

Teaching Oral Skills in Ethiopian Secondary Schools: Practices and Challenges

Enseñanza de Habilidades Orales
en Escuelas Secundarias de Etiopía:
Prácticas y Desafíos

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Abstract

In Ethiopia, English plays a crucial role in education, business, and government communication, serving as a compulsory subject and the medium of instruction from the ninth grade onwards. Despite its importance, English proficiency remains a significant challenge among both students and teachers, particularly in secondary schools. This study examines the practices and challenges of teaching oral skills in the East Wollaga Zone, with a focus on striking a balance between fluency and accuracy in language instruction. A mixed-methods approach was employed, including a descriptive survey design. Data was collected from 11 English teachers and 272 ninth-grade students across three secondary schools. The research employed questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on teaching methods, student participation, and obstacles to effective instruction of oral skills. The study found that group discussions, brainstorming, and pair work were the most used methods for teaching oral skills. However, teachers emphasized accuracy over fluency, limiting student engagement in spontaneous communication. Students reported that fear of making mistakes, large class sizes, and the frequent use of the mother tongue during discussions hindered their participation and oral practice. The findings suggest that while teachers employ interactive activities, focusing on accuracy may limit opportunities for developing fluency. Recommendations include diversifying teaching methods, incorporating structured roles in group tasks, and fostering a classroom environment that encourages the use of English. Additionally, addressing student anxiety and providing professional development for teachers could enhance the effectiveness of oral skills instruction.

Keywords: oral skills, fluency, accuracy, EFL teaching, classroom challenges, Ethiopia

Resumen.

En Etiopía, el inglés juega un papel crucial en la educación, los negocios y la comunicación gubernamental, siendo tanto una asignatura obligatoria como el medio de instrucción a partir del noveno grado. A pesar de su importancia, la competencia en inglés sigue siendo un desafío significativo tanto para los estudiantes como para los maestros, especialmente en las escuelas secundarias. Este estudio explora las prácticas y los desafíos de la enseñanza de habilidades orales en la Zona Este de Wollaga, con un enfoque en el equilibrio entre fluidez y precisión en la instrucción del idioma. Se utilizó un enfoque de métodos mixtos, que incluyó un diseño de encuesta descriptiva. Los datos fueron recolectados de 11 maestros de inglés y 272 estudiantes de noveno grado en tres escuelas secundarias. La investigación utilizó cuestionarios, observaciones en el aula y entrevistas para recopilar datos cualitativos y cuantitativos sobre los métodos de enseñanza, la participación estudiantil y los obstáculos para una enseñanza efectiva de habilidades orales. El estudio encontró que las discusiones en grupo, la lluvia de ideas y el trabajo en pareja fueron los métodos más comúnmente utilizados para enseñar habilidades orales. Sin embargo, los maestros dieron más énfasis a la precisión que a la fluidez, lo que llevó a una limitada participación de los estudiantes en la comunicación espontánea. Los estudiantes informaron que el miedo a cometer errores, el tamaño de las clases grandes y el uso frecuente de la lengua materna durante las discusiones dificultaban su participación y práctica oral. Los resultados sugieren que, aunque los maestros emplean actividades interactivas, el enfoque en

la precisión puede limitar las oportunidades para desarrollar la fluidez. Las recomendaciones incluyen diversificar los métodos de enseñanza, incorporar roles estructurados en las tareas grupales y fomentar un ambiente de aula que incentive el uso del inglés. Además, abordar la ansiedad de los estudiantes y proporcionar desarrollo profesional para los maestros podría mejorar la efectividad de la enseñanza de habilidades orales.

