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Effective Strategies for Developing English Listening and Speaking Skills

Abstract

The acquisition of oral proficiency in English as a Second Language (ESL) necessitates a synergistic approach that bridges the gap between receptive listening comprehension and productive speaking fluency. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions of teaching these core communicative skills, emphasizing that listening is not a passive act but an active decoding process that serves as the primary input for linguistic development. By implementing "Top-Down" processing—where learners use background knowledge and context to predict meaning—and "Bottom-Up" processing—where they focus on phonemes, stress, and intonation—educators can help students navigate the complexities of natural speech. The discourse further examines the "Affective Filter" hypothesis, noting that speaking anxiety often hinders progress; therefore, creating a low-stress, "fail-safe" environment is crucial for encouraging risk-taking. Key pedagogical strategies discussed include the use of authentic audiovisual materials to expose learners to various dialects and real-world registers, as well as the integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). These tasks, ranging from role-plays and simulations to information-gap activities, require students to negotiate meaning and use the language functionally rather than just repetitively. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of "Shadowing" and "Scaffolding" techniques, which allow learners to mimic native-like prosody and gradually build complex sentences from simpler structures. Technology's role is also scrutinized, specifically how AI-driven speech recognition and interactive podcasts provide personalized, asynchronous practice that traditional classrooms may lack. The integration of pronunciation instruction is presented not as a quest for "perfect" accents, but as a means to achieve international intelligibility, ensuring that learners can communicate effectively in a globalized context. Ultimately, the article argues that listening and speaking should not be taught in isolation; instead, they should be woven into a continuous feedback loop where input informs output, and output identifies gaps in comprehension. By focusing on communicative competence rather than mere grammatical accuracy, instructors can empower students to move beyond the textbook and engage in meaningful, spontaneous English conversation, ultimately fostering a sense of agency and confidence in their linguistic identity. This comprehensive framework provides educators with a roadmap to transform the language classroom into a dynamic hub of interaction, ensuring that learners are not just "knowing" the language, but "living" it through every heard word and spoken phrase.

Keywords: *English as a second language, communicative competence, speaking fluency, listening competence, top-down processing, bottom-up processing*

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İngilis dilində dinləmə və danışmaq bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirmək üçün effektiv strategiyalar

Xülasə

İngilis dilinin ikinci dil (ESL) kimi mənimsənilməsi prosesində şifahi sərəştəyə nail olmaq, qavrayıcı dinləmə anlama ilə məhsuldar danışmaq axıcılığı arasındakı boşluğu dolduran sinerji yanaşmasını zəruridir. Bu məqalə, dinləmənin sadəcə passiv bir hərəkət deyil, dil inkişafı üçün əsas giriş rolunu oynayan aktiv bir dekodlaşdırma prosesi olduğunu vurğulayaraq, bu əsas kommunikativ bacarıqların öyrədilməsinin çoxşaxəli ölçülərini araşdırır. Öyrənənlərin mənası təxmin etmək üçün fon biliklərindən və kontekstdən istifadə etdiyi "Yuxarıdan-Aşağıya" (Top-Down) və fonemlərə, vurğuya və intonasiyaya diqqət yetirdikləri "Aşağıdan-Yuxarıya" (Bottom-Up) emal proseslərini tətbiq etməklə, pedaqoqlar tələbələrə təbii nitqin mürəkkəbliklərini anlamağa kömək edə bilirlər. Diskursda daha sonra "Affektiv Filtir" hipotezi nəzərdən keçirilir və qeyd olunur ki, danışmaq təşvişi tez-tez inkişafa mane olur; buna görə də, risk etməyi stimullaşdıran az stresli, "təhlükəsiz" mühitin yaradılması həlledici əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Müzakirə olunan əsas pedaqoji strategiyalara öyrənənləri müxtəlif dialektlərə və real dünya registrlərinə məruz qoymaq üçün orijinal audiovizual materiallardan istifadə, eləcə də Tapşırıq Əsaslı Dil Tədrisinin (TBLT) inteqrasiyası daxildir. Rollu oyunlardan və simulyasiyalardan tutmuş informasiya boşluğu fəaliyyətlərinə qədər uzanan bu tapşırıqlar tələbələrdən dili sadəcə təkrar etmək deyil, mənada razılığa gəlməyi və dildən funksional şəkildə istifadə etməyi tələb edir. Bundan əlavə, məqalədə öyrənənlərə yerli dil daşıyıcıları kimi prozodiyanı təqlid etməyə və sadə strukturlardan tədricən mürəkkəb cümlələr qurmağa imkan verən "Shadowing" (Kölgə salma) və "Scaffolding" (Dayaq) texnikalarının əhəmiyyəti vurğulanır. Texnologiyanın rolu, xüsusən də süni intellekt əsaslı nitqin tanınması və interaktiv podkastların ənənəvi siniflərdə çatışmayan fərdiləşdirilmiş, asinxron təcrübəni necə təmin etdiyi də araşdırılır. Tələffüz təlimi "mükəmməl" vurğu axtarışı kimi deyil, beynəlxalq anlaşılıqlığa nail olmaq vasitəsi kimi təqdim olunur ki, bu da öyrənənlərin qloballaşan kontekstdə effektiv ünsiyyət qura bilməsini təmin edir. Nəticə etibarilə, məqalədə iddia edilir ki, dinləmə və danışmaq bir-birindən təcrid olunmuş şəkildə öyrədilməməlidir; əksinə, onlar girişin çıxışa təsir etdiyi və çıxışın anlaşmadakı boşluqları müəyyən etdiyi davamlı bir rəy dövrəsinə daxil edilməlidir. Yalnız qrammatik dəqiqliyə deyil, kommunikativ kompetensiyaya diqqət yetirməklə, müəllimlər tələbələrə dərslərin hüdudlarından kənara çıxmağa və mənalı, spontan ingilis dili danışmalarına qoşulmağa imkan verə bilər, bu da nəticədə onların linqvistik kimliyində özünəinam hissini formalaşdırır. Bu hərtərəfli çərçivə pedaqoqları dil sinfini dinamik qarşılıqlı əlaqə mərkəzinə çevirmək üçün yol xəritəsi ilə təmin edir və öyrənənlərin dili sadəcə "bilməsini" deyil, hər eşidilən söz və deyilən ifadə ilə onu "yaşamasını" təmin edir.

