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**EXAM TAKING STRATEGIES TO PRACTISE STUDENTS' SPEAKING
SKILLS IN ENGLISH LESSONS IN FORM 10**

**EKSĀMENU KĀRTOŠANAS STRATĒGIJAS RUNĀTPRASMES ATTĪSTĪBAI
ANĢĻU VALODAS STUNDĀS 10. KLASĒ
DIPLOMA PAPER**

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**LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE
PĒDAGOGOĢIJAS, PSIHOLOĢIJAS UN MĀKSLAS FAKULTĀTE
SKOLOTĀJU IZGLĪTĪBAS NODAĻA**

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged work from any source.

Mārtiņš Vētra

6th January, 2012.

ABSTRACT

Ability to communicate, express one's ideas logically in a foreign language is a part of everyday life. Students at schools often participate in foreign projects, students at universities take part in students' exchange programs. Also when a person wants to find a job in public sector there will always be the requirement to know one or more foreign languages; being able to communicate in it. Thus it is very important to develop speaking skills till the level when students can express their ideas, make conversations with foreign people.

One way how to assess students' ability to speak is by evaluation that he or she gets for the speaking part in Year 12 exam. The Diploma Paper was written with the aim to study how exam taking strategies contribute to improvement of such speaking skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam.

To achieve the aim of the Diploma Paper the case study was used as a research method. During the research part questionnaires were designed. Questionnaire 1 was designed to find out learners experience and preferences with speaking tasks. Interview for the teachers was designed to find out possible exam taking strategies that are used in their classes. Feedback and observation field notes also were collected to monitor the learners' progress.

The case study was conducted during the author's teaching practice for three months in Riga State German Gymnasium.

The research results allowed the author of the Paper to conclude that using such exam taking strategies as "Learner aims", "Likes and dislikes", "Assessment", "Reading the instructions", "Saying what you think", "Candidates and examiners", "Describing", "Role Play for a Mark" positively influences students' general attitude towards Year 12 exams speaking part and develop summarizing and expressing opinion speaking skills. Also the general understanding about Year 12 exam increased.

ANOTĀCIJA

Spēja komunicēt, skaidri izteikt savu viedokli kādā no svešvalodām ir kļuvusi par daļu no mūsu ikdienas. Skolēni skolās bieži vien piedalās ārvalstu projektos, studenti augstskolās izmanto studentu apmaiņas programmas. Arī tad, kad cilvēks vēlas atrast darbu publiskajā sektorā, viņam nākas saskarties ar darba devēja prasību zināt kādu svešvalodu un spēt tajā komunicēt. Tādēļ ir ļoti svarīgi attīstīt runātprasmi līdz līmenim, kurā skolēns spēj izteikt savu viedokli, domas un veidot sarunas ar cittauniešiem.

Viens veids, kā novērtēt studentu prasmi runāt, ir balstoties uz divpadsmitās klases eksāmena mutiskās daļas vērtējumu. Diplomdarbs tika uzrakstīts ar mērķi izziņāt eksāmena kārtības stratēģiju nozīmi runātprasmju attīstībā un skolēnu sagatavošanā divpadsmitās klases eksāmenam.

Lai sasniegtu Diplomdarba mērķi, autors izmantoja atsevišķa gadījuma pētījumu, kurš tika veikts Rīgas Valsts vācu ģimnāzijas 10. klasē trīs mēnešu garumā. Datu ieguvei tika izveidotas divas anketas skolēniem un intervija skolotājiem. Darbam tika pievienotas skolēnu novērošanas un izvērtējuma piezīmes, rakstītie vērtējumi.

Autora iegūtie rezultāti ļāva secināt, ka eksāmena kārtības stratēģijas izmantošana angļu valodas stundās pozitīvi ietekmēja skolēnu attieksmi pret divpadsmitās klases angļu valodas eksāmena mutisko daļu. Tika uzlabota viņu spēja izteikt un apkopot savu viedokli, kā arī izpratne par eksāmenu.

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INTRODUCTION

When a student is learning a language, one of the main reasons why he or she is doing that is the ability to speak that particular language. All grammatical rules, vocabulary comes together in order to understand and be understood.

It is nearly impossible to successfully pass Latvian or IELTS exam without good results in speaking part. There is a difference between passing the exam and successfully passing the exam. Students should understand that they are not only passing the exam for the school or their parents, they are doing that for themselves in order to fit in society, to be competitive in the labour market.

During the teaching practice the author had opportunity to teach Form 10 students so they were good candidates with whom the author could try out different exam taking strategies and develop such speaking skills as summarising and expressing opinion that could later be required in exam tasks, real life situations.

The aim of the paper is: to study how exam taking strategies contribute to improvement of such speaking skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam.

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To select and study literature about speaking skills and exam taking strategies;
2. To design Questionnaire 1 to learn learners' experience and preferences with speaking tasks;
3. To design Interview for the teachers to find out possible exam taking strategies that are used in their classes to prepare for the exam;
4. To design tasks and select strategies basing on the gained information;
5. To try them out in the classroom and fill out observation and feedback field notes;
6. To design Questionnaire 2 to gain feedback from the learners;
7. To analyse the results and draw conclusions.

Research questions:

- What speaking skills should be practised in upper secondary school?
- What effective exam taking strategies for speaking tasks are?

Method of the research: Case study

Place: Riga State German Gymnasium

Methods of data collection: Questionnaires for students, Interview for teachers, Observation and feedback field notes.

Time: January – March

The hypothesis of the paper is: if exam taking strategies are applied in English lesson then such speaking skills as summarizing and expressing opinion are improved.

The Diploma Paper consists of 4 chapters:

Chapter 1 outlines the main things behind word “speaking”. This chapter shows how speaking skills can be developed and how speaking tasks should be presented.

Chapter 2 analyses two popular speaking exams and draws attention to the factors that interfere with successful practice of speaking skills.

Chapter 3 is concerned with exam taking strategies and possible ways how to practise them during the lesson.

Chapter 4 is case study done by the author of the Diploma Paper. It focuses on using the selected exam taking strategies to develop summarising and expressing opinion speaking skills.

1. SPEAKING IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

The author decided to start the work with the research in the field of literature in order to find out what different authors are thinking about speaking skills, how these skills could be improved and developed during the English lesson. The general secondary education standard also was studied.

When continuing to learn the first and second foreign language in high school, “Terms of the general education standards and general education curricular standards” encourages students to achieve communicative competence in language and social-cultural competence in set proficiency levels B2-C1. These levels require the following abilities:

Proficiency level B2

- Student is able to understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including discussions on professional issues in their specialty.
- Student is able to converse quite freely and spontaneously, communications with native speakers take place without a hitch.
- Student is able to speak clearly and in detail about various topics, to justify their views, outlining the various options the advantages and disadvantages;

Proficiency level C1

- Student is able to understand a variety of topics complicated, lengthy texts and recognize implicit meaning.
- Student is able to express themselves creatively and spontaneously, without searching for words.
- Student is able to appropriately use language in social, academic and professional field.
- Student is able to produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, good knowledge of the text-based principles, using appropriate links and means of alignment; (<http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=181216>)

Gower (1995) notes down that from the communicative point of view, speaking has many different aspects including two major categories – accuracy, involving the

correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practised through controlled and guided activities; and, fluency, considered to be ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously’. This is, however, rather a superficial view of this skill because ability to speak fluently also demands correct usage of pauses and stresses.

Accuracy involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In controlled and guided activities the focus is usually on accuracy and the teacher makes it clear from feedback that accuracy is important. On-going correction is often appropriate during accuracy activities. In freer activities the teacher is hoping for the correct use of language but is also keen to encourage the students’ attempts to use the language they have in order to communicate. Even in free activities students can be encouraged to be as accurate as possible so long as their anxiety to ‘get it right’ does not interfere too much with their fluency and ability to communicate. In any particular activity the teacher can make it clear to students in which areas accuracy is expected, and to what extent.

When speaking fluently students should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they’ve got, regardless of grammatical and other mistakes. Normally, students should not be corrected during fluency activities. However in feedback afterwards teacher can comment favourably on any strategies the students used to increase their fluency. For example:

- The use of natural-sounding ‘incomplete’ sentences;
- The use of common expressions matter;
- The use of ‘fillers’ and hesitation devices;
- The use of communication strategies;
- The ability to paraphrase - this can involve using gesture or even mime;

Some of these aspects are more difficult to focus on than others. Students obviously transfer many of the speaking skills they have in their own language when they are speaking English. (Gower 1995)

According to Bygate (1987), in order to achieve a communicative goal through speaking, there are two aspects to be considered – knowledge of the language, and skill in using this knowledge. It is not enough to possess a certain amount of knowledge, but

a speaker of the language should be able to use this knowledge in different situations. We do not merely know how to assemble sentences in the abstract: we have to produce them and adapt to the circumstances. This means making decisions rapidly, implementing them smoothly, and adjusting our conversation as unexpected problems appear in our path. (Bygate 1987) Without practising skills in using language the ability to make and maintain meaningful and dynamic conversation is not possible.

When discussing the elements of speaking that are necessary for fluent oral production, Harmer (2001), distinguishes between two aspects – knowledge of ‘language features’, and the ability to process information on the spot, it means ‘mental/social processing’. The first aspect, language features, necessary for spoken production involves, according to Harmer, the following features: connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation language. For a clearer view of what the individual features include, here is a brief overview:

- connected speech – conveying fluent connected speech including assimilation, elision, linking ‘r’, contractions and stress patterning – weakened sounds);
- expressive devices – pitch, stress, speed, volume, physical – non-verbal means for conveying meanings (super segmental features);
- lexis and grammar – supplying common lexical phrases for different functions (agreeing, disagreeing, expressing shock, surprise, approval, etc.);
- negotiation language – in order to seek clarification and to show the structure of what we are saying. (Harmer 2001, 269-270)

In order for the student to successfully build and maintain a conversation, concerning different life situations, he needs to know these previously mentioned language features.

Being able to decide what to say on the spot, saying it clearly and being flexible during a conversation as different situations come out is the ability to use the knowledge ‘in action’, which creates the second aspect of speaking - the skill, Bygate notes (p4).

Bygate views the skill as comprising two components: production skills and interaction skills, both of which can be affected by two conditions: firstly, processing

conditions, taking into consideration the fact that ‘a speech takes place under the pressure of time’; secondly, reciprocity conditions connected with a mutual relationship between the interlocutors (Bygate 1987).

In order to wage a successful language interaction, it is necessary to realize the use of the language features through mental/social processing – with the help of ‘the rapid processing skills’ (Harmer 2001, 217).

‘Mental/social processing’ includes three features – language processing, interacting with others, and on-the-spot information processing. Again, to give a clearer view of what these features include, here is a brief summary:

- language processing – processing the language in the head and putting it into coherent order, which requires the need for comprehensibility and convey of meaning (retrieval of words and phrases from memory, assembling them into syntactically and proportionally appropriate sequences);
- interacting with others – including listening, understanding of how the other participants are feeling, a knowledge of how linguistically to take turns or allow others to do so;
- on-the-spot information processing – i.e. processing the information the listener is told the moment he/she gets it. (Harmer 2001, 271)

The processing conditions (time pressure) in certain ways limit or modify the oral production; it means the use of production skills. For that reason, speakers are encouraged to use devices which help them make the oral production possible or easier through ‘facilitation’, or enable them to change words they use in order to avoid or replace the difficult ones by means of ‘compensation’, states Bygate (p14).

There are four elementary ways of facilitating that Bygate distinguishes: simplifying structures, ellipsis, formulaic expressions, and using fillers and hesitation devices. On the other hand, when a speaker needs to alter, correct or change what he or she has said, they will need to make use of compensation devices. These include tools such as substitution, rephrasing, reformulating, self-correction, false starts, and repetition and hesitation.

Facilitation and compensation, both devices which help students make the oral production possible or easier, or help them to change, avoid or replace the difficult expressions, besides these elementary functions also help students to sound more naturally as speakers of a foreign language.

According to Bygate (1987), both speakers and listeners, besides being good at processing spoken words should be 'good communicators', which means 'good at saying what they want to say in a way which the listener finds understandable'. This means being able to possess interaction skills. Communication of meaning then depends on two kinds of skill: routines, and negotiation skills.

Routines are the typical patterns in which speakers organize what they have to communicate. There are two kinds of routines: information routines, and interaction routines. The information routines include frequently recurring types of information structures involved in, for example, stories, descriptions, comparisons, or instructions. These routines require well developed summarising skill.

