FROM SILENCE TO SPEECH: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR EFL STUDENTS TO CONQUER SPEAKING ANXIETY

Student: **Shermuxamtova Dilnoza**

Supervisor: **Shamsiddinova Dilafruz**

Uzbekistan State World Language University

dilnozashermuxamatova@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the effectiveness of collaborative learning, the mirror method, classroom games, and debates in improving communication skills. After one month, collaborative learning showed the highest impact (40%), followed by the mirror method (30%), while classroom games and debates had lower effectiveness (20% and 10%). The findings highlight the role of peer interaction in enhancing fluency and confidence, while self-reflection and classroom activities had limited impact. The study suggests that interactive, peer-driven methods are most effective for communication development.

Keywords: Interactive learning, peer collaboration, mirror method, role-play, debates, classroom activities, communication skills, fluency, engagement, self-reflection.

Introduction.

For many EFL learners, speaking in English can feel daunting. The fear of making mistakes, struggling with fluency, or facing judgment often creates anxiety, preventing students from expressing themselves confidently. This challenge, known as speaking anxiety, is a major hurdle in language learning and real-world communication. However, with the right strategies, overcoming this barrier is achievable. By identifying the causes of speaking anxiety and applying effective techniques, learners

can gradually build confidence and enhance their speaking skills. This article explores practical methods to help students shift from hesitation to active communication, allowing them to speak English with greater ease.

Literature Review.

Learning English entails being able to express thoughts, feelings, and opinions to other people. It is a method of conveying concepts from one individual to another using spoken language (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Namaziandost says people who learn English frequently have a problem using the language in real communication. There are a number of reasons why students struggle with speaking English. It is thought that a student's attitude, motivation, confidence, self-anxiety, classroom environment, lack of vocabulary, and little exposure to the language all prevent them from effectively using the target language for communication. A student cannot execute oral communication in the target language if they do not have a sufficient vocabulary. According to Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal's (2013) research, learners' poor confidence is the primary obstacle preventing them from communicating in English. Additionally, their findings revealed that the learners were dissatisfied with the way the language was presented to them, emphasizing linguistic proficiency over communicative proficiency. Furthermore, inhibition, low engagement, mother tongue interference, positive reinforcement from instructors or lecturers, and lack of knowledge were all taken into consideration by Tuan & May in Leong and Ahmadi (2017) as potential barriers to speaking the target language. In former studies, Do (2007) finds those teachers who concentrate on presenting lexical and grammatical structures probably do not have sufficient time to organize other necessary activities or they cannot recognize the importance of other skills. Moreover, Sullivan and McIntosh (1996) revealed that teachers get used to the traditional lecture method which is a passive, one-way method of transferring information. Meanwhile, students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often have limited opportunities to practice speaking in an authentic and meaningful way inside and outside of the classroom (Nakazawa, Muir, & Dudley,

2007). However there are several productive ways to enhance EFL students' speaking. Recording can be a good way, digital recordings in speaking classes has yielded inconclusive results with respect to the effectiveness of digital recordings on the improvement of oral language proficiency (Danny Huang & Alan Hung, 2010; Akef & Nossratpour, 2010; Sun, 2009, 2012). To illustrate that, Danny Huang and Alan Hung (2010) conducted a study to explore the EFL learners' perceptions towards the use of e-portfolios as an alternative way of assessing their oral proficiency at a university in Taiwan. In the study, fifty-one EFL learners were asked to upload an audio file in which they conveyed their ideas and thoughts on the topic discussed in the class to their e-portfolios on a bi-weekly basis. Voice recording tools have been introduced and used in a variety of ways in language instruction in an attempt to provide learners with opportunities to produce oral output "as they allow language students to practice and enhance their speaking skills outside the classroom while receiving feedback on their performance" (Pop, Tomuletiu, & David, 2011, p. 1199). Numerous studies and theories suggest that output is essential for second language learning. Swain and Lapkin (1995) emphasized the importance of output, pointing out that it would promote observation as well as fluency. Furthermore, in developing fluency, there must be a supporting activity which has some specific features to improve speaking skills. The activities should focus on meaning, contain students' previous activity, and be challenging for students. Challenging means that the activities should trigger students' hard work, and it can be obtained through arranging limited time and pressure (Nation & Newton, 2009). Another effective way to improve speaking is classroom activities such as debates, games and role-play activities. Debate is a format where students express and defend their viewpoints on a specific topic. Since it involves argumentation, students can develop different perspectives, formulate claims with supporting evidence, provide counterarguments, and actively engage in discussions (Werdiningsih, 2018). In terms of role-play activities, it was designed to provide learners with an environment to practice communication in social contexts. However, the noticeable discrepancy between theoretical support and practical

application made us aware of the challenges in these assumptions. When it comes to games, they play a crucial role in EFL classrooms, as they involve structured activities with specific goals and rules while also being enjoyable. Hadfield (1990, as cited in Deesri, 2002, p.1) defines games as activities that incorporate rules, objectives, and a fun element. Students will be able to improve their speaking skills without being embarrassed.

Methodology.

