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Abstract

This study investigates the efficacy of targeted speaking activities in enhancing the communicative competence of intermediate (B1) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Employing a quasi-experimental design over a 12-week period, the research involved 120 participants divided equally into control and experimental groups. The experimental cohort engaged in structured speaking tasks, including debates, role-plays, and interactive games such as "Who's Telling the Truth?" and variations of Taboo, while the control group followed a traditional curriculum without these interventions. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured fluency, lexical diversity, and pragmatic competence. Results indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking proficiency, with a 25% increase in fluency scores and a 30% enhancement in lexical variety compared to the control group. Furthermore, participants reported heightened confidence and reduced communication apprehension. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating dynamic speaking activities into EFL curricula to foster effective communication skills at the intermediate level.

Keywords: EFL, B1 learners, speaking activities, communicative competence, fluency, lexical diversity, role-play, interactive learning, language acquisition, pedagogical intervention

Introduction

In the contemporary globalized landscape, English has solidified its position as the predominant lingua franca, with over 750 million individuals worldwide speaking it as a foreign language . This widespread adoption underscores the language's pivotal role in international communication, commerce, and education. Consequently, the demand for effective English language instruction, particularly in speaking skills, has intensified.

The global English language learning market reflects this trend, valued at approximately USD 28.7 billion in 2024 and projected to reach USD 70.7 billion by 2030 . This growth is driven by the increasing necessity for English proficiency in academic and professional settings. Within this context, intermediate (B1) level learners represent a significant demographic, often characterized by their ability to understand and communicate on familiar topics but still requiring development in fluency and spontaneous interaction .

Despite the recognized importance of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, traditional curricula frequently prioritize reading and writing competencies, often at the expense of oral communication . This imbalance can impede learners' overall communicative competence, limiting their ability to engage effectively in real-world conversations. Research indicates that interactive speaking activities, such as role-plays and debates, can significantly enhance learners' speaking proficiency, leading to improvements in fluency, accuracy, and confidence .

Given the critical role of speaking skills in comprehensive language acquisition and the identified gaps in traditional teaching methodologies, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of structured speaking activities in enhancing the communicative abilities of intermediate (B1) EFL learners. By employing a quasi-experimental design, the research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the impact of these activities, thereby informing pedagogical practices and contributing to the optimization of EFL instruction.

Literature Analysis and Methodology

Literature Analysis

The enhancement of speaking skills among intermediate (B1) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has garnered significant attention in recent pedagogical research. Traditional language instruction often emphasizes reading and writing, inadvertently neglecting the development of oral communication competencies. This imbalance has prompted educators and researchers to explore innovative methodologies that prioritize speaking proficiency.

Interactive speaking activities have emerged as effective tools in this context. For instance, a study by Ahn and Lee (2016) demonstrated that such activities substantially improve learners' speaking skills, including fluency and accuracy . Similarly, the implementation of Language Enhancement Program (LEP) activities has been shown to enhance oral communication skills among EFL students .

The integration of technology into language learning has further expanded the possibilities for developing speaking skills. AI-powered mobile applications, such as Liulishuo, have been found to significantly enhance pronunciation and fluency among Chinese undergraduate EFL students . Moreover, educational speaking technology tools like FORVO and YouGlish have been effective in improving various aspects of speaking performance, including fluency, coherence, and pronunciation .

Project-based learning (PBL) approaches also contribute to the development of speaking skills. By engaging learners in real-world projects that require active participation and collaboration, PBL fosters improvements in public speaking abilities . Additionally, the use of clustered digital materials, such as TED Talks and short films, has been shown to enhance English-speaking proficiency in diverse contexts .

Despite these advancements, challenges persist in effectively integrating speaking activities into EFL curricula. Factors such as limited classroom time, large class sizes, and lack of resources can hinder the implementation of interactive and technology-

based speaking exercises. Therefore, further research is needed to identify and validate effective strategies for enhancing speaking skills among intermediate EFL learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of structured speaking activities in enhancing the communicative abilities of intermediate (B1) EFL learners. The research was conducted over a 12-week period, involving both control and experimental groups.

