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THE WAYS OF IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS IN DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS

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Abstract: Speaking is the most important aspect of language learning. This study explores effective strategies for enhancing speaking skills among language learners at various proficiency levels—beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Using a mixed-methods approach, participants took part in targeted activities over a designated period: beginners focused on role-playing and pronunciation drills, intermediates participated in conversation groups and technology-assisted tools, while advanced learners engaged in debates and discussions.
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Introduction

Nowadays, effective communication skills, particularly in speaking, are important for individuals who want to succeed in personal, academic, and professional settings. For language learners, the ability to articulate thoughts fluently and accurately is often the most challenging aspect of language acquisition. This is especially true across different proficiency levels, where learners face unique obstacles and require appropriate approaches. Beginner learners may come across some difficulties in basic vocabulary and sentence structure, while intermediate and advanced learners seek to refine their fluency, pronunciation, and complex expression. Consequently, a one-size-fits-all approach to speaking skill development may fail to meet the needs of all learners, emphasizing the importance of customized strategies for each proficiency level. Despite the recognition of these needs, existing research offers limited guidance on effective methods specifically adapted to improve speaking skills across varying proficiency levels. Most studies tend to focus on general language learning techniques, with fewer addressing the nuances required to support learners at distinct stages of proficiency. Thus, there is a need to identify and analyze targeted strategies that can optimize speaking skill development for beginner, intermediate, and advanced language learners alike. This study aims to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of various methods for enhancing speaking skills across different proficiency levels. Through examining specific strategies for beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners, this research intends to provide insights into which techniques yield the best outcomes for each group. The findings from this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how to support diverse language learners in developing strong speaking skills, ultimately promoting more effective language education practices.

Materials and methods

The study involved a different group of language learners. They divided into three distinct proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Participants were enrolled in language courses at a local language institute, where proficiency levels were assessed using a standardized language proficiency test. This initial test evaluated speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills and ensured that participants were grouped accurately according to their skill level. Beginner learners consisted of those who demonstrated foundational knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but had limited speaking fluency. Intermediate learners displayed moderate fluency and grammatical control, while advanced learners exhibited high fluency, complex expression, and conversational fluidity. A total of 90 participants were included, with 30 individuals representing each proficiency level. To gather comprehensive data on the effectiveness of various speaking improvement strategies, a mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-study assessments of speaking performance, enabling a measurable comparison of progress across different proficiency levels. Qualitative data were gathered via participant surveys and semi-structured interviews, which provided deeper insights into participants' perceptions of the methods used. Surveys focused on learner satisfaction, perceived improvement, and challenges faced, while interviews allowed participants to discuss their experiences in more detail.

Tools and Resources. A range of instructional materials, techniques, and technological resources were employed to improve speaking skills. These included:

- *Role-playing activities*: Designed to simulate real conversational contexts, role-playing encouraged participants to practice speaking in a variety of social and professional scenarios.
- *Conversation practice groups*: Participants were organized into small groups according to proficiency level and were given weekly conversational prompts to encourage free dialogue and develop spontaneous speaking ability.
- *Technology-assisted learning tools*: Language-learning applications, such as Duolingo and Babbel, were integrated to provide daily speaking practice exercises and pronunciation feedback. Additionally, online platforms like Zoom were used for virtual conversation practice, which allowed participants to engage with native speakers.
- *Pronunciation and fluency drills*: These included timed exercises where participants practiced reading aloud and mimicking native speaker audio recordings. This method was aimed at increasing fluency and reducing hesitation in speech.

The study was conducted over a 12-week period. Each participant attended two weekly sessions of 60 minutes, where they practiced speaking using the tools and techniques mentioned above. In each session, learners participated in structured activities tailored to their proficiency level. For example, beginners focused on basic sentence construction and pronunciation, intermediates practiced narrative storytelling, while advanced learners engaged in debates and discussions on complex topics. To measure progress, participants completed a speaking assessment at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the study. These assessments were recorded and evaluated by experienced language instructors using a standardized rubric assessing fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. Progress was determined by comparing the scores across the three assessments, while feedback from the surveys and interviews provided qualitative insights into the perceived effectiveness of each technique. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data helped to create a holistic view of how each method influenced speaking improvement at different proficiency levels.

