

ENHANCING YOUNG LEARNERS' SPEAKING PROFICIENCY THROUGH ENGAGING CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article discovers that in early childhood education, the ability to speak confidently and effectively in a second language plays a foundational role in a learner's overall language development. This article investigates how diverse classroom activities can foster young learners' speaking skills. Emphasis is placed on the interaction between cognitive development, motivation, and activity design. It also explores how modern technologies and multilingual classroom dynamics influence oral language acquisition. Practical recommendations are presented for language teachers working with primary-level learners in both monolingual and multilingual settings.

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Language Development in Young Learners: As global communication and educational standards evolve, young learners are increasingly exposed to second language environments at earlier stages of schooling. Developing speaking skills is not merely a component of linguistic competence—it is the keystone for communicative success and participation in diverse social contexts. While literacy is often prioritized in language instruction, oral skills are foundational for language acquisition, particularly for children. Speaking enables learners to test hypotheses, negotiate meaning, and engage in immediate feedback loops. In primary education, the classroom becomes a central space where learners encounter structured opportunities to use the target language actively. Therefore, intentional classroom activities, adapted to learners' developmental stages and linguistic backgrounds, are vital for effective speaking development.

Young children learn languages differently than adolescents or adults. They acquire language through active exploration, imitation, and social interaction. Their cognitive development is closely tied to their language use: speaking

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supports thought formation, narrative structure, and categorization of experience. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary, shyness, or lack of exposure outside the classroom can hinder speaking development. Additionally, in multilingual societies or classrooms with English as a foreign language (EFL), learners may have few opportunities to use the target language beyond structured learning time. Teachers must, therefore, bridge the gap by creating language-rich environments in which learners feel safe, curious, and supported. The development of speaking skills in children is grounded in socio-cultural and communicative language learning theories. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in language learning. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates for authentic, meaningful use of language, particularly through tasks that simulate real-life communication.

Types of Speaking Activities for Young Learners: The choice of activities should align with students' interests, developmental needs, and cultural backgrounds. The following categories of speaking activities have shown strong results in building oral skills:

Communicative Drills with Personalization

Although drills are often considered outdated, when combined with personalization, they become valuable tools for reinforcing sentence patterns and vocabulary. For example, instead of mechanical repetition, learners might answer prompts like:

- "I like ___ because ___."
- "My favorite food is ___."

Personalized drills allow learners to embed language within their own experiences.

Dialogues and Conversational Routines

Using functional language (e.g., greetings, requests, questions), learners can participate in controlled conversations such as:

- Buying items in a classroom "shop."
 - Asking a classmate about their weekend.
- These routines build fluency and familiarity with discourse patterns used in everyday life.

Creative and Open-Ended Tasks

Unlike drills, open-ended tasks allow learners to explore language creatively. Examples include:

- Describing a made-up animal.
 - Inventing a superhero and sharing their powers.
- Such tasks encourage flexible use of language, hypothesis testing, and storytelling.

Peer Interviews

Pair learners to ask and answer questions using structured frames.

- "What games do you play?"
- "How many brothers or sisters do you have?"

This builds both social bonds and speaking confidence.

Circle Time and Group Discussions

Classroom "circle time" offers a ritualized context for spontaneous speaking. Learners can

share weekend stories, answer a “question of the day,” or comment on a picture book. These sessions help normalize speaking in front of others and develop narrative fluency.

The Role of Technology in Speaking Development

Apps such as *Puppet Pals* Digital tools and multimedia can significantly enrich speaking instruction, especially in contexts where real-life interaction in the target language is limited.

Digital Storytelling

It allows learners to record their voices while narrating stories or manipulating characters. This blends creativity with pronunciation practice.

Language Learning Games

Interactive speaking games like *Kahoot!*, *Wordwall*, or *Quizlet Live* can be adapted for oral tasks and pronunciation practice, especially in classrooms with digital access.

Sociolinguistic Considerations: In many classrooms, learners may come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Recognizing and valuing these backgrounds enhances motivation and learner identity. Teachers can:

- Encourage code-switching in early tasks to build confidence.
- Use translanguaging strategies to allow learners to express meaning across languages.
- Incorporate cultural elements from students’ home languages into English speaking activities (e.g., sharing traditional stories or songs in both languages).

Multilingualism should be seen as an asset rather than a barrier. Teachers who leverage students’ full linguistic repertoires can foster a deeper, more inclusive approach to speaking development.

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