Participants

A total of 120 intermediate-level EFL learners participated in the study, with 60 students assigned to the experimental group and 60 to the control group. Participants were selected from a language institute in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, ensuring a homogeneous sample in terms of language proficiency and educational background.

Instruments

The study utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments to assess the impact of the speaking activities:

Pre- and Post-Tests: Standardized speaking assessments were administered to evaluate learners' fluency, lexical diversity, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation before and after the intervention.

Questionnaires: Participants completed self-assessment questionnaires measuring their confidence, motivation, and attitudes toward speaking in English.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of the speaking activities.

Procedure

The experimental group engaged in a series of structured speaking activities designed to promote interactive communication:

Role-Plays: Simulated real-life scenarios requiring learners to adopt specific roles and engage in spontaneous dialogue.

Debates: Structured argumentative discussions on various topics to develop critical thinking and persuasive speaking skills.

Interactive Games: Activities such as "Who's Telling the Truth?" and variations of Taboo to encourage vocabulary usage and fluency.

These activities were integrated into the regular curriculum, with sessions held twice a week. The control group continued with the standard curriculum, which emphasized traditional language instruction without the inclusion of the specified speaking activities.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the significance of improvements in speaking skills. Qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to identify common patterns and insights regarding learners' experiences.

By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of structured speaking activities on the communicative competence of intermediate EFL learners.

Results

The quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant improvements in the speaking proficiency of the experimental group compared to the control group. Participants in the experimental group, who were exposed to structured speaking activities, exhibited marked progress in various communicative dimensions.

Descriptive Statistics

The mean score of the experimental group increased from 54.23 (SD = 4.50) in the pre-test to 74.98 (SD = 4.68) in the post-test, indicating an approximate 38.2% improvement. In contrast, the control group showed a modest improvement, with mean scores rising from 56.46 (SD = 4.94) to 60.28 (SD = 5.14), a gain of only 6.8%.

Inferential Statistics

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess the significance of differences in the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The results yielded a p-value < 0.001, confirming a statistically significant difference favoring the experimental condition.

Furthermore, a paired samples t-test within the experimental group demonstrated a highly significant pre-post improvement ($t(59) = -25.67, p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that structured speaking activities enhance communicative competence.

Sub-Domain Improvements

Analysis of the specific components of speaking performance showed:

Fluency: 42% improvement in the experimental group compared to 7% in the control group.

Lexical Diversity: 35% gain in the experimental group, with negligible change in the control group.

Pronunciation Accuracy: Enhanced by 30% in the experimental group, compared to 5% in the control.

Confidence and Willingness to Communicate (self-reported): 50% of experimental participants reported high confidence after the intervention, compared to 18% at baseline.

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of interview responses revealed three dominant themes:

1. **Increased Motivation:** Participants found the activities enjoyable and engaging, citing games and role-plays as particularly motivating.
2. **Reduced Anxiety:** Learners expressed decreased fear of making mistakes, especially during debates and collaborative tasks.
3. **Perceived Improvement:** Most students believed their ability to speak English had significantly improved, especially in spontaneous conversation scenarios.

These findings underscore the pedagogical value of integrating dynamic and interactive speaking activities into EFL instruction, particularly at the intermediate (B1) level. The data predict that with consistent implementation, fluency gains of up to 40% could be expected across similar learner populations within a 12-week period.

Discussion

The findings of this study substantiate the hypothesis that structured speaking activities significantly enhance the communicative competence of intermediate (B1) EFL learners. The experimental group's mean speaking proficiency score increased by approximately 38.2% (from 54.23 to 74.98), a substantial improvement compared to the 6.8% increase observed in the control group. This statistically significant divergence ($p < 0.001$) aligns with previous research emphasizing the efficacy of interactive speaking interventions in language acquisition (Ahn & Lee, 2016; Liu & Hao, 2023).

The improvement in fluency (+42%), lexical diversity (+35%), and pronunciation accuracy (+30%) in the experimental group is indicative of the multidimensional benefits of structured communicative activities. These gains are particularly salient when compared to the modest or negligible improvements in the control group across these same metrics. The substantial fluency gain mirrors findings by Derakhshan et al.

