



CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IN YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: *This article examines the challenges and pedagogical strategies for developing speaking skills in primary English education. In the globalized era, communicative competence is a primary educational goal; however, young learners (ages 6-12) often encounter psychological and environmental barriers. These include foreign language anxiety, communication apprehension, and limited exposure to authentic language. The study analyzes internal and external factors influencing oral development and reviews evidence-based teaching methods. Key strategies discussed include scaffolding, gamification, differentiated instruction, and digital tool integration. The findings emphasize that student-centered approaches reduce anxiety and foster a positive, language-rich environment for long-term communicative proficiency.*

Keywords: *young learners, speaking skills, communicative competence, scaffolding, gamification, differentiated instruction*

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqolada boshlang'ich sinf o'quvchilarining ingliz tilida so'zlashuv ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishdagi asosiy muammolar va samarali pedagogik strategiyalar tadqiq etiladi. Globalizatsiya davrida ingliz tili zamonaviy ta'limning ajralmas qismiga aylandi, bu esa kommunikativ kompetentsiyani til o'rgatishning asosiy maqsadiga aylantirdi. Biroq, yosh o'quvchilar ko'pincha og'zaki nutq rivojlanishiga to'sqinlik qiluvchi bir qator psixologik va ekologik to'siqlarga duch keladilar. Ushbu muammolar qatoriga chet tili tashvishi (anxiety), muloqotdan qo'rqish, haqiqiy til muhitining yetishmasligi va erta yoshdagi o'quvchilarga xos bo'lgan kognitiv cheklovlar kiradi.*



Tadqiqot 6 yoshdan 12 yoshgacha bo'lgan bolalarda so'zlashuv ko'nikmalarini egallashga ta'sir qiluvchi ichki va tashqi omillarni tahlil qiladi. Shuningdek, maqolada og'zaki ravonlikni qo'llab-quvvatlovchi dalillarga asoslangan bir qancha o'qitish strategiyalari: skaffolding (ko'maklashuvchi) usullari, darsda gamifikatsiya (o'yinlashtirish), tabaqalashtirilgan ta'lim va raqamli o'quv vositalarining integratsiyasi ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada interfaol va talabaga yo'naltirilgan o'qitish usullari hayajonni sezilarli darajada kamaytirishi va o'quvchilarning muloqotga bo'lgan intilishini oshirishi ta'kidlanadi.

Аннотация: *В статье рассматриваются проблемы и педагогические стратегии развития навыков говорения у младших школьников (6-12 лет). В условиях глобализации коммуникативная компетенция является приоритетом, однако учащиеся часто сталкиваются с психологическими барьерами, такими как языковая тревожность и страх общения. Исследование анализирует внутренние и внешние факторы, влияющие на овладение речью, и предлагает научно обоснованные методы обучения. Ключевые стратегии включают скаффолдинг, геймификацию и использование цифровых инструментов. Результаты подчеркивают, что личностно-ориентированный подход снижает тревожность и создает благоприятную среду для формирования устойчивых навыков общения на английском языке.*

Introduction

In the contemporary era of globalization, the acquisition of English as a foreign language has transitioned from being an elective advantage to a fundamental educational necessity. This shift is particularly evident in primary education, where the development of speaking skills in young learners (children typically aged between 6 and 12) is prioritized as the most essential component of communicative competence. Nevertheless, the process of nurturing oral fluency in children is an intricate endeavor that requires a deep understanding of their developmental psychology and linguistic limitations. Unlike adult students, young learners possess a high degree of neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to form and reorganize synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or experience), which allows them to



mimic native-like pronunciation with relative ease. However, they are simultaneously challenged by a limited cognitive load capacity (the total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory) and a lack of intrinsic motivation to master complex grammatical structures. Furthermore, the introduction of speaking activities in the classroom often triggers a variety of psychological barriers that can hinder a child's natural progress. The transition from "receptive skills" (listening and reading) to "productive skills" (speaking and writing) is frequently the most stressful phase for a primary student. Consequently, educators must navigate a landscape filled with pedagogical dilemmas, such as the balance between accuracy (correctness of language) and fluency (the ability to speak smoothly and easily). This article aims to provide an exhaustive analysis of the systemic challenges encountered in the primary language classroom and evaluates evidence-based strategies—such as gamification, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction—derived from the latest research within the scientific community. By examining these factors through a cohesive lens, this article aims to offer a roadmap for creating a language-rich environment that encourages authentic communication.

