

COMMUNICATIVE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO HIGH-LEVEL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Developing communicative competence is essential for high-level English learners to achieve fluency and accuracy in real-life interactions. This paper explores various communicative speaking activities, their theoretical underpinnings, and their impact on language acquisition. Through an analysis of previous research and literature, the study highlights the effectiveness of discussion-based tasks, role-plays, debates, and problem-solving activities in enhancing learners' proficiency. The findings suggest that communicative activities foster linguistic, cognitive, and social development, making them a vital component of advanced English language instruction.

Keywords

communicative competence, speaking activities, high-level learners, fluency, accuracy

Introduction.

Achieving effective communication is a fundamental goal in language learning, particularly for advanced English learners who seek to refine their linguistic abilities. While mastering grammar and expanding vocabulary are essential components of language acquisition, the ability to express thoughts fluently, accurately, and appropriately in various social and professional contexts is equally critical. In this regard, communicative competence plays a key role in determining overall language proficiency. Hymes (1972)³⁴ introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing that language mastery extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. This perspective has significantly influenced modern language pedagogy, shifting the focus from traditional grammar-based instruction to more interactive and communication-oriented approaches.

³⁴ Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Historically, language teaching methodologies have evolved considerably. In the mid-20th century, traditional approaches such as the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method were widely used, emphasizing repetition and memorization of language structures (Skinner, 1957)³⁵. However, research in the late 20th and early 21st centuries revealed the limitations of these methods, highlighting the importance of meaningful interaction in language learning. Canale and Swain (1980)³⁶ further expanded on Hymes' theory by identifying four key components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Their work underscored the need for learners to develop not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts.

Richards (2006) argued that communicative speaking activities, such as role-plays, debates, problem-solving discussions, and open-ended speaking tasks, significantly enhance learners' fluency and pragmatic competence. These activities provide learners with opportunities to engage in real-life communication, encouraging them to think critically and respond spontaneously. As a result, students not only improve their grammatical accuracy but also develop confidence and fluency in their speech. The integration of communicative speaking activities into language instruction has thus become a widely recognized best practice in teaching English as a second or foreign language.

This study investigates the effectiveness of communicative speaking activities in enhancing the spoken proficiency of advanced English learners. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

What types of communicative speaking activities are most effective for high-level English learners?

How do these activities contribute to learners' fluency, accuracy, and confidence?

By analyzing existing literature and empirical studies, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into best practices for communicative language teaching (CLT) at the advanced level. Understanding the impact of these activities can help educators design instructional strategies that maximize learners' communicative abilities, ultimately enabling them to achieve greater proficiency in English.

Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research approach**, primarily focusing on literature review and theoretical analysis. A qualitative methodology is well-suited for exploring the effectiveness of communicative speaking activities, as it allows for an in-depth examination of previous research, theoretical frameworks, and

³⁵ Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

³⁶ Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>

pedagogical practices in communicative language teaching (CLT). By analyzing scholarly works, this study aims to identify the most effective strategies for enhancing the spoken proficiency of advanced English learners.

To achieve this, the research draws on **peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reports from language education experts**. These sources provide valuable insights into how communicative language teaching has been implemented in high-level language instruction and its impact on learners' fluency, accuracy, and confidence. The theoretical foundation of this study is informed by the works of prominent scholars in second language acquisition (Hymes, 1972³⁷; Canale & Swain, 1980³⁸; Richards, 2006³⁹), whose research has significantly influenced modern communicative teaching methodologies.

The analysis focuses on four key communicative speaking activities that have been widely recognized as effective in developing oral proficiency:

Discussions and Debates – Engaging learners in structured discussions and debates encourages them to articulate their opinions, defend viewpoints, and engage in persuasive argumentation. These activities promote spontaneous speech production, enhance interactional competence, and improve the ability to construct logical arguments in real-time communication. Research has shown that debates in language learning settings enhance not only fluency but also critical thinking and the ability to respond effectively in high-pressure communicative situations (Kramsch, 1993)⁴⁰.