The interaction routines, on the other hand, present the characteristic ways, in which interactions are organized dealing with the logical organization and order of the parts of conversation. Interaction routines can typically be observed in, for example, telephone conversations, interviews, or conversations at the party. These routines require well develop expressing opinion skill. (Bygate 1987)

The level of explicitness refers to the choice of expressions with regard to interlocutors' knowledge. As regards the procedures of negotiation, i.e. how specific speakers are in what they say, this aspect of negotiation of meaning involves the use of paraphrases, metaphors, on the use of vocabulary varying the degree of precisions with which we communicate. (Bygate 1987)

To sum it up, both Bygate and Harmer agree that for a speaker, in order to be able to wage a successful fluent oral production, it is necessary to possess knowledge of the language and skill in using this knowledge. Harmer and Bygate approach the speaking from the viewpoint of a skill that involves several elements to be considered during language teaching.

Harmer makes a distinction between knowledge of language features (skills) and the ability to possess information and language on the spot via mental/social processing. According to Bygate, the skill of speaking involves production skills and

interaction skills. While Harmer includes under the term language features connected speech, expressive devices, knowledge of lexis and grammar, and negotiation language; Bygate, on the other hand, distinguishes between two devices that are involved in production skills – facilitation and compensation.

The second group of skills that Harmer distinguishes includes rapid processing skills that help speakers process the information and language on the spot. These involve language processing, interacting with others and on-the-spot information processing. Bygate, on the other hand, recognizes the term interaction skills and involves here routines, the typical patterns for organizing utterances, and negotiation skills that realize these routines through management of interaction and negotiation of meaning so that understanding and thus communicative goal is achieved.

Without the previously mentioned skills student cannot achieve communicative competence in language and social-cultural competence in proficiency levels B2-C1 set by the general secondary education standard.

In the next section the author will turn his attention to organizing speaking activities.

1.1 Organizing speaking activities in lesson

In order to successfully do any tasks in English lesson connected with speaking it is important to know how to prepare the activity, how to manage the activity and how to end activity. All these stages of organizing activity will be discussed in the next sections.

Penny Ur (1991) discusses four different stages for organizing speaking activities in groups, pairs or whole-class – presentation, process, ending, and feedback. Harmer (2001), when considering organizing group work and pair work in relation to various communicative and pre-communicative speaking activities, proposes three stages.

The first stage, pre-activity stage, includes two focus areas - ‘engage-instruct-initiate sequence’, of which the name has been borrowed from Harmer (2001), and ‘grouping students’, it means dealing with the ways that can be initiated in order to divide learners into groups or pairs in case of including group work and pair work activities.

During-activity stage focuses on ‘the roles of the teacher’ that he or she can take on during activities, and, what can be suggested concerning the roles of the teacher. Another focus area concentrates on ‘providing feedback during activities’.

Conclusion stage includes the areas which focus on the process of ‘stopping the activity’, it means the appropriate time and method selection; and, ‘providing feedback’ after the activity.

In the next sections the author will be looking closer at the stages mentioned above.

1.1.1 Pre-activity stage

William Littlewood (1991) states that activities can be categorized into two groups: pre-communicative activities, and communicative activities.

The aim of the pre-communicative activities is, apart from producing certain language forms in an acceptable way, as Littlewood suggests, to ‘help the learners to develop links with meanings that will later enable them to use this language for communicative purposes’ (p8). Pre-communicative activities are therefore divided into two subcategories: ‘structural activities’, such as mechanical drills or verb paradigms, for producing accurate and appropriate language forms, on one hand; and, ‘quasi-communicative activities’, that are also used in high schools, such as question-and-answer activities, giving directions to a stranger basing learner’s replies on, for example, a town plan, or questionnaires, which bear a potential functional meanings of the language. (Littlewood 1991)

The second category forms a group of ‘communicative activities’, which Littlewood divides into two further categories: ‘functional activities’, and ‘social interaction activities’. The aim of the functional communication activities is to practise students’ ability to get meaning across as effectively as possible. Littlewood includes here activities based on sharing information with restricted and unrestricted cooperation (identifying pictures, discovering sequences, locations, missing information, ‘secrets’, differences, etc.), sharing and processing information (reconstructing story sequences, pooling information to solve a problem, etc.), or processing information (for example, groups must decide what they will take for a trip). On the other hand, social interaction activities, in addition to overcoming an

information gap or solving a problem, extend the social meanings of the language through, for example, simulation and role-play activities, discussions or conversations thus developing also social acceptability in the language use. (Littlewood 1991)

In upper secondary school both, 'functional activities', and 'social interaction activities' are used to develop students speaking skills.

When classifying activities focusing on the development of speaking skills, Byrne (1991) besides taking into consideration organizational forms to be involved in the activities and their focus either on accuracy or fluency of the language, also considers their teacher or learner centeredness. Learner directed pair work, or group work activities that focus on accuracy involve role-plays, controlled conversations or working with questionnaires, while fluency activities make use of project work, various games, and also discussions carried out within groups or pairs. (Byrne 1991)

Both kinds of activities that aim at either communicative or partially communicative purpose will inevitably be connected with the use of different organizational forms. There are primarily three organizational forms of speaking activities that methodologists describe – group work, pair work, and whole-class teaching.

To sum it up, the first stage, pre-activity stage, includes two focus areas: engage-instruct-initiate sequence, and grouping students. The first area concerns engagement of students, it means the techniques for drawing attention or involving students, providing students with instructions and initiating students to start the activity. The second area deals with setting students into groups, providing this is required by the nature of the activity.

Engage-Instruct-Initiate Sequence

For the majority of theoreticians, for example Scrivener (1994), or Harmer (2001), the primary aspect when dealing with the theory of instructions is their clarity, logical order, and comprehension check. In relation to problem behaviour, Penny Ur (1996), clearly explains how instructions should be conducted: Problems sometimes arise to student uncertainty about what they are supposed to be doing. Instructions, though they take up a very small proportion of lesson time, are crucial. The necessary information needs to be communicated clearly and quickly, courteously but assertively: this is precisely what the task involves. (Ur 1996)

To begin with, there is an ‘engage-instruct-initiate sequence’ that Harmer (2001) proposes for the beginning phase of an activity. Firstly, engagement, according to Harmer, means “making it clear that something ‘new’ is going to happen”.

As regards giving instructions, this involves a number of aspects that need to be considered for achieving the maximal effectiveness of activities, consequently the development of speaking skills.

Firstly, the use of language (mother tongue or target language) that is used for providing instructions will be considered. It is basically agreed, for example Ur (1991) and Byrne (1991), that explaining instructions in mother tongue are acceptable especially with classes whose knowledge of the target language is not on a sufficient level yet. The aim is primarily to find ‘a more accessible and cost effective alternative to sometimes lengthy and difficult target-language explanations’ (Ur 1996).

Parrot (1993) thinks that instructions should be given in both languages, but at the same time is afraid that students may ‘switch off’ knowing that they will be repeated in their own language.

Secondly, there is a length of instructions. Optimal choice, according to Scrivener (1994) is based on sequencing instructions in a sensible order, using short sentences and avoiding or separating instructions clearly from ‘the other chit-chat, telling off, joking, etc.’ (p98).

All of these is necessary because as Ur (1991) warns the concentration span of students is limited; and, therefore, the instructions should be clear and concise. Furthermore, support for instructions, such as, visual clues, physical movement, aural input or gestures that the teacher makes need to be considered. Gower et al. (1995) propose that instructions should be supported with visual clues ‘whenever possible’, among which real objects, pictures, gestures and mime or instructions written on the cards or pieces of paper are included. In addition, Atkinson (1993) notes that for giving concise instructions in English, techniques, such as gestures and mime play an important role in their comprehension.

According to Ur (1996), restatement of the main points or repeating is important for accurate perception of instructions. The use of comprehension check on provided instructions is the last area that is frequently commented upon.

Dividing Students into Pairs or Groups

The author decided to examine the possible ways of dividing and grouping students in order to use these strategies when speaking tasks will be practised. Not always teacher can provide attention to each student so they have to be divided and work individually.

There are different ways of grouping learners, it means dividing them into pairs or groups. To begin with, Harmer (2001) suggests four basic ways - friendship, streaming, chance, and changing groups. The first method provides enough space for students to choose their friends and thus create groups. On the other hand, streaming method assumes that students will be divided into groups according to their abilities, thus creating the same ability groups or mixed ability groups. Counting out avoids the ability differentiation within groups, this method Harmer calls this technique 'chance'. Finally, changing groups presupposes that students keep changing while the activity continues.

Byrne (1991), prefers as little students' movement as possible, suggesting that it is reasonable, taking into consideration a time factor influenced by moving students and frequency of the use of pair work and group work, to make use of the existing classroom arrangement. Byrne advises to get students to work with a neighbour or neighbours and move students only if it is absolutely necessary. It is important for students to be able to form pairs and groups quickly and without any fuss, Byrne concludes.

Pre-activity Stage is very important for the rest of the work to turn out successfully. Any wrong action can lead to wrong reaction from the students in the class. In the next section the main principles that should be taken into account during the activity will be explained.

1.1.2 During-activity stage

As important how we prepare for the activity; it is also important how we manage to do this activity. In these section the main things about the second while activity stage will be discussed.

The second stage, during-activity stage, will include two focus areas – the role of the teacher and providing feedback during the activity. In this stage it is important to

focus the attention on teacher's attitude, consequently the role he or she takes during the activity. Secondly, it necessary to consider the feedback though some theories suggests postponing the actual feedback after the activity.

The roles of the teacher can be categorized from several points of view, for example, according to the type of the activity, stage of the activity, or the interaction pattern selected for the particular activity. Nunan and Lamb (1996) point out that the roles that the teachers adopt are dynamic, not static, and are subject to change according to the psychological factors brought by the participants. (Nunan, Lamb, 1996)

In addition, Byrne (1991) compares the teacher to an actor claiming that the teacher 'will have to play different roles at different times' (p13).

Byrne (1991) divides the roles of the teacher according to the type of interaction activity distinguishing between fluency and accuracy activities. During fluency activities the teacher most frequently adopts the roles of stimulator, manager and consultant, reminding that the main reason for taking part in such activities is to get students to interact, set up the activities and to be available for help and advice if students need and ask for it. On the other hand, the roles that the teacher carries out during accuracy activities will primarily include the roles of conductor, organizer and monitor. Teacher's main task will therefore be to make sure that the students know what to practice, and that they practise effectively, together with organizing the activities and checking while students are performing.

Nunan and Lamb (1996) grade the roles of the teacher from the most problematic, in terms of participants' roles and behaviour. They include the roles of: controller, entertainer, disciplinarian, and a developer of a sense of independence and responsibility. The teacher continually establishing control, giving directions, threats and punishment, is labelled as 'controller'. Still noisy, but positive atmosphere, where the teacher introduces games and recreational activities, or reading stories, shows the teacher as 'entertainer'. The 'disciplinarian' establishes rules to be followed and is quick to notice any misbehaviour; while the teacher who spends time by teaching, not requiring a close supervision and in case of noise providing only a simple reminder with effectively, called as 'developer of a sense of independence and responsibility'. (Nunan and Lamb 1996)

In relation to fluency speaking activities, Harmer (2001) mentions three basic roles that teachers take on including: prompter, participant, and feedback provider. While taking the role of a prompter, the teacher offers discrete suggestions or lets students struggle out of a difficult situation (when students get lost, cannot think of what to say next, lose fluency), which can stop the sense of frustration when coming to a 'dead end' of language ideas. A teacher acting as a participant prompts covertly, introduces new information to help the activity along, ensures continuing students' engagement, and generally maintains a creative atmosphere. Harmer warns that when acting as a participant, the teacher should be careful not to participate too much, thus dominating the speaking and drawing all the attention to him or her.

Finally, feedback provider, Harmer says, during the activity may inhibit students and take the communicativeness out of the activity by over-correction; therefore, the correction should be helpful and gentle getting students out of difficult misunderstanding and hesitations.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1999), feedback on students' spoken language during the activity can be either positive or negative and may serve not only to let students know how well they have performed but also increase motivation and build a supportive climate.

Harmer (2001) says that the decision about how to react to students' performance will depend upon the stage of the lesson, the activity, the type of mistake made, and the particular student who is making that mistake.

Different methodologists look at providing feedback from several aspects; most often, however, feedback is seen from the viewpoint of accuracy (form of the language used) and fluency (content of spoken production) activities.

