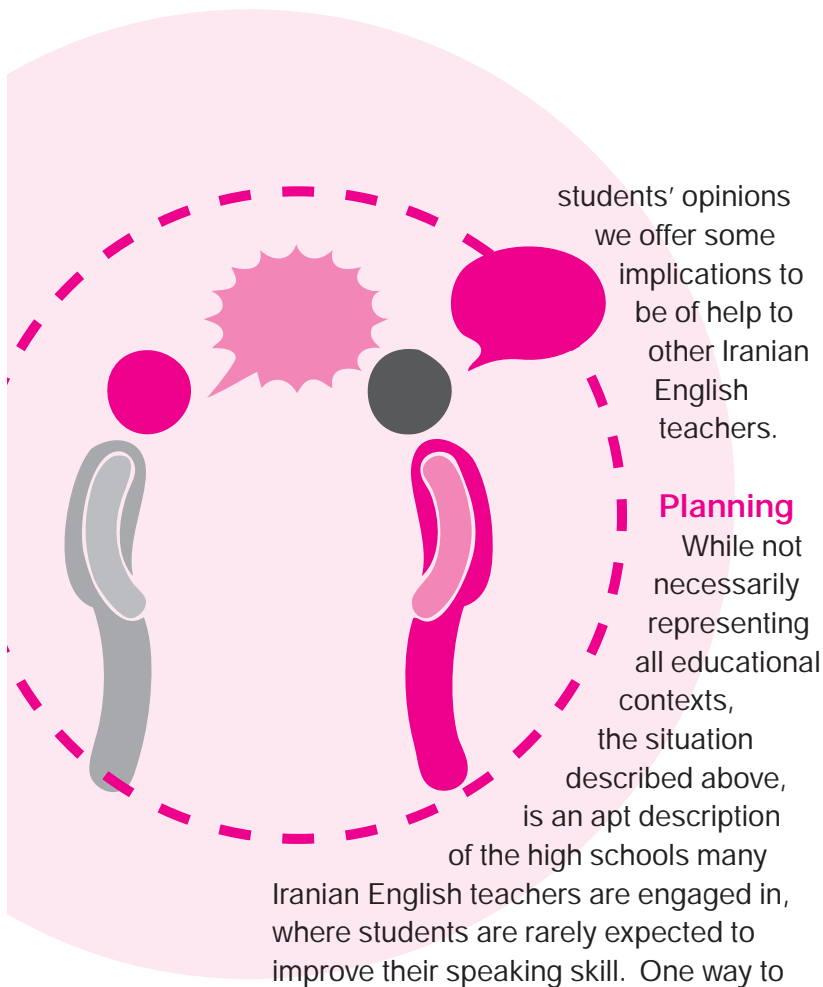
students' opinions we offer some implications to be of help to other Iranian English teachers.

Planning

While not necessarily representing all educational contexts, the situation described above, is an apt description of the high schools many Iranian English teachers are engaged in, where students are rarely expected to improve their speaking skill. One way to tackle this problem is to find the root of the problem and start from there. Regarding the current curricular restrictions in our schooling system, we believe that one solution is probably to get students motivated to take an active part in the classroom and to speak more. This could only be possible by allocating a portion of the class time to speaking practice and let the students know they are being assessed continually on their speaking skill throughout the educational year. Thus, we attempted to add a speaking component to our regular classroom instruction. In particular, we devised a framework to work on our students' speaking skill by prompting them with three speaking techniques including prepared talk, picture description and role play. Since these techniques are not commonly practiced in Iranian high schools, a brief introduction into these techniques is in order.

● *Prepared Talk*

Harmer (2001) argues that prepared talk is a popular type of classroom activity which can be effectively used to enhance students' speaking skill. In this technique, which can be extremely enjoyable for both speaker and listener, a student makes a presentation on a topic of his/her own choice and interest. Some researchers have suggested a number of tips for using this technique. For instance, it is recommended that 1) Students practice their talk out loud. 2) Learners be encouraged to use visual aids and point to the related parts at the right times during their talks. 3) Students practice their talk in front of their classmates. 4) Students be allowed to keep notes of the important information they are going to say in their talks.

