"TALK SHOW TIME": USING ROLE-PLAY INTERVIEWS TO ENHANCE SPONTANEOUS SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This article presents Talk Show Time, a dynamic and interactive classroom activity designed to enhance spontaneous speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. By adopting the roles of talk show hosts and guests with secret or fictional identities, students engage in real-time, unscripted dialogue that promotes fluency, creativity, and communicative competence. The activity encourages active listening, improvisation, and natural turn-taking while reducing anxiety through role-play. In addition to highlighting the pedagogical benefits, this article provides a clear, step-by-step procedure for implementing the activity effectively in diverse classroom contexts. Multiple variations including mystery guest interviews featuring celebrities or fictional characters are also included to support flexibility and sustained student engagement. Talk Show Time not only fosters meaningful interaction and confidence in speaking but also transforms the classroom into a vibrant space for authentic language use.

Keywords:

EFL speaking activities, spontaneous speaking, role-play, classroom interaction, fluency development, communicative competence, talk show activity, improvisation, English language learning, interactive learning, student engagement, creative speaking tasks.

Introduction

Developing the ability to speak spontaneously and confidently in a second language remains one of the most challenging goals for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. While many classroom activities emphasize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition, these often occur in controlled or written formats that do not adequately prepare students for real-life communication. In everyday situations—such as casual conversations, job interviews, or public speaking where speakers must formulate thoughts quickly, respond to unexpected questions, and maintain coherent dialogue.

There's often a big difference between how students perform in classroom exercises and how they speak in real conversations. In practice tasks, they might use correct grammar and know a lot of words, but when they're suddenly asked to speak without preparation, they often hesitate, lose confidence, or go back to speaking in their native language. To help students overcome this problem, teachers need to use activities that help them speak more fluently, encourage them to be creative, and give them a safe space to make mistakes without feeling embarrassed.

One particularly effective approach is the use of role-play, which encourages learners to step into imagined roles and interact in simulated real-world scenarios. Among various role-play formats, the talk show interview stands out as an especially engaging and adaptable framework. In this activity, students take on the roles of talk show hosts and guests, with the latter given secret or fictional identities to improvise during the interview. This imaginative structure not only adds fun and novelty to the classroom but also serves as a powerful tool for promoting spontaneous speaking.

Activity overview

Talk Show Time is a communicative role-play activity that places students in a mock talk-show setting. One student acts as the host, while another assumes the role of a guest with a secret identity, unusual background, or fictional life story. The host must conduct an interview, asking follow-up questions and reacting in real time, while the guest improvises responses based on their assigned character. This activity not only increases student talk time but also enhances learners' ability to think and speak on their feet, a crucial skill in developing communicative competence in English.

Materials and preparation

1.   A list of guest identities (e.g., "a time traveler from the future," "a famous star," "an alien learning about Earth," "a detective solving a case")

2.   Optional props (hats, glasses, name tags) to add theatrical flair

3.   A mock "talk show" setup (chairs facing each other, a microphone if available)

Each guest identity should be prepared on a card or slip of paper and handed privately to each "guest" before the interview begins. The "host" does not know the guest's identity and must uncover it through natural questioning.

Procedure: Step-by-Step Implementation

Implementing Talk Show Time successfully in the EFL classroom requires a balance of clear instructions, engaging materials, and encouragement for student creativity. Below is a step-by-step

guide to help teachers carry out the activity with confidence, whether working with a small group or a full class.

Step 1: Introduce the Talk Show Format

Begin by introducing students to the idea of a talk show. Explain that this type of television program involves a host who interviews guests—sometimes celebrities, experts, or people with interesting stories. Emphasize that the tone of talk shows is usually informal, conversational, and sometimes humorous.

To give students a concrete understanding, play a short clip (2–3 minutes) of a popular English-language talk show, such as The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon or The Graham Norton Show. Ask students to observe the host's body language, the type of questions asked, the way the guest answers, and how both speakers interact naturally. Point out examples of spontaneous humor, active listening, and how the host reacts to unexpected responses.

