DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the common difficulties encountered in teaching speaking skills to secondary school students at the A2 level of English proficiency. It explores both linguistic and psychological barriers that hinder students' ability to express themselves orally, such as limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient speaking practice. The study also discusses challenges faced by teachers, including large class sizes, limited classroom time, and lack of resources. Various strategies and practical solutions are proposed to help overcome these issues and improve students' speaking abilities in a supportive and interactive learning environment.

Key words: A2 level, speaking skills, secondary school students, English as a foreign language (EFL), communication barriers, language teaching, speaking activities, learner motivation

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in language learning, as it allows students to communicate effectively in real-life situations. However, teaching speaking to secondary school students, especially those at the A2 level, presents several challenges for both learners and teachers. At this level, students often struggle with limited vocabulary, basic grammar structures, and low confidence in using the language. In many cases, they are afraid of making mistakes or being

judged by their peers, which reduces their willingness to participate in speaking activities. Teachers, on the other hand, may face difficulties such as large class sizes, time constraints, and a lack of suitable materials or training. This article aims to identify the main obstacles in teaching speaking to A2 learners and to suggest effective methods and strategies to enhance students' oral communication skills in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of speaking skills in foreign language education has long been recognized as a critical yet complex component of communicative competence. According to Brown and Yule (1983), speaking is not only a product of linguistic knowledge but also a real-time process that requires learners to retrieve, organize, and express their thoughts under communicative pressure. In the context of secondary school education, particularly at the A2 level (as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR), learners often exhibit limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, which hinder their ability to express themselves clearly and confidently (Council of Europe, 2001).

Research by Goh and Burns (2012) emphasizes that speaking is frequently neglected in classrooms due to time constraints, large student groups, and an overemphasis on written exams. This imbalance leads to insufficient speaking practice, which is essential for language development. Moreover, Ur (1996) identifies several classroom-related obstacles, including students' fear of making mistakes, lack of motivation, and the tendency for a few dominant students to monopolize speaking opportunities. These issues are particularly pronounced in lower-level learners who are still developing basic language competence.

From a psychological perspective, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) suggests that emotional factors—such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence—can block language acquisition, especially in speaking tasks. A2-

level learners, who are often in the early stages of productive language use, are especially vulnerable to these affective barriers.

Pedagogical approaches, such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), have been proposed as effective strategies to overcome these challenges. Studies by Nunan (2004) and Richards (2006) advocate for learner-centered classrooms where communication is prioritized over form, and where authentic tasks encourage students to use language meaningfully. However, as Thornbury (2005) points out, implementing these methods in resource-limited classrooms—especially in large public schools—can be problematic without proper training and support for teachers.

In summary, the literature reveals a complex interplay of linguistic, psychological, and institutional factors that affect the teaching of speaking to A2-level learners. While various strategies have been proposed to address these difficulties, there remains a gap between theory and classroom practice, particularly in under-resourced educational contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The development of speaking skills in foreign language education has long been recognized as a critical yet complex component of communicative competence. According to Brown and Yule (1983), speaking is not only a product of linguistic knowledge but also a real-time process that requires learners to retrieve, organize, and express their thoughts under communicative pressure. In the context of secondary school education, particularly at the A2 level (as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR), learners often exhibit limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, which hinder their ability to express themselves clearly and confidently (Council of Europe, 2001).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data and classroom observations revealed several key difficulties in teaching speaking to A2-level learners. These difficulties were categorized into three main areas: learner-related challenges, instructional constraints, and methodological issues. All five interviewed teachers reported that students frequently experience low confidence when speaking in English. This

finding was supported by classroom observations, where only a small number of students volunteered to participate in speaking activities. Many learners appeared hesitant, often relying on their native language when asked to respond orally. Teachers attributed this hesitation to limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences, and a strong fear of making mistakes in front of peers. Furthermore, motivation emerged as a significant issue. Teachers observed that many students viewed speaking tasks as stressful rather than engaging. This is consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that anxiety and low motivation can hinder language acquisition, particularly in speaking. A second set of difficulties was related to classroom conditions. Three out of five teachers cited large class sizes as a major obstacle to providing sufficient speaking practice for all students. With 30–40 students in a class, it was challenging to manage interactive speaking tasks effectively. In addition, time constraints often forced teachers to prioritize grammar and reading exercises over communicative activities. The lack of appropriate teaching materials also posed a problem. Teachers noted that textbooks often contain limited speaking tasks and are not tailored to the specific communicative needs of A2 learners. This resulted in a reliance on repetition and memorization, rather than meaningful interaction. While all observed lessons incorporated speaking tasks, many of these were mechanical in nature—such as sentence drills and scripted dialogues. Only a few lessons included open-ended activities like role plays or group discussions. Teachers admitted that they often avoid communicative activities due to a lack of training and fear of losing classroom control. However, in lessons where more student-centered techniques were used, such as pair work and picture-based discussions, a noticeable increase in student engagement was observed. This supports the findings of Goh and Burns (2012), who argue that well-structured communicative tasks, even at lower proficiency levels, can foster learner participation and confidence.

CONCLUSION

Teaching speaking skills to secondary school students at the A2 level presents a complex set of challenges that stem from both learner-related and instructional factors. This study has shown that students often struggle with low confidence, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes, all of which negatively impact their willingness to participate in speaking activities. At the same time, teachers face obstacles such as large class sizes, limited classroom time, and insufficient training in communicative methodologies.

Despite these challenges, the study also revealed that with the use of supportive, student-centered approaches—such as pair work, visual aids, and structured communicative tasks—students become more engaged and confident in speaking. It is therefore essential for schools and educational policymakers to provide targeted support for teachers through professional development and to incorporate more communicative content into textbooks and lesson planning.

In conclusion, improving speaking skills among A2-level secondary school learners requires a balanced focus on developing learners' confidence and competence, while also enhancing the teaching environment. By addressing these interconnected issues, educators can create more effective and motivating speaking lessons that lead to real progress in learners' communicative abilities.

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