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Approaches To Developing English Speaking Proficiency In Intermediate Level Learners

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ABSTRACT

A "fluency ceiling" often stops intermediate-level learners from getting better at speaking. They have enough grammar and vocabulary to communicate, but when they're under pressure, their speech is still slow, broken, and limited in terms of what they can say. This article combines important research on second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching to suggest a set of methods for helping intermediate learners improve their speaking skills. These methods focus on fluency, accuracy, complexity, pronunciation intelligibility, interactional competence, and emotional readiness. The paper contends that successful speaking development relies on recurrent opportunities for meaning-centered interaction, meticulously structured task cycles, and feedback that is discerning, prompt, and congruent with communicative objectives. In this model, preparing and planning before a task helps with lexical and discourse retrieval; repeating tasks and spacing them out helps with proceduralization and automaticity; focused corrective feedback and raising awareness of form-meaning mappings; and pronunciation training based on intelligibility principles improves comprehensibility without putting too much emphasis on a native-like accent. The synthesis also talks about psychological factors that are especially important at the intermediate level, such as willingness to communicate, anxiety management, and self-efficacy. It also talks about how technology-mediated interaction, such as AI tools, can create more practice opportunities but needs careful planning and evaluation. The proposed framework serves as an assessment-informed cycle that connects diagnostic profiling to specific intervention and transfer tasks, facilitating quantifiable advancement on CEFR-aligned performance descriptors. There are suggestions for how to plan lessons, run a classroom, and make decisions as a teacher in EFL settings where there aren't many hours of contact and the need for communication is growing.

Keywords: Speaking proficiency; intermediate learners; oral fluency; task-based language teaching; corrective feedback; pronunciation intelligibility; willingness to communicate; technology-mediated speaking.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency is frequently regarded as the most apparent measure of second language proficiency and the skill most closely linked to educational and professional advancement. However, for learners at the intermediate level, progress in speaking may seem much slower than progress in receptive skills. A lot of intermediate students can follow along with lessons, read modified academic texts, and do controlled grammar tasks, but they have trouble speaking smoothly when they are not prepared. This gap isn't just about "more vocabulary" or "more grammar." Speaking is a time-limited, mentally taxing task that requires quick thinking, word retrieval, sentence building, phonological planning, and articulation, all while keeping an eye on what the other person is saying and making sure it's appropriate. When these processes vie for scarce attentional resources, speech becomes tentative and accuracy declines, particularly in real-time dialogue.

Learners at the intermediate level, which is roughly equivalent to CEFR B1–B2, can usually communicate well in familiar situations, but their performance can suffer

when the topic changes, when there is more pressure to interact, or when tasks require longer turns. Some common problems are speaking slowly, taking breaks in the middle of sentences, relying too much on basic vocabulary and common grammatical patterns, having trouble using discourse markers to manage turns, not being able to be flexible with pragmatics, and being hard to understand because of segmental pronunciation and prosody. These difficulties are often exacerbated by emotional limitations, such as fear of negative assessment, feelings of inadequacy relative to fluent peers, and a diminished readiness to commence speech. As a result, intermediate learners may use avoidance techniques like short answers, little elaboration, or relying on memorized phrases. These techniques make it harder for them to get the speaking practice they need to improve.

A strong way to help people improve their speaking skills must be multidimensional. Current research defines performance in terms of interacting dimensions, including complexity, accuracy, and fluency, while also highlighting interactional competence, strategic competence, and comprehensibility. This means that when teaching speaking, you shouldn't just use one method (like conversation practice) but instead combine task design, repeated practice with variation, selective attention to form, and feedback systems that don't hurt communicative confidence. At the intermediate level, the main goal of instruction is to make proceduralization happen. This means turning clear knowledge and partial control into quick, reliable performance that can be used outside of the classroom.

This article examines a pragmatic inquiry with theoretical significance: what methodologies are most efficacious for enhancing English speaking proficiency in intermediate learners, and how can these methodologies be integrated into a cohesive classroom cycle? Instead of suggesting separate methods, the paper combines established SLA theory with recent empirical trends to create a unified framework that works well in EFL settings where students don't often get to interact with real people outside of class.

