

Chapter 28

Designing a Speaking Competence Course for Future Teachers of English: Exploring Students' Needs



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Abstract The policy of teaching English in and through English has become standard in many educational systems across the globe, stimulating renewed interest in the role of language proficiency in teacher expertise. In this connection, teacher language proficiency is being reconceptualised as a specialised set of language abilities required in addition to general communicative ability. Against this backdrop, a new speaking competence course for future teachers of English has been developed for the English Language Competence (ELC) programme at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. This chapter explores the perceived learning needs of 73 pre-service English teachers in relation to speaking ability for classroom purposes. Data collection involved a group-administered questionnaire to elicit opinions about English teachers' speaking ability in general, the students' own speaking ability, the speaking module of ELC, and potential topics the new course should cover. Learning needs emerged particularly in relation to three areas: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. The findings are discussed in the light of their implications for syllabus design. At a general level, the study reflects the growing recognition that students should be involved in curriculum and syllabus design from the planning stage on.

Keywords English-for-Teaching · Syllabus design · Needs analysis · Teaching mediation skills · Scaffolding

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343

28.1 Introduction

In 2015, the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna implemented a major curriculum reform. The then existing diploma programme for teacher education was gradually being replaced by two new teaching degrees, the Bachelor and Master of Education (BEd and MEd), which started to be offered alongside the other Bachelor and Master degrees in the department. This reform also effected a change in the English Language Competence (ELC) programme, the language study component of all curricula. Whereas prior to the reform, all students at the department, regardless of degree focus, attended the same language competence courses, there are slightly different course paths now (see Berger, “Advanced English Language Competence at the Intersection of Programme Design, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Research: An Introduction,” [this volume](#)). In particular, a new language competence course has been introduced for students taking an MEd: Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers (ASSET). This course is designed to give pre-service English teachers a grounding in the characteristics of spoken language, including classroom discourse, and to develop students’ oral presentation, interaction, and mediation skills (for details, see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)).

Prior to the reform, the ELC speaking component consisted of two courses: Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills 1 and 2 (PPOCS 1 and 2). PPOCS 1 focuses on the main aspects of English pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels, and PPOCS 2 is designed to improve students’ formal presentation and interaction skills (for details, see Richter, “Practical Phonetics and Oral Communication Skills,” [this volume](#)). Whereas the speaking module has not changed for students pursuing a BA, BEd students take PPOCS 1 and MEd students take ASSET.

In the process of designing the syllabus for ASSET, the decision was made to adapt the existing PPOCS 2 course to the specific needs of future English teachers rather than to develop an entirely new concept from scratch. The PPOCS 2 syllabus had proved to be effective and well received over the past years. In addition, many aspects of spoken language and oral communication taught in PPOCS 2, such as knowledge of the characteristics of spoken language, fluency, the ability to give a formal (academic) presentation, and the ability to interact successfully in the context of formal discussions, were deemed relevant to students of all degree programmes. The course developers therefore decided to adopt the basic parameters of the PPOCS 2 course in terms of structure and organisation, and adjust the focus, language functions, and topics.

Conceptually, the new course is based on the premise that teaching English in and through English is a distinct target language use domain (i.e., a particular situation or context in which the language is used) which requires specific language knowledge and skills that differ from other areas of language use, and that future teachers of English need to develop such knowledge and skills through explicit instruction. While drawing on their general communicative ability, language teachers also need domain-specific knowledge of discourse events related to instruction

as well as functional language skills in relation to these events (Elder, 2001; Freeman, 2016; Young et al., 2014), a relationship that has recently regained attention in second language teacher education through the focus on teacher cognition and teaching knowledge (Richards, 2017). If the language ability needed to teach English through English should indeed be the focus of explicit instruction, the question arises as to how this type of competence can be conceptualised, how it differs from general or academic language competence, and how it can be developed. Highlighting the difficulty of modelling the target use domain, Elder (2001, pp. 152–154) concludes that there is no choice but to define it for each specific context at the expense of a theoretically defensible model. As it is typically course developers who define the target use domain for their purposes and design their syllabi accordingly, students are usually not part of this process. However, there is a growing recognition that students should be more actively involved in curriculum and syllabus development as early as the planning stage (Oscarson, 2014), notably in the form of participating in needs analyses.

This chapter revolves around a questionnaire survey which aimed to involve students and explore their perceived language learning needs in relation to speaking. Whereas the ELC team had a firm grasp of our students' needs with regard to academic speaking in university contexts, there was less understanding of the specific needs of our students when using English in their roles as language teachers. The survey is situated in this context of characterising the specific language competence of English teachers and identifying the learning needs of pre-service teachers in relation to speaking. The chapter first examines the issue of conceptualising the specific language competence needed by English teachers, then proceeds to present the findings of the survey, and finally discusses some implications for syllabus development.

28.2 Theoretical Background

Language teacher education programmes have often assumed that raising students' general language proficiency and improving their academic English will automatically equip them with the skills they need to teach English through English (Sešek, 2007). Curricula tend to be designed on the assumption that highly proficient language users have, by nature, the discourse competence necessary to deliver effective lessons in the target language. By the same logic, native speakers are often considered to be at an advantage in terms of language teaching as they are deemed communicatively competent for the classroom merely by virtue of being native speakers, an assumption that mirrors "a legacy of the valuing of 'nativeness' as criterion for being a 'good' language teacher" (Freeman, 2016, p. 182). Richards (2017), however, emphasises that language proficiency is not the same as teaching ability, and that teaching a foreign language through that language requires specialised knowledge and skills which need to be developed by native and non-native speakers alike.