Richards and Lockhart (1999) distinguish between the feedback on content, and feedback on form, suggesting strategies and decisions to be considered for both kinds. The strategies that Richards and Lockhart suggest for feedback on content include: acknowledging a correct answer, indicating an incorrect answer, praising, expanding or modifying a students' answer, repeating, summarizing, or criticizing. On the other hand, feedback on form represents focusing on the accuracy of spoken production including decisions about 'whether learners' errors should be corrected, which kinds of learner errors should be corrected, and how learner errors should be corrected' (p189).

Richards and Lockhart provide different ways for accomplishing feedback on form:

- Asking the student to repeat what he or she said;
- Pointing out the error and asking the student to self-correct;
- Commanding on an error and explaining why it is wrong, without having the student repeat the correct form;
- Asking another student to correct the error;
- Using a gesture to indicate that an error has been made. (Richards and Lockhart 1999)

Similarly, Byrne (1991) describes providing feedback from the viewpoint of accuracy and fluency activities. During accuracy activities, Byrne notes down, the teacher may provide feedback immediately on how well or badly students have done, or make a note of mistakes and shift the feedback onto a future lesson. In addition, teacher should not forget that the students may want to ask some questions or say what they think of the activity. On the other hand, when conducting a fluency activity, Byrne suggests that the teacher makes notes of anything serious and reteach it in another lesson and lets the students to take responsibility for what they are doing by not interfering. (Byrne 1991)

For the feedback provided during fluency work, according to Harmer (2001), it is important that the teacher does not interrupt in 'mid-flow', since it interrupts the communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form or precise meaning. The techniques for correcting students during fluency work that Harmer suggests including gentle correction, such as prompting students forward, reformulating what a student has said, and recording mistakes with further analysis.

During accuracy work, according to Harmer, it is necessary to point out and correct the mistakes the students are making, but at the same time the correction should not be too intensive, because it can be just as unpleasant as during fluency work. Harmer goes on by suggesting several ways of correcting students during accuracy work, among which he includes showing incorrectness by repeating, echoing, giving statement and question, making a facial expression, or hinting. (Harmer, 2001)

In the authors case the major emphasis will be on the fluency activity.

In the next section the author will explain how to end the activity.

1.1.3 Ending the activity

Every activity comes to the end and when it does it is better to know how it should be done. In this section the main things about the ending of the activity will be discussed.

Before the actual process of bringing the activity to the end, however, some pairs or groups may finish earlier than others. In such a case, it is important to be prepared and 'have some way of dealing with the situation', primarily, in order to show students 'that they are not just being left to do nothing' (Harmer 2001, 124-125).

Ur (1996) agrees and emphasises that in any case 'these reserve occupations should be ready to hand; and their preparation is an essential part of the lesson plan as a whole' (p.22). Such extra work may include, for example, a further elaboration of the task, getting students to read their books, or asking students to get on with their homework. (Ur, 1996:22)

Harmer also suggests that tired students may be told to relax for a bit while the others finish. (Harmer 2001)

As far as accuracy work is concerned, Byrne (1991) suggests that the activity should not go on for too long giving an estimate for the appropriate length of the activity from three to five minutes. Nevertheless, stopping the fluency work, on the other hand, is dependent on the time that the teacher allocates for the activity, Byrne says. Both for accuracy and fluency activities, it is not desirable to let the activities drag on or give an opportunity for some students to get bored. (Byrne 1991)

Ur (1991) states that it may be best to wait until all the groups have completed the task, however, sometimes this may take too long, and it is better to stop the last ones before they finish. Ur continues that sometimes, on the other hand, it is necessary to quit students' work while they are all occupied, e.g. for the reason that the teacher wants to organize a 'fruitful session' (p22). Ur believes, though this might not be the best thing to do, that this intervention will leave students with a taste for more, and thus 'heightened enthusiasm, or at least willingness' (p22).

Basically, in addition to time allocation, Ur agrees with Byrne (1991) that time solves the problem of appropriate end of the activity, though this may also bring about some inappropriate. However, students should be left to know in advance, in order to save protests and delays when the time comes. (Ur 1991)

Ur concludes that it is up to the teacher to be flexible and rely on common sense considering the end of an activity. Ur advises, in relation to extra activities it is very important to have them ready at hand in order to make students busy not disturbing others, though, especially for beginning teachers this might be sometimes rather time consuming.

Feedback after the activity

What feedback is and what form it should take, Ur (1991) describes as follows: What the groups have done must then be displayed and related to in some way by teacher and class: assessed, criticized, admired, argued with, or even simply listened with interest! (Ur 1996)

Generally, in order to bring about self-awareness and improvement in students, Gower at al. (1995) suggest that it is important to provide 'positive feedback', i.e. positive points to comment on, such as successful communication, accurate use of grammar points, use of vocabulary, appropriate expressions, good pronunciation, or expressive intonation, good use of fluency strategies in conversation, etc. As an inseparable part of the feedback, Harmer (2001) proposes getting students to express what they found easiest or most difficult. Putting some of the recorded mistakes on the board, asking students to recognize the problems and putting them right should follow, Harmer notes down. Similarly to feedback provided during activities, methodologists commonly draw a distinction between the feedback on accuracy and fluency activities, for example, Ur (1991), Harmer (2001).

Both Harmer (2001) and Gower at al. (1995) agree that it is not necessary to say which students made the mistake, but more importantly, focus on common ones, or ones in general interest, and provide students with individual notes and instructions on how to correct them, or where to find them (in dictionaries, grammar books, or on the Internet). As regards the fluency activities, Gower at al. (p103) propose that the teacher should indicate how each person communicated, comment on how fluent each was, how well they argued as a group, and so on.

Harmer (2001) suggests that it is also advisable to have a few pairs or groups quickly demonstrate the language they have been using with the teacher correcting it, if and when necessary. Such demonstration gives both the students and the rest of the class goal information for future learning and action, Harmer says. In case of

discussing an issue or predicting the content of a reading text, it is important to encourage students to talk about their conclusions with the teacher and the rest of the class since by comparing the different solutions, ideas, and problems; everyone gets a greater understanding of the topic.

Penny Ur (1996) distinguishes between three focus areas of feedback to be provided: on the result, on process, and on the language use. There are different approaches towards organizing the individual forms of feedback. Firstly, the feedback on the result can be organized by, for example, giving the correct results, getting groups to assess their own success, trying to collate proposals and versions of outcomes, or comparing or displaying conclusions. The feedback on process, on the other hand, means the organization and performance of, for example, debate, and it requires more teacher-centred approach. Teacher should take an active part – react, assess, criticize, preferably immediately after the activity. At the same time, however, students' reactions or comments should be taken into consideration. Finally, what is used rightly and what needs correction and practice should be monitored by the feedback on the language. The language used in the activity is a valuable source of information on what language is actively known and what is not. (Ur 1991)

When providing feedback after the activity, methodologists distinguish the feedback according to the type of the activity. It is necessary to provide a positive feedback that is likely to motivate students and bring about some kind of improvement, along with pointing out what went wrong during the activity. Furthermore, it is not important to concentrate on who made the mistakes but rather focus on the mistakes that have been frequent among the students.

Conclusion

Each speaking activity comprises three stages: Pre-activity stage; During-activity stage; Conclusion stage.

Each of the stages involves several focus areas that should be taken into consideration when organizing speaking activities. The author of the paper has suggested and discussed the following:

- Pre-activity stage – engage-instruct-initiate-sequence – grouping students;
- During-activity stage – the role of the teacher– Feedback during the activity;

- Conclusion stage – stopping the activity – Feedback after the activity.

In the next chapter the author will analyse two popular speaking exams.

2. EXAM ANALYSIS

In order to study how to prepare for Year 12 exams speaking part, the author had to research what kind of tasks were there, what were the rules and how they were assessed. To have an extra example and to see if there was a big difference between Latvian and foreign exam, author decided to analyse IELTS speaking test.

2.1 Speaking part Latvia's Year 12 exam

The oral exam starts after the invitation of student into the classroom. The invited student has to introduce him or herself to the assessor. Usually that is an English teacher from another school. Student has to show his or her identification document. The last step before the exam can begin is the choosing of the paper.

Examination paper comprises three tasks:

1. Interview. Student has to answer to 5 questions asked by the interviewer. Student has to say as much as he or she can.
2. Role play. Student will have one particular situation that he and his interviewer have to play out. (one minute to prepare)
3. Monologue. Student has to read extract from an article and summarize whole thing into 2-3 sentences. Also give his or her opinion about the issue raised in the text (two minutes to prepare, 3 to speak). This task is new and this is the first year with such kind of activity.

To go through all tasks in the speaking part should not take more than 15 minutes. The whole examination conversation is recorded.

Exam is assessed by marking scale. (Appendix 4)

Criteria for assessing speaking skills consist of the following parts: Communication strategies and interaction; Task achievement; Accuracy; Fluency; Pronunciation.

Maximum points that the student can get is 30. All depends on how well students manage to apply their knowledge in each part. (<http://visc.gov.lv/eksameni>)

2.2 Analysis of the IELTS speaking test

Many people are taking Year 12 Exam in the school but also many students who want to study abroad are also taking IELTS exam, one part of which is a speaking test. The author thought that it would only be valuable for students to get familiar with the structure of this speaking test.

The International English Language Testing System speaking test consists of a one-to-one interview with a specially trained examiner. The examiner will lead the candidate through the three parts of the test: An introduction and interview, an individual long turn where the candidate speaks for one or two minutes on a particular topic, and a two-way discussion thematically linked to the individual long turn. This interview will last for approximately 11-14 minutes. (<http://www.ielts-exam.net/index.php>)

After reading the two exams, the author can confidently say that they have more common features than differences. If a student has good results in Year 12 exam speaking part, he can be sure that he could also pass an international exams speaking part. The Year 12 exam rating scale is designed so that when the student receives the results he can identify which skills should be further improved.

The next section will be about speaking anxiety.

2.3 Speaking anxiety

A study by Hopkins indicates that students with more anxiety are less prone to communicate or use communicative strategies in the language classroom and especially examination. The subjective feelings that students with anxiety have are for example worry and fear and these feelings are similar to persons with anxiety in any aspects of life. According to Hopkins students with a high level of anxiety also have difficulties concentrating, often miss class, have palpitations and can even experience sleep deprivation due to the anxiety. He claims that anxiety towards a second language also specifically centres on speaking and listening where most problems and anxiety are reported with reference to the skill of speaking in the classroom (Hopkins 2002).

Anxiety often interferes with language learning, and the result might be that anxious students fail to focus on the actual task at hand since they are more worried about not making mistakes (Hedge 2000).

Anxiety of speaking also affects the students' self-esteem since the students are more vulnerable each time they are expected to share authentic information in the foreign language. In addition, students with a high level of speaking anxiety express that they are afraid of making mistakes and being constantly corrected by the teacher (Hopkins 2002).

A study by Hedge, dealing with anxiety as a wider concept, indicates that anxiety has a negative effect on both short-term and long-term memory. The study also shows "that anxiety impaired performance in a wide range of repetition (...) and learning tasks" (Hedge 2000, p. 93).

Low levels of anxiety can accumulate and lead to a significant difference in self-esteem and performance in the second language. It is therefore important to attempt to remove possible triggers for anxiety in the classroom and one way of doing it is by using exam taking strategies.

As to the authors mind, the more familiar the learners are with the exam, the less anxious they are when taking it.

The next chapter will look at possible speaking exam taking strategies.

3. SPEAKING EXAM TAKING STRATEGIES

This chapter consists of strategies designed to raise awareness of exam questions and materials, increase learners independence and help students to manage exam papers and providing them with confidence building strategies to improve their language skills in the class and in the exam room.

There are some general tips that can be used for every speaking activity and they are as follows:

- “Read all the tasks and make sure you understand what you have to talk about;
- If you do not understand the question, ask examiner to repeat it;
- If you cannot remember a word or phrase, use another one instead. Do not show that you have forgotten something or expect the examiner to finish your answers for you.
- Think of ideas for things to say and organize them in a logical order. You can note down a few useful words or phrases for each task. Do not waste time writing down full sentences.
- Use full sentences and try to elaborate your answers, make them more interesting. Do not just answer with one word. Give reasons for your opinions and examples to support your point of view.
- Avoid using the same words and structures all the time. Use a wide range of grammar structures and vocabulary to make your speech more effective.
- Stick to the point and keep the question in mind, do not talk about irrelevant things.”
(Hastings, B., Uminska, M., Chandler, D., Hegedus, K. 2010)

The author of this Paper gave exactly these speaking test taking strategies in written form to students at the beginning of his teaching practise. These strategies for speaking tasks are universal.