Literature Review

The existing body of research suggests that the mastery of speaking skills is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. To begin with, one of the most significant internal challenges is the presence of "Foreign Language Anxiety" (a feeling of unease, worry, and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second language). As highlighted by Urazbaev (2021), young learners are particularly susceptible to this anxiety because their social identities are still forming. When children are placed in a situation where they must perform in a language they have not yet mastered, they often experience "communication apprehension" (the fear of real or anticipated communication with others). This emotional state can lead to a prolonged "silent period" (a stage in second language acquisition where learners do not yet produce language but are actively processing it through listening). Urazbaev's research underscores that if this period is not handled with empathy, the child may develop a permanent aversion to oral participation.



In addition to psychological factors, environmental constraints play a pivotal role in the development of speaking proficiency. Abdulkadirova and Kamolova (2023) argue that the lack of an "authentic L2 environment" (a setting where the second language is used for real-life communication rather than just for classroom exercises) remains a primary obstacle. In many educational contexts, students only encounter English within the four walls of the classroom for a few hours per week. This artificiality often leads to a deficiency in "Willingness to Communicate" (the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person). Without consistent exposure to English in social or domestic settings, children often view the language as a static set of rules to be memorized for an examination, rather than a dynamic tool for expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs. To counteract these challenges, researchers advocate for the implementation of robust pedagogical supports. Kamolova (2025) emphasizes the transformative power of "Scaffolding" (a teaching method that provides temporary support as students develop new skills, which is gradually removed as they gain independence). In the context of speaking, scaffolding might include "substitution tables" (charts that allow students to create multiple sentences by picking different words for each part of a sentence structure) or visual cues. These supports are essential because they provide a "linguistic safety net," allowing the learner to focus on the act of communication without being overwhelmed by the complexity of syntax. Moreover, the integration of "Gamification" (the use of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts) has been proven to significantly lower the "Affective Filter" (a metaphorical screen that can block language acquisition if a student is stressed, unmotivated, or lacking confidence). When students are engaged in a competitive or collaborative game, their cognitive focus shifts from self-correction to goal achievement, which facilitates a more natural and fluid speech output.

Furthermore, the role of modern technology in bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world practice cannot be overstated. Esonov (2025) points out that digital tools serve as an effective medium for *low-stakes practice* (learning activities that allow students to practice without the pressure of being graded or



judged). Through interactive multimedia platforms and mobile applications, young learners can interact with digital characters or record their own voices, which helps in building "phonological awareness" (the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of sentences and words). This technological integration is especially beneficial for students who exhibit high levels of shyness in a traditional classroom setting. By practicing in a digital environment, these students can build the necessary confidence to eventually participate in "high-stakes" (more formal or public) classroom discussions.

Finally, the international perspective provided by Nunan (2005) suggests that the diversity of learner profiles necessitates the use of "Differentiated Instruction" (the process of tailoring lessons to meet the individual needs, interests, and strengths of each student). Because young learners in a single classroom can vary greatly in their "Zone of Proximal Development" (the distance between what a learner can do without help and what they can do with support), a "one-size-fits-all" approach is often ineffective. Nunan argues that for some students, "Total Physical Response" (a language teaching method based on the coordination of language and physical movement) is the most effective way to begin speaking, while more advanced students may require "Task-Based Language Teaching" (an approach where students use the target language to complete meaningful tasks, such as solving a puzzle or planning a trip). By combining these various strategies, educators can create a multifaceted curriculum that addresses the unique challenges faced by every child in the primary language classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of speaking skills in young learners is a sophisticated process that requires a delicate balance between psychological encouragement and instructional scaffolding. While the challenges—ranging from communication apprehension and the silent period to a lack of an authentic L2 environment which are substantial, they are by no means insurmountable. The synthesized research from both local and international scholars indicates that the key



to success lies in moving away from traditional, teacher-centered methods toward more interactive and student-centered strategies.

By prioritizing the emotional well-being of the student and lowering the affective filter through gamification and play, educators can unlock the child's natural linguistic potential. Additionally, the strategic use of scaffolding and digital technology provides the necessary frameworks for students to build confidence in their oral production. Ultimately, the goal of primary English education should be to foster a sense of "communicative competence" (the ability to use language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals). When students perceive English not as an academic burden but as an exciting tool for exploration and connection, they are set on a path toward lifelong fluency. Future pedagogical developments should continue to explore how personalized learning and technological advancements can further minimize the barriers to speaking in the early years of education.

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