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OVERCOMING SPEECH BARRIERS AT UNIVERSITY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

This article focuses on the importance of developing speaking skills at foreign language classes at university, as the ability to communicate in English is one of the essential requirements for success in various careers both nationally and internationally. However, while speaking a foreign language university students face challenges like hesitation, limited vocabulary, anxiety and lack of real-world practice. Traditional methods often struggle to address these issues due to large classes, limited interaction and time constraints. Teaching speaking is particularly demanding, requiring focus on pronunciation, grammar and fluency, along with overcoming shyness, low confidence and fear of judgment. To overcome these barriers, teachers should use innovative methods and technologies. Techniques like communicative language teaching, task-based learning, immersion, and digital tools help students build confidence and fluency. Activities like role-playing and digital storytelling make language use more natural and reduce anxiety. The article highlights the importance of adapting teaching methods to students' needs, focusing on real-world application of a foreign language like professional communication. Practical strategies include regular practice, engaging with native content, cultural exploration and learning from mistakes. By creating supportive and interactive environments, teachers can help students to become confident speakers, preparing them for successful work and realization in a globalized world.

Key words: communication barriers, communicative teaching methods, digital tools in education, fluency, foreign language, immersive language experiences, speaking, university classes.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, university students need a range of essential skills, including critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication, media literacy, technical proficiency, adaptability and leadership. Effective speaking abilities play a crucial role in demonstrating and applying these skills. With English serving as a global lingua franca, strong English-speaking skills are particularly valuable for mastering and utilizing these competencies (Harahap et al., 2024). However, many students encounter barriers when learning to speak a foreign language, such as hesitation, a limited vocabulary and insufficient real-world practice. Traditional classroom settings often do not provide enough opportunities for encouraging fluency due to limitations like minimal interaction, a limited number of lessons and large number of students at a class. Additionally, anxiety and unwillingness to speak can further be obstacles on the way to progress. At the same time, learning to speak is one of the most challenging aspects of acquiring a new language. Teaching this skill is equally demanding, as it requires extensive practice and perseverance to achieve proficiency. Effective communication involves planning, refining, and simplifying messages to convey them clearly. It also necessitates mastering pronunciation, intonation, and stress – elements that can be particularly difficult for non-native English speakers (Masuram & Sripada, 2020, p. 61).

The purpose of the article is to study the approaches and techniques for developing speaking skills at foreign language classes at university and overcoming existing barriers on the way of developing fluency in a foreign language.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Fluency in a foreign language and common barriers in acquiring it. Fluency is the skill of speaking a language smoothly and naturally, without too many pauses or corrections. It is measured by how often a speaker pauses, corrects mistakes, restarts sentences or repeats words. Fluency can also be judged by how quickly a person speaks and how long he or she can talk without stopping (Hasnain & Halder, 2024). Fluency is a key sign of language ability. It includes using good sentence structure, a variety of words and clear communication. More specifically, fluency means expressing ideas naturally and smoothly, with minimal pauses or interruptions (Tavakoli, Campbell & McCormack, 2016).

Fluency includes key language skills: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. A fluent person can easily understand spoken or written language, speak clearly, and take part in conversations or presentations without difficulty. Fluency also means using correct words, grammar, and expressions naturally. It shows confidence and strong ability to use a language in various settings, from casual chats to professional discussions (Durdas et al., 2024, p. 103).

In this regard, it is necessary to admit that when students encounter a language system and structure different from their own, their performance is often affected by interference from their native language, as it influences strongly their learning process (Suyanti et al., 2022, p. 336).

There are several common barriers which students encounter while learning a foreign language. They include: *fear of making mistakes; lack of consistency; limited vocabulary; pronunciation challenges; lack of exposure to native speakers; cultural differences; time constraints; motivation loss*. These challenges may also arise from a lack of confidence in using the target language, struggles with comprehending complex sentences, difficulty in articulating ideas clearly in English, slow progress in learning due to language barriers, a weak understanding of sentence structure and limited familiarity with English pronunciation (Saragih, 2024, p. 103).