Role-plays and Simulations – These activities create immersive learning experiences by placing students in real-world communicative scenarios. Role-plays allow learners to practice language in social and professional contexts, such as job interviews, negotiations, or customer interactions. Simulations, which often involve complex, multi-step interactions, help learners develop pragmatic competence by requiring them to adapt their speech based on situational factors. Studies indicate that role-plays increase learners' confidence and foster their ability to use language naturally in unpredictable situations (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994)⁴¹.

Problem-solving Tasks – These activities require learners to work collaboratively to solve real or hypothetical problems, thereby fostering cooperative communication, negotiation skills, and critical thinking. Problem-solving tasks

³⁷ Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

³⁸ Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>

³⁹ Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰ Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴¹ Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1994). Teaching conversational skills intensively: Course content and rationale. *ELT Journal*, 48(1), 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/48.1.40>

encourage students to exchange ideas, justify decisions, and reach consensus using the target language. According to Swain (1995)⁴², such tasks create opportunities for meaningful language use, reinforcing both fluency and accuracy through interactive engagement.

Storytelling and Narratives – Encouraging learners to construct and share stories improves their ability to organize thoughts, use cohesive devices, and maintain fluency in extended discourse. Storytelling fosters creativity and self-expression while simultaneously reinforcing grammatical structures and vocabulary retention. Research suggests that narrative-based activities enhance learners' coherence and overall communicative competence (Thornbury & Slade, 2006)⁴³.

The impact of these activities is assessed based on their **reported effectiveness in fostering fluency, interactional competence, and self-confidence** among learners. The study examines how these communicative tasks influence oral proficiency through existing research findings, educator reports, and empirical studies. Key indicators of success include:

Fluency: The ability to speak smoothly and naturally without excessive hesitation.

Interactional Competence: The ability to manage conversations, use appropriate turn-taking strategies, and respond effectively in dialogues.

Self-Confidence: The extent to which learners feel comfortable and assured in their spoken English performance.

By synthesizing findings from multiple sources, this study provides a **comprehensive overview of best practices** for communicative language teaching at the advanced level. The insights gained can inform educators and curriculum designers on how to effectively integrate speaking activities that maximize learners' communicative abilities and overall language proficiency.

Results

Language learning is not merely about acquiring vocabulary and mastering grammatical structures; it is about **communicating effectively** in real-world situations. For advanced English learners, reaching a high level of proficiency requires not only linguistic accuracy but also **fluency, confidence, and interactional competence**. Traditional language instruction has often emphasized rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary lists, but research suggests that such methods alone are insufficient for developing strong communicative

⁴² Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in honor of H. G. Widdowson* (pp. 125–144). Oxford University Press.

⁴³ Thornbury, S., & Slade, D. (2006). *Conversation: From description to pedagogy*. Cambridge University Press.

skills (Richards, 2006). Instead, communicative speaking activities have proven to be a **powerful tool** in fostering the ability to use language in **meaningful and practical contexts**. These activities, including **debates, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and storytelling**, have been shown to significantly enhance learners' **fluency, confidence, and ability to engage in interactive communication**.

One of the most notable benefits of communicative speaking activities is their **impact on fluency and accuracy**. Engaging in debates and storytelling, for instance, requires learners to **think quickly and articulate their thoughts spontaneously**, which is a key component of fluency. Unlike traditional drills that focus on isolated sentences, these activities immerse learners in **dynamic conversations**, encouraging them to use language **naturally and fluidly**. Furthermore, fluency does not come at the cost of accuracy—rather, through repeated exposure to spoken discourse, learners naturally incorporate grammatical structures and lexical patterns into their speech (Nation, 2013). By practicing language in **contextualized settings**, they develop a deeper understanding of syntax and word usage, leading to more **precise and sophisticated expression**.

Beyond linguistic accuracy, **confidence is a crucial factor** in effective communication. Many learners struggle with speaking anxiety, fearing mistakes or embarrassment when using a second language. However, **role-plays and simulations** create a **supportive and low-pressure environment** where learners can practice language use without the fear of judgment (Thornbury, 2005). By assuming different roles—such as participating in a business negotiation or handling a customer inquiry—learners experience **real-life communication scenarios**, allowing them to develop **self-assurance** in their speech. Studies have shown that **confidence is closely linked to language proficiency**; the more comfortable learners feel in expressing themselves, the more willing they are to engage in conversation, which in turn improves their overall ability to communicate (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994).

