

TAILORING EDUTAINMENT FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS: A MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN TERTIARY CLASSROOMS

By

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Abstract

The current, standardised approach to fostering speaking skills in tertiary classrooms overlooks the unique learning styles present within the student body. This research proposes a ground breaking solution: a multi-modal edutainment approach that utilises engaging and interactive elements to enhance speaking skill development for all learners. The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of integrating various learning modalities (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) within edutainment activities designed specifically for tertiary classrooms. We hypothesise that by catering to these diverse learning preferences, students will experience heightened engagement, improved comprehension, and ultimately, more effective development of speaking skills. The research will involve the design and implementation of a series of multi-modal edutainment activities within a tertiary speaking skills course. These activities will encompass a variety of elements, such as audio dialogues for auditory learners, interactive video presentations for visual learners, and kinesthetic activities like role-playing simulations. Data collection will involve pre- and post-tests to assess student speaking skills, along with surveys and focus groups to gauge student engagement and learning preferences based on the different modalities employed.

Keywords: *multimodal edutainment, diverse learners, speaking skills development, tertiary classrooms, engagement*

Introduction

The winds of change are sweeping through tertiary education, placing a new emphasis on graduating well-rounded individuals. No longer is theoretical knowledge enough; success in today's dynamic and interconnected world demands a strong foundation in practical skills. Communication, particularly effective spoken English, has become a central pillar of this transformation. Tertiary classrooms are a melting pot of students with diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and prior

exposure to English. A teacher's main target is to "prepare" his students for the examination and not to make his pupils competent in the use of language they are learning" (Balasubiramanian 1985.p.56) However, traditional teaching methods, heavily reliant on rote memorization and dry textbook exercises, fail to cater to this rich tapestry of learners. The consequence is a classroom environment lacking in engagement, where students struggle to connect with the material and develop the nuanced speaking skills crucial for both

academic and professional success. Since the mid-1970s there have been many discussions of what constitutes communicative methodology, but overall there seems to be one 'standard' view which is characterized by a view of language rather than a view of language learning (although some argue for a more cognitive idea of the methodology, a view which incorporates an information-processing approach for more discussion of this see Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 153-177). This is where the concept of edutainment emerges as a potential game-changer. Edutainment, the strategic infusion of fun and interactivity into the learning process, offers a captivating alternative to traditional methods. By weaving elements of play, competition, and storytelling into the curriculum, edutainment activities naturally capture student attention and foster a more engaging learning environment. Imagine a classroom transformed into a bustling marketplace, where students aren't passive learners, but active participants representing different companies, tasked with pitching their ideas to potential investors. This playful approach not only ignites student interest but also creates a safe space to hone persuasive communication and critical thinking skills in a dynamic and engaging setting.

The magic of edutainment lies not just in its fun and interactive nature but in its ability to cater to the unique ways students learn. We can categorise learners broadly as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Auditory learners

absorb information best through sounds and spoken language, while visual learners excel with imagery and graphics. The SFL perspective, therefore, involves an "attempt to relate language primarily to one particular aspect of human experience, namely that of social structure" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 4). Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, thrive on movement and physical activity. Traditional teaching methods often focus on a single modality, leaving many students behind in their grasp of concepts or ability to actively participate.

This research dives into the potential of a multimodal edutainment approach to bridge this gap. By incorporating elements that cater to all three learning styles within edutainment activities, we aim to create a truly inclusive learning environment where every student can flourish. Imagine captivating audio dialogues or engaging podcasts, immersing auditory learners in the language. Visual learners can benefit from interactive video presentations and simulations that bring abstract concepts to life. Kinesthetic learners, meanwhile, can thrive through role-playing scenarios, debates, and activities that involve movement and physical interaction. This multi-modal approach goes beyond simply acknowledging learning preferences. By incorporating a variety of modalities, we hypothesise that engagement will be enhanced for all students. Auditory learners will be drawn in by captivating dialogues, while visual learners will be stimulated by interactive presentations. Kinesthetic

learners, by actively participating in role-playing scenarios, will find themselves fully immersed in the learning process. This heightened engagement is expected to lead to a deeper understanding of the material, and ultimately, more effective development of speaking skills.

This research stands as a ground breaking step in the evolution of tertiary education. It delves into the potential of edutainment to tackle the challenge of diverse learning styles hindering the development of speaking skills. By crafting a learning environment that is both multi-modal and inclusive, we aim to empower all students. This will equip them with the confidence and fluency necessary to thrive in a world that demands effective communication as a cornerstone of success.