Step 2: Pair Up Students and Assign Roles

Divide the class into pairs. One student will act as the host, and the other will be the guest. Give each guest a secret identity card that includes a fictional or humorous role (e.g., "a chef who only cooks with chocolate," "a superhero who lost their powers," "an alien trying to understand Earth's customs"). Allow guests 2–3 minutes to read and internalize their roles quietly without sharing them with their partners.

Meanwhile, encourage hosts to think of a few general opening lines or questions to get the conversation started. These can include:

- "Welcome to the show! Can you tell us a little about yourself?"
- "What brings you here today?"
- "I've heard you've been involved in something unusual—care to share?"

If needed, provide a worksheet with sample questions and expressions to support hosts, especially at lower proficiency levels.

Step 3: Conduct the Role-Play Interview

When students are ready, begin the interviews. The host leads the conversation, asking questions and reacting to the guest's answers. The guest responds in character, improvising their responses based on the identity card. The interviews should last 3–5 minutes, depending on the students' language level and confidence.

Remind students that fluency is more important than accuracy during this task. Encourage them to take risks, use gestures or expressions, and play with language creatively. Guests can add

interesting twists to their stories, and hosts should follow up naturally, adapting to the conversation rather than sticking to a rigid script.

While the interviews take place, the teacher should walk around the room, offering light guidance and noting interesting language use or errors for later feedback.

Step 4: Switch Roles and Repeat

After the first round, have the students swap roles: the guest becomes the host, and vice versa. Provide the new guest with a different identity card. Give students a minute or two to prepare again before starting the second interview.

This switch ensures that all students have the chance to practice both spontaneous speaking and active listening. It also keeps the activity fresh and offers new creative opportunities for each round.

Variations of the Talk Show Time Activity

One of the strengths of Talk Show Time is its flexibility. It can be adapted to suit different student levels, learning objectives, or even classroom moods. Below are several variations to keep the activity fresh and engaging throughout the term:

1. Celebrity or Fictional Character Guessing Game

In this variation, the guest plays a well-known celebrity, historical figure, cartoon character, or movie character (e.g., Harry Potter, Taylor Swift, Spider-Man, Sherlock Holmes), but does not reveal the name. The host conducts the interview as usual, asking questions about the guest's life, achievements, hobbies, or unusual habits.

The host (or the rest of the class) must guess the identity of the guest by the end of the interview. This format sharpens listening comprehension, inferencing skills, and encourages students to stay in character, offering clues through their responses without making it too obvious.

2. Group Panel Interviews

Instead of one host and one guest, a panel of guests can be interviewed by a single host or a team of co-hosts. Each guest has a unique character or backstory, and the host rotates between them with themed or tailored questions. This works particularly well with themes such as:

- "Time Travelers' Reunion"
- "Superheroes Anonymous"
- "Famous Artists' Conference"

This format allows students to collaborate in-character and develop dynamic interactions.

3. Mystery Guest Press Conference

In this variation, one student is the mystery guest, and the rest of the class acts as a panel of journalists. Journalists ask questions one by one, and the guest responds in character. After several rounds, students vote on who they think the guest is. This format can be especially engaging when integrated into a "celebrity week" or pop culture unit.

4. Talk Show with a Twist: Job Interviews or Scandals

To add more real-world context, frame the talk show as a job interview, a book promotion, or even a celebrity scandal. Guests may have to defend their actions, explain bizarre inventions, or pitch a strange product. This introduces persuasive language, defending opinions, and problem-solving into the mix.

5. Cultural Exchange Show

Guests represent different countries or cultures (real or imagined), and the host interviews them about food, traditions, or current events. This is an excellent way to integrate CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) topics, geography, or intercultural awareness into language practice.