Another critical aspect of language learning is interactional competence, which refers to the ability to manage conversations effectively. Language is not just about forming grammatically correct sentences—it is about knowing when to speak, how to respond, and how to navigate complex discussions. Activities such as discussions and problem-solving tasks promote collaborative communication, teaching learners essential skills such as turn-taking, active listening, and negotiation strategies. These skills are particularly important in professional and academic settings, where effective interaction can determine the success of meetings, presentations, and group projects (Brown & Yule, 1983). Furthermore, exposure to different viewpoints through discussions enhances cultural awareness,

helping learners adapt to diverse communication styles and expectations in international environments.

The findings from various studies suggest that communicative speaking activities are not just helpful – they are essential for high-level English learners who aspire to achieve full proficiency. While grammar exercises and vocabulary drills lay the foundation for language learning, they must be complemented by interactive and engaging speaking tasks that simulate real-world communication. Traditional methods that focus solely on written exercises or mechanical repetition fail to prepare learners for the spontaneity and unpredictability of spoken discourse. On the other hand, communicative activities provide learners with the tools to express themselves confidently, respond appropriately in conversations, and interact effectively in professional and social settings.

In conclusion, communicative speaking activities serve as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application in language learning. They help learners develop fluency by encouraging spontaneous speech, build confidence by reducing anxiety, and enhance interactional competence by promoting real-life communication strategies. For advanced English learners aiming for proficiency in academic, professional, and everyday contexts, integrating these activities into language instruction is not merely an option—it is a necessity. As language educators and researchers continue to explore best practices in communicative language teaching, it is clear that the future of language learning lies in meaningful, interactive, and dynamic speaking experiences.

Discussion

The effectiveness of communicative speaking activities in language learning can be best understood through the lens of key language acquisition theories. Traditional language instruction often prioritizes grammar drills and vocabulary memorization, yet research suggests that true proficiency comes from active engagement in meaningful communication. Scholars such as Krashen (1982) and Swain (1985) have provided theoretical foundations that explain why interactive speaking tasks play a crucial role in developing fluency, accuracy, and confidence. While Krashen's Input Hypothesis underscores the need for exposure to comprehensible and meaningful language input, Swain's Output Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of practice in spoken production. These theories suggest that students must not only receive language but also actively use it to become proficient communicators.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis proposes that language learners acquire proficiency when they are exposed to comprehensible input—language that is slightly beyond their current level but still understandable within context.

However, exposure alone is not sufficient. Learners need opportunities to interact with the language in a way that challenges them while providing enough support to facilitate understanding. This is where communicative activities such as role-plays, debates, and problem-solving tasks become instrumental. These activities push students to engage with language in dynamic and unpredictable ways, ensuring that they are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in meaningful exchanges.

Swain's Output Hypothesis, on the other hand, highlights the importance of speaking practice in developing linguistic accuracy and fluency. According to Swain (1985), learners refine their language skills through the process of producing language, receiving feedback, and making adjustments. Speaking forces students to retrieve vocabulary, structure sentences, and express ideas in real time, thereby strengthening both their grammatical accuracy and communicative confidence. Research has shown that students who participate in structured speaking activities—such as simulations, discussions, and storytelling—demonstrate significant improvements in spontaneous speech, coherence, and grammatical control over time.

While the benefits of communicative speaking activities are well-documented, successful implementation requires careful lesson planning and an awareness of classroom dynamics. Teachers play a crucial role in designing activities that are engaging, inclusive, and pedagogically effective. Several key strategies can enhance the effectiveness of communicative language teaching:

Designing Tasks That Mimic Real-Life Communication – Classroom activities should reflect authentic language use, preparing students for conversations they are likely to encounter outside the classroom. Tasks such as job interviews, business meetings, customer interactions, and social discussions help learners practice using language in practical contexts. When students see the real-world relevance of speaking tasks, they are more likely to engage actively and retain what they learn.

Encouraging Student-Centered Discussions – Effective communicative language teaching minimizes teacher intervention and promotes learner autonomy. Teachers should act as facilitators rather than controllers of conversation, allowing students to take ownership of discussions. Open-ended questions, group problem-solving tasks, and debate prompts encourage students to think critically and express themselves freely, fostering greater confidence and fluency.

