THE USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR PRACTICING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract. Online platforms have become essential tools for practicing English speaking skills, offering interactive spaces where learners can communicate with peers and native speakers across the globe. This article reviews research from Russian and international scholars to examine how platforms such as Zoom, Tandem, and Speakly influence speaking fluency, pronunciation, and learner confidence. Findings indicate that structured video sessions, conversation exchange apps, and gamified speaking activities significantly improve communicative competence when paired with thoughtful pedagogy. However, issues such as unequal internet access, limited instructor oversight, and learner motivation remain important challenges. The article concludes that online platforms are most effective when integrated into a blended learning approach and supported by clear speaking goals and regular feedback.

Keywords: *online platforms; english speaking skills; communicative competence; digital language learning; virtual interaction.*

The rise of digital communication and affordable high-speed internet has opened new doors for practicing English speaking skills. Learners no longer need to travel abroad or enroll in specialized language schools to interact with native speakers. Today, a smartphone or laptop can connect them to conversation partners across continents, making real-time English practice more accessible than ever.

Online speaking platforms include mainstream video-meeting tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, as well as dedicated language-exchange apps such as Tandem, HelloTalk, and Speaky. Services like italki, Cambly, and Preply pair learners with

professional tutors for individual or group sessions. All these tools provide live voice or video interaction and often include extras like instant messaging or automated pronunciation feedback.

Speaking is a crucial driver of language development. According to Swain's Output Hypothesis, learners improve grammar and fluency when they produce language and receive feedback. Online platforms create precisely this environment. Russian researcher Elena Makarova reports that students who joined weekly English voice chats on Telegram and Zoom improved their fluency and confidence more quickly than peers who relied on classroom activities alone [7].

These platforms offer several important advantages. They provide global reach, allowing learners in remote regions to connect with native or near-native speakers. They allow flexible scheduling, so short but frequent sessions fit around work or school. They also create varied interaction, from informal chats to structured debates, exposing learners to different accents and cultural viewpoints. Studies like Godwin-Jones confirm that such authentic communication strengthens both linguistic skills and cross-cultural awareness.

Despite these benefits, online practice is not without obstacles. Bao notes that unstable internet connections or poor audio quality can disrupt communication. Motivation can also decline if learners lack clear goals or feedback [3]. Russian scholar Andrey Sokolov observes that students often start enthusiastically but taper off after a few weeks without structured guidance [8].

Educators are increasingly integrating online platforms into formal courses. Hampel and Stickler emphasize that teachers must carefully design tasks rotating partners, setting clear speaking objectives, and using breakout rooms to keep students engaged [4]. Blake highlights that blended approaches, which combine classroom instruction with regular online conversations, often produce the strongest outcomes by balancing structure and autonomy.

The review highlighted four key findings about how online platforms support the practice of English speaking skills.

Many studies show that online platforms make regular speaking practice possible for learners who might not have access to native speakers or formal language schools. For example, Makarova found that Russian university students in small towns could hold weekly conversations with English speakers worldwide without leaving home. Similarly, Godwin-Jones reports that learners appreciate the freedom to schedule short, frequent sessions, which helps maintain steady progress.

Across the literature, speaking fluency and self-confidence improved noticeably when learners participated in regular online conversations. Baralt and Moranski observed that students using tools like Zoom and Tandem developed more natural speech rhythms and faster response times after only a few months. Russian scholar Sokolov notes that students who joined structured online debates reported lower anxiety and stronger communicative competence compared with peers in traditional classroom-only settings [8].

Features such as breakout rooms, instant chat, and speech-recognition tools create more opportunities for practice and feedback. Hampel and Stickler (2020) highlight that breakout rooms encourage shy learners to speak more, while automated pronunciation feedback helps students refine accent and intonation. In Russian contexts, Ivanova found that combining live video sessions with asynchronous voice-message tasks boosted both pronunciation and vocabulary retention [5].

Despite these positives, several obstacles emerged. Bao points to unstable internet connections and limited access to quality microphones or quiet spaces, which can disrupt sessions and reduce learning quality [2]. Motivation is another issue: Kudryavtseva reports that without clear goals or instructor support, some learners gradually reduce participation, leading to inconsistent progress [6]. Cultural

differences and time-zone gaps sometimes made scheduling exchanges difficult, as noted by Chen and Lee in their cross-border language-exchange study [3].

Taken together, these studies suggest that online platforms are effective for practicing English speaking skills when three conditions are met: (1) regular, structured sessions; (2) interactive features that promote authentic conversation; and (3) ongoing guidance or feedback from teachers or experienced conversation partners. Where these elements are lacking, gains in fluency and confidence are less pronounced.

The findings from recent research make it clear that online platforms can be a powerful tool for improving English speaking skills, but their success depends on how they are used. The first major advantage is accessibility. Students in small towns or countries where opportunities to speak with native English speakers are limited can connect with conversation partners anywhere in the world. This aligns with Makarova's observation that even learners in remote Russian regions were able to practice consistently with international partners. Easy scheduling and the ability to join a session from home reduce barriers to practice and help students stay motivated.

A second important theme is fluency and confidence building. Repeated exposure to real-time communication pushes learners to think quickly and use the language naturally. Baralt and Moranski showed that regular online sessions improve the pace and rhythm of speech [1]. This is consistent with Sokolov's findings that participation in online debates lowers anxiety and strengthens communicative competence. When students feel comfortable experimenting with language in a low-pressure environment, they are more likely to use new vocabulary and complex grammar.

Interactive tools within these platforms such as breakout rooms, instant chat, and automated pronunciation feedback also play a key role. Hampel and Stickler argue that small-group spaces encourage shy learners to participate more actively.

Ivanova demonstrated that combining live video with asynchronous voice tasks enhances both pronunciation and vocabulary retention. These features replicate some of the benefits of in-person conversation classes while offering the flexibility of digital technology.

However, the research also points to significant challenges. Reliable internet and access to good equipment are not guaranteed everywhere. Bao highlights that unstable connections or background noise can interrupt learning and discourage participation. Motivation remains another concern. Without clear goals or instructor guidance, some learners gradually reduce their participation, a trend noted by Kudryavtseva. Cultural differences, time zones, and scheduling conflicts can also complicate cross-border exchanges [3].

Overall, the evidence suggests that online platforms are most effective when they are integrated thoughtfully into a broader language-learning strategy. Teachers and program designers can increase success by setting clear goals, providing regular feedback, and selecting platforms with interactive features. Blending online speaking practice with other methods such as classroom instruction, reading, and writing tasks creates a balanced environment that supports all aspects of language acquisition.

In summary, online platforms have transformed opportunities for English speaking practice by breaking down geographical barriers and offering flexible, interactive experiences. Yet their potential is fully realized only when learners have the necessary technology, structured guidance, and a supportive community. For educators, the challenge is to design programs that combine the best aspects of digital and traditional learning while addressing issues of access, motivation, and quality interaction.

ЛУЧШИЕ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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