It follows that language teacher education programmes should provide specific courses in which the language ability required to teach through English is the focus of explicit instruction. The difficulty for such programmes is to define and operationalise this construct of teacher language competence in their local contexts.

Characterising the specific language ability needed by language teachers is a challenge, not least because it draws on three interrelated domains of knowledge and skill: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and discourse skills (Richards, 2017), a distinction which has its root in Shulman's (1987) description of teacher knowledge. The content knowledge of language teachers refers to their understanding of the subject, which comprises areas such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, literature, and cultural studies. Pedagogical knowledge pertains to the teachers' knowledge of teaching, including their repertoire of techniques and strategies as well as the theories, principles, values, and beliefs they draw on to teach the subject matter. It involves the ability to deploy content knowledge in relation to the specific context, the learners, the curriculum, and the teaching methods. Discourse skills, finally, refer to the teachers' ability to communicate successfully for the purpose of teaching a foreign language through that language. These three areas are interrelated, and the boundaries might not always be clear. Richards (2017) gives the example of a grammar course, which could cover either content knowledge if it targets grammar as a linguistic domain or pedagogical knowledge if it focuses on teaching grammar to language learners. Teacher discourse skills, in turn, facilitate specific classroom language, building on what is known about the subject and pedagogy. Although the three areas are intertwined, the main focus here is on discourse skills.

One early attempt to investigate the kind of English that teachers need was Elder (1994). She proposes four "aspects of language and language-related ability" (1994, p. 9), namely the ability to use the target language as both the medium and target of instruction, the ability to modify target language input to render it comprehensible to learners, the ability to produce well-formed input for learners, and the ability to draw learners' attention to features of the language (Elder, 1994, pp. 9–11). Building on needs analyses carried out by Elder (1994) and Viète (1998), Elder describes teacher language competence as an underspecified domain which comprises "everything that 'normal' language users might be expected to do" (2001, p. 152) along with a number of specialist skills, including a command of subject-specific and metalinguistic terminology as well as the discourse competence necessary to deliver the subject content effectively in the classroom. Effective classroom delivery, in turn, requires a command of linguistic features such as directives, questioning techniques, rhetorical signalling devices, and simplification strategies to communicate subject content in a comprehensible way.

Illustrating Elder's four aspects, Richards (2017) offers a sequential breakdown of language knowledge and ability in relation to three stages: *before*, *during*, and *after* teaching, as well as a comprehensive list of examples illustrating classroom activities that require specialised discourse skills for each of these stages. *During* the teaching process, for example, teachers need to be able to explain lesson goals, give instructions, use formulaic expressions for classroom routines, define

terminology related to language, monitor students' work, provide corrective feedback, adjust their language for difficulty, illustrate how words are used, develop students' responses, and lead discussion activities, to name but a few. Such activities are examples of instructional scaffolding, which is the process of providing the support learners need in order to reach levels that they would not be able to reach without assistance (Richards, 2017).

Another recent attempt to characterise teachers' classroom language is captured by the notion of *English-for-Teaching* (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015; Young et al., 2014). Dismissing the common misconception that "the more fluent in English, the more effective the teacher," Freeman (2017, p. 32) promotes the concept of English-for-Teaching as one form of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In this view, traditional models of general language proficiency are insufficient to prepare future teachers for using English specifically for teaching purposes. Instead, teachers need to learn the specific English-for-Teaching, that is "the essential English language skills a teacher needs to be able to prepare and enact the lesson in a standardised (usually national) curriculum in English in a way that is recognizable and understandable to other speakers of the language" (Young et al., 2014, p. 5). English-for-Teaching unfolds in the interaction between the teachers' language knowledge, the national curriculum providing the content, and the social and pedagogical encounters in which language use is situated. Within this triangle, teachers use language in three functional areas: managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing students and giving them feedback. Speaking is an important skill in this model, which features in all functional areas. Classroom management, for example, involves the routine of organising students to start an activity. The language involved in such a routine is characterised by directions to students to settle down and start their work. Other speaking-related classroom routines include greeting students, giving instructions and explanations, introducing new vocabulary, and responding to students' oral output during a role play activity (Freeman et al., 2015, p. 137). While this ESP approach to defining classroom language might be criticised as being too focused, narrow in scope, and impoverished, thus representing a somewhat 'reduced' variety of classroom language (see Walsh, 2013), it foregrounds the teachers' tasks and can raise their confidence that their language is appropriate to accomplish their work in English (Freeman et al., 2015).