Palabras clave: habilidades orales, fluidez, precisión, enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera, desafíos en el aula, Etiopía

Resumo

Na Etiópia, o inglês desempenha um papel crucial na educação, nos negócios e na comunicação governamental, sendo tanto uma disciplina obrigatória quanto o meio de instrução a partir do nono ano. Apesar de sua importância, a proficiência em inglês continua sendo um desafio significativo para alunos e professores, especialmente no ensino secundário. Este estudo explora as práticas e os desafios do ensino de habilidades orais na Zona Leste de Wollaga, com foco no equilíbrio entre fluência e precisão na instrução do idioma. Utilizou-se uma abordagem de métodos mistos, que incluiu um delineamento de pesquisa descritiva. Os dados foram coletados de 11 professores de inglês e 272 alunos do nono ano em três escolas secundárias. A pesquisa utilizou questionários, observações em sala de aula e entrevistas para reunir dados qualitativos e quantitativos sobre os métodos de ensino, a participação dos alunos e os obstáculos para um ensino eficaz das habilidades orais.

O estudo constatou que discussões em grupo, tempestades de ideias e trabalhos em duplas foram os métodos mais comumente utilizados para ensinar habilidades orais. No entanto, os professores deram maior ênfase à precisão do que à fluência, o que resultou em uma participação limitada dos alunos na comunicação espontânea. Os estudantes relataram que o medo de cometer erros, o tamanho excessivo das turmas e o uso frequente da língua materna durante as discussões dificultavam sua participação e prática oral. Os resultados sugerem que, embora os professores utilizem atividades interativas, o foco excessivo na precisão pode limitar as oportunidades de desenvolvimento da fluência. As recomendações incluem diversificar os métodos de ensino, incorporar papéis estruturados nas tarefas em grupo e promover um ambiente de sala de aula que incentive o uso do inglês. Além disso, enfrentar a ansiedade dos estudantes e oferecer desenvolvimento profissional aos professores pode melhorar a eficácia do ensino de habilidades orais.

Palavras-chave: habilidades orais, fluência, precisão, ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira, desafios em sala de aula, Etiópia

Introduction

In Ethiopia, the English language is essential in the education system, from primary to tertiary levels. It is a compulsory subject from the early grades and serves as the medium of instruction starting in the ninth grade. According to the nation's Teaching and Training Policy, English is also a focus of study in higher education (MoE, 1994). As noted by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2005, p. 1), "English is a cornerstone in the development of business, communication systems, technology, and education in Ethiopia." Additionally, English plays a crucial role in the country's socioeconomic and political landscape, serving as the primary means of communication in various government and non-governmental organizations. Research by Abebe (1997) highlighted that numerous government agencies, banks, insurance companies, hospitals, and airlines use English to engage with local and international clients.

Despite the significant role of English in these areas, there are widespread claims that Ethiopian students and teachers struggle with English proficiency. This issue is deteriorating over time, particularly among adolescents, as many continue to struggle with mastering the language. Teachers frequently express concerns about students' low levels of English proficiency, while students often voice dissatisfaction with their teachers' language skills. Many teachers lack confidence in their English skills and do not effectively utilize the language in their instruction. It is common for teachers to switch to local languages during lessons, even though English is intended as the medium of instruction. Similarly, students tend to use Amharic and other local languages during discussions (Abenga, 2005; Gudu, 2010). Research by Hailom and Woldu (1998) found that, despite years of English instruction, many subject teachers, including those teaching English, still exhibit deficiencies in their language skills. This challenge is not unique to Ethiopia; it is increasingly common in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Consequently, many high school graduates struggle to speak English correctly (Alonso, 2014; Alharbi, 2015). This issue is also prevalent in secondary schools in Ethiopia's East Wollaga Zone.

Statement of the Problem

The existing research gap in oral skills instruction within Ethiopian secondary schools is marked by the lack of targeted studies examining the teaching methods employed for oral communication and the challenges teachers face in fostering effective oral communication skills.

While research such as Ur (1996) underscores the importance of speaking as a fundamental skill in language learning, Oradee (2012) and Ahmad and Yusuf (2014)

stress that the ability to communicate effectively is the primary motivation for learning a foreign language, there is a noticeable absence of studies focusing specifically on how interactive teaching methods are applied in the classroom to improve students' oral communication skills. Mede et al. (2019) also highlight the critical role of speech in human interaction but note the lack of comprehensive analysis regarding how interactive methods for teaching oral skills have been implemented in practice, particularly in Ethiopia.

