

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JUST A MINUTE (JAM) SESSIONS IN DEVELOPING  
SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING (ELL)  
ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract:**

In this highly advanced contemporary society, there is a cut throat competition in corporate and business world and some people find it very difficult to face the challenges in global market today. As a result, many of them are jobless and encounter so many problems to face the interviewers in the modern society. As there are many rounds of interviews in the existing job market, most of the educated youth fail to perform well in these interviews. The modern intellectuals as well as the educated youth attempt many times to compete with others by adopting several ways to overcome this problem. After a thorough research, they finally realize that oral communication skills play a vital role in the success of any individual in getting employment in the present competitive job market. Furthermore, they also understand the necessity of acquiring good oral communication skills to present and prove themselves that they are better than the other job seekers. To showcase their talent within the stipulated time, they try to find the ways to overcome this problem and get success in the interview process even if it is quite intricate or complex process. Keeping in view the importance of oral communication, English teachers train their learners in speaking skills by implementing certain activities in their classrooms such as JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, group discussions, debates, presentations and so on. Initially, JAM sessions help the learners speak boldly and fluently by expressing their ideas. JAM sessions are to be focused in the beginning by teachers as to motivate or encourage the learners to speak English spontaneously and fearlessly in the ELL environment.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to elaborate the importance of speaking skills and employ certain activities to promote these skills among the young learners in the ELL environment. This paper also highlights the need of introducing JAM sessions into the modern classrooms as they play a significant role in developing the learners' speaking skills. It also brings out the main steps involved in these JAM sessions. Furthermore, the role of the English language teachers to promote the learners' speaking skills during these JAM sessions has been elaborated comprehensively. Finally, some valuable recommendations are suggested to the teachers to improve their own teaching strategies in organizing these JAM sessions and to develop the speaking skills of their learners gradually. Moreover, the learners are encouraged to follow certain techniques during these JAM sessions as these sessions promote

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their speaking skills in order to prepare them well for group discussions, debates, presentations and develop their critical thinking and creativity.

Key words: activities;ELL environment;English language classroom; JAM sessions;speaking skills.

## Introduction

English language is spoken in almost all the countries around the globe and it is the language spoken by most of the people for various purposes. It is the language used in the fields such as medicine, pharmacy, education, science, business, software, information technology, engineering, journalism, research, fashion technology, banking, internet, tourism, etc. It is the language widely used all over the world and it is the mostly used language in information technology and business correspondence. It is the language that has a wide range of speakers in almost all the countries and it enjoys the official language status in most of the countries. English is used to communicate human's thoughts, ideas, feelings and expressions. It is the language of getting opportunities for employment in all the areas. It is also the language mostly used in social media websites and internet, software development, electronic media and even in the research work. Anything that is written in English is listened to, understood, read and reproduced in a wider range of circles all over the world. Therefore, English is taught as a foreign language or a second language these days in almost all the educational institutions of the non-native speaking countries around the world.

Language is used as a tool of communication and we communicate with each other to express our ideas, feelings and thoughts in order to convey our messages to the others. In order to communicate with others, speech is needed and it is without speech, we cannot communicate properly with others. Hence, learning speaking skills is essential for all the learners irrespective of the language. Moreover, a language remains merely as a script unless it is spoken by anyone. Language is used in a wide range of situations like; it is spoken at workplaces, in language laboratories, medical research laboratories, scientific research centres, etc. to communicate with others clearly, coherently, correctly and effectively. But the gaps in communication result in problems and even misunderstandings. The speakers of any language should be perfectly trained in acquiring speaking skills for the smooth running of any organization or system.

One needs to acquire the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to become a well-rounded communicator, whereas the talent of speaking fluently and skillfully provides the speaker with many distinct advantages.Channey (1998: 13) states, "Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non- verbal symbols in a variety of contexts". And Byrne (1998, p. 8) states,"Speaking is a two way process between speaker and listener and involves the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of understanding". The ability to express one's feelings, opinions and thoughts in the form of sentences in a meaningful way provides the speakers with the advantages that have already been discussed. A person with good

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speaking skills, certainly gain the attention of a majority of the audience. The speaker can influence almost all the audience with the art of his good articulation skills. The use of the real language plays a significant role in promoting the speaking skills of the learners. We know that it is very difficult to prepare a readymade draft for speaking purposes unless it is meant for presentations or for speech preparations. Except for these purposes, spoken English is neither organized nor planned and is only the spontaneous flow of an individual where his entire talent in expressing the matter is estimated. According to Harmer (2001), "Teaching speaking must be focused on the real language use that learners are able to perform based on what they have achieved related to language learning". He (2001: 47) further adds, "Communication is the central feature in teaching and learning language. It is between students, creates opportunities for them to participate in the negotiation of meaning to perform a range of language functions and to attend to both language forms and functions".