Benefits of the activity

One of the main advantages of the Talk Show Time activity is that it helps students improve their ability to speak spontaneously and fluently. Since the activity involves unscripted conversation, students must think on their feet, organize their thoughts in English, and respond quickly. This kind of practice trains them to rely on their existing language knowledge in real time, which is essential for building oral fluency and becoming more comfortable with natural communication.

The activity also encourages active listening and real-time interaction. Because the host needs to respond to whatever the guest says, they must pay close attention and think carefully about their next question. This strengthens listening comprehension skills and promotes natural turn-taking, which is often overlooked in traditional speaking exercises. Students learn how to stay engaged in a conversation and respond appropriately to the other speaker.

Another important benefit is the boost in student confidence. Speaking in a second language can be intimidating, especially in front of peers. However, by using role-play and stepping into the shoes of a fictional character, students are less afraid of making mistakes. Pretending to be someone else gives them the freedom to express themselves without fear of judgment. This emotional distance can help even shy or anxious students participate more freely.

Creativity is also a major part of the activity. Students must imagine details about their character, respond to unexpected questions, and sometimes invent entire stories on the spot. This

not only improves their speaking ability but also encourages them to think outside the box. Using their imagination helps students become more flexible with the language and more confident in using it in a variety of situations.

Because the activity is fun and interactive, it keeps students highly engaged. Many learners find traditional speaking tasks boring or repetitive, but Talk Show Time feels more like a game or performance. The playful format, combined with the excitement of surprise identities and humorous responses, increases motivation and makes students more willing to speak. When students are having fun, they are more likely to stay focused and participate actively.

The talk show format also gives students a chance to practice authentic communication. Instead of memorizing dialogues or filling in blanks, they are using English in a meaningful way—asking questions, giving opinions, telling stories, and reacting naturally. These are all real-life communication skills that prepare them for conversations outside the classroom, whether with native speakers or in future academic and professional settings.

The activity is also highly adaptable. It can be easily modified to suit different proficiency levels, class sizes, or themes. For beginner students, the teacher can provide simple questions and sentence starters. For advanced learners, the task can include more challenging roles or debate-style interviews. The flexibility of the activity allows it to be reused throughout the school year with new scenarios, characters, or goals.

Another strength of the activity is that it promotes peer learning. When students watch their classmates perform or listen to their partners during interviews, they pick up new vocabulary, learn different ways to respond, and observe how others manage the task. This shared learning environment encourages cooperation and helps students improve together, rather than working in isolation.

Although the focus is on fluency, students also get the chance to use grammar and vocabulary in context. For example, they practice forming questions, using the past tense to describe events, and applying descriptive language to explain their character. This kind of contextualized practice reinforces language structures they've already learned and helps them remember them better.

Most importantly, the activity makes English learning feel meaningful and enjoyable. Students get to laugh, be creative, and express themselves in a fun and supportive atmosphere. They see that English is not just a school subject, but a tool for connection, imagination, and real communication. This shift in mindset can make a lasting difference in how they approach language learning overall.

Conclusion

Spontaneous speaking remains one of the most essential yet underdeveloped skills in many EFL classrooms. Traditional methods often focus on controlled exercises, leaving students unprepared for the real-time communication required in everyday life. Talk Show Time offers a fresh and engaging alternative that brings the language to life through creative role-play and unscripted dialogue. By transforming the classroom into a lively talk show studio, students not only improve their fluency and listening skills but also build confidence, imagination, and the ability to interact naturally in English. The flexibility of this activity allows it to be adapted for various proficiency levels, themes, and class sizes, making it a practical tool for any language teacher. With its focus on improvisation, character play, and authentic communication, Talk Show Time goes beyond the boundaries of traditional speaking tasks. It encourages students to take risks, enjoy the learning process, and see English as a language they can use creatively and confidently. Overall, this activity helps students move from using English only in the classroom to using it in real-life situations. It fosters a fun and meaningful environment where students can explore language freely, develop essential conversation skills, and, most importantly, enjoy the process of becoming more fluent and expressive English speakers.

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