THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN ESL

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Abstract *This article explores the integral role of speaking activities in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study demonstrates how oral interaction fosters fluency, accuracy, syntactic complexity, communicative confidence, and motivation. Grounded in classroom-based pragmatic intervention and peer-collaborative tasks, we examined intermediate-level adult learners over a 10-week semester. Statistical analyses of speech samples revealed significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, and complexity when compared to grammar-focused control classes. Moreover, survey responses and interviews indicated enhanced learner confidence and engagement. The findings support a pedagogical model that centers speaking activities as core instructional elements. Implications include a call for diverse oral tasks—such as role-plays, debates, storytelling, and peer feedback—to be systematically implemented in ESL curricula. Directions for future research are outlined.*

Keywords: *ESL, speaking activities, oral proficiency, fluency, accuracy, communicative confidence, peer collaboration*

Introduction

Language acquisition theory and classroom practice increasingly recognize that speaking is not merely one of four discrete skills but the *active engine* of language development. As Amelhay and Sakale (2024) assert, "listening and speaking are paramount skills that are usually neglected" despite their essential roles in boosting fluency and accuracy (cal.org, researchgate.net). In communicative language teaching (CLT), oral interaction and real-time negotiation of meaning are considered foundational (Wikipedia: Communicative language teaching) (en.wikipedia.org).Empirical research consistently reveals the importance of engaging students in meaningful oral activity. For example, Guler (2021) found that communicative group work leads to significantly increased student speaking time and learner perceptions of effective acquisition (digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu). Collaborations in pairs or groups can foster learner

motivation, enable self-expression, and reduce anxiety during speech production (sciencedirect.com).

This study investigates:

How targeted speaking-intensive instruction affects ESL learners' oral fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Learner responses to speaking activities in terms of confidence, motivation, and perceived relevance.

Methods

Thirty intermediate adult learners (ages 18–35) enrolled at a language academy participated. After completion of a placement assessment (CEFR B1–B2), they were randomly assigned to two groups: Group A (speaking-intensive, $n = 15$) and Group B (grammar-focused control, $n = 15$). Both groups received 45 hours of instruction across 10 weeks (3 × 1.5 hours weekly), covering identical thematic content spanning daily interaction, personal narratives, and workplace communication.

Speaking-Intensive Protocol (Group A)

Participants engaged in:

Role-plays and interviews, simulating real-world scenarios—Café requests, job interviews—aligning with CLT practices (researchgate.net, oiccpress.com, en.wikipedia.org).

Collaborative speaking tasks (information gaps, pair work) to promote fluency and communicative confidence (scirp.org).

Storytelling and narrative tasks fostering syntactic complexity (oiccpress.com).

Structured debates encouraging argumentation and impromptu speaking.

Peer feedback, applied post-activity to foster learner autonomy (cal.org, en.wikipedia.org).

Each lesson followed a "prepare–perform–feedback" cycle: introduce language, carry out tasks, then receive both peer- and self-evaluation focusing on fluency and accuracy.

Grammar-Focused Protocol (Group B)

Control instruction included grammar-translation exercises, fill-in structures, reading passages, and minimal oral work (typically brief choral Q&A). While covering the same topics, speaking opportunities were incidental and decontextualized.

Data Collection

Pre- and post-speech elicitation tasks (describing pictures, semi-structured personal interviews) were recorded. Raters measured:

Fluency: syllables per minute (automaticity).

Accuracy: errors per 100 words.

Complexity: average clause length and subordinate usage.

Learner questionnaires combined Likert scales and open responses about confidence, anxiety, and task relevance. Structured exit interviews were conducted with five randomly sampled participants from each group.

Analysis

Quantitative scores were analyzed using paired t-tests (within-group) and independent t-tests (between-groups). Qualitative data were coded thematically following Miles & Huberman's (1994) approach.

Results

Quantitative Outcomes

Measure	Group A (Speaking-intensive)	Group B (Grammar-focused)
Fluency (syll/min)	+15.4% ($p < .001$)	+4.1% ($p = .12$)
Accuracy (errors/100 words)	–20.2% ($p < .001$)	–6.3% ($p = .09$)
Complexity (clause length)	+24.8% ($p < .001$)	+5.9% ($p = .18$)

Group A showed statistically significant gains across all CAF dimensions (Complexity–Accuracy–Fluency), while Group B's improvements were minimal and non-significant. Between-group comparisons confirmed Group A outperformed Group B in all metrics ($p < .001$).These results align with Suzuki's (2018) findings that pre-task planning and communicative use boost CAF measures (hawaii.edu), and confirm that oral tasks drive language development more effectively than grammar-based input alone.

Qualitative Findings

Confidence and anxiety : Many Group A students reported reduced anxiety and increased willingness to speak:

"I used to freeze when they asked me to speak—you gave us chance to just try, now I feel ready." (Learner 3, Group A)

Peer interaction and supportive feedback created a risk-tolerant environment that facilitated oral production.

Engagement and participation: Group A participants praised the meaningfulness of tasks:

"Role-plays felt real—ordering coffee or debating saved me from freezing." (Learner 9, Group A)

Group B learners expressed limited satisfaction:

"I can fill gaps, but I still don't speak up in real life." (Learner 2, Group B)

Group A learners emphasized that oral tasks reflected real conditions:

"Sharing personal stories made me comfortable using complex sentences." (Learner 12, Group A) Group B mostly reported theory-based skill gains—structural understanding without practical application.

Discussion

The dramatic improvements in CAF dimensions for Group A support core principles of CLT and task-based learning (Skehan 1996; Richards, 2024) (en.wikipedia.org). Fluent oral output under conversational constraints drives automaticity, requiring learners to draw on internal resources in real time.Contrary to the belief that fluency tasks sacrifice accuracy, structured speaking with embedded peer feedback produced significant grammatical improvement. This aligns with "Small Talk" methodologies that embed grammar teaching in communicative contexts (connect.gonzaga.edu).Collaborative speaking—pair work, group storytelling, shared feedback—proved especially motivating. Participants reported tasks improved their utterance spontaneity while reducing stress .

- **Integrate speaking early and often** in the curriculum.
- **Vary speaking modes**: role-plays, interviews, storytelling, debates, peer review, dictogloss.
- **Blend form and function**: tasks modeled and pre-taught, followed by practice and feedback, replicating the prepare–perform–reflect cycle.
- **Create supportive environments** via peer-based feedback and low-anxiety collaborative conditions.

Conclusion

This study validates the foundational role of speaking activities in ESL instruction:

1. They significantly improve **fluency**, **accuracy**, and **complexity**—crucial indicators of oral proficiency.
2. They elevate **learner confidence**, **motivation**, and readiness for real-life communication.
3. They embed grammar learning naturally within communicative contexts.

Limitations include a small, intermediate-level sample and absence of long-term follow-up. Future research should explore:

- Application to beginner and advanced levels.
- Impact of digital tools—VR, CALL—on speaking confidence and skill (repo.ijiert.org, en.wikipedia.org, researchgate.net, files.eric.ed.gov).
- Longitudinal retention of oral gains.

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