● *Picture description*

In picture description activity, students are supposed to tell the story taking place in a set of sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as the rubric of the talk. In this activity, the teacher can give all the students just one picture (or one set of pictures) and ask them to describe what is in the picture. Alternatively, s/he can divide the students into different groups and give each group a different picture. The students discuss the picture with their partners and a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity promotes the creativity and imagination power of the learners as well as their public speaking skills. It provides a variety of fun and games and offers equal opportunities both for teacher-student and student- student interactions. In this activity pictures can take different forms such as flashcards, large wall

daily activities we speak more than we write, yet in English classes, many of our teachers still spend the majority of class time on reading and writing practice, almost exclusively ignoring speaking and listening skills. Of course, we have to admit that this unfair balance is based on the pedagogical objectives and it goes in line with the expectations of the educational system.

However, as the newly introduced English curriculum has made the development of communicative competence its major goal, the oral skills have assumed more importance than before and so these skills should be incorporated into classroom activities and be regularly taught. More over,experience Shows that, if the right activities are taught in the right way, oral activities can generate a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom an enjoyable and dynamic place to be.

Ha Ha Ha...

Ha Ha Ha...

In the Iranian educational system, getting students to speak is often a great challenge for English teachers. This is perhaps, due to the fact that the speaking skill is mainly undervalued in our high schools and in some rare contexts where attempts are made to develop students' speaking skill, they are often restricted to pattern practice through drills or memorization of dialogues

In this article, we describe a collaborative action research study that we conducted in a typical high school on 30 elementary language learners in order to help them develop their speaking ability. Our intervention included a shift in the regular instructional program from a grammar-translation method to a communicative language teaching process. We accomplished this by means of employing three techniques of teaching speaking namely, prepared talk, picture description and role play within the framework of an action research project. Through a "four-phase" cycle of enquiry (planning, action, observation, reflection), as recommended in a previously published Roshd FLT article (i.e. Mehrani, 2015) we evaluated our intervention by following a "presentation – practice – test" procedure in the hope of showing how effectively these speaking techniques could be employed to address students' speaking problems amidst difficult teaching circumstances. Finally, based on our experience and a survey of

teachers are required to follow, whose primary aim is to develop students' reading skill. As a consequence, the majority of the students entering high schools receive little, if any, instruction in how to get engaged in a simple conversation. A second consequence, familiar to many high school teachers, is that our classes suffer from students' lack of interest, motivation, and enthusiasm for speaking in English. High school teachers working in these sorts of classes often complain about the difficulties they experience in getting their students to speak, just as the way parents complain why their children are not able to carry out even the simplest of conversations, despite six years of English education in secondary schools.

The fact, however, is that students and parents often equate knowing the language to being able to speak a language and thus view learning the language as learning how to speak the language. In this respect, Nunan (1991)

claims that the achievement of an ELT program is often measured in terms of how well students are able to carry out a conversation in the foreign language. On this basis, teachers' and parents' complaints are justified to the extent that our education system fails in preparing students to speak English in and out of the classroom.

> **Harmer (2001) argues that prepared talk is a popular type of classroom activity which can be effectively used to enhance students' speaking skill**

If we think about all types of conversations that a typical person has in one day and compare them with how much written communication s/he does in one day, we can easily see that in our

Abstract

In the present article, we exemplify an action research study that was carried out to increase students' engagement in classroom interactions and also to investigate the effectiveness of three techniques for enhancing students' speaking skill. The study was conducted as part of the regular instructional program in a typical high school on 30 elementary language learners. A "presentation – practice – test" procedure was followed within a four-phase action research framework. Through a survey questionnaire, we also asked the students for their opinions on each of these teaching techniques. The results of the study indicated that the three techniques (role play, picture description and prepared talk) can effectively contribute to students' speaking development. However, subsequent comparisons showed that role play is more effective than the other two techniques. In addition, our survey showed that the students mainly held a positive attitude toward the use of these techniques in their classes. The findings and the pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

Key Words : action research, picture description, prepared talk, role play, speaking ability.