Another source for characterising the language specific to the classroom is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020). Although the original version of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) has been criticised as being too general a language proficiency framework for the purpose of defining the specifics of language use in the classroom (Freeman et al., 2015), the extended version (Council of Europe, 2020) can be useful in specifying learning outcomes in relation to teachers' language development. In particular, new descriptors for mediation, conceptualised as communicative language activities in which the language user acts as a social agent helping others to create or convey meaning (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90), may have great potential in this respect. Such activities include 'mediating concepts,'

which is defined as “the process of facilitating access to knowledge and concepts for others, particularly if they may be unable to access this directly on their own” and characterised as “a fundamental aspect of parenting, mentoring, teaching and training” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91). This type of mediation has two main aspects: “constructing and elaborating meaning” and “facilitating and stimulating conditions that are conducive to conceptual exchange and development.” Pertinent mediation activities include managing interaction (e.g., taking on different roles according to the needs of the participants and providing appropriate individualised support) and encouraging conceptual talk (e.g., guiding the direction of the talk by targeting questions and encouraging others to elaborate on their reasoning; Council of Europe, 2020, p. 113). Likewise, the mediation strategies listed in the CEFR *Companion Volume*, such as linking new information to previous knowledge, adapting language, breaking down complicated information, or amplifying a dense text (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 118–122), may be helpful in characterising the specific language competence needed by teachers of English. In contrast to the models mentioned above, mapping out as they do a horizontal dimension consisting of possible parameters of teacher language competence, the CEFR also offers a vertical dimension of ascending reference levels for describing teacher language proficiency. For example, the ability to amplify a dense text progresses from a focus on providing repetition and additional illustrations at B1 and B2 to conceptual elaboration, explanation, and helpful details at the C levels (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 122).

The conceptualisation of English teachers’ language competence as a specialised set of abilities has potential implications for teacher education programmes. Rather than, or in addition to, general (academic) language proficiency, courses should focus on the specific language abilities teachers need for their work in the classroom. The survey presented in the following sections is situated in this context of reshaping the design of language competence courses for pre-service teachers of English.

28.3 Research Questions

The specific purpose of the survey was to analyse the perceived learning needs of pre-service English teachers in relation to speaking ability as a basis for designing the ASSET course. While university language courses are often developed intuitively based on the expertise and experience of the teachers, the ASSET course designers exploited the benefits of consulting students at the planning stage. In line with the concept of the negotiated curriculum (Nunan, 1988), students contributed to defining the course content by participating in a needs analysis. This form of participation has the potential to create a sense of involvement and to support a constructive evaluation of what happens in the classroom, as content that is considered to accord with the perceived needs is more likely to be endorsed by the students (Oscarson, 2014). The survey was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English in relation to speaking ability?
2. How should the existing speaking course (PPOCS 2) be adapted to suit the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English?

28.4 Methodology

28.4.1 Participants

The study was conducted in the form of a questionnaire survey, with data gathered in the summer semester 2016 among 73 undergraduate students in the old teacher education programme who had just completed the PPOCS 2 course. With 57 female (78.1%) and 16 male (21.9%) participants, the gender imbalance was considerable but mirrored the overall gender ratio of students at the department. The respondents had been studying at university for a minimum of five semesters, with about one third ($n = 27$) studying for more than eight semesters.

As regards teaching experience, 46.6% ($n = 34$) of the participants reported to be doing what they were required to do as part of their degree programme (at the most, they would have observed ten and taught five English lessons, the latter possibly in tandem with peers); 53.4% ($n = 39$) of the participants indicated that they had additional teaching experience. Only a minority of participants (11.0%, $n = 8$) reported to be practising teachers in an Austrian school context alongside their studies.

28.4.2 Questionnaire

The main instrument used in this survey was a pencil-and-paper questionnaire administered in class with a series of attitudinal items. Most items were selected response; two were in an open-ended format. A small number of factual items at the end of the questionnaire concerned the participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, semester of study, and teaching experience. In accordance with the research questions, the questionnaire focused on the topics and specific speaking skills needed by teachers of English as well as students' opinions about the existing PPOCS 2 course.

The body of the questionnaire was divided into five parts: Part one contained multi-item Likert-type scales with six answer categories: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) partly agree, (4) slightly disagree, (5) disagree, and (6) strongly disagree (Tseng et al., 2006). The statements referred to the respondents' beliefs about English teachers' speaking skills (5 items), their attitudes towards the PPOCS 2 course (6 items), and a self-evaluation of their own speaking skills (4 items). To minimise response bias and prevent participants from simply repeating previous

answers, the items were presented in a random order. Part two consisted of a percentage rating scale for students to evaluate their level of confidence in a number of language functions for classroom purposes, for example giving instructions, simplifying a complex topic, explaining an abstract idea, checking for understanding, and eliciting responses from others. Students rated how confident they are in their ability to perform each of these activities in English on a percentage rating scale from 0% ('no confidence') to 100% ('high confidence'). Part three was a selection task in which students chose the top ten topics out of 32 that a speaking course for future teachers of English should cover. Part four was a ranking scale item in which students ranked eight key areas of expertise for teachers of English from most important to least important. Part five included two open-ended short-answer items in relation to what students need to do to improve their English for classroom purposes and what they would do to make PPOCS 2 more relevant to future teachers of English.

The questionnaire items were based on a review of the relevant literature (see Sect. 28.2). They were honed in several loops of feedback and revision involving comments from colleagues as well as informal trialling with a class similar to the target population. The questionnaire was administered in four groups as part of a regular lesson.

28.5 Results

28.5.1 *Student Opinions About Key Points*

The first part of the questionnaire concentrated on students' attitudes towards English teachers' speaking ability, the PPOCS 2 course, and their own speaking ability. The results of this part are presented in Fig. 28.1. The following subsections describe these results grouped according to the main constructs.

