CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. Teaching oral communication remains one of the most challenging aspects of foreign language education. While learners may acquire grammar and vocabulary through

traditional methods, developing fluency, pronunciation, and interactive competence requires authentic practice and exposure. This article examines the key difficulties teachers face in teaching oral communication skills, including learner anxiety, limited classroom time, assessment issues, and lack of authentic contexts. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating communicative methodologies, task-based learning, and digital tools to overcome these challenges. The findings suggest that successful development of oral communication requires a balance between linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency, supported by learner-centered strategies.

Keywords: oral communication, speaking skills, foreign language teaching, communicative competence, classroom challenges.

Introduction. The development of oral communication skills is one of the most essential yet problematic areas in foreign language teaching. While written competence can be taught through exercises and controlled practice, speaking requires dynamic interaction, rapid processing, and confidence. For decades, teachers have acknowledged that helping students to speak fluently in a foreign language is far more challenging than teaching grammar or reading comprehension. In today's interconnected world, oral communication competence is no longer optional but a necessity. International mobility, global employment opportunities, and intercultural exchange make speaking skills a priority. However, learners often face psychological barriers such as fear of mistakes, anxiety about pronunciation, and lack of confidence in spontaneous conversation. Teachers, in turn, are constrained by limited classroom time, large group sizes, and the difficulty of creating authentic speaking contexts. This article addresses the main obstacles in teaching oral communication skills and explores pedagogical strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of instruction.

Literature Review. Research on oral communication in second and foreign language acquisition emphasizes its central role in communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Canale and Swain (1980) identified speaking as an integral component of communicative competence alongside grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic elements. Richards (2008) highlighted that fluency is not only the ability to produce speech but also the capacity to interact effectively and spontaneously.

Scholars such as Horwitz (2001) have documented the pervasive issue of foreign language speaking anxiety, which negatively affects learner performance and willingness to communicate. Nation and Newton (2009) stressed the importance of fluency-oriented practice, while Thornbury (2005) argued for task-based approaches that simulate real-life communication.

More recent studies (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Rao, 2019) have focused on pronunciation instruction, advocating intelligibility over native-like accuracy. Digital technologies, such as speech recognition and virtual exchanges, have also emerged as tools to enhance oral communication practice in classroom and online settings.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative approach through the review and analysis of existing research, teaching practices, and case studies in the field of foreign language pedagogy. Data sources include peer-reviewed articles, textbooks on communicative methodologies, and teacher-reported experiences. The methodology involves: identifying common challenges teachers encounter in teaching oral communication; categorizing these challenges into psychological, methodological, and contextual dimensions; evaluating existing strategies and innovations aimed at overcoming these challenges. This approach allows for a holistic understanding of the problem and provides a foundation for practical recommendations.

Results and Discussion. The findings indicate that teaching oral communication skills presents a set of interrelated challenges:

1. Learner Anxiety and Psychological Barriers. Students often hesitate to speak for fear of making mistakes or being judged. This anxiety reduces participation and limits opportunities for practice. Teachers need to create a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and values communicative effort over perfection.

2. Limited Classroom Time and Group Sizes. Traditional classroom structures rarely allow sufficient speaking practice. Large groups reduce the teacher's ability to provide individual feedback, while limited lesson time often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over speaking activities.

3. Assessment Difficulties. Evaluating oral performance is complex due to its subjective nature. Teachers struggle to balance criteria such as accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and interaction. Overemphasis on accuracy may discourage students from speaking freely.

4. Lack of Authentic Communication Contexts. Classroom dialogues often feel artificial and fail to reflect real-life communicative demands. Without opportunities to use the language meaningfully, learners cannot transfer classroom skills to real situations.

5. Potential Solutions: Communicative and Task-Based Approaches (Role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving activities foster authentic interaction); Integration of Technology (Speech recognition apps, virtual exchanges, and online discussions extend speaking opportunities beyond the classroom); Fluency over Perfection (Prioritizing intelligibility and spontaneous expression reduces anxiety and builds confidence); Learner-Centered Strategies (Encouraging peer interaction, group work, and collaborative tasks promotes active engagement).

Conclusion. Teaching oral communication skills in foreign language classrooms is a demanding but essential endeavor. The main challenges – learner anxiety, time limitations, assessment difficulties, and lack of authentic contexts – require innovative pedagogical responses. By adopting communicative methodologies, integrating digital tools, and creating supportive learning environments, teachers can help learners develop both fluency and confidence. The future of foreign language education lies not in eliminating errors but in empowering students to communicate meaningfully across cultures.

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