This study employed one-month multifaceted research in an EFL classroom approach to explore various interactive learning methodologies. A combination of the mirror method, role-play, games, debates, and collaborative learning with a partner was utilized to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment. The mirror method provided participants with an opportunity for reflective self-assessment, allowing them to observe and refine their verbal and non-verbal communication. This technique encouraged greater self-awareness and confidence in their expressive abilities. Furthermore, role-play, games, and debates were incorporated to simulate real-world interactions, fostering critical thinking, spontaneity, and adaptability. These interactive methods encouraged participants to engage in diverse communicative scenarios, enabling them to explore different perspectives and refine their articulation skills in an engaging manner. Additionally, collaborative learning with a partner was integrated to enhance peer interaction and active participation. This approach encouraged mutual exchange of ideas, cooperative problem-solving, and constructive feedback, reinforcing a supportive learning atmosphere. By implementing these diverse methodologies, the study aimed to examine the effectiveness of interactive learning techniques in fostering engagement, communication, and critical thinking.

Results.

After one month, distinct patterns emerged in the effectiveness of each method. Collaborative learning with a partner proved to be the most effective, significantly

enhancing fluency, confidence, and engagement through active participation and peer interaction. The mirror method showed moderate effectiveness, allowing for self-reflection and refinement of communication skills, though it lacked the dynamic exchange present in interactive methods. Classroom games and debates, while encouraging critical thinking and spontaneity, had the least impact due to varying participation levels and the competitive nature of these activities. These findings suggest that while all methods contribute to learning, peer-driven interaction plays a crucial role in fostering communication skills. Moreover,voice recording also illustrated a significant impact enhancing speaking with fluency.
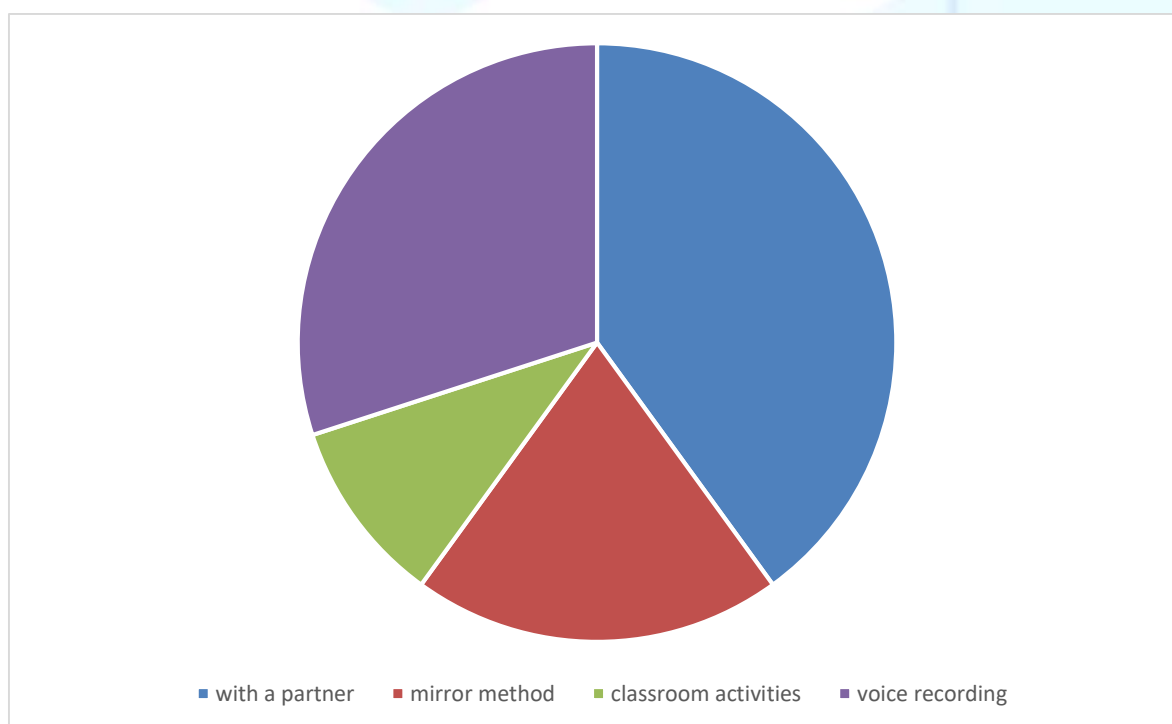
The result of one-month survey.

Discussion.

The findings indicate that collaborative learning with a partner was the most effective method, accounting for 40% of the observed improvement. This highlights

the significance of peer interaction in enhancing communication skills, as real-time feedback and active engagement create a more dynamic learning experience. The mutual exchange of ideas allows for increased fluency, confidence, and adaptability in conversations. The mirror method, which contributed 30%, also proved to be a valuable tool, particularly in fostering self-awareness and refining verbal and non-verbal communication. However, its effectiveness was somewhat limited due to the absence of direct interaction, making it less engaging compared to partner-based learning. Meanwhile, classroom activities such as games and debates accounted for 20%, demonstrating some impact on critical thinking and spontaneity but lacking the same level of individualized engagement as other methods. The competitive nature of these activities may have also affected participation levels, making them less effective overall. Lastly, the remaining 10% reflects minimal impact from other classroom-based strategies, suggesting that structured interaction plays a key role in improving communication skills. Overall, these results reinforce the importance of interactive and peer-driven learning, where students actively engage with one another to develop their abilities in a meaningful and effective way.

Conclusion.

This study found that collaborative learning with a partner was the most effective, followed by the mirror method, while classroom games and debates had the least impact. The results emphasize the importance of peer interaction in building fluency and confidence. While the mirror method helped with self-reflection, its lack of real-time feedback made it less effective. Classroom activities, though useful for critical thinking, were limited by participation levels. Overall, interactive and peer-driven learning proved to be the most beneficial for communication skills.

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