28.5.1.1 English Teachers' Speaking Ability

As can be seen in Table 28.1, the vast majority of the respondents (87.5%, $n = 63$) agreed or tended to agree that speaking is the most important language skill for teachers of English, with 22.2% ($n = 16$) agreeing strongly. The level of consensus was particularly high in relation to two types of speaking skills: interaction and presentation skills. All participants thought that teachers of English need to have good interaction skills, with more than three quarters (76.7%, $n = 56$) agreeing strongly. The equivalent item relating to presentation skills yielded practically identical results. Opinions were more divided on the question as to whether English teachers should be able to speak like native speakers, although with 56.1% ($n = 41$) expressing agreement without reservation, the overall tendency was still clearly in favour of a native-like accent. When this question was related to their own pronunciation (as opposed to that of English teachers in general), students valued a

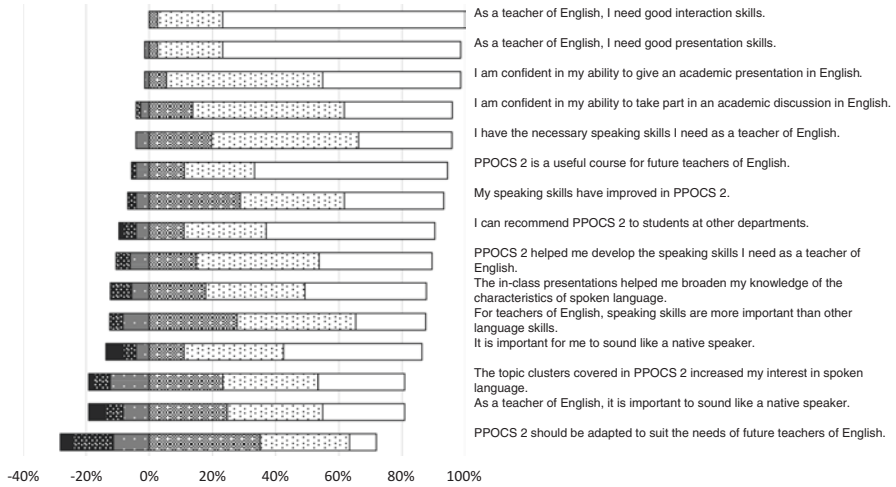


Fig. 28.1 Students’ attitudes towards speaking ability and PPOCS 2 (answer categories from left to right: strongly disagree [black], disagree, slightly disagree, partly agree, agree, strongly agree [white])

Table 28.1 Students’ attitudes towards English teachers’ speaking ability

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
For teachers of English, speaking skills are more important than other language skills.	72	22.2	37.5	27.8	8.3	4.2	0	2.35	1.05
As a teacher of English, I need good interaction skills.	73	76.7	20.5	2.7	0	0	0	1.26	0.50
As a teacher of English, I need good presentation skills.	73	75.3	20.5	2.7	1.4	0	0	1.30	0.59
As a teacher of English, it is important to sound like a native speaker.	73	26.0	30.1	24.7	8.2	5.5	5.5	2.53	1.40
It is important for me to sound like a native speaker.	73	43.8	31.5	11.0	4.1	4.1	5.5	2.10	1.41

Note. Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

native-like accent even more highly: while 26.0% ($n = 19$) strongly agreed that it is important for English teachers to sound like a native speaker, as many as 43.8% ($n = 32$) strongly agreed when it came to their own pronunciation.

28.5.1.2 Attitudes Towards the PPOCS 2 Course

The items relating to PPOCS 2 revealed that students were generally quite satisfied with the course and its outcomes. Table 28.2 shows that, overall, 80.8% ($n = 59$) agreed or tended to agree that the topic clusters they covered (for example, accents and attitudes, culture and social interaction, spoken language and the media, new developments in pronunciation) had stimulated their interest in spoken language. Furthermore, 87.7% ($n = 64$) agreed or tended to agree that the compulsory in-class

Table 28.2 Students' attitudes towards PPOCS 2

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The topic clusters covered in PPOCS 2 increased my interest in spoken language.	73	27.4	30.1	23.3	12.3	5.5	1.4	2.42	1.25
The in-class presentations helped me broaden my knowledge of the characteristics of spoken language.	73	38.4	31.5	17.8	5.5	6.8	0	2.11	1.19
PPOCS 2 is a useful course for future teachers of English.	72	61.1	22.2	11.1	4.2	1.4	0	1.63	0.94
PPOCS 2 helped me develop the speaking skills I need as a teacher of English.	67	35.8	38.8	14.9	6.0	4.5	0	2.04	1.08
PPOCS 2 should be adapted to suit the needs of future teachers of English.	71	8.5	28.2	35.2	11.3	12.7	4.2	3.04	1.28
I can recommend PPOCS 2 to students at other departments.	73	53.4	26.0	11.0	4.1	4.1	1.4	1.84	1.18

Note. Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

presentations, which were accompanied by a range of reflection, feedback, and revision activities, had helped them to broaden their understanding of the characteristics of spoken language. Although PPOCS 2 does not have an explicit teaching focus, the respondents found the course highly relevant to language teachers. As many as 94.4% ($n = 68$) considered PPOCS 2 to be useful for future English teachers, with 61.1% ($n = 44$) even agreeing strongly; 89.5% ($n = 60$) thought the course was helpful in developing the speaking skills required as a teacher of English. The perceived suitability of PPOCS 2 for future teachers of English was evidenced by the fact that the responses to the question as to whether the course should be adapted to the needs of future teachers of English were more tightly clustered around the central answer categories compared to the other items referring to PPOCS 2. The negative answer categories reflecting no need to change the course were selected relatively frequently as well, with 28.2% ($n = 20$) disagreeing or tending to disagree. Nevertheless, about one third (36.7%, $n = 26$) agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to the syllabus should be made to meet teachers' needs. Overall, 79.4% ($n = 58$) would recommend PPOCS 2 to students at other departments without reservation.