Learning a new language can be challenging for many reasons. Students often feel anxious about speaking or writing, they may be afraid of making mistakes. Inconsistent practice makes it harder to retain the learnt material. Expressing ideas can be hard if the vocabulary is limited. Pronouncing words correctly can be difficult and may affect the speaker's confidence. Without communication with native speakers, it's hard to acquire a natural accent and slang. Students' busy schedules often leave little time for regular studying and practicing, and they may lose motivation

and feel discouraged over time. Thus, overcoming these barriers requires patience, persistence, adaptability and teachers' support. Employing these strategies can help students achieve fluency faster, at the same time gaining confidence and enjoy the process of mastering a new language.

Let us consider some of these challenges and their reasons. One major challenge for students learning a foreign language is the lack of opportunities to practice speaking. In classrooms, emotions like speaking anxiety and language enjoyment also affect their performance. Foreign language anxiety hinders learning progress. At the same time, advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) may offer a solution to this problem. AI chatbots can be effective tools for language practice. Chatbots can be used as virtual speaking partners or tutors to support language learning and improve students' speaking skills (Hapsari & Wu, 2022). Students who lack confidence, feel shy, do not have sufficient preparation or fear making mistakes, often face challenges with speaking anxiety in their classroom or in public. Shyness, in particular, intensifies this issue as it fosters negative self-perceptions even before speaking. Shy students often doubt their abilities and feel uneasy in social settings, which can affect their performance at work, in friendship, relationships and leisure activities (Marchand et al, 2022, p. 2–8).

Students often worry about how others see them (metaperceptions), but they are usually wrong about it. This is part of a so-called «liking gap» – people speaking in their first or second language often think they are liked less than they actually are. These feelings can influence whether they want to talk or work with others again (Zheng et al., 2024).

Another barrier, hesitation in speaking a foreign language, is mainly caused by psychological factors: anxiety, low confidence, shyness and an introverted personality. According to A. Mugaddam (2024), sociocultural factors, such as not using a foreign language frequently in daily life and gender differences, also play a major role. The researcher admits that female learners tend to be more hesitant in speaking English than male learners.

It is crucial to note that speaking involves performing multiple complex mental tasks, making nervousness a common hurdle for speakers. Two essential factors in learning a foreign language are *access to abundant comprehensible input* and *maintaining high levels of motivation and confidence*. These factors enable students to effectively process input and improve their language skills (Malik et al., 2024, p. 675–676).

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety is one more barrier on the way to fluency in a foreign language. Psychologists define «speaking anxiety» as a feeling of discomfort, nervousness, insecurity or worry that students have while speaking with others. It affects how well they perform in speaking, and anxiety is often triggered by self-doubt and fear of judgment. Speaking is one of the most «anxious» aspects of language mastering. Various factors contribute to this anxiety: psychological (low confidence), cognitive (overthinking), physiological (nervousness), interpersonal (difficulty interacting with others) and socio-cultural factors (peer pressure, parental influence). Personality traits like shyness, introversion, or negative attitudes can also play a role. Anxiety during speaking situations, such as on stage or in public, often leads second language learners to poor performance. (Malik et al., 2024, p. 675–676).

In this regard, qualitative methods like observing classrooms and interviewing teachers and students help uncover the main challenges in speaking English and reveal the reasons behind them (Suliman, 2024).

Suggested solutions for overcoming speaking barriers. To teach speaking skills effectively, teachers must use innovative methods to ensure that students achieve strong learning results. Students are considered proficient in speaking a foreign language when they can effectively convey their message with proper accent, pronunciation, and fluency, allowing their listener to understand them clearly. In the process of learning a foreign language, elements from other languages may come into use, leading to language transfer or borrowed language elements. This often occurs due to the influence of bilingualism or the interplay between languages (Suyanti et al., 2022, p. 331).

Advances in learning technology have pushed universities to change how they prepare and realize programs. Universities need to help students build skills for career growth by creating a

supportive environment for technology-based learning. Today, technology plays a central role in education, offering tools that improve teaching and learning. Modern students, raised in tech-filled environments, are more familiar with technology than past generations. However, research shows that being tech-savvy doesn't always mean students feel confident using technology in educational backgrounds (Ali et al., 2023, p. 146). Moreover, virtual environments can immerse students into the academic culture of their target destination, providing opportunities for teamwork, collaboration and creative activities. These settings emphasize the importance of social interaction, making communication and language learning essential. Technology that builds key skills and competencies in these immersive environments should be a focus (Ciupe et al., 2023).

