

Teachers as Catalysts for Developing Speaking Proficiency in Foreign Language Classrooms

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Abstract. *As we approach a world of globalization and rapid advancement of technology, it has become essential for people to speak multiple languages not only to foster their career opportunities, promote personal growth, enable travel abroad, but also to build meaningful relationships. Although reading and writing skills are important in language acquisition, speaking remains the most challenging and anxiety-inducing aspect of a foreign language, highlighting the need for teachers to implement interactive methods, actively guide and motivate students. This difficulty is largely due to common traditional way of teaching students through rote memorization, grammar, test-based classes, and the feeling of reluctance to learn a language rather than authentic communication, thereby reducing students' motivation and passion. However teachers can create an environment, where students feel nothing but passion, energy, and eagerness to acquire a new language by facilitating modern and student-centered classes. It is usually lack of confidence and practical skills that many students struggle from. Speaking ability goes beyond the mere use of words to express thoughts; it also requires emotional engagement, creativity, and spontaneity. The greatest problem many people face today is finding effective, innovative, and accessible methods to improve speaking ability in a foreign language. This article examines the indispensable role of teachers in helping learners enhance their speaking proficiency through social learning approaches and evidence-based practical techniques such as debates, drama, and storytelling.*

Key words: *Speaking proficiency, confidence, EFL classes, oral skills, interactive approaches, film-based techniques, storytelling.*

Introduction. Speaking a foreign language is beneficial not only for fostering global communication but also for forming both meaningful and lasting relationships. It serves not only as a means of preserving cultural heritage through direct interaction, but as an important tool to foster international diplomacy as well. This highlights the need for teachers to guide students beyond memorization and grammar toward real and meaningful communication. Because it preserves cultural nuances that can be missed by AI tools, enhances memory and problem-solving skills, and promotes career development, enabling people to have wider career opportunities [7]. Research also shows that multilingualism enhances executive function, a set of mental skills that help us manage our thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to achieve goals, and attentional control [4].

If students can speak another language, they are better equipped to share ideas and knowledge through speech. Moreover, it helps students build greater confidence in expressing their thoughts and emotions. Such skills contribute to the development of a generation capable of engaging in international dialogue, which is valuable for the country's progress in global relations and diplomacy

[16]. However, this largely depends on how effectively students are taught to communicate, highlighting the crucial role teachers play in developing their speaking abilities.

Main part. These personal and societal benefits are threatened by formal language learning in many education systems. According to British Council, in the UK, enrollment in foreign language subjects at the GCSE level (the main secondary school qualification has been declining, particularly in less affluent schools [3]. This trend challenges teachers to find innovative techniques that make language learning process more interesting and engaging for students.

Studies show that many students tend to avoid practising speaking a foreign language in the classroom because they are afraid of making grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation mistakes [13]. Teachers can help students overcome this fear by fostering self-confidence, providing positive reinforcement and guidance for effective progress [12].

Teachers play a vital role in shaping students' speaking ability by creating interactive, motivational, and emotionally supportive environment. This environment can reduce student's fear and anxiety, thereby boosting their self-confidence and esteem in the classroom. Consequently, peer relationships, student centered lessons, and physical space play a vital role in student's engagement [17]. In many educational systems, studying still heavily relies on traditional methods such as rote memorization, grammar drills, and test-based assessment, which discourages many learners to improve speaking. Conversely, modern techniques provided by professional teachers encourage people to convey their thoughts freely, speak out in public, and communicate globally.

Teachers influence the effectiveness of the lessons not only through linguistic inputs but also with emotional support. Researches consistently illustrate that students' willingness to learn a language mainly depends on the teacher's enthusiasm, feedback style, and energy [6].

There are several key features that are counted for one of the most effective modern ways of acquiring a new language.

1. Debates and Speaking clubs. Teachers can structure debates to ensure that everyone participates, guide them to communicate and express opinions freely while respecting one another's responses and provide useful feedback and logical reasoning. Debates and public speaking are one of the most effective techniques to improve oral skills. Debates provide a platform for students to improve fluency, argumentation, and critical thinking. Debates and public speaking help learners think spontaneously, make answers clear and precise, manage anxiety while speaking, thereby fostering self-confidence. Research conducted in Cambodia elaborates on the effectiveness of student engaging classroom activities such as debates. It demonstrates that students who were engaged in English debates had higher levels of oral skills compared to those who were taught in traditional lecture-based classes [2]. Similarly, another study was carried out in Indonesia, highlighting the importance and benefits of debates in EFL learning classes. This approach particularly underlines the improvement of XI-grade students' vocabulary range and pronunciation in the target language [11].