28.5.1.3 Students' Own Speaking Ability

With regard to their own speaking ability, the students generally seemed quite confident. From the data in Table 28.3, it can be seen that as many as 93.1% ($n = 68$) agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident in their ability to give academic presentations, which is in line with the strong emphasis PPOCS 2 places on that skill. The agreement was somewhat less strong in relation to discussion skills, with 34.2% ($n = 25$) agreeing strongly that they are confident in their ability to take part in an academic discussion in English, compared to 43.8% ($n = 32$) agreeing strongly in relation to presentation skills. Particularly pertinent to the purposes of this study, 76.1% ($n = 54$) agreed or even strongly agreed that they have the necessary speaking skills required as a teacher of English; however, with one fifth of the respondents (19.7%, $n = 14$) agreeing only partly, there was less consensus compared to the previous items. Finally, the students believed that their speaking skills had improved in PPOCS 2, although at 28.8% ($n = 21$) the number of students agreeing only partly is the highest in this set of items. Table 28.3 presents the results in more detail.

28.5.2 Confidence in Teaching-Related Speaking Skills

When rating their level of confidence in a number of teaching-related language functions on a percentage scale, where 0% indicates no confidence and 100% indicates high confidence, students selected on average between 70% and just under 90% for the most part. Only one function, namely reprimanding others for poor work, had a comparatively low mean rating of 63.9% ($SD = 25.55$). The opposite

Table 28.3 Students' self-evaluation of their speaking ability

Items	Total count	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am confident in my ability to give an academic presentation in English.	73	43.8	49.3	5.5	1.4	0	0	1.64	0.63
I am confident in my ability to take part in an academic discussion in English.	73	34.2	47.9	13.7	2.7	1.4	0	1.89	0.84
I have the necessary speaking skills I need as a teacher of English.	71	29.6	46.5	19.7	4.2	0	0	1.99	0.82
My speaking skills have improved in PPOCS 2.	73	31.5	32.9	28.8	4.1	2.7	0	2.14	1.00

Note. Category values: (1) strongly agree – (6) strongly disagree

activity, praising others for good work, ranked at the other end of the spectrum ($M = 87.9$, $SD = 13.74$). Table 28.4 lists the skills and functions according to their mean ratings, ranging from highest to lowest confidence.

28.5.3 Topics to Be Covered

According to the participants, the top ten topics that a speaking competence course for future teachers of English should cover comprise giving feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, classroom management, acquisition of pronunciation, teaching of pronunciation, elicitation techniques, assessing speaking, and motivation through body language. Table 28.5 provides the complete list of topics in order of priority. As can be seen, the first five topics listed were selected by more than half of the respondents. At the opposite end, theoretical models of speaking, coursebook analysis, teaching-related spoken genres, multi-modal talk, and examiner behaviour were the least frequently selected topics.

Table 28.4 Students' confidence in teaching-related speaking skills

Language skills and functions	Total count	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Praising others for good work	73	87.9	13.74
2. Checking for understanding	73	83.8	15.42
3. Passing on factual information	73	82.3	14.29
4. Eliciting responses from others	73	80.4	14.85
5. Giving constructive feedback	73	80.1	17.68
6. Asking questions that help others respond correctly	73	79.5	15.54
7. Summarising a written text orally	73	78.5	14.50
8. Encouraging participation in activities	73	78.1	17.13
9. Giving clear instructions	73	77.4	13.23
10. Managing group activities	58	76.9	18.47
11. Simplifying a complex topic	73	75.6	14.72
12. Elaborating on someone else's idea	73	75.5	15.28
13. Guiding others towards a particular response	73	74.2	15.89
14. Telling an exciting story	73	73.3	23.92
15. Illustrating an abstract concept	73	72.7	14.55
16. Using different questioning techniques	73	72.2	19.31
17. Encouraging others to construct new meaning	72	71.9	16.33
18. Reformulating incorrect language without drawing attention to the error	73	71.5	20.32
19. Explaining an abstract idea	73	71.0	14.55
20. Reprimanding others for poor work	71	63.9	25.55

Note. 100% = 'high confidence'; 0% = 'no confidence'

28.5.4 Areas of Expertise

The results of the ranking task, in which participants ordered eight key areas of expertise in relation to teaching speaking from the most important to the least important, revealed that teaching speaking skills was considered to be the most important area of expertise relative to the other ones. Expertise in spoken genres, by contrast, was by far the least important category. The detailed results are summarised in Table 28.6.

28.5.5 Further Suggestions

The two open-ended questions, "What would you need to do to improve your English speaking skills for classroom purposes?" and "If you could change PPOCS 2 to make it more relevant to future teachers of English, what would you do?", yielded a small corpus of 611 tokens.