The objective of this article is to formulate a research-based, classroom-focused framework for enhancing English speaking proficiency among intermediate-level learners by amalgamating strategies that address fluency, accuracy, complexity, pronunciation clarity, interactional competence, and emotional preparedness, while delineating the sequencing and evaluation of these strategies within a cyclical instructional model.

This work is both conceptual and synthetic. It is founded on an analytical examination and synthesis of significant SLA theories (speech production models, interactionist perspectives, skill acquisition, and task-based pedagogy) alongside empirical research pertinent to intermediate speaking development, encompassing studies on planning and task readiness, task repetition and spacing, corrective feedback in oral interaction, pronunciation instruction aimed at intelligibility, and psychological factors such as communication willingness and anxiety. The method involves thematic synthesis, where findings and constructs are structured around fundamental mechanisms that likely facilitate speaking improvements, such as attentional allocation, proceduralization, noticing, feedback uptake, and affective engagement.

To make sure that the synthesis can be used in teaching, it is turned into an operational model that is shown as a repeating cycle of instruction. The cycle connects diagnostic profiling (assessing learner needs in fluency, accuracy, discourse, and pronunciation) to task design and sequencing. Then comes performance, feedback, repetition with variation, and transfer tasks. Therefore, the "results" of this article are shown as a clear framework with clear teaching implications, not as numbers from a single empirical dataset.

A good way to start improving your speaking skills is to make clear what "speaking proficiency" means in terms of what you can see. Speaking is often scored as a whole in classroom assessments, which can hide the fact that different students need different kinds of help. One learner might speak quickly but make a lot of grammatical mistakes, while another might be correct but very slow. A third learner might be able to speak fluently in a monologue but not be able to take turns in conversation. An integrated model regards speaking proficiency as a performance construct consisting of various dimensions that evolve through somewhat distinct mechanisms. Fluency enhancement is intricately linked to automatization and retrieval velocity; precision is contingent upon consistent form-meaning associations and monitoring ability; complexity signifies both linguistic resources and willingness to take risks; pronunciation and prosody affect comprehensibility and listener effort; and interactional competence relies on pragmatic understanding and responsiveness to interlocutors. The intermediate stage is when trade-offs between these

dimensions become most clear because learners are moving from controlled production to real-time interaction.

From this viewpoint, a principal "outcome" of the synthesis is that solitary speaking practice is inadequate unless it is designed to transition learners' processing from laborious construction to more automatic execution. This change is most likely to happen when people do the same thing over and over again with a focus on meaning, but with some attention to form. The framework thus emphasizes task-based cycles that enhance communicative intent by adjusting planning time, repetition schedules, feedback emphasis, and interactional requirements.

Planning is one of the most consistently supported tools for teaching speaking to intermediate learners. When students have time to plan their content and language before they speak, they usually speak more clearly and can focus on choosing the right words and grammar instead of trying to come up with ideas. Planning benefits are not just motivational; they also change how the brain organizes the task by making it easier to understand while doing it. But planning must be done with the goal of teaching. If planning turns into writing scripts, students may read or memorize, which helps them do better in the short term but doesn't always help them speak spontaneously. So, good planning at the intermediate level is better thought of as strategic preparation: making an outline of the main points, choosing useful phrases, pre-activating topic vocabulary, and practicing openings and transitions that keep the conversation going. When planning is followed by timed performance, students slowly learn how to follow discourse routines and stop hesitating.

Repetition of tasks is another very effective way to improve fluency. Doing the same or similar tasks over and over again lets learners use the same ideas again, which frees up their attention for language form and delivery. As performances go on, speech rate tends to go up, pauses tend to go down, and articulation tends to get smoother. This is because the demands of processing change from coming up with ideas to making them more efficiently. Repetition is also helpful for accuracy and complexity when it is used with feedback or specific attentional prompts. Recent research on repetition schedules indicates that repetition is not uniform; spacing and interleaving can affect retention and transfer. For intermediate learners, the most useful lesson is that repetition should be planned and have a purpose. Learners should do a task, get specific feedback on what they did wrong, and then do it again with a few changes (like a new partner, a different role, or a time limit) so that they don't just remember one performance. Studies on repetition schedules show that they can help people speak more fluently in controlled settings. This supports the idea that short, repeated speaking cycles are better for the classroom than single "one-off" speaking activities.