2. Drama activities. Drama-based learning has also become an important part of modern ways of learning a foreign language. It encourages students not only to engage emotionally and socially, but more importantly to express themselves confidently and creatively. Teachers play a central role in designing dramas, assigning roles, and guiding students during the performance, increasing students' interest in language learning process. Acting on roles, improvising situations, and performing dialogues, students experience language as an authentic way of communication rather than a subject for memorized dialogues. As Mahrous noted in his study conducted in Egypt, drama-based classes reduces anxiety and stress during speaking. While students are focused on role-play, mime, improvisation, and simulation, they tend to forget about their fear of speaking, thereby improving oral proficiency [10]. Additionally, incorporating drama techniques in EFL classrooms can significantly improve students' pronunciation, clarity, accuracy, and overall communicative competence [5].

3. Watching movies in a foreign language. Another noteworthy technique that can be implemented by professional teachers in EFL classrooms is watching films in a target language and expressing

personal opinions about them afterward. Films also help learners immerse themselves in the language they are learning, promoting faster growth. If students watch movies in a foreign language, they can not only enhance their comprehension, but also improve critical thinking in a new language by retelling the story and sharing their viewpoints. This process helps students shape language skills and build confidence in speaking. According to Teng, using films as a part of modern EFL teaching classroom methods improves students' listening abilities, comprehension, and pronunciation accuracy, which in turn strengthens speaking fluency [15]. Also, incorporating film-based lessons can boost learners' vocabulary range; since words and expressions in certain movie scenes are often repeated, helping students recall them spontaneously and use them actively [14].

4. Pronunciation and Fluency Workshops. This approach has been proven to be highly efficient in improving students' oral competence if guided properly by teachers. Such workshops combine structured oral activities such as pronunciation drills, intonation and rhythm practise, and shadowing - a process of listening to native speakers and repeating their speech until students achieve a similar tone, rhythm and clarity of pronunciation as model speakers. This allows students to imitate natural stress, rhythm, and tone. According to studies conducted in Japan, shadowing significantly improved Japanese EFL students' fluency and clarity of speaking [8]. First of all, teachers should choose the audio recordings that are appropriate for students' language level, making sure that materials have clear pronunciation, rhythm, and authentic dialogues. By first modeling shadowing, teachers demonstrate how to repeat speech simultaneously with native speakers, what aspects to focus on, and how to adjust phrases to make the speech sound more natural. They listen to students' speaking carefully in order not to miss any mispronounced word or sentence and correct errors, providing learners with constructive feedback. After practising pronunciation individually, students can work in pairs or small groups, using a target language to convey their thoughts. This highly improves their authentic language, intonation, stress, and pace, thereby enhancing both fluency and pronunciation.

5. Storytelling and Personal Narratives. Storytelling has always been one of the most effective ways not only to improve oral proficiency, but also to enhance public speaking skills, thereby overcoming fear and anxiety. In this approach, students are encouraged to tell personal stories, recount real-life situations, or create imaginative narratives. Teachers play a vital role in facilitating these activities by modeling storytelling first and then guiding students through their own narratives. These techniques allow learners to organize their thoughts, choose appropriate vocabulary, overcome fear of speaking, and convey opinions coherently. According to Kim, in the study conducted in South Korea, Korean EFL students were able to strengthen their not only vocabulary, but also fluency by storytelling and narrative speech [9]. Similarly, another study noted that narrative tasks lower stress and anxiety and improve students' ability to express their thoughts clearly and persuasively, thereby fostering self-confidence [1].

Conclusion. Teachers play a vital role as catalysts in developing students' oral proficiency in EFL classrooms. Their influence goes beyond linguistic input by creating an environment where students are encouraged to explore innovative modern ways of learning a foreign language by growing both socially and intellectually. Teachers motivate students to overcome the challenges with language acquisition, helping them reduce stress, anxiety, and fear. Additionally, they foster collaboration and encourage students to actively participate in lessons, allowing them to practice language in authentic and meaningful contexts. Teachers are not just facilitators of knowledge, they are catalysts who ignite curiosity, inspire confidence, and make the language learning journey more engaging, dynamic, and long-lasting.

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