The various activities that take place in the English classrooms must be designed by keeping in view of the learners' needs and interests. These activities have to promote the oral fluency of the learners as the main aim of the learners is to communicate well in both formal as well as informal interaction. Most of the learners have the intention of speaking in English; they find it difficult to speak because of the ability of speaking in English is quite a complex and difficult process in its nature. So many of the learners feel anxious to speak in English either in the classroom or outside the classroom and they keep quiet because of psychological and social reasons. Hence, the language teachers have to implement various natural strategies such as group work, pair work, JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, group discussions, role plays, debates, presentations, etc. in order to make the learners self-confident and fearless to speak English fluently. In this regard, the responsibility of the language teachers is to motivate their learners to participate in the regular ongoing activities in the English classrooms and also interact with their peers, teachers or any other people who can speak English well.

The learners can acquire language skills, especially speaking skills, through interaction. So the teachers should provide the learners with many more opportunities to speak in English during the classroom interaction and should avoid the usage of the learners' mother tongue. According to Ur (2012), "Communicating orally and fluently in normal interaction is the primary goal for many language learners. For that purpose, designing classroom activities to improve students' ability to promote oral fluency is of great importance". Ur (2012) further states, "Getting students to talk is much more difficult than to make them read, write or listen during language courses. Thus, the teachers should promote student talk activities; however, most of the lesson time is allotted for teachers to talk, instruct and manage the classroom". Harmer (2010) states, "there are three primary reasons why students must be encouraged to speak in the classroom. First, students can have the opportunities to practice real-life speaking in the classroom atmosphere where they are likely to feel less anxiety. Second, speaking activities can provide teachers and learners with the knowledge of how well learners can speak English, what kind of mistakes are being

made so that the teachers can have the chance to focus on specific speaking features to foster. Finally, the acquired language knowledge can be activated as long as the learners speak English in the classroom; moreover, some linguistic elements can become automatic resulting in the learners' ability to use them unconsciously and in this way the fluency can be improved". Even though the language learners are expected to be exposed to speak English as much as possible, the usage of English in the classroom is very limited. Therefore, it is the primary duty of the English teachers to provide their learners with ample number of opportunities by encouraging them to use English both in the classroom and also in their daily interaction with their classmates, teachers and the people who speak English fluently. AsHuda (1999: 158) says, "The main source of success, in language learning, is the exposure to the language". According to Hymes(1971), "The ability to adjust and accommodate one's language to the context is called Communicative Competence".

As there is a great demand for oral communication skills, especially speaking skills, to get the right opportunities in this competitive world, there is a responsibility for the English language teachers to develop the learners' communicative competence. Hence the language teachers have to adopt a variety of strategies in their classrooms in order to improve their learners' speaking skills. For this purpose, the activities such as Just a Minute (JAM) sessions, group discussions, debates, group work and pair work, impromptu speeches, presentations and so on. Among these activities, JAMsessions should be introduced initially in the English language classrooms as these sessions promote the learners' proficiency and fluency of theirEnglish language. With these JAM sessions, learners get an opportunity to speak for a minute without any deviation to the given subject, without repeating the points and without any hesitation.