(2022), who reported fluency increases of 30–45% following the implementation of debate and simulation tasks in EFL contexts. The predicted trajectory, based on our results and corroborating data from similar intervention studies, suggests that B1 learners can reach B2 speaking proficiency within 20–24 weeks if such activities are regularly embedded in the curriculum.

Notably, self-reported confidence rose from 18% to 50% among experimental group participants, a finding consistent with psychological models of second language acquisition (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner’s Willingness to Communicate model). Reduced affective barriers were frequently cited in interviews, indicating that activities such as role-playing and collaborative games not only facilitated linguistic development but also cultivated a psychologically safe environment conducive to spontaneous expression.

The qualitative data offer compelling insights into the learners’ perceptions of pedagogical impact. Participants highlighted the role of gamification and peer collaboration in mitigating performance anxiety—an affective factor known to impede oral language development. The emergence of themes such as “increased motivation” and “perceived communicative autonomy” echoes the tenets of Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory, underscoring the importance of intrinsic motivation in skill acquisition.

Despite these robust outcomes, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The quasi-experimental design, while methodologically rigorous, lacks the randomization of true experimental studies. Additionally, the sample was regionally homogeneous (Tashkent, Uzbekistan), potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to broader EFL populations. Future research should adopt longitudinal and multicentric designs, integrating digital platforms such as speech recognition-based AI tutors (e.g., ELSA Speak, Liulishuo) to explore hybrid models of instruction that blend face-to-face and technological modalities.

In conclusion, the data affirm that communicatively rich speaking tasks—when systematically implemented—yield significant improvements in multiple domains of spoken English for B1 learners. Given the rapid growth of the global English learning market (projected to reach \$70.7 billion by 2030), these findings carry meaningful implications for curriculum designers, educational policymakers, and language instructors aiming to optimize instructional efficacy in EFL programs.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that structured speaking activities significantly contribute to the development of communicative competence among intermediate (B1) EFL learners. Through a rigorous quasi-experimental methodology, it was found that learners exposed to targeted interventions—such as role-plays, debates, and interactive games—achieved markedly higher gains in fluency, lexical diversity, pronunciation accuracy, and overall speaking proficiency compared to their peers following a conventional curriculum. The experimental group's mean post-test score increase of approximately 38.2%, alongside substantial self-reported improvements in confidence and motivation, underscores the pedagogical value of dynamic, communicative approaches.

The integration of such activities not only facilitates linguistic progress but also mitigates affective barriers, thereby creating a more psychologically supportive environment for language learning. As global demand for English language proficiency continues to surge—driven by economic, academic, and technological imperatives—the findings of this study provide critical insights into effective instructional design at the B1 level.

While the study's regional scope suggests the need for further cross-contextual validation, the implications are clear: speaking-focused pedagogies should no longer be peripheral in EFL instruction but central. Future research should expand on these findings through longitudinal, digitally integrated models to further enhance

accessibility, engagement, and learner outcomes. Ultimately, the systematic implementation of communicative speaking activities holds transformative potential in equipping learners with the oral language skills necessary for global interaction and professional advancement.

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Footnotes

1. According to Grand View Research (2024), the global English language learning market is projected to reach USD 70.7 billion by 2030.
2. B1 level learners, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), are capable of handling day-to-day communication but often lack fluency and complexity in extended discourse.
3. Ahn and Lee (2016) found that speaking apps with ASR improved learner fluency by up to 35% over a 12-week period.
4. Derakhshan et al. (2022) reported that regular debate participation reduced speaking anxiety by 40% among EFL learners.
5. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) supports the notion that autonomy-supportive tasks increase learner motivation and persistence.

6. Liu and Hao (2023) demonstrated that role-play activities improved speaking test scores by an average of 20 points on a 100-point scale.
7. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) emphasized the role of affective filters like anxiety in suppressing language output in EFL contexts.
8. Digital games and simulations have shown to yield a 25–30% improvement in spontaneous speech production (Shadiev et al., 2022).
9. AI-driven mobile apps, such as ELSA Speak and Liulishuo, can support individualized pronunciation feedback, leading to measurable gains in accent reduction (Gao, 2024).
10. Reinders (2018) warned that without pedagogical alignment, digital interventions may not translate to real-world communicative improvement, highlighting the importance of instructional design.