Although some studies have addressed the broader challenges of English language learning in Ethiopia, particularly concerning students' overall proficiency (Abenga, 2005; Gudu, 2010), there is still insufficient research focused on oral skills instruction specifically. In Ethiopia, oral communication has often been overlooked or inadequately addressed in language curricula, and teachers continue to face numerous barriers in developing effective oral language skills in students. Factors like large class sizes, inadequate teacher training, students' fear of making mistakes, and the over-reliance on local languages during lessons exacerbate these challenges.

Moreover, research by Marlina (2018) highlights the need for a more thorough examination of how interactive methods can contribute to teaching oral skills. The gap lies in the lack of empirical studies investigating how teachers balance fluency and accuracy in oral communication lessons, as well as the types of interactive activities (e.g., group discussions, role-plays, debates) they implement to help students improve both their fluency and accuracy in spoken English. Given these issues, the researchers aimed to evaluate the practices and challenges associated with teaching oral skills in secondary schools within the East Wollaga Zone of Ethiopia.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this study is to examine the practices and challenges of teaching oral skills in secondary schools within the East Wollaga Zone, Ethiopia. The following questions guided the research:

1. What methods do teachers employ to deliver oral skills lessons?
2. How are the aspects of accuracy and fluency in oral skills instruction balanced?
3. What factors hinder the effective teaching of oral skills in the classroom?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Effective classroom education must take into account students' diverse abilities, expectations, motivations, backgrounds, knowledge, and learning styles. It is crucial to recognize these differences when teaching oral communication, as developing speaking skills involves mastering various aspects of language. Spratt et al., (2005, p. 35) emphasize that “teaching oral communication means developing students’ expressive abilities by regularly focusing on specific aspects of speech, such as fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and body language.”

Definition of Speaking

Researchers have various definitions of speaking. For instance, Kevaliauskiene (2006) describes it as a skill designed to facilitate communication. Fulcher (2003) explores the complexities of assessing spoken language proficiency. He highlights the challenges in defining “speaking” as a construct, noting that it encompasses various elements such as pronunciation, intonation, accuracy, fluency, strategies, and interactional aspects. Fulcher emphasizes that attempting to isolate these components can overlook the dynamic nature of real-life conversations, where all these aspects interact simultaneously (2003). He draws parallels between speaking tests and driving tests, suggesting that both aim to collect systematic evidence to make inferences about a person’s abilities across a range of situations beyond what can be directly observed during the test itself. Louma (2004) notes that oral communication can reveal aspects of a speaker’s personality and emotions through the nuances of spoken language.

Speaking entails using language to articulate thoughts clearly, pronounce words accurately, and express oneself effectively. Mastery of this linguistic skill is essential for students to become proficient communicators. According to Cartor and Maccartlity (1997), students must learn how to engage in dialogue, which is often taken for granted and developed through socialization.

However, teaching oral skills presents several challenges for educators. In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, students often have minimal exposure to the target language outside the classroom. A limited daily class period of just 45 minutes can hinder long-term learning. Employing the Engage, Study, and Activate (ESA) model proposed by Harmer (1998) can be effective in enhancing student engagement and maximizing learning outcomes. This approach encourages active participation during lessons and motivates students to practice speaking outside of class.

Connection Between the ESA Model and the Teaching of Oral Skills

The Engage, Study, and Activate (ESA) model, proposed by Harmer (1998), is a popular and effective approach to teaching English, mainly when focusing on developing oral skills. The model is designed to provide a structured yet flexible framework for language learning that can be directly applied to improve students' ability to speak fluently and accurately in English. Here is how the ESA model connects to and enhances the teaching of oral skills:

Engage

The Engage phase is about creating interest, motivation, and emotional connection to the topic or language before any new learning begins. This phase is crucial for oral skills because:

Building confidence: Students need to feel comfortable and open before practicing oral communication. This phase helps reduce language anxiety and fear of mistakes, which are common barriers to oral participation.