Fig: Speaking Activities in English Classrooms

JAM, which is an acronym for Just a Minute, is organized to develop and improve the learners' English speaking skills or oral communication skills in order to prepare them to speak for at least one minute on a chosen topic or the topic given by the English language teachers. These JAM sessions have to be held regularly in the English language classes to motivate the shy or introvert learners to take initiative and make them speak on a particular

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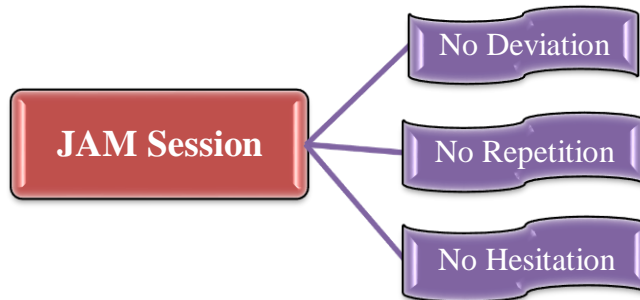
topic for a stipulated time given, i.e., one minute. It can also be useful during the regular classes to sum up the lesson taught on that day so that the learners get an opportunity in summarizing the lesson which is taught. With this technique, the teachers also come to know whether their learners have understood the lesson well or not. Moreover, the teachers also find out whether the learners have grasped the main points or not. In this way, these JAM sessions are also useful for the learners to focus on the main important points of the lesson and this technique also promotes the learners' note taking skills. When the teachers realize that their learners haven't understood much about the content of the lesson, then the teachers should take this opportunity to reteach the lesson.

These JAM sessions are very much useful for testing the candidates' speaking skills in interviews when they attend for job interviews after finishing their studies. Now-a-days, most of the learners have come to know that they cannot achieve any job unless they are very good at oral communication skills. So the learners are very much interested in participating either in group discussions or in JAM sessions and they are striving hard to acquire these communication skills. They also come to a conclusion that these JAM sessions play a vital role to participate in group discussions, debates, presentations and so on to grab the opportunities in the present competitive job market. As majority of the recruiting agencies conduct campus interviews everywhere in this modern world, most of the students have formed an opinion that their employability skills are enhanced when they perform very well in these interviews, especially with their communication skills. As the present learners have to appear for those job interviews once they finish their education, there is a need for the English language teachers to motivate their learners to prove themselves that they are efficient in their communication skills by participating in activities such as JAM sessions in their regular classrooms. Therefore, classrooms are the best places to practise the required skills to grab the best employment opportunities to settle down in higher and comfortable positions.

Before introducing the JAM topics in their classrooms, the English language teachers have to inform the students of all the principles involved in this game. Let us discuss these principles in order to make the learners a clear understanding about the game. The teachers have to ask the learners to select some burning topics that are related to the contemporary issues. Sometimes when the learners find a problem in getting the topics, the teachers can suggest some topics according to the needs and interests of the learners. Before announcing the topic to the learners, the teachers should ask the speaker(s) to sit separately from their peers in order to avoid promptings or other help. This is a crucial stage for the teachers to avoid the involvement of the other learners. Here the teachers should take utmost care at this stage to control the learners in helping the speakers with some points for the talk. Once the topic has been given, the preparation time to prepare the speech should not be more than two minutes. To maintain the time effectively, the teachers use stopwatches. As soon as the teachers start the stopwatch, the speaker starts talking on the given subject. The time allotted for this JAM session is only one minute and during this activity, the speakers should

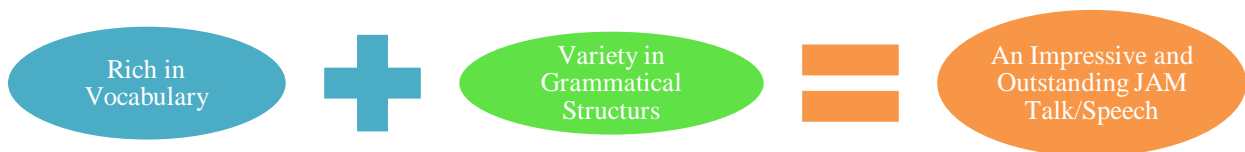


neither deviate to the given topic nor utter the same points repeatedly. They are expected to speak for the entire period of one minute fearlessly, without any hesitation.



**Fig: The Main Principles involved in a JAM Session**

The speakers should continue the same flow from the beginning of their speech to the end of their session. The vocabulary they use in their speech should not be repeated unless they are the content words, prepositions, verbs, conjunctions, etc. Moreover, the grammatical structures they use should be unique and there should be a variation in the structure.