Table 28.5 Preferred topics in order of priority

Topics	Total counts	Percent
1. Giving feedback	50	68.5
2. Oral fluency	50	68.5
3. Classroom interaction	47	64.4
4. Speaking (fluency) activities	41	56.2
5. Classroom management	39	53.4
6. Acquisition of pronunciation	33	45.2
7. Teaching of pronunciation	31	42.5
8. Elicitation techniques (e.g., questioning)	30	41.1
9. Assessing speaking skills	30	41.1
10. Motivating through body language	30	41.1
11. Teacher talk	27	37.0
12. Intercultural communication	27	37.0
13. Teaching multicultural classrooms	25	34.2
14. Non-verbal classroom management	22	30.1
15. Turn-taking in the classroom	22	30.1
16. Getting attention through body language	19	26.0
17. English for specific purposes (e.g., business meetings, technical presentations)	19	26.0
18. Providing different levels of support	18	24.7
19. Use of meta-language	17	23.3
20. Creating bonds through body language	17	23.3
21. Teaching English as a Lingua Franca pronunciation	16	21.9
22. Speaking test tasks	16	21.9
23. New developments in teaching speaking	15	20.5
24. Genres in conversation (e.g., storytelling, gossiping)	14	19.2
25. Reinforcing learning through body language	14	19.2
26. Speaking tests	11	15.1
27. Media genres (e.g., interviews, reality shows)	10	13.7
28. Examiner behaviour	9	12.3
29. Multi-modal talk (e.g., text messaging, social networking)	8	11.0
30. Teaching-related spoken genres (e.g., school assemblies, lessons)	5	6.8
31. Coursebook analysis	4	5.5
32. Theoretical models of speaking	0	0.0

Note. $N = 73$

28.5.5.1 Improving Speaking Skills for Classroom Purposes

From a content analysis of the question concerning students' needs, ten key themes emerged. As can be seen in Fig. 28.2, classroom experience and additional opportunities to speak and interact in English were the most frequently mentioned needs. Of all the students who answered this question ($n = 37$), 18.9% ($n = 7$) mentioned that

Table 28.6 Areas of expertise ranked in order of importance

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Teaching speaking skills	33.8	19.7	15.5	5.6	15.1	1.4	5.5	2.8	2.90	2.00
2. Classroom management	29.6	11.3	11.3	11.3	12.7	9.9	7.0	7.0	3.59	2.33
3. Classroom discourse	14.1	25.4	15.5	7.0	12.7	9.9	8.5	7.0	3.77	2.21
4. Giving feedback	7.0	12.7	23.9	21.1	14.1	9.9	9.9	1.4	3.99	1.75
5. Culture and social interaction	14.1	12.7	9.9	14.1	14.1	11.3	12.7	11.3	4.42	2.30
6. Body language	8.5	9.9	12.7	11.3	9.9	22.5	14.1	11.3	4.85	2.17
7. Assessing speaking skills	2.8	7.0	8.5	14.1	9.9	19.7	19.7	18.3	5.51	1.99
8. Spoken genres	1.4	4.2	1.4	12.7	12.7	12.7	19.7	35.2	6.24	1.84

Notes. 1 = the most important; 8 = the least important
 Frequencies in percent
 N = 71

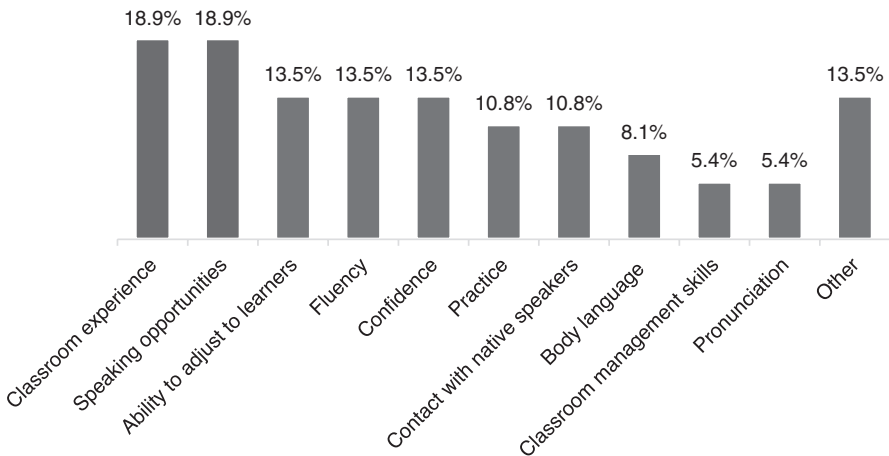


Fig. 28.2 Perceived learning needs in relation to speaking for classroom purposes

they would appreciate the opportunity to speak in a classroom setting: for example, “more experience in the classroom,” “speak English in the classroom,” “more classroom interaction.” Just as many referred to the need for additional speaking opportunities: for example, “more conversations,” “basically just talk more in classes,” and “a lot of speaking time.” The next most frequently expressed needs were the ability to adjust one’s language to the learners’ levels, increased speaking fluency, and confidence, mentioned by 13.5% ($n = 5$) each. This was followed by further practice and more interaction with native speakers (10.8%, $n = 4$ each). Minor topics listed were body language (8.1%, $n = 3$), classroom management skills (5.4%, $n = 2$), and better pronunciation (5.4%, $n = 2$).