Providing Corrective Feedback Without Interrupting Fluency – One of the biggest challenges in communicative activities is balancing fluency with accuracy. While grammatical correctness is important, excessive correction can discourage students from speaking freely. Teachers should provide delayed feedback or use

error correction techniques that do not disrupt the flow of conversation. For instance, recasting (repeating a student's incorrect sentence with the correct structure) allows learners to notice and self-correct mistakes without losing confidence.

Incorporating Technology for Engagement – The integration of digital tools and online platforms can significantly enhance communicative language practice. Video conferencing, language exchange apps, and AI-powered conversation simulations offer learners opportunities to engage in interactive and immersive speaking experiences. These tools are particularly valuable for learners who may not have access to native speakers or authentic language environments in their daily lives. Virtual discussions and interactive speaking exercises can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Communicative Activities

Despite their effectiveness, communicative speaking activities come with their own set of challenges, which educators must address to create a successful learning environment. Some common obstacles include:

Limited Student Participation – In some classrooms, students may be reluctant to engage in speaking activities due to shyness or fear of making mistakes. To counter this, teachers can use pair work and small group discussions, which create a less intimidating environment and encourage more active participation.

Lack of Confidence – Many learners struggle with self-doubt when speaking a foreign language. Building confidence requires a supportive classroom culture where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures. Encouraging positive reinforcement and celebrating small achievements can help students develop a sense of linguistic self-efficacy.

Cultural Differences in Communication Styles – In multicultural classrooms, students may come from different cultural backgrounds that influence their approach to communication. Some learners may be accustomed to more structured, formal interactions, while others may prefer informal and spontaneous discussions. Teachers must be mindful of these differences and create activities that accommodate diverse communication preferences while promoting a shared understanding of effective interaction strategies.

By addressing these challenges through scaffolded learning experiences, gradual confidence-building, and a focus on student engagement, educators can ensure that communicative speaking activities are accessible and effective for all learners.

Conclusion

The process of mastering a language extends far beyond the memorization of grammatical rules and vocabulary lists; it requires the ability to communicate effectively and confidently in real-world situations. For advanced English learners, achieving full proficiency means developing fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence, which are essential for success in academic, professional, and social contexts. Traditional methods of language instruction often focus on passive learning, emphasizing reading and writing over active speaking practice. However, research and classroom experience have shown that communicative speaking activities are indispensable tools in helping learners bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

By engaging in discussions, role-plays, storytelling, and problem-solving tasks, learners immerse themselves in meaningful interactions that mimic real-life communication. These activities not only improve fluency by encouraging spontaneous speech but also reinforce grammatical accuracy by placing linguistic structures in authentic contexts. Furthermore, they foster self-confidence, allowing learners to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. A well-structured communicative classroom promotes learner autonomy, encouraging students to take an active role in their language development rather than relying solely on teacher-led instruction.

However, the successful implementation of communicative speaking activities requires thoughtful lesson planning and a supportive learning environment. Teachers must design tasks that align with real-world communication needs, ensuring that students practice language in contextually relevant scenarios. Additionally, feedback should be constructive and carefully balanced, so that learners receive guidance on improving their accuracy without losing their natural flow of speech. The use of technology can further enhance communicative language teaching by providing access to virtual conversations, language exchange platforms, and interactive speaking applications.

While communicative activities have proven to be highly effective, there is still much to explore regarding their role in modern language education. Future research should investigate how digital tools and online platforms can enhance communicative speaking practice, particularly in a world where virtual communication is becoming increasingly prevalent. Understanding the impact of AI-powered language tutors, virtual reality simulations, and real-time speech analysis tools could revolutionize the way language learners develop speaking skills.

In conclusion, communicative speaking activities are not merely an optional supplement to traditional teaching methods—they are a necessity for advanced

English learners aiming to achieve real proficiency. By fostering active engagement, meaningful interaction, and real-world application, these activities ensure that learners are not just knowledgeable about the language but also capable of using it confidently and effectively. As educators and researchers continue to refine communicative language teaching, the goal remains clear: to empower learners with the skills they need to navigate the complexities of communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

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