Preparing students for an exam in spoken English can present certain dilemmas which are less likely to occur in non – exam contexts. Usually these dilemmas are about deciding the most useful activities; amount of time that should be spent practising speaking skills when there are so many other exam skills to be practised; possible ways of building up students confidence who is terrified at the thought of having to speak English in the presence of an examiner. To ensure that students are given the best chance of performing well in the exam, teachers should:

- Make sure that ourselves are thoroughly familiar with the “what, who, and how” of the particular exam our students are preparing for (this will also help us to see just how far spoken language testing has moved towards simulating real communication, and to justify the authenticity of the activities we ask our students to do).
- Make sure that candidates know exactly what to expect and what their particular strengths are in speaking.
- Make clear how the speaking work done in class is designed to match the requirements of the exam and to build up the skills the candidates will be expected to demonstrate. (Davies P., Pearse E. 2000.)

3.1 Introducing students to the exam requirements

From a teaching point of view, the fact that interlocutor scripts are used to standardize the conduct of exams opens up a range of possibilities for teachers to provide classroom practise which simulates the exam procedure. Examples of examiner scripts can be found in many exam handbooks. Students can practise in pairs or groups with one student taking the role of the examiner. Even quite low – level learners would be able to perform the role of examiner using the instructions provided in the script.

Putting learners in the interlocutor role greatly increases their understanding of the mechanics of the test, and familiarizes them with what the interlocutor is going to say in the exam itself. It also means that teachers can monitor much larger number of learners practising together than they could if they were taking the role of interlocutor themselves. (Davies P., Pearse E. 2000.)

A good activity to develop and reinforce a positive attitude towards the course; to practise oral decision – making is called “Learner aims”. Activity consists of group work and individual work. Activity starts with teacher dividing class into the groups. Next step is for groups to brainstorm all the ways the course will be useful to them in the future. They note down aims that can be achieved by: (a) passing the exam; (b) improving their level of English in general; (c) developing specific skills. After the lists are noted down teacher asks each student to make a list of his personal aims. The last thing they do is to write down answers for the teacher given questions which

enquire about things from the list they can already do; which things they will be able to do after the school and about skills that they still have to develop to achieve their aims. Another activity to encourage students to think about the exams speaking part and how to prepare for it is “Likes and dislikes”. The activity requires individual and pair work. It starts with teacher telling the class that it would be interesting for him to know what they feel are the hardest tasks from the Year 12 English exams oral part and also what kinds of activity they would like to do to prepare for it. Then teacher gives homework to go carefully through a set of past papers oral exam part and grades each task for difficulty – as it seems to them – on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 10. In the next lesson everything starts with whole class discussion. Everybody shares their thoughts and opinions. Teacher writes on board a list of classroom activities associated with speaking tasks. Then teacher asks the class which activities they would prepare for with task of the exam. Students work in pairs and decide which they enjoy, which they do not, and which they think are the most useful as exam preparation. After that is the whole class discussion and the teacher writes down in notes about the findings. Having a plenty of information on what students find difficult, teacher can decide which tasks use in the following lessons.

To ensure students success it is of utmost importance to encourage careful reading of exam instructions. One option how to do it is by the strategy “Reading the instructions”. The activity requires pair work. At the start of the activity teacher should stress the need to follow exam instructions to the letter. Students answer the questions teacher has devised and then check with their partner. Afterwards whole class study any difficulties that arise. Focus on the relevance of the wording to actual exam questions, for instance the importance of choosing answers according to what the text says rather than what students might already know about the subject. (May 1996)

3.2 Introducing students with the assessment criteria

To avoid misunderstandings concerning assessment of the exam, it is very important for teachers to introduce learners to the formal criteria that the assessor will be using in the exam, and give them hands on experience of applying them to actual performances. Here are some ideas for activities that can be set up for this purpose:

- Students watch a video or listen to the tape of an exam taking place, and assess the candidate's performance (some exam boards provide videos for teacher training purposes which can be shown to students). They could also assess one another.
- The teacher models a task, and students assess this performance.
- Some students are chosen to act as candidates, and the teacher conducts a mock exam in front of the class. The other students assess each candidate's performance.
- Students do a practise exam in groups of three or four. They then use the criteria to assess the performance of the person taking the "candidate" role. This person can also assess himself or herself, and compare with the assessment given by the other students. (Burgess S., Head K. 2007)
- Another activity to encourage self-assessment and oral exchange of opinions is called "Assessment". It requires individual and pair work. At first teacher explains to the class that they will be thinking about their own strengths and weaknesses, talking to other people in the class about theirs. Then teacher gives out oral exam assessment checklist. Next is whole class discussion about the assessment checklist, teacher answers and asks questions. When one student has to do some speaking task for a mark, other students in the class are asked to assess his success by the assessment checklist. It is better if teacher gives already made checklists where students can write in. (May 1996)

Any of these strategies will help students to see that the assessor is not there just to record errors and complain about them to the interlocutor after they have left the room, but to draw a complete picture of a candidates performance, making sure that the full credit is given for what was done well. It is important to make sure that when students assess one another they exercise sensitivity and remember to praise as well as criticize. (Burgess S., Head K. 2007)

When students know what is assessed they gain the confidence necessary to succeed in the exam. Therefore the author conducted the case study to assure how the above mentioned strategies work in real classroom.

The next chapter will be concerned with the authors' case study in Riga State German Gymnasium.

4. CASE STUDY

The case study was conducted during the author's teaching practice in Riga State German Gymnasium. It was the second teaching practice for the author. It started on 24.01.2011. and ended on 18.03.2011.

The author had an opportunity to work with two English classes – form 10 and form 11. Both of these classes had divided English groups so the author had to work with one half of the students from the each class. Form 10 was also the class with whom the author had to work and participate in some extracurricular activities. So the author decided that the case study would be done with form 10 students.

Form 10 English group consisted totally from 15 students, 12 girls and only three boys. The English lessons took place in the same room for the whole week. That gave good opportunity to plan activities and the group work well in advance.

The aim of the case study was to select and use exam taking strategies to develop summarising and expressing opinion speaking skills and help to prepare for Year 12 exams speaking part.

The case study consisted of the following six parts:

1. Questionnaire to students to find out the students' opinion and aim of studying the English language.
2. Interview with three experienced English teachers to find out exam taking strategies.
3. Design and use a set of activities to help students to prepare for year 12 exam and develop summarising and expressing opinion speaking skills.
4. To fill observation notes to follow students' progress and the way they do that.
5. To ask students to evaluate the peers.
6. The second questionnaire to students to gain feedback about the tasks that were used in English language lessons and about the strategies that were used by the author.

At the beginning of the teaching practice the author made the first questionnaire and distributed to form 10 students during the lesson when the author was class teachers' assistant. Questionnaires were given out to all students in the class but only those who were in the authors English class were used. Questionnaire was anonymous

so in order to collect accurate data they were divided by the author in two parts, one for the English group, other for the rest. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out how students evaluate their level of English language and learn, if they were going to take English exam at the end of class 12. The author also wanted to know more about their level of dedication to learn the English language as it is the second foreign language to be learnt at this school, the first being German.

An interview with three English teachers was conducted. The author chose teachers from his native town and school. The aim of the interview was to find out possible exam taking strategies that are used to prepare for the exam.

Basing on the gained information from the first questionnaire and the interview the author chose and made different speaking activities. After each activity observation field notes were filled out. In the last test that was given to students they had to assess each other's presentations by filling in special hand-out and give marks when at the same time both the author and the teacher of the class were doing the same thing. Results and the comments were interesting.

The second questionnaire was distributed to the students at the end of the author's teaching practice. The purpose of this questionnaire was to get feedback from students about the tasks and strategies that were used in English language lessons, taught by the author.

4.1 Analysis of the first questionnaire for the students

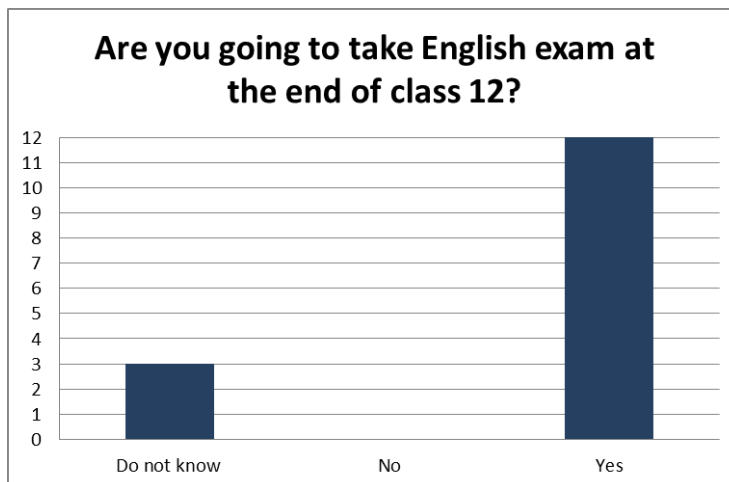
The first questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed to form 10 students at the beginning of the teaching practice. It was made in the Latvian language for the students so they could pay their full attention and give reliable answers. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out how students evaluate their level of the English language and learn, if they were going to take English exam at the end of class 12. The author also wanted to know more about their level of dedication to learn the English language as it is the second foreign language to be learnt at this school, the first being German.



How would you evaluate your level of knowledge in speaking English? Figure 1.

Three students thought that they had a very good level of knowledge. In addition majority of students (7) thought that they had good knowledge. The rest of the students (5) thought that their level of speaking was decent. No one in the class considered their level of skills bad. That meant the group consisted of people with good self – confidence. That showed to the author that there was a good possibility that the students would not be shy during the lessons and would express their opinion when they would be asked to. That also could have meant that during the lesson there is a good, positive atmosphere in the classroom.

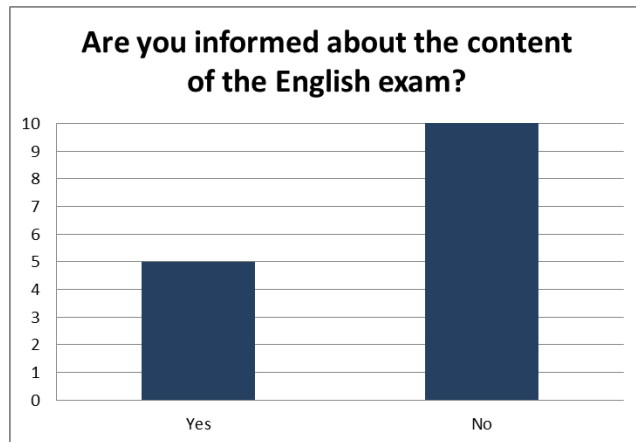
The second question was about the students’ possible decision whether to take or not Year 12 exam in English. Maybe for students who have English as the first foreign language this question would have no point, but the authors’ pupils English had as the second foreign language. It is obvious that they have free choice to choose.



Are you going to take English exam at the end of class 12? Figure 2.

Most of the students (12) confirmed that they were going to take the exam. Rest of the students still were not certain about their decision. Still that was a positive sign that the topic that the author was going to talk about and work with could be a helpful and pending matter.

The third question was about students experience and general knowledge regarding the content of the exam. The author thought that there was still a possibility that students did not know the content of the exam.

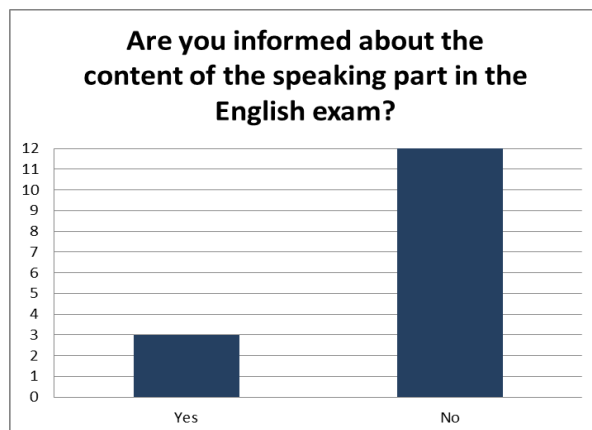


Are you informed about the content of the English exam? Figure 3.

Only five students confirmed that they were informed about the content of the English exam, the rest of the class (10) answered negatively. That meant the author would have the opportunity to be the first who would provide this topic to the students. That also meant that the students had not done the tasks from the exam, at least not by the rules of the exam.