Thus, students' ability to speak a foreign language depends on their learning environment and personal characteristics. Teachers can help by creating a supportive and engaging atmosphere. This involves using communicative teaching methods and modern technology to keep students active and involved in learning (Vlasenko & Mirochnyk, 2016).

To become fluent in a foreign language, it's important to use methods that match students' needs and learning styles. For professional purposes, students should work at general language skills and industry-specific vocabulary. Setting clear goals – like running business meetings, learning technical terms, writing formal documents or attending specialized events – is essential. Effective methods to improve fluency include: *communicative language teaching; immersion in the target language; language exchanges; using real-life materials; role-playing activities; fluency-focused tasks; repeated reading (with or without audio); digital storytelling; creating video blogs (vlogging)*. These techniques help learners practice practical language use and build confidence (Durdas et al., 2024).

Communicative language teaching focuses on practicing real conversations through activities like role-plays, group discussions and communication tasks. These help students use the language in real-life situations and improve fluency. Immersion programs are also effective, surrounding students with the target language in settings like study abroad programs, language camps, or virtual experiences. Using real materials, such as articles, videos, or podcasts, helps students practice fluency while also learning about culture and developing critical thinking skills. Role-playing lets students practice real-life scenarios, like job interviews or meetings, encouraging spontaneous speaking and building confidence. Multimedia tools, apps, and online platforms provide additional opportunities to practice. These technologies engage learners, offer personalized feedback and help to overcome classroom challenges like limited time or large groups. Online platforms also boost confidence and encourage more speaking practice through interactive exercises and communication outside the classroom (Fathi et al., 2024).

Including vlogging and social media activities into language teaching reduces anxiety, encourages university students to speak more confidently and boosts their speaking skills (Jin, 2024). Similarly, digital storytelling offers a modern approach to storytelling by using technology. It blends various media, including websites, audio, video, animation and graphics, turning traditional storytelling into engaging and dynamic presentations (Zhussupova & Shadiev, 2023). The research supports the idea that such creative methods work well. By creating a fun, interactive and low-stress environment, students can practice speaking a foreign language without fear. This approach also helps them break emotional barriers and enhance their language abilities (Jin, 2023).

Task-Based Language Teaching is crucial in developing students' speaking skills and overcoming barriers. Such teaching focuses on creating activities and tasks that help students learn a language through real-life experiences, rather than just following a traditional grammar-based syllabus. Supporters of such method in teaching believe that students can improve their grammar and communication skills naturally by participating in conversations and sharing personal experiences. This method encourages «learning by doing», where students actively work at tasks, which helps them think critically and apply new knowledge. Hands-on activities boost their understanding and allow them to build on what they already know. Through reflection and transformation, students move from their current skills to mastering new ones (Masuram, Jyothi & Sripada, Pushpa, 2020, p. 63).

Tasks are valuable tools for encouraging students to actively participate in a communicative classroom. They help students become more creative, spontaneous and interactive as they work together to achieve specific goals by thinking and planning. When students use their current language skills to complete tasks, they not only practice the language but also start acquiring it naturally. Tasks focus on meaning and help learners improve their communication strategies and interaction skills. Tasks are activities where the target language is used to achieve real communicative goals (Masuram & Sripada, 2020, p. 63). Here spoken, written and visual materials are used by learners for completing activities. Such materials provide real-life or creative content for engaging with the foreign language. The materials used may include «*newspapers, magazines and journal articles; scripts from radio, TV and documentaries; comic books for entertainment; brochures and posters for publicity; short stories, poems and plays; shopping lists; business cards; postcards; picture stories; street maps*» (Masuram & Sripada, 2020, p. 63). The above-mentioned materials help students practice and develop their language skills in diverse, interesting and meaningful ways (Masuram & Sripada, 2020, p. 63). For overcoming speaking barriers teachers can also use strategies such as «*code-mixing and code-switching, repeating key words multiple times, translating material into the students' first language, speaking slowly, changing communication methods, using gestures and paraphrasing*» (Saragih, 2024, p. 104).

