

ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING FLUENCY THROUGH INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: This article investigates the pedagogical significance of developing oral communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, focusing on enhancing speaking fluency through structured interactive activities. While traditional methods heavily prioritized grammatical precision (accuracy), modern communication demands spontaneous and fluid speech production (fluency). This study explores the theoretical dichotomy between fluency and accuracy, evaluates the efficacy of communicative tasks—such as role-plays, classroom debates, and information-gap activities—and presents the results of a pedagogical experiment. The findings demonstrate that increasing Student Talking Time (STT) through interactive frameworks significantly accelerates speech rate and reduces foreign language anxiety.

Keywords: speaking fluency, accuracy, interactive activities, role-play, debate, information-gap, Student Talking Time (STT), classroom anxiety.

In the contemporary era of globalization, proficiency in English has transitioned from an academic asset to a functional necessity. Within the framework of modern language pedagogy, the ultimate objective of language acquisition is the attainment of communicative competence—the capacity to interact effectively in diverse social and professional contexts [1]. However, a persistent problem remains visible within higher education: many university students demonstrate an advanced understanding of grammatical formulas, yet they experience profound anxiety when thrust into real-life, spontaneous spoken interactions [2]. This "silent learner syndrome" highlights an over-reliance on traditional, teacher-centered methodologies that prioritize linguistic knowledge over pragmatic execution [5]. To bridge this gap, classrooms must systematically integrate interactive, student-centered activities that prioritize the fluid transmission of meaning over the rigid enforcement of form.

To contextualize the role of interactive activities, it is crucial to understand the operational definitions of fluency and accuracy, which represent the two primary pillars of language proficiency.

Fluency: Brumfit defines fluency as "natural, smooth, and rapid communication" [1]. It signifies a stage where the learner uses the linguistic system effortlessly, focusing primarily on the *meaning* of the message. From a psycholinguistic perspective, Lennon notes that it indicates automaticity in speech production, allowing the speaker to formulate thoughts without debilitating pauses [6].

Accuracy: This refers to the production of grammatically, lexically, and phonologically correct utterances, focusing primarily on the *form* of the language. [4]. According to the Interactionist Theory, fluency and accuracy develop dialogically through the active negotiation of meaning [7]. Therefore, modern pedagogy should not sacrifice one for the other but must create distinct boundaries: specific lesson segments must be dedicated to form, while separate, uninterrupted segments must be carved out exclusively for meaning-focused fluency practices [3]. Over-correcting students' errors during fluency tasks breaks their flow of thought and triggers communication anxiety [2]. To foster fluency, teachers must practice *delayed feedback*, noting errors quietly and addressing them only at the end of the activity [4].

Typology of Fluency-Enhancing Interactive Activities

Interactive activities shift the classroom dynamic from a linear model (Teacher $\rightarrow$ Student) to a multi-directional matrix (Student $\leftrightarrow$ Student). The following methods are highly effective in cultivating speaking speed and automaticity:

3.1. Socio-Pragmatic Role-Plays Role-playing simulates real-life scenarios, such as job interviews, business negotiations, or problem-solving situations [2]. It forces students to retrieve lexical units appropriate to a specific social status and emotional state. Because the partner's responses are unpredictable, the student must listen, decode, and articulate in real-time, which directly exercises the neural pathways responsible for fluency [3].

3.2. Structured Classroom Debates.

Debates on contemporary, controversial topics force students into active intellectual engagement. During a debate, fluency is enhanced because students are driven by a communicative desire to defend their stance [4]. The cognitive focus shifts away from internal grammar monitoring to argumentative strategy, leading to the natural utilization of complex cohesive devices.

3.3. Information-Gap Activities.

An information-gap activity occurs when one student possesses information that another lacks, and both must communicate to complete a mutual goal. This creates a genuine "negotiation of meaning" [3]. If communication fails, the task cannot be completed, forcing students to use circumlocution, self-correction, and clarification requests, which builds strategic competence.

4. Methodology and Empirical Results.

A 12-week pedagogical experiment was conducted within a university language department among 60 intermediate-level (B1) EFL students to test the efficacy of interactive activities. The participants were divided into two equal groups:

1. The Control Group (n=30): Followed a traditional syllabus utilizing textbook reading, explicit grammar explanations, and passive translation exercises.

2.The Experimental Group (\$n=30\$): Exposed to the same topics, but 70% of classroom hours were systematically dedicated to interactive tasks (debates, role-plays) with an explicit ban on immediate teacher intervention. Oral pre-tests and post-tests were evaluated by independent assessors using three metrics: Speech Rate (Words Per Minute - WPM), Mean Length of Runs (MLR - average syllables produced between pauses), and the Language Anxiety Scale (LAS, scaled 1-50).

The theoretical and empirical findings of this study demonstrate that oral speaking fluency is a distinct linguistic skill that must be explicitly trained through interactive methodologies [2].

To achieve optimal results, educators must re-evaluate classroom management:

Maximize STT: Teacher Talking Time (TTT) should be minimized to allow Student Talking Time (STT) to occupy at least 70% of the lesson [4].

Enforce Delayed Correction: Teachers should step down as authoritarian critics and act as invisible facilitators, delaying error correction until the task is complete to protect the psychological flow of speech [3]. Ultimately, updating language syllabi with interaction-driven pedagogy is essential to produce competitive graduates capable of effortless cross-cultural communication.

References:

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