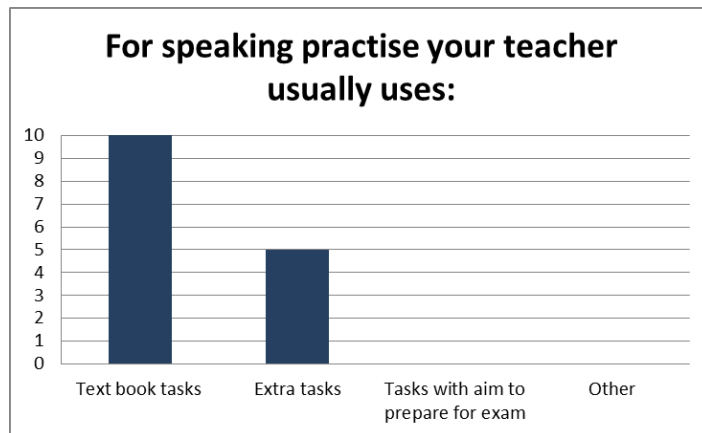
The fourth question was devised to be more detailed about the exam. Students had to answer if they knew the actual content of the speaking part in the English exam.

Are you informed about the content of the speaking part in the English exam? Figure 4.



Three students said that they knew the content of the speaking part. Twelve students chose the answer “No”. Still, there was possibility that those three students actually did not know the content or knew only partially because the questionnaire did not ask to specify that.

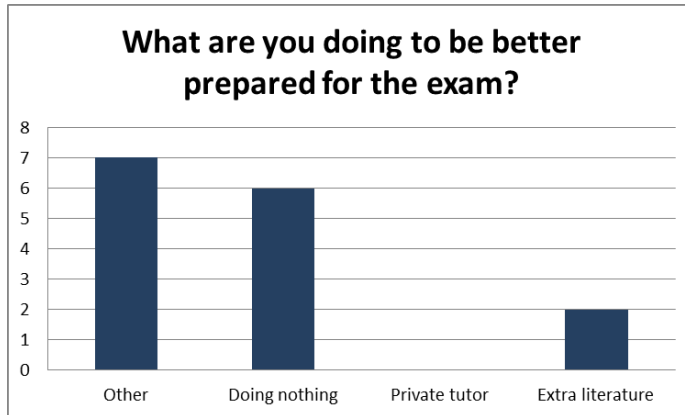
The fifth question asked students to tell the author what kind of tasks their teacher used to practise speaking in everyday lesson. The author could have allowed choosing more than one answer, but the main idea was to see the majority of tasks that were given by teacher.



For speaking practise your teacher usually uses: Figure 5.

Ten students chose the first possible answer – tasks that were in their course book - Opportunities Intermediate. The other students (5) chose the second option – extra prepared tasks. It meant that their teacher had not prepared them or informed them about the tasks connected with the exam. It also meant that they most frequently were used to doing tasks from their course book. There was a possibility that the tasks that the author would prepare and give for the students would arouse more attention and interest than usual tasks from the course book.

The sixth question asked the students about activities that they did in order to prepare for the exam. Four answer options were given. Students could choose between extra literature, tutor, doing nothing and writing down another variant. Even if they still had two years to prepare for the exams, it is always better to start preparing soon in order to get better results.

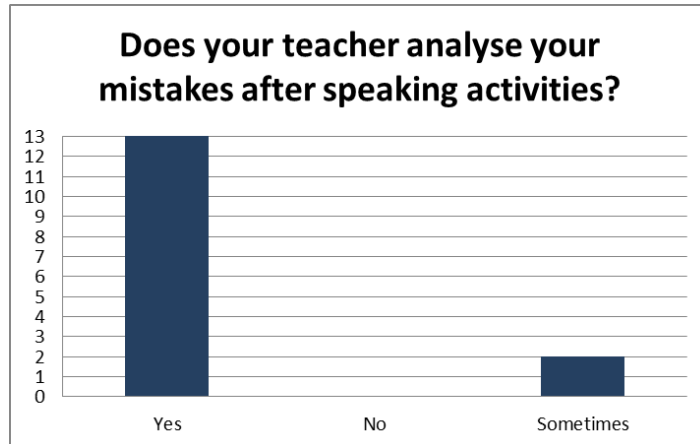


What are you doing to be better prepared for the exam? Figure 6.

Two students chose extra literature. No one had a tutor, it could have meant that there were no problems with the level of knowledge in this English group. There was always a possibility that students could have left out that kind of fact. Six students admitted doing nothing. The majority or the other seven students chose to write down their variant. All of their variants were connected with the Internet. Four of them were doing online English tests, two of them just wrote down the Internet. The last one wrote down PC games. That was understandable; therefore the teacher also has to use the Internet to search for the appropriate extra activities, there are courses that teachers can do online. It was positive that majority of students used the Internet not only for entertainment but also for learning purposes. The author decided to search and give to the student's online addresses to learn and prepare extra topics from the course books or at least mention them during the learning process.

The last question inquired about the students' ability to get feedback from the teacher after every speaking task. Students were given three possible answers – yes, no, or sometimes.

Does your teacher analyse your mistakes after speaking activities? Figure 7.



Majority of the class (13) answered positively with “yes”. Nobody selected the answer “no”. Still two of the students chose the answer sometimes. The author understood that the students were used to getting feedback and that it is important to plan lesson so that there is enough time to give main ideas, suggestions and corrections of errors.

Conclusions after analysing first questionnaire

After analysing the questionnaire, the authors was convinced that his chosen topic is going to be new and interesting to the students because they had not done any tasks connected to the exam and were not informed about the requirements that are asked from the student. Also majority of them were sure that they were going to take Year 12 exam.

The author paid attention to the fact that the students were keen to learn by using the internet. At the end of introducing every new topic to the students, the author offered the internet addresses connected to the theme.

Another thing that the author decided was to try to use as much self-made, not the course book speaking activities as possible. Of course that did not mean that speaking activities from the course book would not be used, but the author decided that the emphasis was going to be on his prepared or found tasks.

4.2 Analysis of the interview with the teachers

In order to find out information about preparing students for Year 12 exams in schools, interview with three English teachers was conducted. The author had no practical experience in preparing students for the exam. Also more competent point of view concerning exam speaking tasks was needed. The author decided to interview teachers from Valmiera Viesturs Secondary School. The chosen teachers were Līvija Kraukle, a very experienced teacher; her students have one of the highest results in English exams in the region, also in 2011 her student won public speaking contest in the country. Sarmīte Švalbe, a competent teacher, with good results in examination and different contests. Dzintra Grava, a former authors' teacher who also is a very good and talented English teacher.

The interview (Appendix 2) was done in the Latvian language. The author chose the Latvian language because all the contact he had before with two of three teachers was in Latvian, also the author himself felt more confident to do this interview in Latvian so that the conversation would be fluent and at ease, more informal.

The first question was asked about specific exam taking strategies that are used to prepare students for Year 12 exam. All teachers said that they had their action points that should be considered. Teachers are using group work, pair work. Students are asked to do analysis of their mistakes. Learning process includes doing different creative, self-dependent tasks. The order can vary but the basic principles were the same. The content should be explained as well as the rules of the exam. Usually previous year's exam papers were used as an example. Students were going through those tasks together with the teacher and questions were answered.

Another thing that all teachers did, especially with year twelve students, was to make their own exam tasks and give them out to do them for a mark. Every part was done by the same rules as in the exam. In the end, whole class went through the most frequent mistakes and analysed the works. Feedback from the students had always been positive and that also lowered the level of anxiety. Mock examination was another popular strategy. Afterwards students felt prepared and ready for the real exam.

The second question was asked about the approach how these teachers explained the requirements of the exam. Already in grade 10 students were introduced with the

requirements and the way they were corrected in order to get high results in, for example, writing tasks. Speaking part was approached in more detail in grade 12 second semester. Course books that were used by the teachers also contained exam training tasks. For example in the course book Matrix there was a special heading in each paragraph called “Exam Training”, that has similar tasks and the requirements as Year 12 exam. With the previous year’s exams students were acquainted in grade 11. Teachers agreed it was not enough to just explain. Every time after going through exam tasks students had new questions to ask. The safest way was to go through the same or similar tasks practically then only by discussing them.

The third question requested to speak about the most frequently used speaking activities in the classroom. There cannot be mentioned one task in particular. Usually tasks are taken from the textbooks. For example dialogs (teacher – student; student – student), pair works, group works, storytelling, expressing one’s opinion on any question/theme, role plays. The Curriculum also is one of the factors that show what kind of tasks should be used in the classroom. In year twelve class speaking tasks are similar or the same as in the exam.

The fourth question was about lesson plans and specifically about the amount of time that is used in every lesson only for speaking tasks. Teachers could not state specific amount of time that is usually needed. One teacher mentioned 1/3 of the lesson as the minimum. It depended on the topic of the lesson. In some lessons time for speaking was only for discussing some tasks and answering questions, some lessons consisted only of speaking, like presentations. The most popular tasks usually were those where students could express their opinion, or connected with real life situations. Teachers said that in every lesson they had speaking tasks, but the amount of time still differed. One was clear, that speaking tasks are those which were the most popular between students, with the best results in exam.

The fifth question was about criteria that speaking activities were assessed. Teachers said that it mostly depended what requirements or what skills were evaluated, for example how much information was said; fluency; accuracy; pronunciation, basically the same requirements as in the exam. In some tasks one skill was more important than another. Sometimes teacher allowed students to assess each other.

The sixth question was asked about the third task in the English speaking part which required from the students to be able to summarize and give opinion about one specific theme. Teachers had mixed feelings about this task. As a positive thing students' ability to demonstrate their amount of vocabulary, ability to speak was mentioned. Few negative things were mentioned as well. Time limit for this task was too short. It was hard for a student to speak about theme about which he/she does not know much or even nothing. If the student did not understand the text then he lost points for ability to speak. There was a possibility they would get better score if they were interested in the topic. It was hard for teachers to understand how close to the theme student should have spoken. It was important that students planned what they were going to speak about. It was better for students to write down or underline the main points. As this exercise was new, the teachers were doing the same kind of tasks with year 12 students.

The seventh question asked the teachers for their manner how they prepared students specially for speaking part. Teachers answered that this special attention was made only in class twelve when these last year students were going through exam tasks. Then some lessons were devoted only for speaking. In project week students were able to go through all exam speaking tasks. In some cases the teacher was also recording students while they were speaking and listening to the tape afterwards to analyse it. One teacher also explained, that she frequently asked students to assess one another according to Year 12 marking scale. Thus students not only practised their evaluation skills but also got hands-on experience and got acquainted with the requirements of the exam. They knew what would be assessed in the exam.

The last question allowed teachers to name things that they would change in year 12 English exam. This question made teachers think for a while. One of the first things that were said was the quality of the recording in the listening tasks. There had been cases when records were damaged. In some cases task requirements should be explained more carefully. Also texts that were used could have been simpler. Those who were responsible for choosing texts should have remembered that there still was going to be enough time to read very difficult texts in the university, there was no point of doing that in Year 12 exam.

After these interviews the author of the paper understood that his intention to use different exam taking strategies with grade 10 students to improve such speaking skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam was doable, because already in grade 10 students should be aware of requirements that are asked from them in the Year 12 exam. The same requirements are asked to be fulfilled in everyday English lesson. Types of activities that the author could use in his lessons were close to unlimited. It was clear that it was important to use topics that were interesting to students, related to the course book topics. The author decided to start with explaining the rules and then, while practising some speaking tasks, introduce them to the possible ways how to manage those tasks more successfully. The imperfections that were mentioned by the teachers helped the author to address these things more carefully with his students.

4.3 Exam taking strategies implemented during English lesson

After two weeks into the authors teaching practice, the author had established good rapport with his students and decided that it was possible to start doing tasks connected to development of exam taking strategies. The author wanted to do tasks that would show to the students that they were more likely to achieve aims if they set them for themselves rather than being told what they should be.

The author decided to use the task called “Learner aims” from the book Exam classes by Peter May. (May 1996) The aim of this task was to show students that there were more benefits in learning English than only passing exam and the possible advantages that students would get if learned it responsibly, that was showed by the fact that (b) and (c) in stage 1 did not depend on (a).

Activity: Learner aims

Type of activity: Group/Individual work

Aim: To develop and reinforce a positive attitude towards the course; to practise oral decision – making

Procedure: 1 Groups brainstorm all the ways the course will be useful to them in the future. They note down aims that can be achieved by: (a) passing the exam; (b) improving their level of English in general; (c) developing specific skills. For example:

a) Do a better exam in English.