28.5.5.2 Changes to PPOCS 2

When asked to suggest ideas for improving the existing PPOCS 2 course to make it more relevant to future teachers of English, the students mentioned six types of changes. As illustrated in Fig. 28.3, by far the most frequently suggested change was to cover pedagogical topics. Of all the students who answered this question ($n = 29$), one third ($n = 10$) would place greater emphasis on pedagogically oriented topics. For example, one participant suggested spending “more time to focus on teaching-specific topics;” another one would “draw the attention to teaching topics and away from the academic context.” As many as 20.7% ($n = 6$) explicitly stated that no changes to the current course concept were necessary. One participant, for example, noted that “the course is highly relevant, covering necessary topics to a great extent.” Another one made a clear distinction between language competence courses and teaching methodology courses when she wrote, “I think [PPOCS 2] already fits the needs; having good presentation and interaction skills helps at being a teacher. Other skills like conducting a lesson are part of other classes.” Another recurrent theme in the responses was teaching practice, with 17.2% ($n = 5$) advocating integrating real-world teaching into the current syllabus. Less frequently suggested changes included a greater focus on what could be subsumed under the general headings of classroom management (e.g., “focus on language and body language for managing a group that might not be 100% cooperative;” “give more information on how to speak with students, certain ways of dealing with more ‘complicated’ students”), organisational changes (e.g., separate courses for MA and MEd students, double the number of hours per week, two semesters instead of one), and changes to the exam.

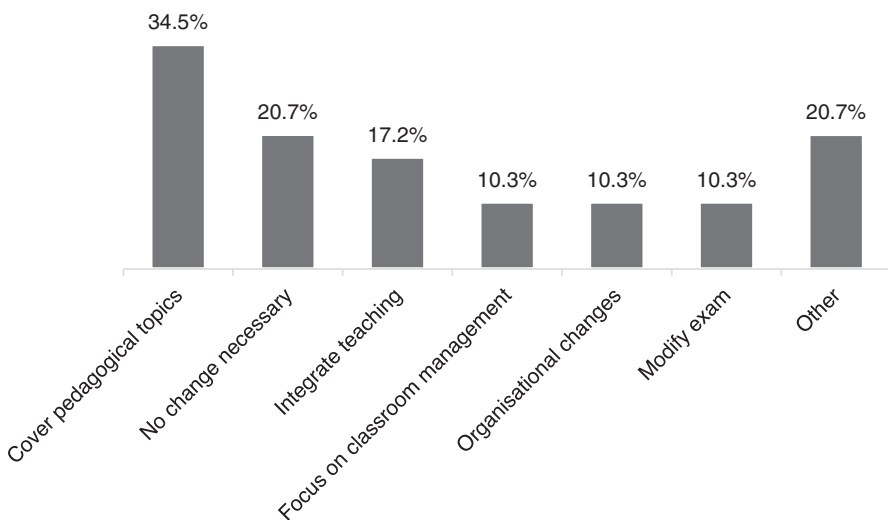


Fig. 28.3 Suggested changes to PPOCS 2

28.6 Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire survey clearly show that the participating students consider speaking to be a very important language skill for teachers of English. In particular, good interaction and presentation skills are regarded as absolutely crucial in the context of language teaching. The great value attached to speaking skills seems to justify, at least from the students' perspective, the provision of speaking competence courses specifically designed for future teachers. It also supports the view that the speaking ability required to teach English in and through English should be the focus of explicit instruction and offered as part of pre-service teacher education as opposed to on-the-job learning.

With respect to the first research question, which relates to the perceived language learning needs of pre-service teachers of English, it was established that the students were generally quite confident about their speaking skills, not only in regard to formal presentations and interactions, but also as far as more specifically teaching-related speaking skills are concerned. The majority believed that they have the speaking skills they need for their roles as English teachers, both holistically in terms of their overall speaking ability and analytically in terms of a number of language functions. In contrast to findings in other contexts (Butler, 2004; Elder, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), only a small minority reported a lack of language competence needed for their roles as English teachers. On the one hand, these findings seem to demonstrate the effectiveness of the PPOCS 2 approach, not just for students in the BA programme but also for students doing a teaching degree. This is supported by the fact that, unexpectedly, many students did not feel that PPOCS 2 should be adapted for future teachers. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind a possible bias in the responses: although the self-assessment of advanced-level learners can be reasonably accurate (Oscarson, 2014), students may, due to their inexperience or lack of pedagogical knowledge, have had a somewhat limited understanding of what speaking skills the teaching job really involves, therefore overestimating their competence and failing to recognise gaps in their skill set.

What many students did recognise is their need for additional speaking practice, especially in terms of fluency. Both a larger number of speaking opportunities and explicit practice were among the most frequently stated learning needs. These findings accord with Thornbury's (2012) observation that even advanced learners of a language with a sound knowledge of the target language systems often find it hard to activate this knowledge in a real-time speaking situation. The students' self-reported needs thus seem to reflect the view that learning to speak a second language is an incremental, long-term project in the course of which the process of accessing and applying the knowledge that is relevant to speaking becomes automatised through loops of practice and feedback (DeKeyser, 2007). Many students would like to combine speaking practice with classroom experience, pointing towards a "situational approach" to speaking instruction (Thornbury, 2012, p. 203), where typical speech events characteristic of a classroom context are presented and practised, for example in the form of peer teaching and classroom simulation.

More specifically, explicit instruction seems to be desirable in relation to three areas: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. Firstly, students may benefit from instruction in giving feedback. While they feel confident about praising others for good work and giving positive feedback, they are less confident about negative or more complex forms of feedback, such as expressing disapproval or reformulating incorrect language without drawing attention to the error.