The Challenges of Speaking Skill Development in a Diverse Tertiary Classroom

The modern tertiary classroom is a dynamic mix of students from various backgrounds, with unique ways of learning and varying levels of prior English experience. While this diversity enriches the learning environment, it also presents a significant hurdle for educators trying to cultivate effective speaking skills in everyone. Traditional methods, often relying on rote memorisation and textbook drills, fail to resonate with this diverse audience. Lectures become one-sided presentations, and classroom discussions can be monopolised by a few, leaving many students feeling lost and

struggling to connect with the material. The pressure to perform well on standardised tests worsens this situation, prioritising formulaic responses over the development of genuine fluency and sophisticated communication skills. This disengagement partly stems from a disconnect between teaching methods and learning styles. Students have inherent preferences for how they absorb and process information. Auditory learners flourish with sounds and spoken language, while visual learners excel with imagery and graphics. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, benefit from movement and physical activities. Traditional methods often focus on a single modality, leaving many students struggling to grasp concepts or participate actively. Even with the potential to excel, some students get lost in the traditional classroom. Imagine an auditory learner overwhelmed by walls of text on a whiteboard, or a kinesthetic learner restless during a long lecture. The current approach fails to tap into their strengths. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds or rural areas often lack exposure to spoken English outside the classroom. This creates a significant gap compared to peers who may have years of exposure through TV, movies, or daily conversations. This disparity in prior knowledge leads to apprehension and a lack of confidence in using English, further hindering progress in spoken communication skills.

Ultimately, the current system fails to prepare students for the demands of today's

world. Effective communication is vital for academic and professional success. Graduates need to articulate complex ideas, collaborate effectively, and confidently present their work. Yet, the current methods often leave students underprepared, hindering their overall success. This highlights the urgent need for innovative approaches that cater to diverse learning needs and foster strong spoken English skills in all tertiary students.

Edutainment: A Playful Approach to Learning

Imagine a classroom transformed from a sleepy lecture hall into a bustling marketplace. Students, armed with persuasive arguments, morph into entrepreneurs pitching their ideas to potential investors. This is the heart of edutainment, a dynamic approach to learning that weaves threads of fun and interactivity into the curriculum. In stark contrast to traditional methods that rely on rote memorization and dry textbooks, edutainment activities from gamified simulations to engaging debates and collaborative storytelling projects naturally capture student attention and create a more stimulating learning environment. This playful approach not only sparks intrinsic motivation but also fosters a safe space for experimentation. Students can hone communication skills, delve into complex concepts, and even make mistakes without fear of judgment.

Furthermore, the beauty of edutainment lies in its ability to cater to diverse learning styles. Auditory learners can immerse themselves in captivating dialogues or podcasts, while visual learners flourish with interactive presentations and simulations. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, can thrive through role-playing scenarios, debates, and activities that involve movement and physical interaction. This emphasis on fun and engagement goes beyond mere entertainment. Research suggests that edutainment activities can lead to a deeper understanding of the material, improved critical thinking skills, and ultimately, more effective learning outcomes. In essence, edutainment offers a breath of fresh air from the monotony of traditional learning methods, transforming classrooms into engaging playgrounds where students can actively participate, develop essential skills, and embark on a joyful journey of discovery.

Beyond Engagement: How Multimodal Edutainment Improves Speaking Skills

The magic of edutainment goes beyond simply keeping students awake in class. While engagement is undeniably important for effective learning, the true strength of a multi-modal edutainment approach lies in its ability to create a well-rounded environment that demonstrably improves speaking skills. This approach breaks free from the limitations of traditional methods by strategically incorporating elements that cater to the various learning styles within a student population.

Firstly, by employing a multi-modal approach, edutainment activities can address how different learners process information. Auditory learners benefit from interactive audio dialogues or captivating podcasts that immerse them in the language and allow them to actively hone their listening skills. Visual learners, on the other hand, thrive with the integration of data visualisations, simulations, and engaging video presentations that bring abstract concepts to life and facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Mechanical media refers to the physical channel that is used, such as radio, television, film, telephone, and computer media, which act as transmitters for the presentational and representational media (Fiske, 1982, p.18). Kinesthetic learners, who excel through movement and physical interaction, are particularly well served by role-playing scenarios, debates, and activities that require active participation. These activities provide them with a safe and dynamic environment to experiment with spoken language.

The inherent collaborative nature of many edutainment activities fosters the development of critical communication skills essential for effective speaking. Group discussions, collaborative storytelling projects, and simulated presentations encourage students to clearly and concisely articulate their ideas, negotiate viewpoints,

and provide constructive feedback to their peers. This collaborative learning environment not only promotes active participation but also hones their ability to synthesise complex information and present it in a coherent and persuasive manner all, key components of strong speaking skills.

Conclusion

Gunther Kress (2000) suggested that given the changes in the modes and affordances of communication systems in today's world, it is "now impossible to make sense of texts, even of their linguistic parts alone, without having a clear idea of what these other features might be contributing to the meaning of a text" (p. 337). The multi-modal edutainment approach goes beyond grabbing attention; it fosters a deeper understanding of spoken English. By incorporating various modalities that cater to diverse learning styles, edutainment activities create a more inclusive learning environment. This ensures all students have the opportunity to grasp the subtleties of the language. This enhanced understanding naturally translates into improved fluency, confidence, and a more sophisticated command of spoken English. In turn, this equips students with the essential skills to thrive in academic settings, confidently navigate professional environments, and effectively communicate in our increasingly interconnected world.

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To cite this article

Subash, M., & Mary Lowrencia, C. (2025). Tailoring Edutainment for Diverse Learners: A Multimodal Approach to Speaking Skill Development in Tertiary Classrooms. *Sparkling International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Studies*, 8(1), 9-14.

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