Work as translator.

Teach English.

Go to foreign university.

b) Travel abroad for professional reasons.

Understand textbooks in English.

Meet people from other cultures.

Live in another country.

c) Reading reports.

Note taking in lessons.

Speak fluently English.

2 Each student makes a list of personal aims.

3 They ask themselves these questions and write down the answers:

- Which can you do now?

- Which should you be able to do when you have finished the school?
- Which skills do you need to improve in order to achieve your aims?

Observation notes: In the previous lesson the students had written test on the unit about health food so the lesson with this activity started with getting tests back and checking results. It took about 15 minutes of the lesson. The rest of the lesson was devoted to “Learner aims”.

The author divided the students into groups of four and three people. Each group got A4 sheet of blank paper. Then the author wrote three heading a, b and c on the white board. For each heading the teacher wrote one example. The students were given time limit of 10 minutes to write down aims that can be achieved by

- (a) passing the exam;
- (b) improving their level of English in general;
- (c) developing specific skills.

When they were done the teacher asked them to open their note books and make a list of personal aims. Meanwhile the teacher was writing down three questions that the students would have to answer after finishing writing down their aims. The most frequent aims of the students were to get into the University and continue studies in profession or field they liked. Some of those fields mentioned needed good knowledge of English language.

After about 5 minutes the students were ready to do the last part and analyse their aims. As the lesson was coming to the end, the author decided to make whole class discussion. The aim of the discussion was to show the students that the aims in columns b and c did not necessarily depend on a. Moreover, another thing that the author wanted to tell them was that if they had an obvious aim that they wanted to achieve, it was easier to take and learn in school that specific thing or skill than learn everything but nothing in particular.

Timing - there was not enough time to do the last part properly. There was a whole class discussion but not all of the students were participating. It is better to give more time for the last part. This is whole lessons activity.

When students were working in groups teacher had to go round the class and make frequent checks on the progress. Some of the students were doing things not connected to the topic at hand.

There were problems with understanding the columns, the things that they needed to write down, it is better if teacher writes down more than one example in each column.

Feedback: students liked the way this task showed that there were things that depended on the outcome and the results in Year 12 exam, but there were also more things that can be done and achieved by simply learning English. Some of the students were bored because they did not have specific aims in their lives or only a few. In general, it seems that setting aims is a very challenging task for this group of students. Yet it is necessary to raise awareness of them to make the learning process more meaningful.

Activity: Likes and dislikes

The author decided to use the activity from the book Exam classes by Peter May (May 1996) called “Likes and dislikes”. The author chose this activity because the students had started to get to know tasks from the exam but not doing them. Another thing that was in favour of using this task was the possibility to find out what kind of speaking tasks students preferred better than others. The third reason for choosing this activity was that it gave the students the chance to practise expressing their opinion.

Type of activity: Individual/Pair work

Aim: To encourage students to think about the exams speaking part and how to prepare for it; to practise expressing opinion concerning exam tasks.

Procedure:

1. Teacher tells the class that it would be interesting for him to know what they feel are the hardest tasks from Year 12 English exams oral part and also what kinds of activity they would like to do to prepare for it
2. For homework, the teacher tells the class to go carefully through a set of past papers oral exam part and grade each task for difficulty – as it seems to them – on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 10. For example:

Task 1 Interview (answer 5 questions asked by the interviewer) – 5/10

Task 2 Role Play – 6/10

Task 3 Monologue – 8/10

3. In the next lesson everything starts with whole class discussion. Everybody shares their thoughts and opinions. On the board, a list of classroom activities associated with speaking tasks is written, for example: pronunciation exercises, role plays, discussions, storytelling, dialogs etc. The teacher asks the class which activities they would prefer to do to prepare for exam.
4. Students work in pairs and decide which they enjoy, which they do not, and which they think are the most useful as exam preparation.
5. Whole class discussion and the teacher writes down the findings. Having a plenty of information on what students find difficult, teacher can decide which tasks use in the following lessons.

Observation notes:

At the end of one of the usual lessons the author asked students to get acquainted with the tasks that are used in Year 12 English exams oral part. After everybody assured that there was not going to be a problem to find these tasks in the internet, the teacher wrote down the internet address where these tasks could be found - www.visc.gov.lv. The teacher also had examples to show to the students during the class.

At home students had to go through those tasks and grade them. A possible example of grading was provided on the whiteboard by the teacher.

At the start of the next lesson the teacher started with checking if everybody had done their homework. Generally all students had done their homework, except two. That was not a big problem because they could manage to get familiar with the exam tasks from teachers' materials. Also the teacher asked some questions about oral exam part that the students should have known if they had done the task. Then the teacher gave out examples of Year 12 exam speaking part.

Afterwards, the teacher made the same table as in the sample and asked the students to express their preferences about those three exam activities, what kind of score they had given. Task 1 Interview – 7/10; Task 2 Role Play – 5/10; Task 3 Monologue – 6/10. Such were the average scores given by the students. After the level of difficulty was clear, the teacher started to say aloud different speaking activities and asked for the students' opinion next to which exam task write it, to help them prepare for that exam task.

When all the possible activities had been written down the students had the opportunity to work in pairs and decide which they enjoyed, which they did not, and which they thought were the most useful as exam preparation.

When the teacher was sure that all pairs had done the task he started a whole class discussion and with the help of the students he made chart Top 5 of the activities that students preferred. Those were games, group works, pair works, listening tasks, speaking tasks. That helped to decide what kind of activities teacher would use in the upcoming lessons. There were no objections against using exam like tasks during the lessons or some distinct dislike towards one of those three tasks. Students had positive attitude towards speaking tasks because they thought that speaking as such was interesting more fun than doing some grammar tasks.

Feedback: the main aims that were set by the author were successfully achieved. Students got to know the tasks from the Year 12 English oral exam part. Also students' likes and dislikes towards different speaking tasks were noted and later used to help the author to select preferable tasks for his study. These speaking tasks were role plays, dialogs, presentations. It should, however, be noted that the activity took longer than planned as the students were not familiar with the terminology, i.e., it should be explained what the difference between role play and discussions were. If the author wanted to do the same activity again, the used terms should be simplified and explained to the students.

Activity: Assessment

The author decided to introduce the students to the oral exam assessment checklist (Appendix 4), so appropriate strategy had to be chosen. After a while of deciding the author chose activity called "Assessment" from the book Exam Classes by Peter May. (May 1996) Exactly this model of activity was chosen because it encouraged students to do self – assessment and their classmates' assessment. This activity allowed student to get to know exam assessment checklist by using it as well as to express their opinion.

Type of activity: Individual/Pair work

Aim: To encourage self-assessment and oral exchange of opinions

Procedure:

1. Teacher explains to the class that they will be thinking about their own strengths and weaknesses, talking to other people in the class about theirs.
2. Teacher gives out oral exam assessment checklist (Appendix4). Whole class discussion about the assessment checklist, teacher answers and asks questions.
3. When students have to do some speaking task for a mark, ask other students to assess their success by the assessment checklist. It is better if teacher gives already made checklists where students can write in.

Observation notes:

The lesson started with the teachers' introduction to that lessons topic, teacher said that it was very important to know by what exact criteria students would be evaluated and that by the same scale all of their speaking asks can be evaluated. Teacher encouraged students to be honest to themselves and honest with their classmate when they were going to evaluate themselves and others.

Then author gave assessment checklist to each student and instructed to keep them in their books or notes because there were going to do other activities when they were going to need them.

Then the teacher discussed each point with the class. Asked the students the meaning of different words used in that checklist. It was useful to ask questions to students about the checklist because when teacher asked if they had more questions about it - nobody asked, but when teacher started to ask questions to them, they could not explain. Then teacher divided students into pairs. The author wrote different headings of the topics on the whiteboard. Each pair member had to choose one and speak about it to the other pair member for about one minute. Meanwhile the other pair member was trying to assess the other by using those charts. For that lesson that was all what was done connected to that checklist but there were other lessons and tasks where these checklists were used. For example: Candidates and examiners; Role Play for a Mark.

Feedback: there were some points in the assessment checklist that needed to be explained, for example columns Communication strategies, Task achievement and Accuracy took the biggest amount of time from explanations. Also the way the points were counted and divided raised interest in the students. Activity was done to make them try to use this chart was a good idea, because more questions were asked about

the distinct differences that determined the division of points. After this activity students had been introduced to the assessment checklist.

Activity: Reading the instructions

Reading the instructions or not reading the instructions carefully enough can cost a lot of exam points, sometimes even turn out to be crucial to the success of the student. So when the author had to explain this topic to his students, he chose the strategy “Reading the instructions” from the book called Exam Classes by Peter May. (May 1996)

The author chose this activity because by doing it students could experience the importance of careful reading when it comes to exam instructions. It suggested using real exam or test instructions that consisted of phrases or numerations that were commonly used. Then by asking them tricky questions teacher could check how carefully they had read and understood the instructions.

Type of activity: Pair work

Aim: To encourage careful reading of exam instructions

Procedure:

1. Teacher should stress the need to follow exam instructions to the letter.
2. Students answer the questions teacher has devised and then check with their partner. (Appendix 5)
- 3 Whole class study any difficulties that arise. Focus on the relevance of the wording to actual exam questions, for instance the importance of choosing answers according to what the text says rather than what students might already know about the subject.

Observation notes:

Starting the lesson, the teacher pointed out that it was very important to read the task instructions, especially if it was exam instruction. At the start of the activity the students were sure about their success. The students who usually had the highest marks in this task had more mistakes than students that usually were less successful. Of course there were students that had no mistakes.

Then teacher divided students into pairs and gave them the task that is shown in the Example below. The students had to read the given instructions and answer the questions. The fair amount of the mistakes was corrected in the stage where students

were working in pairs. When they had done the task individually they could check the answers together.

Then the teacher started whole class discussion in order to check if the answers were correct. Also all the highlighted things in the example were talked through and in the case of misunderstanding explained.

Feedback: There were a lot of mistakes because the students inattention or because they had not fully understood the used expressions, symbols. The students admitted that there had been cases when they had got a lower mark just because of their inattention/carelessness towards tasks instructions. The author's aim was reached because students experienced how the slightest misinterpretation of the instructions can lead to the mistakes made in the task.

Activity: Saying what you think

For the students to practise asking for, expressing and justifying opinions the author chose task called "Saying what you think" from the book called Exam Classes by Peter May. (May 1996)

Type of activity: Group work

Aim: To practise asking for, expressing and justifying opinions

Procedure:

1. Teacher prepares two 60 – second talks on topic that he feels quite strongly about.
Give out handouts. (Appendix 6)
2. Teacher speaks to the class about the subject without mentioning the topic by name. The class have to guess what the question might be.
3. Teacher chooses another subject and does the same again. This time, as well as guessing the topic, class notes down any expressions they hear teacher says that they might want to use to express their own opinions.
4. In groups, students list topics which arouse strong feelings.
5. Each group in turns asks teacher a question similar to the first task (Interview) in Year 12 exam.
6. After a few seconds, the teacher speaks for about one minute using expressions from the given handouts.

7. In pairs, students choose more topics to talk about. Their partners listen and try to guess the subject – as in stage 2. Teacher encourages them to include expressions from the handout..

Observation notes:

For this activity the author prepared the handout (Appendix 6) that consisted of expressions that can be used for asking information, expressing and justifying information. Then by using phrases from the handout the author prepared two, approximately, minute long talks.

First in the lesson students were getting familiar with the handout. Then the teacher started to speak about his chosen topic but without mentioning its title. The class had to guess what the topic might be, and it was instructed to use the phrases from the given handouts.

When the first topic was guessed, the teacher started to speak about the second topic and the students had to guess again but this time teacher asked to pay attention to the expressions that he used and mark them in the handout. After the topic was guessed, the teacher highlighted that these expressions can be very useful when students were preparing their own speeches. The students were very good when it came to guessing topics, not so good when it came to using those expressions, they had a challenge who would guess the topic first, and sometimes even some were shouting ideas in the Latvian language. In that case the teacher should remind them in what lesson they were participating, namely, English.

Teacher divided class into groups of 3 – 4 students. They were asked to make a list of topics that they thought they could feel well informed. Then the teacher asked to the groups to ask him questions about the topics they had chosen and he would try to answer them by involving the expressions from the handout. Teacher chose the group to ask the question. After a few seconds of thinking, the teacher answered the question also involving some of the expressions. It did not take more than a minute for each question.