Secondly, students seem to need focused instruction in mediation. As can be seen in Table 28.4, students felt less confident about encouraging others to construct meaning, illustrating an abstract concept, or simplifying a complex topic, which are examples of what the CEFR *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) refers to as ‘mediating concepts’ and ‘mediation strategies.’ Whereas the process of mediating concepts includes activities that help others access knowledge and concepts they would normally be unable to access by themselves (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91), mediation strategies represent the techniques chosen by a mediator to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 117–118), such as linking unknown content to familiar content, breaking down complex ideas, and adapting language to make it more accessible. Such accommodation to support learning is roughly equivalent to what Elder (1994) refers to as “the ability to modify target language input to render it comprehensible to learners” (p. 9). Based on these findings, a mediation component addressing such functions should feature prominently in a language competence programme for future teachers of English.

Finally, instructional scaffolding seems to be an area that deserves attention. The students did not feel entirely confident about using different questioning techniques, guiding others towards a particular response, or elaborating on someone else’s ideas. All these functions are related to the support teachers give to learners to enhance learning, usually in an interactive process of co-constructing meaning that is specifically tailored to the needs of the learners and is said to take place in the learners’ zones of proximal development, a concept that goes back to Vygotsky (1978) and is typically understood as the learning that emerges when students are given adequate assistance and guidance (Walqui, 2006). Providing adequate assistance that helps learners to accomplish tasks that they would not yet be able to do on their own may involve specific language skills such as questioning techniques to elicit an expected response or to monitor understanding, which are among the specialist skills identified by Elder (2001). In this regard, the results are consistent with Richard’s (2017) observation that “language proficiency can be presumed to play an important role in determining the effectiveness with which the teacher can provide support for scaffolded learning” (p. 17).

With respect to the second research question, which was intended to elicit students’ views on how the current PPOCS 2 course should be adapted to meet the perceived needs of future English teachers, the questionnaire survey yielded two important insights. On the one hand, the students seemed to be well satisfied with the existing syllabus, both in terms of the course foci and the learning outcomes, with a relatively clear consensus about the usefulness of the course for future teachers of English. This finding empirically justifies the decision made by the course designers to adapt the existing syllabus rather than to devise an entirely new concept.

On the other hand, some students did recommend adapting the syllabus to suit future teachers' needs. The suggested changes primarily concern the choice of topics covered in the course. The topic clusters, which form the basis of the students' in-class and exam presentations, should ideally be more pedagogical in orientation. The desired topics clearly reflect a preference for teaching-related, practically relevant topics, such as giving feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, and classroom management, over more theoretical topics, such as models of speaking, coursebook analysis, or genre analysis. Incidentally, the preferred topics roughly correspond to students' perceived needs in relation to their own speaking skills: classroom experience, speaking opportunities, and fluency. These findings support a content-based approach to language teaching, which integrates content and language learning by exposing students to relevant content in context and to meaningful activities or scenarios that mirror the students' future professional realities more closely.

The findings have to be seen in the light of some limitations. Besides the small sample size, perhaps one of the most important limitations lies in the fact that the survey revealed only *perceived* needs of pre-service teachers of English, which may not necessarily tally with the students' *real* needs. A complementary methodology involving some form of diagnostic assessment could provide a fuller picture of what students really need. Furthermore, the small amount of teaching experience of many participants may have affected the results; the responses may have been based on vague or erroneous impressions of the speaking tasks and routines that students will face in their future classroom settings. Syllabus design in teacher education programmes should therefore be informed by the needs and views of other stakeholders as well, including lecturers, coordinators, teacher educators, and in-service school teachers. Finally, the results are based on students who had already taken PPOCS 2. It would be interesting to explore the needs of students prior to any speaking course.

28.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a questionnaire survey conducted at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna to explore the perceived learning needs of pre-service teachers of English in relation to speaking. Although students generally felt they are well equipped with the necessary speaking skills to function as English teachers, some learning needs emerged. These needs can be subsumed under three categories: feedback, mediation, and scaffolding. Firstly, while students feel confident about their ability to express praise in English, this is not so much the case when more complex forms of feedback are involved. Secondly, some learning needs seem to exist in relation to the ability to mediate concepts (i.e., the ability to make knowledge and concepts accessible through language in a co-constructive process). Thirdly, learning needs seem to arise in connection with the speaking skills required for effective scaffolding (i.e., the support teachers give to

learners during the learning process which helps the latter to narrow the gap between their current level of ability and the targeted level of ability).

The findings of this survey provided a sound basis for the development of the ASSET syllabus (see Richter, “Advanced Speaking Skills for English Teachers,” [this volume](#)). They shaped the design of the course in terms of the topics covered and the specific discourse skills targeted. Major course topics that emerged from the findings include effective feedback, oral fluency, classroom interaction, speaking activities, and classroom management. Relevant functional areas besides giving feedback, mediating, and scaffolding include communicating (complex) lesson content and organising classroom activities. Delineating topics and functions in this way helped the course designers to formulate tangible, student-centred learning outcomes based on students’ perceived needs. Future directions for the course design might include a stronger integration of content and language learning, of pedagogical knowledge and language competence, with possibly more systematic cooperation between ELC and the Centre for English Language Teacher Education and Research, the specialist group responsible for the pedagogical content at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna.

At a more general level, this study represents a deliberate attempt to involve students in syllabus development from the planning stage on. Participating in a needs analysis gives students the opportunity to contribute to defining the course content. Such student involvement not only has great face validity; it also has the potential to yield more realistic and student-oriented learning outcomes. This empirical approach involving students complements the largely intuitive approach to curriculum and syllabus design in tertiary language education. A key policy priority for curriculum and syllabus designers should therefore be to integrate student input in all phases of the development process.

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