One important decision for teachers is how to pay attention to form without breaking up the flow of communication. The synthesis advocates for a "focus on form" approach, wherein meaning is paramount, yet both the teacher and students intermittently concentrate on linguistic elements that are prominent, prevalent, and directly beneficial for effective communication. For intermediate learners, corrective feedback is most effective when it is selective and based on patterns rather than being all-encompassing. When all mistakes are fixed, students may become afraid of making mistakes and do less work. Errors can become stable when there is no feedback. A balanced approach identifies a limited number of recurring targets per unit—typically associated with communicative functions such as clarifying, comparing, providing reasons, or expressing uncertainty—and employs feedback to cultivate dependable control over these forms. In practice, this can be done by giving learners short feedback sessions after each task that use examples from their speech, followed by micro-practice and immediate re-performance. These cycles fit with how people learn new skills: they notice the gap, practice the feature, and then use it when they have to communicate.

Lexico-grammatical packaging is also important for developing fluency. Intermediate speakers frequently possess a substantial vocabulary in isolation but lack immediate access to multiword units that facilitate real-time speech. Formulaic language—collocations, lexical bundles, discourse markers, and pragmatic routines—reduces processing load because it allows speakers to retrieve chunks rather than assemble every clause from scratch. This means that speaking classes should include systematic work on spoken formulas like stance expressions ("I'm not sure, but..."), turn-management ("What do you think about...?"), and coherence devices ("The main point is...," "On the other hand..."). These phrases shouldn't be taught as pretty words; instead, they should be taught as useful tools that are used in speaking tasks over and over again. Over time, learners' speech becomes more like that of a native speaker in terms of rhythm and organization, not because they copy the accent,

but because they learn how to package their speech in a way that is clear and concise.

Intermediate learners also benefit from clear instructional framing when it comes to pronunciation. Many students think that the goal of pronunciation is to sound like a native speaker, which is usually not possible and can make them anxious. Modern pronunciation teaching focuses on being clear and easy to understand, not on getting rid of an accent. At the intermediate level, the most useful goals are high-functional-load segmental contrasts (those that change meaning) and prosodic features that change rhythm, stress, and phrase boundaries. Research on perceptual training, such as high-variability phonetic training, shows that improving perception can help with production gains, especially when learners hear a lot of different voices and see a lot of different contexts. The instructional implication is that short, regular perception-production loops can be added to speaking classes without making them phonetics classes. This way, students can tell the difference between sounds, hear them in connected speech, and then use them in communicative tasks where intelligibility is important. Shadowing and guided imitation can be effective when integrated with meaning-focused speaking, provided that learners receive feedback on specific objectives rather than ambiguous encouragement to "sound more natural."

Interactional competence merits explicit focus, as intermediate learners may excel in rehearsed monologues yet encounter difficulties in authentic conversation. In order to have a conversation, you need to take turns, fix things, backchannel, and respond to what the other person says. When tasks are set up so that people have to negotiate meaning instead of just talking to each other, they can learn these skills. Tasks that involve information gaps, opinion gaps, and problem solving naturally lead to requests for clarification, confirmation checks, and reformulation. As time goes on, learners develop a set of interactional moves that help them feel more confident and less likely to make mistakes. It is important that interactional practice includes training in repair as a positive skill, not as proof of failure. When students know how to ask for repetition, rephrase, or buy time in a smart way, they can still control the conversation even when their language skills are stretched.