When the teacher had answered two questions he divided groups into pairs and trios and asked them to tell each other about a topic they were interested in and the partner to guess what it was. Of course, the teacher asked to use the expressions from the given handout. There was a big possibility that the work where students were

working into pairs and guessing each other's topics, these topics could be similar. That meant that guessing was short. Then teacher had to encourage students to think on the spot and continue activity.

Feedback: during the lesson the students managed to use the expressions from the given handout. At this point they were using them strictly by reading them out from the paper, but in the upcoming speaking tasks they were going to be asked to involve these expressions and that should help to acquire them.

Introduction of the Interview

The author decided how oral exam tasks would be practised with his students. The author decided to use the strategy called "Candidates and examiners" from the book called Exam Classes by Peter May. (May 1996)

The author decided to use this model of introducing and practising exam tasks, in this case, Task 1. Interview, because this activity helped to get used to the interview by enabling students to experience and discuss the difficulties faced not only by candidates but also by examiners. It also gave valuable language skills practice.

Activity: Candidates and examiners

Type of activity: Pair/Group work

Aim: To encourage critical awareness of candidate performance and the interview procedure; to practise speaking skills and student – student error correction

Procedure:

1. Teacher asks the class what they know about the exam interview.
2. Teacher asks for a volunteer and does a model interview. While they listen the class compares if the answers they said in point one are true.
3. In pairs students practise examining each other using teachers given materials. (Appendix 7)
4. Teacher puts the class into groups of four and assigns the roles of examiner (interlocutor), examiner (assessor), and two candidates. Teacher gives the interviewing examiners testing materials and tells the assessors to keep a note of the candidates' strengths and weaknesses.

5. When the interview has ended, the candidates leave the examiners and talk to each other about how well they think they did, also how well the examiners were. The examiners compare the impressions of the candidates.
6. The group's reform. Examiners and candidates say what they think about each other's performance, comment on their own difficulties and suggest ways of improving both in the future.
7. Groups report back to the class – not about individuals but on difficulties and possible solutions.

Observation notes: At the beginning of the activity the students were asked what they knew about the first task of the exam – Interview. Teacher and students together tried to remember the things that they had already discussed about the first task. Then to make it absolutely clear and demonstrate, the teacher asked a volunteer who would do this task together with him. Teacher did this task with the same procedure as it is done in the exam.

When it was done the teacher divided the students into pairs and gave them two sets of the exam material, one – for the role of teacher, the other for the role of candidate. The teacher gave enough time so the both student could be the examiners and the candidate.

When the previous activity was done the teacher divided the class into groups of three/four people and assigned the roles of examiner (interlocutor), examiner (assessor), and two candidates. Students perceived their duties in a very responsible way, there were many questions regarding their duties. Most of them wanted to be examiners, not candidates. Teacher gave the interviewing examiners testing materials and told the assessors to keep a note of the candidates' strengths and weaknesses by using assessment checklist (Appendix 4) that was introduced earlier.

When the interview finished, the candidates left the examiners and talked to each other about how well they think they did, also how well the examiners were. The examiners compared the impressions of the candidates.

After a while the groups reformed back to way they used to be. Examiners and candidates said what they thought about each other's performance, commented on their own difficulties and suggested ways of improving both in the future.

Groups reported back to the class – not about individuals but on difficulties and possible solutions.

Feedback: Students remembered the first task of the exam. The problems were with the explanation of the rules. There were at least three variants of rules that should be observed. After the given example interview, the students realized which one was the right one.

Students preferred to work in pairs because at the beginning of the group work there were questions about the functions that each of them represented. When the questions were answered, the work could continue in a good pace.

Introduction of a Role Play

To introduce the second task from Year 12 exam – Role Play the author decided to use similar technique as it was used to introduce interview but slightly modified.

Activity: Role Play

Type of activity: Pair work

Aim: To practise active vocabulary; to practise speaking skills; to practise expressing opinion; to practise managing time.

Procedure:

1. Teacher asks the class what they know about the exam Role Play.
2. Teacher asks for a volunteer and does a model role play. While they listen the class compares if the answers they said in point one are true.
3. Teacher gives out material (Appendix) and divides students into pairs.
4. Teacher asks them in pairs to decide who is going to be student A/B. Gives time to read instructions.
5. Then teacher asks for any additional questions. Gives time to do the task.
6. Teacher walks around the class and checks on progress.
7. Once the most pairs have gone through both role-plays, the teacher leads a whole class feedback session, writing up any language needing correction on the board.

Observation notes:

The author was basing on the previous experience with the exam task interview. The start of the activity remained the same. Teacher asked what students knew about the role play. Teacher and students together tried to remember the things that they had

already spoken about the second task. Then to make it absolutely clear, teacher asked a volunteer who would do this task together with him. Teacher did this task with the same procedure as it is done in the exam. The author answered the students' questions. The author divided the class into pairs and gave out previous year's exam material (Appendix 8). The author let the students decide who was going to be student A/B. Students were reminded to read instructions very carefully.

While students were talking through their role plays, the teacher was going round the class and checking on the progress. It was good that some pairs spoke their role plays aloud for the whole class, afterwards teacher had opportunity to ask others opinion, give feedback. The author made sure that all pairs were doing the task as it was supposed to be done in the exam.

When the activity was done the teacher asked for students' opinion about the task. Also teacher wrote down on the whiteboard the most common mistakes and questions asked and done by the students.

Timing was crucial, because role plays usually take a lot of time. At least for a couple first times. Later the teacher can apply some specific time boundaries.

Feedback: Students had fun while doing role plays. Students also could see where they were having problems and what speaking skill should be improved, for example expressing opinion.

Introduction of the Monologue

To introduce the third task from Year 12 exam – Monologue, the author decided to use similar technique as it was used to introduce interview and role play but slightly modified.

Activity: Monologue

Type of activity: Pair work

Aim: To practise speaking skills; to practise summarising, paraphrasing and expressing opinion; to practise managing time;

Procedure:

1. Teacher asks the class what they know about the exam Monologue.
2. Teacher does activity monologue. While they listen the class compares if the answers they said in point one are true.

3. Teacher distributes material (Appendix 9) and divides the students into pairs.
4. Teacher lets the students in pairs to decide who is going to speak first. Gives time to read instructions.
5. Then teacher asks for any additional questions. Gives time to do the task.
6. Teacher walks around the class and checks on progress.
7. Once the most pairs have gone through this task, the teacher leads a whole class feedback session, writing up any language needing correction on the board.

Observation notes:

The author was basing on the previous experience with the exam tasks - interview and role play. The start of the activity was kept the same. Teacher discussed the third task monologue, what students knew. This task is a new one, as two years ago there was not such a task in the exam. It requires paraphrasing, summarising and expressing opinion speaking skills. Therefore it should be paid much attention to. The teacher and students together tried to remember the things that they had already spoken about the third task. Then to make it absolutely clear, the teacher spoke about one of the given themes. The teacher did this task with the same procedure as it is done in the exam. The author answered the students' questions.

The author divided the class into pairs and gave out previous year's exam material (Appendix 9). The author let the students decide who was going to be the first one to speak. The students were reminded to read the instructions very carefully. While the students were talking about their given themes, the teacher was going round the class and checking on the progress. The author made sure that both students in the pair had spoken.

When the activity was done, the teacher asked for students' opinion about the task. Also the teacher wrote down on the whiteboard the most common mistakes and questions asked and done by the students.

Feedback: The only problem students had was to do this Monologue in the asked time frame. For the first time doing this task pairs needed more time as they were supposed to need. Later, when these tasks were done repetitively, the students managed to do them quicker.

Activity: Describing

To further practise the speaking skills and help the students to prepare for the speaking part of the exam, the author decided to use materials from the IELTS exam homepage (Appendix 10).

Type of activity: Individual/Pair/Group work

Aim: To practise active vocabulary; to practise expressing opinion.

Procedure:

1. Teacher gives out handouts (Appendix 10) and decides if the activity should be done individually, in pairs or in groups. Teacher should pay attention to timing.
2. Teacher walks around the class and monitors progress.
3. Teacher asks students to read out their topic and answer. Afterwards invites other students' opinions.

Observation notes:

These activities were very good for the author because he could decide how the activity will be organised. These describing tasks were very useful for students to practise their ability to express their opinion. Also expressions from the previously mentioned handout (Appendix 6) were practised by doing this task. If in the class were less than fifteen students then it was better not to use more than five different describing cards. Only when the students were doing this kind of task for the first time, they needed detailed instructions, already the second time when the author was using these materials students knew in advance what to do. Of course still teacher had to instruct them and decide what type of activity it would be.

Feedback: Students quickly understood the idea and were good at expressing their opinion. The teachers request for using expression handouts was taken into account and implemented.

Activity: Role Play for A Mark

There was time when another unit test was coming and the author decided that the last task in the test could require doing a role play (Appendix11). The author also wanted the students evaluate the peers' success. In order to do that the teacher made evaluation sheets that were given to the students. (Appendix 4)

Type of activity: Pair work

Aim: To practise active vocabulary; to practise expressing opinion; to practise managing time; to practise evaluating the peer

Procedure:

1. The teacher divides students into pairs.
2. Teacher lets the students in pairs to decide who is going to be student A/B. Asks for any questions. Gives time to prepare the task.
3. Teacher asks one pair to come in front of the class and talk their dialog through.
4. After the role play, everybody is given one minute to write down any comments before the next pair has to come.
5. Once everyone has spoken and filled their evaluation sheets, the teacher leads a whole class feedback session, writing up any language needing correction on the board.

Observation notes: Students understood the requirements and did well. Students listened to the other peers role play and evaluated them.

Feedback: Students did well and earned good results in the test. Still it was evident that some students did not feel very confident when having to speak in front of everyone. They need to be encouraged, as in the exam their speech is taped. Activities like this may be frustrating at times but they are worthwhile to give students' confidence.

Conclusions after using exam taking strategies

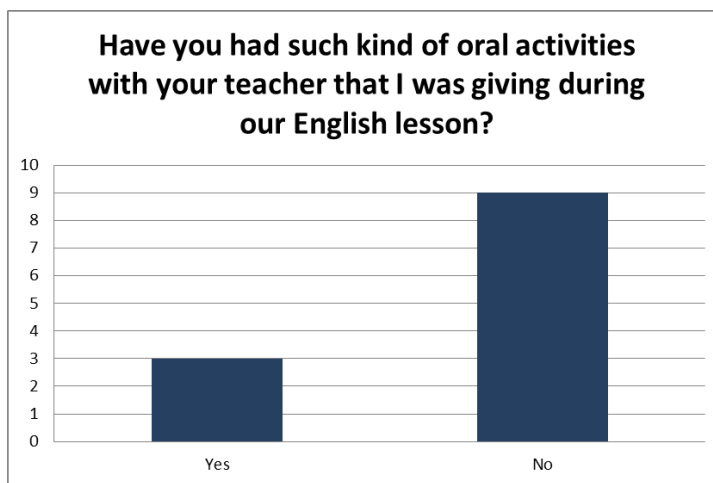
Looking back on the selected strategies, their application and results the author is convinced that his objectives to improve such skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam were achieved.

With the each additional activity students got to know more about Year 12 exam meanwhile training speaking skills. The sequence of the strategies was carefully chosen so that in every next lesson some information from the previous one was needed.

Author was convinced that after the students were introduced to the exam tasks and first practise, with the every next time students were doing these tasks, their speaking skill level required in that activity got better and the level of anxiety was lowered.

4.4 Analysis of the second questionnaire for the students

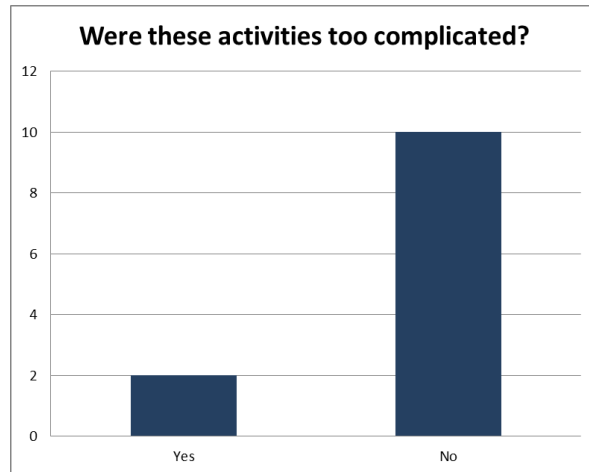
The second questionnaire (Appendix 3) was distributed to the students at the end of the author's teaching practice. The purpose of this questionnaire was to get feedback from students about the tasks that were used in English language lessons, about the strategies that were used by the author. Again the native language was used so that students would concentrate more on answers themselves than how to write them. Of course, the students would have no problems to answer in English, but in this case the message itself was more important than the way it was delivered.