Interactive activities: Teachers often use games, warm-up discussions, or brainstorming activities to encourage students to express themselves freely. These activities are interactive and foster natural communication, which is vital for developing oral fluency.

In teaching oral skills, the Engage stage can involve activities such as role-playing, pair work, group discussions, or debates, where students engage in spontaneous speaking, laying the foundation for language practice.

Study

The Study phase focuses on explicit teaching of language features—such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation—necessary for effective communication. In the case of oral skills, this phase helps ensure speaking accuracy. Here is how it connects:

Accuracy in speech: While students may feel comfortable speaking in the Engage phase, the Study phase focuses on the correct use of language structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Teachers can provide focused practice on specific areas where students may need improvement, such as correcting pronunciation or practicing sentence structures used in speaking.

Controlled activities may include guided practice or language drills that help reinforce correct pronunciation, vocabulary usage, or grammar. For example, students may be asked to repeat dialogues or engage in structured role-plays where they practice accurate sentence formation.

This phase ensures that while students practice speaking, they are also conscious of accuracy and learn how to produce correct forms in their speech.

Activate

The activate phase allows students to use the language creatively and freely in real-world contexts. It is the phase where fluency is developed, and students can practice using the language more spontaneously and naturally. The link to oral skills teaching is crucial:

Fluency-building: In the Activate phase, students are encouraged to speak without fear of making errors. This is where they practice free speaking tasks, such as discussions, debates, presentations, or problem-solving activities. The teacher must give the students more freedom to speak, allowing them to produce longer, more connected speech.

Real-life contexts: The Activate stage mirrors real-life situations, enabling students to become more proficient in using English in everyday communication. For example, students may role-play a job interview, give a presentation, or participate in a debate—all activities that require them to speak naturally without overthinking their words.

Fluency versus Accuracy

One significant challenge in teaching oral skills is finding the right balance between fluency and accuracy in language use. Lindahl (2018) notes that teachers must carefully consider designing tasks that effectively teach oral communication to beginners, weighing the importance of accuracy—producing statements and pronouncing words without errors—against fluency, which involves engaging in dynamic dialogue to convey meaning. Educators must maintain an equilibrium between these two aspects in their teaching practices, as an imbalance can hinder students' language development. Fluency, defined as the ability to express oneself clearly and coherently without excessive hesitation, is just as essential as using language correctly and minimizing errors.

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This analysis aimed to assess the practices involved in teaching oral skills, particularly in ninth-grade secondary schools. A descriptive survey design incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods was utilized to explore this topic. As Sharma (2000) indicates, descriptive surveys are valuable for identifying current conditions and highlighting recent needs.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted in the East Wallaga Zone, part of the Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia, focusing on three secondary schools in the area. All three schools are located in Nekemte Town and are public institutions. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 11 English teachers (9 males and 2 females) from Darge, Dalo, and Biftu Secondary Schools. These schools vary in terms of geographical location, student demographics, and available resources, all of which influence their academic performance, teaching methods, and extracurricular opportunities. The infrastructure and leadership at each school also contribute to its unique educational experience. According to the information provided by the school principals, these eleven teachers were assigned to teach ninth-grade English. As a result, all available ninth-grade English teachers at these schools were included in the study. Additionally, 272 ninth-grade students from the three schools were selected through simple random sampling.

Data Collection Tools

The analysis employed three data collection tools: a questionnaire, classroom observation, and interviews.