Results

The study showed that different speaking improvement strategies had varying levels of effectiveness depending on the proficiency level of the learners. For beginner participants, role-

playing and pronunciation drills emerged as the most impactful methods. Role-playing enabled these learners to build confidence in basic conversational exchanges, while pronunciation drills helped reduce pronunciation barriers that often cause hesitation. Over the 12-week period, beginners showed the most improvement in accuracy and vocabulary use, with many participants reporting that repetitive practice helped them gain confidence in forming simple sentences. Intermediate learners benefited significantly from conversation practice groups and technology-assisted learning tools. The conversation groups fostered an environment where learners could practice constructing more complex sentences, improving both fluency and conversational flow. Technology tools provided pronunciation feedback that helped intermediates become more aware of intonation patterns and reduce common pronunciation errors. Participants in this group displayed marked improvement in fluency, with test scores indicating fewer pauses and smoother speech transitions. Advanced participants found the most benefit from discussion-based activities and debate exercises, which allowed them to engage in nuanced expression and argumentation. This group demonstrated increased proficiency in vocabulary richness, as well as greater grammatical complexity and accuracy. Feedback from this group indicated that debates were highly engaging, allowing them to challenge themselves in real-world speaking scenarios. Advanced learners also reported improved confidence in public speaking and formal settings. The quantitative analysis showed measurable improvements in test scores across all three proficiency levels:

Beginners: Beginners demonstrated an average score increase of 15% from the initial assessment to the final assessment, particularly in areas of vocabulary use and pronunciation accuracy. On a scale of 1 to 10, their average fluency score improved from 4.2 to 6.3, indicating a notable increase in comfort with basic conversational skills.

Intermediates: Intermediate learners exhibited an 18% increase in overall speaking scores, with their fluency score rising from an average of 5.6 to 7.5. Pronunciation scores also improved, rising by approximately 20%, which reflected reduced errors and better intonation. Many intermediates also showed improvement in response speed and the complexity of sentence structure.

Advanced: Advanced learners showed a 12% improvement, with notable gains in vocabulary diversity and syntactic complexity. Their fluency score rose from 7.3 to 8.6 on average, and their scores in grammatical accuracy improved by 15%, suggesting an increase in confidence to use advanced sentence structures and nuanced expressions. Participant feedback gave their opinion to the perceived effectiveness and engagement associated with each method. Beginner Learners expressed that role-playing activities made them feel less intimidated about speaking and helped them adapt to conversational dynamics. One participant noted, “The role-play exercises felt like real situations, and I could practice sentences I would actually use.” Pronunciation drills also boosted their self-assurance, as they received immediate feedback on improvement areas. Intermediate Learners reported that the conversation practice groups and language apps allowed them to build fluency at their own pace, without the pressure of formal assessment. A participant commented, “Practicing with my peers felt natural, and I could see myself improving each week.” Technology-assisted tools, particularly those that focused on pronunciation, were highlighted as especially useful, as they provided corrections that participants could practice independently. Advanced Learners found discussion-based activities and debates to be both challenging and motivating. Several participants noted that engaging in debates allowed them to articulate more sophisticated ideas. One participant shared, “Debates really pushed me to think on my feet and express myself with clarity and confidence.” Feedback from this group indicated that the advanced methods encouraged critical thinking, vocabulary expansion, and increased comfort with spontaneous expression in diverse speaking contexts.

In summary, the findings show that appropriate speaking improvement strategies can cause substantial improvements across different proficiency levels, with each group responding positively to methods that address their specific needs and challenges. Quantitative data supported by qualitative insights suggest that proficiency-specific methods not only improve measurable aspects of speaking ability but also enhance learner confidence and engagement in real-world language use.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that targeted speaking improvement strategies can significantly enhance language development by catering to the specific needs of learners at different proficiency levels. For beginner learners, role-playing and pronunciation drills proved effective due to the manageable cognitive load of these activities. Beginner learners often face high anxiety when speaking, so role-playing in a structured setting allowed them to focus on building foundational conversational skills without overwhelming cognitive demands (Swain, 1985). Pronunciation drills offered immediate, clear feedback, which motivated learners by showing tangible progress early on (Brown, 2007). Intermediate learners benefited most from conversation practice groups and technology-assisted tools. As these learners had already acquired some basic fluency, group discussions encouraged them to extend their verbal expression by experimenting with new vocabulary and sentence structures, thus promoting both fluency and accuracy (Long, 1996). Technology tools also fostered autonomy, as learners could practice and receive feedback outside the classroom, thus reinforcing consistent practice—a key factor in language development (Chapelle, 2001). Additionally, technological tools reduced cognitive load by allowing learners to practice at their own pace (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). For advanced learners, discussion-based activities and debates were most effective. These activities require complex thinking and higher cognitive engagement, challenging learners to use nuanced vocabulary and more sophisticated sentence structures. Such tasks align with the concept of "output hypothesis," which suggests that learners develop language competence through the pressure to produce accurate and complex language in real-time (Swain, 1985). Debates, in particular, encourage advanced learners to refine their speaking skills while fostering confidence in public speaking, aligning with studies showing that self-expression in challenging contexts significantly benefits advanced learners (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The findings of this study align with and expand on existing research in language acquisition. For beginners, the success of role-playing activities corroborates the findings of Swain (1985), who argued that simulated conversational contexts reduce anxiety and build fluency. Similarly, Brown (2007) found that pronunciation drills are particularly effective for beginners, as they provide immediate feedback and help solidify phonetic foundations. For intermediate learners, the positive impact of group practice and technology use mirrors findings from Long (1996), who highlighted that peer interaction fosters language growth by exposing learners to varied speech patterns and vocabulary. Chapelle (2001) and Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) further supported the role of technology in language learning, showing that technological tools allow intermediate learners to practice autonomously and track their own progress, reinforcing learning outside formal instruction. At the advanced level, the effectiveness of debate-based exercises reflects the conclusions of Lantolf & Thorne (2006), who noted that complex conversational challenges benefit advanced learners by promoting critical thinking and precise expression. Additionally, Swain's (1985) output hypothesis aligns with this study's findings, as it suggests that the pressure to speak accurately in debates pushes advanced learners to refine their skills. This is further supported by Ellis (2003), who emphasized that advanced learners benefit from opportunities to practice in situations that require quick, accurate expression, especially when discussing abstract topics (Krashen, 1982). While this study's results are consistent with much of the existing