Introduction

In the Iranian educational system, getting students to speak is often a great challenge for English teachers. This is perhaps, due to the fact that the speaking skill is mainly undervalued in our high schools and in some rare contexts where attempts are made to develop students' speaking skill, they are often restricted to pattern practice through drills or memorization of dialogues. Another reason might be the prevalence of teacher-centered methods, such as grammar-translation, that do not provide students with enough opportunities for speaking practice. A further major factor contributing to the difficulty of teaching speaking in our schooling system is the syllabus that

How We Helped Our Students Speak: A Practical Action Research

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اشاره

اقدام‌پژوهی یکی از روش‌های پژوهشی اســت که هدف آن بهبود بخشــیدن به فرایندها و روش‌های آموزشــی با تکیه بر داده‌های تجربی می‌باشــد. این روش از قابلیت ویژه‌ای برای پژوهش‌های کلاسی برخوردار است.

نظر به اهمیت اقدام‌پژوهی، در شماره‌های گذشته به معرفی و چگونگی کاربرد این روش در پژوهش‌های کلاس پرداختیـــم و از این شـــماره به بعد مقـــالات اقدام‌پژوهی در قالب ســـتون ثابت در مجله مطرح می‌شود. مدیریت ستون را دکتر **مهدی مهرانی**، عضو هیئت علمی دانشگاه نیشابور، بر عهده گرفته‌اند. تقاضا می‌شود خوانندگان محترم که قصد دارند با استفاده از این روش به بهبود آموزش کمک کنند با هماهنگی با مدیریت ستون به ارائه کار پژوهشی خود در این قالب اقدام نمایند.

چکیده

این مقاله گزارش مختصری از یک نمونه اقدام‌پژوهی عملی است که با هدف افزایش تعاملات کلامی دانش‌آموزان، بهبود مهارت صحبت کردن دانش‌آموزان و بررسی اثر سه تکنیک آموزش صحبت کردن (ایفای نقش، شرح تصویر، و گفت‌وگوهای آماده) انجام شده است. شرکت‌کنندگان در این پژوهش شامل ۳۰ دانش‌آموز زبان انگلیسی با توان زبانی محدود (مبتدی) در یک دبیرستان دولتی در شهرستان نیشابور بودند. رویکرد پژوهشی اتخاذ شده برای انجام این تحقیق از نوع اقدام‌پژوهی چهار مرحله‌ای بود که طی آن برنامه آموزشی کلاس که شامل فرایند سه‌گانه «ارائهٔ مطلب، تمرین، ارزیابی از دانش‌آموزان» بود مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. علاوه بر این، در این پژوهش ما دیدگاه دانش‌آموزان نسبت به برنامه آموزشی کلاس و تکنیک‌های به‌کار گرفته شده را از طریق توزیع یک پرسش‌نامه مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار دادیم. نتایج به دست آمده نشان داد که برنامه آموزشی کلاس در افزایش تعاملات کلامی دانش‌آموزان و بهبود مهارت صحبت کردن ایشان نسبتاً موفق بوده است. همچنین بررسی ما از تحلیل داده‌ها نشان داد که گرچه هر سه تکنیک به‌کار گرفته شده در بهبود مهارت‌های کلامی زبان‌آموزان مؤثر است، با این حال به نظر می‌رسد تکنیک ایفای نقش به میزان بیشتری بر مهارت دانش‌آموزان اثر می‌گذارد. علاوه بر این، پس از بررسی داده‌های پرسش‌نامه مشخص شد که دانش‌آموزان عمدتا دیدگاه مثبتی نسبت به به‌کارگیری هر سه تکنیک دارند. در ادامه نتایج به دست آمده مورد بحث و بررسی قرار گرفته است و سپس پیشنهادهایی در راستای افزایش تعاملات کلامی دانش‌آموزان ارائه شده است.

کلیدواژه‌ها: اقدام‌پژوهی، ایفای نقش، شرح تصویر، گفت‌وگوی آماده، مهارت صحبت کردن