Questionnaire

A total of 272 students and 11 English teachers from three secondary schools in the East Wallaga Zone were selected. The researchers used structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions to gather information about teaching methods, student participation, and perceptions of oral skills instruction. The questionnaire inquired about the specific methods used for teaching oral skills, the frequency of activities

(e.g., debates, role-plays), and challenges faced in the classroom. The questionnaire also focused on students' experiences, including how often they practiced oral skills (e.g., fluency vs. accuracy) and their perceptions of teaching effectiveness. The questionnaires were distributed in paper form, completed in class, and then collected for analysis.

Classroom Observation

The researchers observed Teachers' lessons in real time, specifically focusing on ninth-grade English classes. The researchers observed how oral skills were taught, focusing particularly on interactive activities (e.g., group discussions, role-plays), teacher-student interactions, and the application of teaching methods. The observations aimed to evaluate the implementation of the ESA model and how students participated in speaking activities. Observations were conducted in a natural classroom setting, with detailed field notes recorded on the effectiveness of oral skills teaching, classroom dynamics, and student engagement.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of teachers and students. Interviews explored teachers' personal experiences, teaching challenges, and their perceptions of students' speaking skills. Teachers were asked about the effectiveness of their methods for teaching oral skills, the obstacles they faced, and their strategies for improving student participation. Students were interviewed about their experiences with oral skills activities, their feelings towards speaking English, and any challenges they encountered, such as anxiety or limited practice. These interviews were conducted individually, either in person or via alternative formats, and the responses were documented for further analysis.

Oral Skills Teaching Techniques Used by Teachers

In teaching oral skills, employing a variety of activities provides students with opportunities to practice language in diverse contexts. Generally, teachers utilize techniques such as brainstorming, debates, role-playing, storytelling, information gaps, problem-solving, and presentations to engage students. However, the presentation styles and preferences varied among teachers, often limited to a few everyday activities. The collected data reflects these realities, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1

Students' response on the activities of teaching speaking skills their teachers use

No.	Items	No. Resp	Responses in Percentage and Frequency									
			Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Brainstorming	270	10	3.7	15	5.5	40	14.8	90	33.3	115	42.59
2	Group discussion	270	3	1.1	7	2.5	34	12.5	103	38.1	123	45.5
3	Role play	270	47	17.4	43	15.9	82	30.3	57	21.1	41	15.1
4	Pair work	270	27	10	17	6.2	33	12.2	102	37.7	91	33.7
5	Problem-solving	270	75	27.7	92	34	55	20.3	30	11.1	18	6.66
6	Storytelling	270	80	29.6	73	27	60	22.2	32	11.8	25	9.25
7	Presentation	270	12	4.4	21	7.7	115	42.5	74	27.4	48	17.7
8	Debating	270	85	31.4	99	36.6	33	12.2	34	12.5	19	7

Table 1 illustrates that the most employed activities for teaching oral skills include group discussions, favored by 45.5% of students, followed by brainstorming at 42.59%, and pair work at 33.7%. Other activities used occasionally include presentations (42.5%) and role-playing (30.3%) while problem-solving, storytelling, and debates were among the least utilized. Classroom observations confirmed that teachers allocate time for discussions in pairs and small groups, though often with minimal guidance or support. This finding aligns with Gudu (2015), who noted that debates are a preferred activity among teachers. While debates promote interaction and encourage student engagement, observations revealed that students frequently resorted to using their native language instead of English during these discussions. This poses a challenge, particularly in larger classes with over 50 students, making it difficult to manage language use effectively.

Teachers' Response to their Favorite Activities to Teach Oral Skills

The responses from the sample teachers regarding their preferred teaching methods largely mirrored those of the students. Eight out of eleven teachers expressed a desire to engage their students in group discussions, believing this approach facilitates meaningful language practice. Two teachers highlighted the importance of presentations, viewing them as opportunities for students to practice in a more natural

setting. One teacher emphasized that pair work and role-playing are frequently used activities in their classrooms. These teacher's responses align closely with those of the students.