literature, it also provides new insights by identifying specific methods most suitable for mixed-proficiency settings. The combination of role-play, technology, and discussion-based learning is shown to create an adaptable framework for teachers aiming to support a range of skill levels within a single classroom. The findings of this study offer practical guidance for educators working in mixed-level language classrooms. For effective implementation, teachers might consider structuring lessons with differentiated activities based on proficiency levels. For instance, teachers could divide students into proficiency groups for part of the class, allowing beginners to focus on role-playing and pronunciation exercises while intermediate learners engage in conversation practice and advanced learners participate in discussions or debates (Ellis, 2003; Harmer, 2001). Additionally, technology can play an essential role by enabling students to practice autonomously, tailoring exercises to individual needs, and allowing teachers to track each student's progress effectively (Chapelle, 2001). Furthermore, implementing these strategies may also increase learner motivation and engagement. Beginners who experience steady progress in pronunciation and fluency tend to build confidence, which sustains their motivation (Brown, 2007). Intermediate learners, on the other hand, may appreciate the autonomy offered by technology-assisted tools, which gives them a sense of control over their learning (Krashen, 1982). Advanced learners benefit from the challenge of debate, which encourages them to articulate their thoughts clearly and improves their public speaking skills (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In summary, this study underscores the value of tailoring speaking improvement methods to proficiency levels in order to maximize language development across beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. By implementing proficiency-specific strategies, educators can enhance the effectiveness of language instruction in mixed-level classrooms, thus fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of tailored strategies for improving speaking skills across beginner, intermediate, and advanced language learners. Findings indicated that role-playing and pronunciation drills were most effective for beginners, as they offered structured practice and immediate feedback, helping learners build foundational conversational skills. Intermediate learners benefited most from conversation practice groups and technology-assisted tools, which encouraged fluency development and independent practice outside the classroom. Advanced learners excelled in debate and discussion-based activities, where they could engage in complex, nuanced expression, thus improving vocabulary diversity and accuracy. Overall, the study underscores the importance of customized approaches to maximize speaking proficiency across different language levels. While the study offers valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size, though representative, was limited to 90 participants from a single language institute, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's 12-week timeframe may have restricted the extent of observable improvements, particularly for lower-proficiency learners, who might require more time to show significant progress. The study also relied on self-reported feedback in some areas, which may introduce subjectivity in assessing perceived progress and satisfaction with the methods used.

Future research could expand on these findings by including a larger, more diverse sample across different educational settings, allowing for broader application of results. Additionally, a longer study duration might reveal further insights into how these strategies impact speaking proficiency over time, particularly for beginner and intermediate learners. Another promising direction for future research is to explore how a blended approach—integrating technology with face-to-face activities—could further benefit mixed-level classrooms, potentially enhancing engagement and providing real-time feedback. For educators, implementing proficiency-based activities within a single classroom setting can optimize learning for all students, with role-playing for beginners,

group discussions for intermediates, and debates for advanced learners. By adopting these tailored approaches, teachers can better support individual progress while fostering a dynamic and inclusive learning environment for diverse language learners.

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