

DEVELOPING ORAL SPEECH COMPETENCE IN ELEMENTARY-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

developing oral speech competence is a foundational component of English language learning at the elementary level. Young and beginning learners require structured, and meaningful opportunities to use English for real communication. This paper examines effective pedagogical approaches that support oral language development in elementary learners, including communicative methods, Total Physical Response (TPR), formulaic chunks, multimodal input, and pronunciation scaffolding. Drawing on major second language acquisition (SLA) theories, the discussion synthesizes classroom strategies that promote interaction, comprehensible input, confidence-building, and gradual progression from controlled to independent speaking. The paper concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Introduction. Oral communication lies at the heart of language development, especially for elementary-level learners who are forming their first functional ability in English. Oral speech competence involves producing comprehensible and meaningful language, managing simple interactions, and expressing basic ideas in appropriate contexts. At the beginning stages of learning, students often face limitations in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical control, which can create barriers to participation. In addition, psychological factors—such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes—can further inhibit early oral production. For these reasons, teachers must implement pedagogically sound methods that reduce pressure, provide clear models, and encourage communicative use of English.

SLA theories provide important insights into how young learners acquire oral language. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current level. Long (1996) highlights the role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in promoting language development. Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis explains that opportunities for production help learners notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge. Together, these theories provide a strong conceptual basis for designing instruction that supports beginners' oral development.

Main part. Developing oral speech competence in elementary-level learners relies heavily on the quality of input they receive. Teachers must consistently provide simplified but natural English supported with gestures, visuals, and real objects. Such input helps learners

understand new words and structures and builds the foundation for later production. Classroom routines conducted in English—such as greetings, instructions, and short classroom interactions—also expose learners to repeated language patterns that become familiar over time.

Interaction plays a crucial role in oral development. Even at low proficiency levels, learners can engage in simple, meaningful exchanges when tasks are well structured. Activities such as pair dialogues, short role plays, and information gap tasks create natural communicative purposes. Interaction allows students to ask for clarification, repeat information, and modify their speech to be understood, processes that are fundamental to oral development according to Long (1996). When activities are designed with visual support and sentence frames, even beginners can participate successfully.

Formulaic language is another essential component of early oral competence. Beginnings learners benefit greatly from learning useful chunks such as *My name is...*, *I like...*, *Can I have...?*, and *I don't understand*. Nation (2013) notes that formulaic sequences allow learners to communicate with fluency before they fully master grammar. These expressions act as linguistic building blocks that can later be expanded into longer, more complex utterances. Teaching chunks reduces cognitive load and increases learners' confidence to speak.

Total Physical Response (TPR) is especially effective for elementary-level learners because it links language to physical action. When students respond to commands by moving, they demonstrate comprehension without being pressured to produce language prematurely. Over time, learners begin giving commands themselves, gradually shifting from comprehension to production. Asher (2009) emphasizes that TPR mimics natural first-language acquisition, in which listening precedes speaking. This method also lowers anxiety, which is crucial for young learners.

Pronunciation support is important even in early stages of learning. Research by Lightbown and Spada (2013) shows that early attention to pronunciation improves intelligibility and prevents fossilization of inaccurate sound patterns. Teachers can help learners by modeling sounds clearly, using minimal pairs, and incorporating chants and songs that highlight rhythm and intonation. Pronunciation activities must be enjoyable and low-stress, focusing on clarity rather than perfection.

Storytelling contributes significantly to oral development because it offers rich, contextualized language input. When teachers tell or read simple stories supported by pictures, learners acquire new vocabulary and internalize sentence patterns naturally. Cameron (2001) notes that stories motivate young learners and stimulate imagination, making language more memorable. After listening to a story, students may describe pictures, retell events using simple sentences, or act out characters. These tasks transition learners from passive listening to active speaking.

Peer interaction further strengthens oral competence. Collaborative activities such as Think-Pair-Share, group problem-solving, and project presentations allow students to use English meaningfully with classmates. Working with peers reduces pressure and increases willingness to speak. Dörnyei (2001) highlights the importance of motivation and positive

classroom atmosphere, noting that learners participate more actively when they feel safe and supported.

Across all these methods, scaffolding remains essential. Teachers must guide learners through stages of language support—from modeling and choral repetition to guided practice and finally independent speaking. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development supports the idea that learners achieve more with guidance than alone. Scaffolds such as sentence starters, graphic organizers, gestures, and picture cues gradually lead learners toward greater autonomy in speaking.

Overall, effective development of oral competence requires teachers to combine rich input, meaningful interaction, formulaic expressions, pronunciation practice, storytelling, and scaffolding. These strategies work together to create a communicative environment in which young learners can develop confidence and functional oral skills.

Conclusion. Oral speech competence in elementary-level English learners develops when instruction provides comprehensible input, opportunities for meaningful interaction, and supportive conditions for early output. Effective strategies include communicative activities, formulaic language instruction, TPR, storytelling, and explicit but gentle pronunciation practice. Scaffolding plays a central role in helping beginners progress from controlled practice to independent communication. As research in SLA suggests, oral development is most successful when learners feel motivated, confident, and engaged. Future studies may explore how digital tools and multimodal platforms can further enhance oral production among young learners.

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