

SOME WAYS OF TEACHING SPEAKING TO ELEMENTARY LEVEL LEARNERS

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Abstract: Teaching speaking to elementary level learners is a foundational task in any English language curriculum. At this stage, learners are just beginning to communicate using simple sentences, basic vocabulary, and everyday expressions. Therefore, the main goals are to develop their confidence, help them use language in meaningful contexts, and lay the groundwork for more advanced communication in the future. One of the key principles in teaching speaking to beginners is the necessity of creating a safe, supportive, and motivating classroom environment. Learners at the elementary level are often hesitant to speak for fear of making mistakes. Encouraging positive attitudes towards mistakes as part of the learning process is essential. Teachers should praise attempts to speak, provide constructive feedback, and foster a classroom culture in which every student feels comfortable expressing themselves regardless of their proficiency.

Key words: role play, pair work, visual aids, storytelling, songs, games, dialogues, pronunciation practice, group activities, real-life situations

A communicative approach is central to effective speaking instruction. This means designing activities that focus on real communication—using the language for practical, everyday purposes rather than just artificial drills. Role plays are particularly effective for elementary level learners. Through simple scenarios like going shopping, ordering food at a restaurant, or introducing oneself and a friend, students practice set phrases and structures. These scenarios help make language relevant and memorable, as students can immediately see the practical value of what they are learning. Dialogues and pair work are also highly beneficial. By working with a partner, learners can develop conversation routines, practice asking and answering questions, and receive support during speaking tasks. Activities such as “Find Someone Who” encourage learners to move around and interact with multiple classmates, asking and answering simple questions. This not only practices speaking but also listening and social skills [1].

Visual aids play a crucial role in supporting elementary level learners. Pictures, flashcards, and realia (real-world objects) provide context and help clarify meaning, making it easier for learners to express themselves. For example, a picture prompt can be used to elicit descriptive language or tell a simple story. Flashcards with vocabulary items or phrases can be used in games like “What’s Missing?” or “Memory,” which reinforce speaking in a fun, low-pressure manner. Songs and chants offer an engaging way to build speaking skills. Because songs are repetitive and rhythmic, they allow learners to practice pronunciation, intonation, and fluency in a natural and memorable way. Singing together as a class also builds confidence and a sense of community. One significant method is the use of storytelling. Teachers can start with simple stories that use repetitive and familiar sentence structures. After hearing a story, students can retell it in their own words, work with classmates to sequence events, or even create their own short stories using pictures or prompts provided by the teacher. Storytelling activates students’ imagination while also giving them the chance to use language meaningfully. Another important aspect is focusing on functional language—things students need to be able to say regularly in class or daily life. Classroom language, greetings, making requests, asking for help, and giving simple opinions are all examples of functional language that should be practiced regularly through chants, rehearsed conversations, and real classroom interactions [2].

Incorporating games into speaking activities is also highly effective at this level. Games lower the affective filter, decrease anxiety, and increase motivation. Games such as “Simon Says,” “Whisper Down the Lane (Chinese Whispers),” or simple board games with speaking prompts encourage spontaneous speaking and quick thinking in English. Word games using flashcards, such as “Go Fish” with vocabulary cards, require learners to ask and answer questions to win the game. Technology provides many opportunities for enhancing speaking practice. Digital story creation tools, language apps with speaking components, and educational videos can supplement classroom activities. For example, students might record themselves answering questions, describing pictures, or reading a dialogue, and then listen to themselves or share the recording with classmates as a way to build confidence and self-awareness. Pronunciation practice is an integral part of speaking instruction at the elementary level. Activities might include repetition drills, minimal pairs practice (focusing on sounds that are easily confused), and using mirrors so learners can see how their mouth moves when making certain sounds. The teacher should model clear, slow speech, and provide plenty of chances for students to imitate and practice. Monitoring and feedback are essential but should be tailored to the learners’ level and confidence. Instead of correcting every error immediately, the teacher might model the correct form or recast what the learner has said, letting the student repeat the improved version. Error

correction should be sensitive and positive, focusing on encouraging further risk-taking in speaking [3].

Group and pair activities maximize opportunities for practice. The more students talk, the better they get. For this reason, pair and small group work is preferable to only whole-class interactions, especially with large classes. Each learner must have ample time to speak. Real-world tasks, or “task-based learning,” motivate students to use language for a purpose. For example, learners may be asked to work together to decide what food to bring to a class picnic, plan a pretend shopping trip with a budget, or conduct a brief interview with classmates about favorite sports or foods. Scaffolding is critical at the elementary level. Teachers should break down speaking tasks into manageable steps and provide plenty of models before expecting students to produce language on their own. This could include practicing chorally, repeating phrases, matching sentences to pictures, and performing guided dialogues before moving to freer, more creative speaking. The importance of patience and repetition cannot be overstated. Elementary level learners need repeated exposure and practice with language points before they can use them confidently and accurately in speech. Therefore, teachers should regularly recycle key vocabulary and sentence patterns through different activities—games, role plays, dialogues, and storytelling [4].

Assessment of speaking at this level should primarily be formative, focusing on participation, effort, and improvement rather than perfect accuracy. Teachers can use checklists or simple rubrics to track progress, but the main goal is to motivate learners and help them build confidence as speakers. Cultural elements can also be integrated into speaking activities. Simple discussions about holidays, foods, families, and hobbies from different cultures not only build speaking skills but also intercultural awareness. Students can compare their own experiences with those in English-speaking countries, fostering both language and cultural learning. Peer support is a powerful tool. Pairing less confident speakers with more confident ones, or allowing learners to practice in small, supportive groups before sharing with the whole class, reduces pressure and encourages participation. Peer correction, when carefully structured, can also be beneficial, helping students listen more carefully to each other’s speech. Using scripts and dialogues initially can provide valuable structure for elementary students as they develop confidence. Over time, the teacher can encourage more improvisation, prompting students to personalize dialogues and express their own ideas. Physical movement can be harnessed to make speaking activities lively and memorable. Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, where students respond to verbal instructions with actions, are especially useful for very young or low-level learners. Action-based games and drama activities, such as miming or acting out stories, further enhance spoken language practice. Teachers should also strive to make instructions, questions, and feedback as clear and simple as possible, using visual and gestural support when

necessary. This ensures that students understand what is expected and can participate fully. Finally, fostering a genuine interest in communicating can transform elementary speaking lessons from routine drills into meaningful experiences. When students are curious about a topic, motivated by a story, or interested in sharing about themselves, speaking becomes purposeful and rewarding [5].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching speaking to elementary level learners is about laying a solid foundation—providing frequent, meaningful opportunities to use English in a wide range of engaging activities; building confidence through support, encouragement, and careful scaffolding; and always remembering that at this level, enjoyment and active participation are as important as linguistic accuracy. With patience, imagination, and genuine care for students' progress, teachers can inspire even the most hesitant beginners to find their voice in English.

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