Açar sözlər: ingilis dili ikinci dil kimi (ESL), kommunikativ sərəştə, dinləmə anlama, danışmaq axıcılığı, Yuxarıdan-Aşağıya / Aşağıdan-Yuxarıya emal

Introduction

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone a paradigm shift, moving away from a rigid focus on grammatical accuracy toward the attainment of communicative competence. In the contemporary globalized era, the ability to process auditory information and respond with verbal fluidity is no longer a secondary objective but the primary goal for most learners. However, as Krashen (1982) famously posits in his Input Hypothesis, for acquisition to take place, learners must be exposed to "comprehensible input" (i+1), which is slightly beyond their current level of competence. This input is predominantly aural in the early stages of language development, making listening the foundational pillar upon which speaking skills are constructed. Despite this, the pedagogical separation of these two skills often persists in traditional classrooms, leading to a disconnect where students may understand the mechanics of the language but struggle to engage in spontaneous interaction. The complexity of listening comprehension lies in its dual-nature

processing; according to Richards (2008), effective listening involves both "Bottom-Up" processing, where the listener decodes sounds and words into meaningful units, and "Top-Down" processing, where background knowledge and context are utilized to infer meaning. Teaching listening, therefore, is not merely about testing comprehension but about training the brain to navigate these processes simultaneously. Furthermore, the relationship between input (listening) and output (speaking) is cyclical, and as emphasized by Mehdizade (2025), the integration of generative AI and authentic digital resources plays a transformative role in bridging this gap by providing learners with real-time feedback and immersive environments. Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis suggests that producing the language serves as a crucial "notice" mechanism; when learners encounter gaps in their speaking abilities, they become more attuned to those specific structures in future listening inputs. This interplay underscores the necessity of an integrated instructional approach. Another significant hurdle in developing oral proficiency is the psychological dimension of the learner; the "Affective Filter," a term coined by Krashen, refers to variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence that can block the path of linguistic input. Speaking, in particular, is often perceived as a high-stakes activity that triggers performance anxiety. To mitigate this, modern methodologies like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) have been championed by scholars like Ellis (2003). By shifting the focus from the form of the language to the completion of a meaningful task, TBLT reduces the pressure on the learner, allowing for more natural and authentic communication. In this context, the role of the educator evolves from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator who provides "Scaffolding"—a concept rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development—to support the learner until they can perform independently. In conclusion, mastering English in the 21st century requires a sophisticated mastery of the "sounds of the language." This article aims to analyze the most effective evidence-based strategies for teaching listening and speaking, ranging from the use of authentic audiovisual materials to the application of the Shadowing technique. By examining both the cognitive and affective factors at play, we can develop a more holistic framework that empowers learners to transition from passive observers to active participants in the English-speaking world.