Have you had such oral activities before? Figure 8.

The first question asked students if they had had similar oral activities with their teacher before. In this question the authors' emphasis was towards the way tasks were presented and practised. Three students said "yes", nine "no". The author points out that when this questionnaire was given out, not all group students were present. Usually they were 15. The results could mean that usually students were doing tasks from the course book.

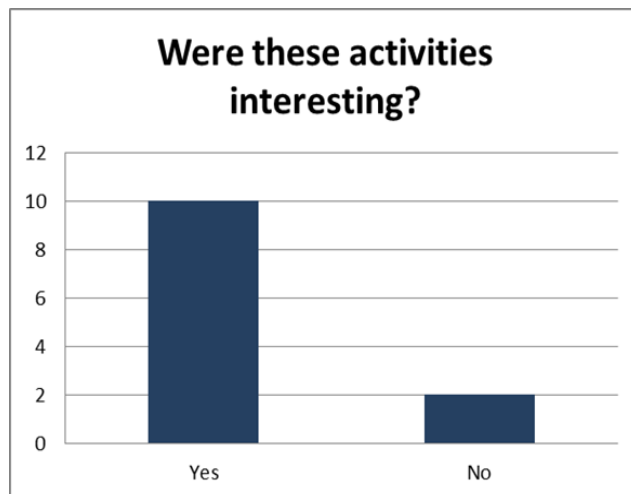
The second question was concerned with the level of difficulty of the given speaking tasks.



Were these activities too complicated? Figure 9.

Only two students answered positively. The rest of the group (10) answered negatively. That means that the author has chosen relevant tasks and given appropriate and understandable instructions.

The third question asked for students' opinion on given tasks. Were these activities interesting or not?



Were these activities interesting? Figure 10.

Ten of the students chose answer "yes". Two of them said "no". This question was meant more for curiosity of the author. It was nice to find out that the majority of

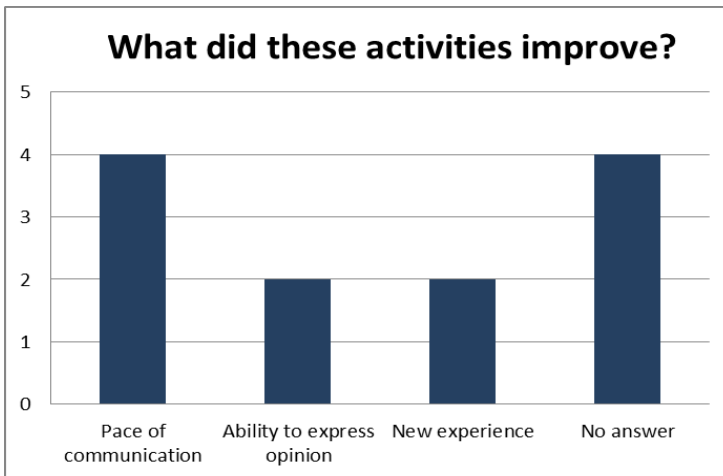
the group found these activities interesting. It also meant that the majority of the class did those activities not only because they were told to but also because they wanted to.

The fourth question was about development of students speaking skills. This question was asked with aim to find out if these activities what the author gave improved their speaking skills and what specifically was improved.



Did these activities improve your speaking skills? Figure 11.

The author was positively surprised when it was clear that all students have chosen answer “yes”. The downside was the fact that not all of them had written down the things that they had improved.



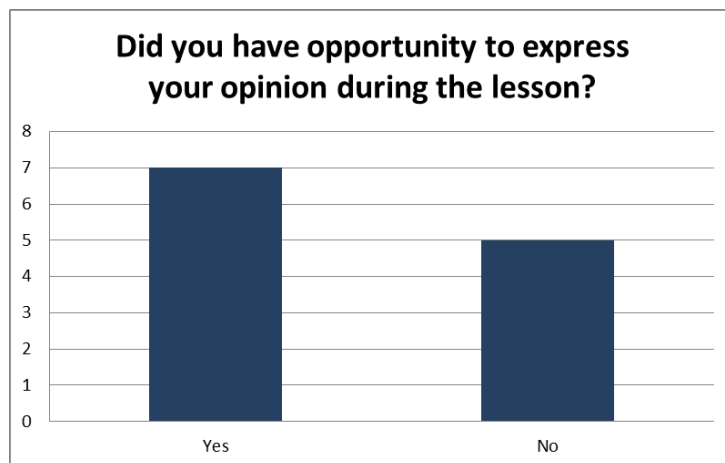
What did these activities improve? Figure 12.

The most frequent answer mentioned general things like: “the pace of communication”, “ability to better express opinion”, “be able to do speaking tasks that have not been done before”.

The fifth was an open question. The author wanted to know what new they found out about the oral part in English exam.

The most frequent thing mentioned was the actual content of this speaking part. For the first time students saw the actual table of assessment criteria – marking scale and had hands-on experience working with it. Most of the students had some kind of notion what were the requirements for passing it, but no one knew that there was a new part in speaking where student had to summarize the information. Also the time limitation for these tasks was something new.

The sixth question asked students to say if they had the opportunity to express their opinion during the English lesson. They also had to specify when they had this chance and when they did not.

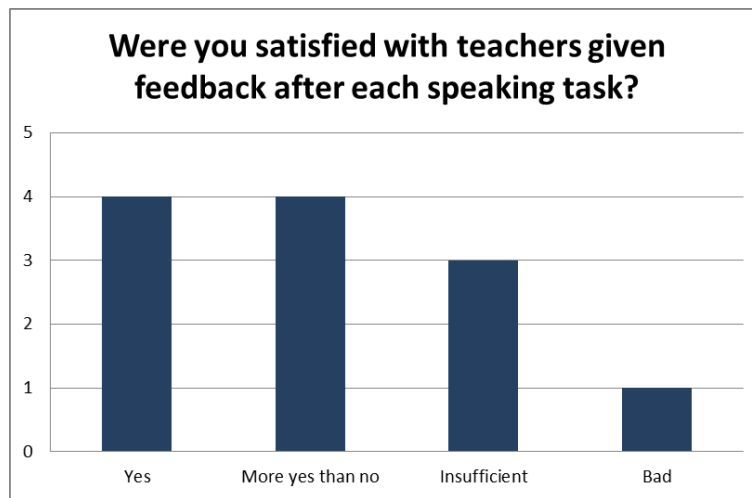


Did you have opportunity to express your opinion during the lesson? Figure 13.

Seven students answered affirmatively. This means there were enough possibilities to express their opinion during the English lessons. After every activity they had time to agree or disagree with the feedback from the teacher. Five students complained that they did not have enough time to share their ideas, thoughts. These answers were surprise to the author because there were given enough chances for students to share their ideas after the tasks. If the student raised his hand, had some questions author was keen to help and answer. Another complain was about group

mates that some of them were very active and only because they could better explain their ideas, thoughts students that were not so successful felt that they got more time to speak than they did. The author encouraged the students to speak up in the lessons and share their ideas, questions thoughts. There was a rule that they were speaking up when they were allowed and they had to do it in English. If the rules were observed, everybody had a chance to express their opinion.

The last question asked from students to evaluate the work of the author. It focused on feedback part after the activity. Was the authors' explanation good enough?



Were you satisfied with teachers given feedback after each speaking task?
Figure 14.

There were four possible answers given. Four students selected the answer “yes”. Another four students chose the second variant “more yes than no”. Three students thought that the authors' explanations for the mistakes were insufficient. One student thought that the explanations were simply bad. The author accepted these answers in more positive than negative way. If the majority of students were satisfied with the given feedback the author had done it right.

Conclusions after the second questionnaire

After the author had gone through whole questionnaires and got the results the feeling of well done work was there.

As the results showed, the author had managed to prepare tasks that for the most of the group were new and they had never done them before. The given tasks were not too difficult, in the contrary, they were interesting.

The students doing the tasks prepared by the author had improved their speaking skills. Such skills as the pace of communication, ability to express opinion were only two of the most frequently written things that were improved doing the tasks designed and selected by the author of this paper.

While doing these tasks, the students also had learned more about the content of the speaking part of Year 12 exam. They had chance to get to know requirements, assessment criteria and work with the tasks.

Most of the students were able to express their opinions during the lesson and get sufficient feedback after each speaking activity given by the author.

That kind of positive results reassured the author that the selected and implemented activities and planning was successful. It was great that hours of the authors work and preparations were acknowledged.

CONCLUSIONS

Without the expressing opinion and summarizing skills student cannot achieve communicative competence in language and social-cultural competence in proficiency levels B2-C1 set by the general secondary education standard.

Each speaking activity comprises three stages: Pre-activity stage; During-activity stage; Conclusion stage. Each of the stages involves several focus areas that should be taken into consideration when organizing speaking activities.

After reading the two analysed exams, the author can confidently say that they have more common features than differences. If student has good results in Year 12 exam speaking part, he can be sure that he could also pass an international exams speaking part. The Year 12 exam rating scale is designed so that when the student receives the results he can identify which skills should be further improved.

After analysing the first questionnaire, the author was convinced that his chosen topic is going to be new and interesting to the students because they had not done any tasks connected to the exam and was not informed about the requirements that are asked from the student. Also majority of them were sure that they were going to take Year 12 exam.

The author paid attention to the fact that the students were keen to learn by using the internet. At the end of introducing every new topic to the students, the author offered the internet addresses connected to the theme.

After having interviews with the English teachers the author of the paper understood that his intention to use different exam taking strategies with grade 10 students to improve such speaking skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam was doable, because already in grade 10 students should be aware of requirements that are asked from them in the Year 12 exam. The same requirements are asked to be fulfilled in everyday English lesson. Types of activities that the author could use in his lessons were close to unlimited. It was clear that it was important to use topics that were interesting to students, related to the course book topics. The author decided to start with explaining the rules and then, while practising some speaking tasks, introduce them to the possible ways how to manage those tasks more successfully. The imperfections that were mentioned by the teachers helped the author to address these things more carefully with his students.

Looking back on the selected strategies, their application and results the author is convinced that his objectives to improve such skills as summarizing, expressing opinion and help to prepare for Year 12 exam were achieved.

With the each additional activity students got to know more about Year 12 exam meanwhile training speaking skills. The sequence of the strategies was carefully chosen so that in every next lesson some information from the previous one was needed.

Author was convinced that after the students were introduced to the exam tasks and first practise, with the every next time students were doing these tasks, their speaking skill level required in that activity got better and the level of anxiety was lowered.

As the results showed, in the second questionnaire, the author had managed to prepare tasks that for the most of the group were new and they had never done them before. The given tasks were not too difficult, in the contrary, they were interesting.

The students doing the tasks prepared by the author had improved their speaking skills. Such skills as the pace of communication, ability to express opinion were only two of the most frequently written things that were improved doing the tasks designed and selected by the author of this paper.

While doing these tasks, the students also had learned more about the content of the speaking part of Year 12 exam. They had chance to get to know requirements, assessment criteria and work with the tasks.

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THESES

1. Without the expressing opinion and summarizing skills student cannot achieve communicative competence in language and social-cultural competence in proficiency levels B2-C1 set by the general secondary education standard.
2. Pre-activity stage includes two focus areas: engage-instruct-initiate sequence, and grouping students.
3. In order to successfully do any tasks in English lesson connected with speaking it is important to know how to prepare the activity, how to manage the activity and how to end activity.
4. Each speaking activity comprises three stages: Pre-activity stage; During-activity stage; Conclusion stage. Each of the stages involves several focus areas that should be taken into consideration when organizing speaking activities.
5. If student has good results in Year 12 exam speaking part, he can be sure that he could also pass an international exams speaking part.
6. The Year 12 exam rating scale is designed so that when the student receives the results he can identify which skills should be further improved.
7. It is necessary to provide a positive feedback that is likely to motivate students and bring about some kind of improvement, along with pointing out what went wrong during the activity.
8. It is not important to concentrate on who made the mistakes but rather focus on the mistakes that have been frequent among the students.
9. It is important to attempt to remove possible triggers for anxiety in the classroom and one way of doing it is by using exam taking strategies.
10. Putting learners in the interlocutor role greatly increases their understanding of the mechanics of the test, and familiarizes them with what the interlocutor is going to say in the exam itself.
11. It is important to make sure that when students assess one another they exercise sensitivity and remember to praise as well as criticize.

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Appendices