**Fig: Usage of Language for an Impressive JAM Talk**

In JAM sessions, the teachers allot marks for each point that the speaker presents. The teachers allot bonus marks for those who use rich vocabulary and unique grammatical structures. Whenever the speaker deviates from the topic, the listeners can protest it by raising their hands. If the objection is genuine, then one point will be deducted from the total points that the speaker has gained. In case the objection is in favour of the speaker, one point will be added to the total points that the speaker has scored. Here the teachers should also give some bonus points for the speakers whose fluency and accuracy is above the normal level.

The teachers can adopt various strategies to implement these JAM sessions in their classrooms. These JAM sessions are generally more suitable for small classrooms to involve the learners to give a talk individually.



**Fig: Steps Involved in a JAM Session**

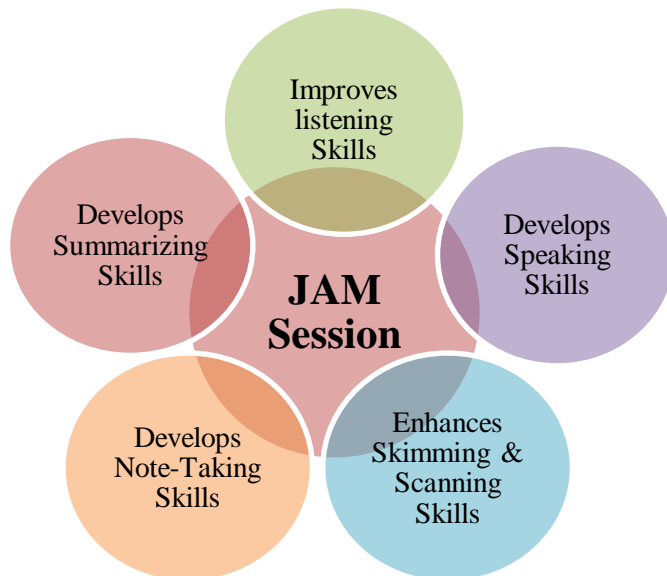
Whereas in the larger classrooms, the teachers should divide the whole class into groups and ask the learners to be ready for the JAM session. Then they have to ask the students to choose some topics according to their interests. Sometimes, the teachers also should suggest some topics for them and then ask them to prepare a speech in groups. Once the preparation part is finished, the teachers prepare each group to give a talk on the subject given. During these JAM sessions, the teachers should act as facilitators rather than instructors. They should not stand at one place and instruct the learners to do something. Instead, they should go around the classroom and monitor the learners' work. Whenever the learners find any problem in preparation, the teachers immediately help them by giving suitable words or phrases to complete the sentences. They even sometimes should fill in the gaps of the speech preparation by substituting with suitable and relevant sentences. While the speakers give a talk, the duty of the teachers is to help the speakers wherever they need any help. The teachers should motivate the learners by giving some signs like keep smiling, nodding the head, eye contact, hand gestures and so on. The teachers should also encourage the speakers by supplying the suitable words or phrases when the speakers struggle or find it difficult to get some vocabulary or grammatical structures. Once this session comes to an end, the teachers should give an overall feedback to the learners so that they can rectify their mistakes and try to prepare well in order to present well in the following sessions that take place in their English classrooms.

At this juncture, the teachers should not blame or criticize their learners by highlighting their individual mistakes as it results to negative motivation. At this juncture, it is right to quote the sayings of Harmer (2001: 123), who says, "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". In this context, Richards and Lockhart (1996: 188) assert, "Feedback on students' spoken language 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". In order to motivate the learners in a positive way, the English language teachers have to be always friendly with the teachers and give valuable suggestions to rectify their mistakes in a teacher-learner-friendly atmosphere.

As Ur (1996: 22) asserts, "Before the actual process of bringing the activity to the end, however, some pairs or groups may finish earlier than others. 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". Hence the teachers are advised to prepare some extra activities ready at hand in order to make the classroom busy with a diversity of activities and also involve the learners in work so that they do not disturb the others. Moreover, these activities certainly develop the learners' speaking skills under the

observation of the dynamic English teachers in the existing English language classrooms.

The teachers who always try for innovations in their teaching, they go on introducing the activities with a variety and novelty and quite different from the normal system. They also think about various applications of the activities they teach in their classrooms.