Consequently, the solutions to overcoming common barriers in learning a foreign language can be summed up to the following ones: *embracing mistakes as learning opportunities and practicing speaking with supportive groupmates and teachers; establishing a daily routine for practice; using language apps and integrating learning into daily life; using flashcards and learning new words in context; improving by listening to native speakers and using pronunciation tools; repeating native speech; engaging with native content like movies or music; learning about the culture, traditions, and idioms of the language; staying open-minded and adapting to new cultural perspectives; using spare moments for quick learning sessions; focus on essential skills and studying in small chunks; setting clear goals and tracking progress; keeping learning enjoyable by using a variety of resources*. The application of these practical strategies can help students overcome obstacles, build confidence and enjoy the journey to proficiency in a new language.

CONCLUSIONS

Developing speaking skills at foreign language classes at the university level is essential for preparing students to succeed in the modern world. Effective communication is a cornerstone of critical thinking, creativity, teamwork and professional growth. However, barriers such as hesitation, limited vocabulary, lack of practice opportunities, and anxiety often hinder students' progress in achieving fluency. Overcoming these obstacles requires a combination of innovative teaching methods, supportive learning environments and the use of modern technologies. Approaches like communicative language teaching, role-playing, task-based learning, digital storytelling and the use of AI chatbots can be used to reduce anxiety, boost confidence and improve fluency in a foreign language. Immersive experiences, such as virtual environments and language exchanges, help students build real-world speaking skills. By applying the suggested strategies and technological tools, students can overcome common barriers, build confidence, and develop strong speaking abilities. Further research should focus on exploring and developing innovative methods and technologies to address existing barriers in speaking a foreign language. In particular, researching the potential of use of virtual reality and gamified applications for creating more engaging and effective immersive language learning practices.

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ПОДОЛАННЯ МОВЛЕННЄВИХ БАР'ЄРІВ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ В УНІВЕРСИТЕТІ

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В умовах сучасного світу студентам університетів необхідно володіти широким спектром навичок: критичним мисленням, креативністю, здатністю працювати в команді, умінням вести комунікацію, медіаграмотністю, технічними навичками, адаптивністю, лідерськими якостями тощо. Однією з ключових компетенцій є вміння вільно висловлюватися іноземною мовою, адже це сприяє ефективному використанню інших навичок. Зважаючи на глобальне використання англійської мови, розвиток англомовних комунікативних здібностей є особливо важливим для навчання та реалізації цих компетенцій. Однак студенти часто стикаються з бар'єрами: нерішучістю, обмеженим словниковим запасом, браком практики в реальних умовах. Традиційне навчальне середовище через обмежену взаємодію, малу кількість занять і великі групи часто не забезпечує достатніх можливостей для розвитку вільного мовлення. Навчання говорінню є одним із найскладніших аспектів вивчення іноземної мови. Воно потребує значної практики, планування, коригування та адаптації висловлювань для досягнення чіткої комунікації. До цього додаються вимоги до правильної вимови, інтонації та акцентування, що особливо складно для тих, хто не є носієм іноземної мови. У статті аналізуються сучасні дослідження українських і зарубіжних учених щодо методів та технік досягнення здатності вільного мовлення. Встановлено, що вільне мовлення – це здатність говорити природно, без тривалих пауз чи виправлень. Воно включає вміння висловлювати думки чітко, використовувати різноманітний словниковий запас та дотримуватися граматичних правил. У статті акцентовано на тому, що поширені бар'єри в навчанні іноземних мов включають страх помилок, обмежений словниковий запас, труднощі з вимовою, недостатню взаємодію з носіями мови, культурні відмінності та низьку мотивацію. Для подолання цих перешкод автори рекомендують використовувати такі інтерактивні методи, як комунікативне навчання, рольові ігри, завдання на розвиток вільного мовлення, а також технології, зокрема влогінг, цифрові історії, чат-боти та інші інноваційні інструменти. Ці методи сприяють зменшенню тривожності, розвитку впевненості та інтерактивного засвоєння мови. Підсумовуючи, стаття демонструє важливість індивідуального підходу, врахування особливостей студентів і створення сприятливого навчального середовища для подолання мовних бар'єрів та досягнення успіху у вивченні іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: вільне володіння, імерсивний досвід у навчанні мови, іноземна мова, комунікативні бар'єри, комунікативні методи навчання, університетські заняття, усне мовлення, цифрові інструменти в освіті.