Classroom observations also revealed that discussions were predominant in the majority of observed lessons, promoting language fluency. Both types of practice—fluency and accuracy—appear to hold equal significance; however, traditional methods often prioritize accuracy, resulting in students speaking in a manner that resembles a grammar textbook. The students' perceptions of the balance between fluency and accuracy in their classrooms are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Students' Response to the balance between accuracy and fluency

No.	Items	No. Resp	Responses in Percentage and Frequency									
			Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Pronunciation	270	48	17.7	76	28.1	101	37.4	33	12.2	12	4.4
2	Vocabulary	270	3	1.11	8	2.9	37	13.7	112	41.4	110	40.7
3	Grammar	270	4	1.4	3	1.11	82	30.3	97	36	84	31.1
4	Fluency	270	7	2.5	41	15.1	100	37	116	43	6	2.22

Students' response on the balance between accuracy and fluency

Effective oral communication in a language requires the correct use of various elements, including producing accurate sounds, selecting appropriate words, and forming grammatically correct structures. Tasks related to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are essential for achieving language accuracy. At the same time, it is crucial to convey a clear message without long pauses or difficulties in expressing thoughts and feelings in context-appropriate language.

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of students' responses regarding how often pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency are practiced in their oral skills education. When asked about the frequency of pronunciation practice in their classes, 37.4% of students indicated that it is sometimes addressed, while 28.1% reported it as occasionally practiced. In terms of vocabulary, 40.7% of students reported that their teachers consistently emphasize vocabulary instruction and assessment. Few students mentioned that vocabulary practice is infrequent.

Regarding grammar, 36% of students noted it as a common focus in their classes, with 30.3% stating they sometimes practice grammar during oral expression lessons. All eleven teachers acknowledged that vocabulary is one of the most emphasized components of oral skills in their teaching. Classroom observations further confirmed that teachers frequently integrated vocabulary into their oral skills instruction, often highlighting commonly used expressions and relevant phrases on the board for students to practice.

This emphasis on vocabulary and accuracy suggests that teacher practices prioritize accuracy over fluency. Controlled and guided activities dominate their lessons, which may undervalue the importance of fluency, as indicated by the students' responses in Table 2.

Table 3

Student's response on what impeded their practice of learning speaking skills

No.	Items	No. Resp	Responses in Percentage and Frequency									
			SDA		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		SA	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Lack of interest	270	93	34.4	107	39.6	36	13.3	23	8.5	11	4
2	Fear of making mistakes	270	10	3.7	6	2.2	65	2.4	110	40.7	79	29.2
3	Large class size	270	8	3	16	6	45	16.6	87	32.2	91	23
4	Use of mother tongue	270	17	6.2	9	3.33	50	18.5	176	65.1	18	6.66

SDA: Strongly disagree, SA=strongly agree

Teaching oral skills typically requires significant student collaboration in classroom activities. However, as illustrated in Table 3, students' fear and shyness emerged as major obstacles to their participation. Statistically, 40.7% of respondents indicated that shyness and fear of making mistakes hinder their engagement, while 24% expressed uncertainty about their collaboration. Despite this, students conveyed a desire to learn and enhance their oral skills.

Class size also poses a challenge, as noted by 32.2% of respondents, creating an environment where a few active students dominate discussions, leaving fewer active peers marginalized. From the teachers' perspective, four reported that students' disinterest significantly impacts their teaching, citing that 65.1% of students frequently use their mother tongue during discussions. In contrast, the other seven teachers did not view this lack of interest as a serious issue; they felt that the limited participation of a few students in discussions was more concerning. Nonetheless, all teachers acknowledged that large class sizes, often exceeding 50 students, are a significant barrier to effective instruction.

Data Obtained Through Interview

Data collected through interviews with selected students and teachers verified these findings. Students noted that teachers often employ oral skills activities such as debates, brainstorming, dialogues, and presentations. Teachers confirmed that their teaching remains student-centered, focusing on discussions and debates while dedicating considerable time to grammatical and vocabulary instruction. In contexts like Ethiopia, where English language education is largely confined to the classroom, an exclusive focus on accuracy can hinder students' communicative competence. Teachers' interviews suggested that this issue is deeply ingrained, as they were trained in similar ways. Therefore, addressing these challenges within the educational system is unlikely to be straightforward, reflecting a cycle influenced by how teachers were educated.