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The practical implementation of listening and speaking instruction requires a shift from teacher-centered lectures to learner-centered, interactive environments that prioritize authentic engagement. Central to this approach is the selection of "Authentic Materials," which, as Herron and Seay (1991) argue, significantly improve listening comprehension by exposing students to the natural rhythm, idioms, and cultural nuances of the target language. By using real-world sources—such as podcasts, TED Talks, or news broadcasts—educators move beyond the artificial clarity of textbook audio, preparing students for the "messiness" of spontaneous conversation. Building on this, the integration of technology has become a cornerstone of modern pedagogy; Mehdizade (2025) emphasizes that the strategic use of Generative AI and speech-recognition software allows for a "flipped classroom" model, where students engage with high-quality auditory input independently, leaving classroom time for active production and peer interaction. This technological integration aligns with the "Shadowing Technique," a method where learners mimic the speaker's delivery with a minimal delay. Research by Hamada (2016) suggests that shadowing effectively bridges the gap between perception and production, improving both phonological awareness and speaking rate. Furthermore, the development of speaking skills is most effective when framed within Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). According to Willis (1996), the TBLT framework—consisting of the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus—ensures that learners use English to solve problems or exchange information, which fosters "fluency over accuracy" in the initial stages. This process is supported by "Scaffolding," where the instructor provides linguistic templates or vocabulary clusters that students can rely on during the task. As students gain confidence, this scaffolding is gradually removed, a process rooted in the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, which promotes movement through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Additionally, the role of "Corrective Feedback" must be handled with sensitivity to maintain a low Affective Filter. Lyster and Ranta (1997) identify various feedback types, such as recasts and clarification requests, noting that while immediate correction can sometimes inhibit flow, delayed feedback focusing on recurring patterns is often more conducive to

long-term acquisition. To maximize output, educators should also incorporate "Information-Gap" activities, where communication is a functional necessity rather than a repetitive drill. These activities force students to negotiate meaning, ask for clarification, and employ compensatory strategies when they lack specific vocabulary. Finally, the inclusion of pronunciation and prosody instruction is vital; however, the goal is not native-like perfection but "International Intelligibility," as proposed by Jenkins (2000). By focusing on core features like word stress and sentence intonation, teachers ensure that students can be understood in a globalized Lingua Franca context. Ultimately, the synergy between high-quality input, technologically-enhanced practice, and task-oriented output creates a robust foundation for linguistic mastery.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pedagogical journey toward mastering English listening and speaking skills is a complex, non-linear process that requires a delicate balance between cognitive input and practical output. As explored throughout this article, the integration of these two core skills is not merely a classroom convenience but a linguistic necessity, as they function as two sides of the same communicative coin. The evidence presented suggests that moving away from rote memorization toward Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the use of authentic materials significantly lowers the "Affective Filter," allowing students to engage with the language in a more natural and less anxiety-inducing manner. Furthermore, the modern ELT classroom must embrace the transformative potential of technology; as highlighted by Mehdizade (2025), the strategic incorporation of Generative AI and digital tools provides a bridge between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, offering students the "scaffolding" necessary to navigate increasingly complex auditory and verbal environments. This evolution in teaching methodology shifts the focus from "knowing about" the language to "performing in" the language, emphasizing international intelligibility over the outdated pursuit of native-like perfection. Educators must, therefore, remain adaptable, functioning as facilitators who curate diverse linguistic experiences—from "Shadowing" exercises that hone prosody to "Information-Gap" tasks that demand functional negotiation of meaning. By recognizing that listening is an active, constructive process and that speaking is a social, goal-oriented act, we can create a holistic learning cycle where input continuously informs and refines output. Ultimately, the goal of English language instruction in the 21st century is to empower learners with the agency to express their unique identities and ideas on a global stage. As we move forward, the continued research into neuro-linguistic processes and the ongoing refinement of AI-assisted pedagogy will undoubtedly offer new frontiers for developing oral proficiency. However, the human element—the desire to connect, understand, and be understood—remains the driving force behind language acquisition. By implementing the evidence-based strategies discussed herein, instructors can ensure that their students do not just survive in English-speaking contexts but thrive, fostering a lifelong competence that transcends the boundaries of the classroom and contributes to the global exchange of knowledge and culture.

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