**Fig: DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH A JAM SESSION**

Through JAM sessions, the learners can improve their listening skills by listening to the speaker and also develop speaking skills by speaking on the given topic and participate in the discussion later. In this process, the listeners note down important points when a speaker makes a speech. Such practice leads the learners to develop their note-taking skills that are mostly needed for the learners as they have to take notes of the lesson taught by their teachers in their regular classrooms. Before giving the talk, the learners get some information by reading related texts and prepare their points for the talk on the given topic. In this regard, the learners search for the main points related to the topic and once they get the relevant information for preparing the speech, they jot down these points and prepare them in a sequence to make it an organized preparation for the talk. Thus, the learners improve their skimming and scanning skills.

By participating in the JAM sessions, the learners can learn how to sum up a lesson or a topic that has been taught. Therefore, JAM sessions are useful activities in the classroom for learners to improve the above mentioned skills besides speaking skills. The English language teachers have to apply various strategies and techniques in their classrooms in order to improve their learners' speaking skills. In this regard, they conduct various activities such as JAM sessions, group discussions, debates, mock interviews, impromptu speeches or extempore, etc. in the process of developing the learners' oral communication skills. As a result, the learners can improve their creative or critical thinking skills while participating in such activities. Moreover, they use different vocabulary and grammatical structures following



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the principles of the JAM session. It means, they do not repeat the same vocabulary and the same sentence structure in their JAM sessions or activities.

The teachers of English can make use of these JAM sessions as a technique to develop the communication skills of the English language learners. The teachers can inspire and motivate the learners to utilise these JAM sessions for various purposes to develop their presentation skills, interview skills, debating and discussion skills and so on. As there is a heavy competition in the present employment field, these JAM sessions are apt to develop the communication skills in the English language learning environment. Therefore, the teachers of English have to introduce the activity of JAM sessions in the form a game so that the learners will participate very actively and develop their communication skills. As a result, the learners will take it as a challenge to win the game. At this juncture, it is wise to quote Rao, P.S. (2018) who says, "As this is the game that each and every learner faces the same problem or challenge and this also gives a good opportunity for the learners to encourage and support each other while working together for the given activity to achieve their main objective of winning the game". So, the teachers should introduce these JAM sessions as an activity that creates competition among the learners to enhance their communication skills.

Therefore, a JAM session is one of the most useful activities to be implemented in the regular EFL/ESL classrooms by the English teachers not only to promote their learners' oral communication skills but also to develop competitive spirit among the learners. Moreover, the learners are also advised to utilize the available ELL environment at the right time to make a good practice of these JAM sessions that promote their speaking skills. It is sure that the learners, with a proper guidance from their teachers, can improve their speaking skills enormously so that they will be in a position to participate in their interviews, discussions, impromptu speeches and presentations and even face the interviews with more self-confidence. As it shows that even JAM sessions are very simple and short activities that take only one minute time to finish the given task, they lay the basic foundation for the English language learners to improve their oral communication skills so that the learners will achieve great success in their future if they practise them in their regular ELL classrooms. Therefore, the responsibility is on the shoulders of the EFL/ESL teachers to promote these JAM sessions in their regular ELL classrooms in order to develop the learners' speaking skills as well as their self-confidence.

## Conclusion

In this research paper, the prominence of English as a global language that is used widely in all fields across the world today has been emphasized. At the same time, the importance of communication skills in personal and professional life has been discussed with relevant examples. Speaking skills are essential today to communicate with people in all walks of life. Teachers use various strategies and activities in English classrooms to teach and improve the oral communication skills of the learners. The importance of speaking skills and

the role of teachers in teaching and improving the speaking skills of the learners have been highlighted. In this context, the activities such as JAM sessions play an important role in classroom activities and the teachers apply various techniques in conducting JAM sessions in the classroom have been discussed comprehensively. The principles involved in these JAM sessions have also been focused.

As there is a huge demand for speaking skills in this modern era, the teachers need to focus on speaking skills in their classrooms and conduct various activities to improve the learners' speaking skills. They have to interact with learners and encourage them to speak in English not only in classrooms but also out of the classrooms. The English teachers have to motivate the learners to participate in various activities such as JAM sessions, group discussions, debates, mock interviews, impromptu speeches or extempore actively to make them experts in speaking skills. Initially, they have to focus on JAM sessions in order to motivate the students to speak spontaneously without any fear. Though JAM sessions are small activities, they impact more on the learners. So these are the suggestions made in this research paper after thorough reading and analysis.

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