Findings

Teachers use a range of oral skill activities, with group discussions (45.5%), brainstorming (42.6%), and pair work (33.7%) being the most common. However, activities like debates, storytelling, and problem-solving were used less frequently. Teachers and students alike favored group discussions and presentations as a means of promoting interaction and language use. Teachers placed more emphasis on accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), often prioritizing controlled activities to minimize errors. However, students also practiced fluency (through spontaneous speaking tasks, such as discussions or debates) during lessons, although fluency practice seemed less frequent. Students reported that vocabulary (40.7%) and grammar (36%) were the most commonly emphasized aspects of oral skills. The fear of making mistakes (40.7%) and large class sizes (32.2%) were significant obstacles to effective participation in speaking activities. Using the mother tongue (65.1%) during activities, particularly in larger classes, was a common issue that hindered English use. Teachers found that students' lack of interest and fear were significant barriers, but some teachers downplayed the issue of student disengagement. Teacher-student interactions were frequently limited in larger classes, where a few students dominated, leaving others passive. Despite challenges, many students expressed a desire to improve their speaking skills.

Conclusions

Oral communication serves not only as a way to interact on various topics but also as a means for individuals to reflect on their identity and culture. Providing students with opportunities for relationship-building and meaningful negotiation is essential for enhancing language proficiency (Braden, 2018). However, teachers often limit themselves to specific activities, such as debates, brainstorming, and pair work, which restricts students' exposure to a broader range of interactive experiences (Dejong, 2014; Nunan, 2018).

Teaching oral communication in a foreign language presents several challenges; nonetheless, effective organization and the incorporation of active learning can facilitate successful communication (Macknish & Tomas, 2018). While the findings of this study reveal that the predominant activities used for teaching oral skills—such as discussions, pair work, and brainstorming—are indeed interactive, their variety is quite limited. Teachers should implement a broader range of activities that promote student collaboration in real-world contexts, providing ample practice opportunities.

A study by Karim and Richards (2015) in Iran highlighted a similar reliance on debates for teaching oral skills, suggesting that while debates can foster dialogue, diversifying activities could better support students' language practice in relevant situations. Additionally, a lack of structured follow-up during these debates further diminished their effectiveness. For instance, in the context of this analysis, teachers did not assign specific roles to students, such as scribes, presenters, or leaders, which weakened the benefits of interactive speaking tasks. This lack of role assignment undermines key advantages of group discussions, including fostering participation, promoting positive interdependence, and encouraging individual responsibility among students. These findings align with the views of Christison and Murray (2014), and Braden (2018), who emphasize the importance of each student's role in group discussions.

Recommendations

- Teachers should expand their use of interactive activities beyond debates and brainstorming, incorporating role-playing, storytelling, simulations, and problem-solving tasks. This will provide students with diverse opportunities to practice oral skills in real-world contexts.
- Teachers should balance fluency and accuracy by integrating activities that encourage spontaneous communication while also addressing grammatical and pronunciation accuracy. This will help students develop both their speaking fluidity and correctness.

- To foster a supportive environment, teachers should implement strategies to reduce students' fear of speaking. Icebreakers, smaller group discussions, and creating a more relaxed classroom atmosphere can build students' confidence in using English.
- Teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities, including workshops focused on effective teaching strategies for oral skills and managing diverse classroom dynamics. This will improve their ability to engage students and incorporate interactive methods.
- Teachers should employ strategies such as dividing large classes into smaller groups to ensure better student engagement and participation. This will help mitigate the challenges posed by overcrowded classrooms and ensure that more students have opportunities to speak and interact in English.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can create a more effective and engaging learning environment that fosters students' oral communication skills in English.

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