Affective variables are not secondary; they serve as causal mediators in the development of speaking skills. Intermediate learners frequently encounter a conflict between a growing awareness of their limitations and elevated expectations for fluent performance. Willingness to communicate (WTC) elucidates the varying speaking trajectories among learners with analogous linguistic knowledge: individuals who initiate interaction accrue greater practice, obtain more feedback, and cultivate more automated control. Anxiety can lower output, make it harder to think of new ideas, and make people want to avoid things even more. So, a good way to improve intermediate speaking skills is to have classroom rules that make mistakes normal, give students support from their peers, and stress the importance of growth through repetition. This is where assessment practices have the most effect. If students think that speaking tests are unfair or random, they will try to avoid taking them. If assessment is clear and helps students learn, they are more likely to keep trying to speak. Recent systematic research on technology and language anxiety highlights that technology can either alleviate or exacerbate anxiety based on design characteristics and social context; therefore, digital speaking tools necessitate pedagogical oversight rather than mere implementation.

Technology-mediated speaking is a quickly growing field with a lot of potential for intermediate learners, mostly because it gives them more time to interact. Artificial intelligence tools, automatic speech recognition, and chatbot-mediated conversation can give students low-stakes practice and quick feedback, which can help them practice speaking outside of class. Mainstream journals have published empirical studies that show improvements in speaking skills and a willingness to communicate after AI-mediated speaking interventions. However, the results depend on how the tasks are set up, how good the feedback is, and how interested the learners are. The most important teaching principle is alignment. Technology should be used as an extension of the same speaking cycle that students use in class, not as something separate. For instance, students can do a short AI-mediated dialogue as practice before the main task, then do a human interaction task in class, then listen to recordings and read transcripts to think about what went wrong and fix it, and finally do the task again with a different partner. This sequence keeps the authenticity of communication while using technology to get more feedback and volume.

The article's main contribution is a cycle of speaking development that is based on assessments and is designed for intermediate learners. The cycle starts with diagnostic profiling that uses CEFR-aligned descriptors and analytic rubrics to figure out if the main problem is fluency,

accuracy, discourse organization, pronunciation intelligibility, or interactional responsiveness. Instruction then goes through a task cycle that includes strategic preparation (activating the topic and priming the functional language), performance with a clear communicative goal and a time limit, selective feedback that focuses on a small number of high-leverage features, and immediate re-performance through task repetition or near-transfer tasks. The cycle ends with transfer tasks that ask students to use the same language and discourse skills in a different topic or way of interacting. This helps them generalize what they've learned to more than one task. Over time, learners usually see measurable improvements in their fluency and control over interactions, with accuracy and range gradually getting better as they learn more procedures.

In real life, learners are most likely to improve their intermediate speaking skills when they talk a lot, have a reason to talk, have a time limit, and then talk again after getting feedback. The efficacy of any singular method—planning, repetition, feedback, pronunciation training, or technology—hinges on its sequencing and the consistency of its integration into communicative performance. The synthesis thus endorses an integrated pedagogy that regards speaking as a trainable performance system rather than a mere byproduct of general language study.

Intermediate learners frequently have the linguistic foundation necessary for communication but are hindered by insufficient automaticity, fragile interactional competence, and emotional barriers that impede meaningful speaking practice. This article combined research on second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching methods to suggest a unified framework for improving speaking skills that works well in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. The synthesis shows that the best gains happen when lessons are built around repeated, meaning-focused task cycles that include strategic planning, task repetition with variation, and a focus on form with timely feedback. In this cycle, proceduralization through repeated performance helps fluency grow; feedback that focuses on high-frequency, functionally valuable features helps accuracy and complexity grow; pronunciation work that focuses on perceptual discrimination and prosodic clarity helps intelligibility grow; and tasks that require negotiation of meaning and repair strategies help interactional competence grow. Psychological mediators, including willingness to communicate and anxiety regulation, are not ancillary factors but crucial prerequisites for ongoing speaking development. Technology-mediated interaction, such as AI-supported speaking tools, can increase practice opportunities and encourage learner independence. However, it must be in line with communication goals and assessment standards to avoid experiences that are not deep or motivating. The main takeaway for teachers and curriculum designers is to replace random speaking activities with a regular cycle that connects diagnostic profiling, performance, feedback, repetition, and transfer. This kind of design makes it easier to see, measure, and apply intermediate speaking progress to academic and professional communication needs.

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