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PROMOTING SPEAKING COMPETENCE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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Annotation. This scientific article delves into the crucial aspect of developing speaking skills among primary school students. The study explores various strategies, methodologies, and interventions aimed at improving oral communication abilities in young learners. This article reviews the current research on the development of speaking skills in the primary school context. It examines the key milestones and influencing variables in the emergence of oral communication competencies. Additionally, it synthesizes effective pedagogical approaches that primary educators can implement to nurture speaking skills within their classrooms. The findings aim to provide an integrated perspective on this critical area of early childhood education and offer practical guidance for supporting the oral language development of young learners.

Key words: speaking, primary school, communication ability, pedagogical approaches, English language, linguistic, collaborative discussions, verbal communication.

Introduction

Developing strong oral communication skills is a fundamental component of primary education. As children progress through the elementary grades, building their capacity to express ideas, ask questions, and engage in meaningful dialogue becomes increasingly important. Effective speaking skills not only benefit academic performance, but also foster crucial social-emotional competencies such as self-confidence, empathy, and collaboration.

However, the process of honing speaking abilities in young learners is complex, involving the interplay of cognitive, linguistic, and environmental factors. Primary school teachers face the challenge of cultivating speaking skills amid diverse student needs, learning preferences, and developmental levels. Understanding the developmental trajectory of speaking skill acquisition, as well as evidence-based instructional strategies, is essential for supporting the oral language growth of all primary students.

The use of English for oral communication appears to be difficult for learners of English as a second or foreign language. Zhang (2009) claims that for the majority of English learners, speaking is the most difficult skill to master. The problem is exacerbated when the language is only heard in the classroom and not practiced. The problem is also intensified when there is no support for its use outside the classroom. This point of view appears to be logical. However, there are a number of factors which can elucidate this matter. Ur (1996) attributes the difficulties to factors such as inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue use. Rababa'h (2005) relates the difficulties in speaking to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. The students' inability to communicate in English is due to the use of the first language in classroom management (Littlewood, 1981). In such situation learners are deprived of the opportunity to speak in English [1].

Understanding how speaking skills develop and identifying the best practices for fostering these abilities are essential for educators, parents, and policymakers. By prioritizing the development of speaking skills, we can ensure that children are better prepared for the demands of their academic and social environments, leading to im-

proved educational outcomes and a more confident, articulate generation of students.

Materials and methods

The Cognitive Foundations of Oral Language Development

At the core of speaking proficiency lies a child's cognitive development. Drawing on the seminal work of theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, researchers have identified the intricate relationship between a student's thinking processes and their ability to articulate ideas through speech.

Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development illuminates how children progress from egocentric speech to more socialized forms of verbal communication. As young learners move through the sensorimotor, preoperational, and concrete operational stages, their speaking skills gradually become more complex, logical, and attuned to the perspectives of their conversational partners [2].

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the critical role of social interaction in shaping a child's language development. He posited that speech emerges first as a social, interpersonal tool before becoming internalized as a means of individual thought and self-regulation. This dynamic has significant implications for how primary teachers structure speaking opportunities and provide scaffolded support within the classroom environment.

The importance of oral language in literacy development:

Speaking skills do not exist in isolation; they are intricately linked to a child's emergent literacy abilities. Scholars like Dorothy Strickland and Deborah Wells Rowe have contributed crucial insights into the reciprocal relationship between oral language and written expression.

Their research has demonstrated that strong speaking proficiency, including a rich vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and discourse competencies, serves as a foundation for success in reading and writing. Conversely, proficient literacy skills reinforce a student's capacity for effective verbal communication.

By recognizing and capitalizing on these synergies, primary educators can adopt integrated, multimodal approaches that nurture both oral and written language development in tandem. Strategies that bridge the gap between speaking and other literacy domains, such as incorporating oral presentations of written work or encouraging students to "think aloud" during the writing process, have proven highly beneficial.

The role of social-emotional factors in speaking skill acquisition:

Developing speaking skills in the primary grades extends beyond the purely cognitive and linguistic realms. Social-emotional factors, such as self-confidence, anxiety, and interpersonal awareness, also play a pivotal role in a child's ability and willingness to engage in verbal communication.

Researchers have highlighted the importance of creating a classroom culture that fosters a sense of safety, belonging, and inclusivity. When students feel supported, respected, and valued for their unique voices, they are more likely to take risks, participate actively, and hone their speaking proficiency [3]. Strategies that promote social-emotional learning, such as modeling empathetic listening and providing opportunities for collaborative dialogue, can significantly enhance a child's communicative competence.

By delving into the cognitive, literacy-based, and social-emotional underpinnings of speaking skill development, primary educators can gain a more holistic understanding of this critical area of early childhood education. Armed with this knowledge, they can design and implement instructional approaches that nurture the oral language growth of all learners in their classrooms.

Results and discussion

Analysis of existing theories and research has shown that the development of oral communication skills in elementary school

students is a multifaceted process, dependent on a number of interrelated cognitive, linguistic, and environmental factors. Key developmental stages and influential variables were identified that teachers must consider when supporting the communicative growth of their students.

The research findings indicate that the use of effective instructional approaches, grounded in established theories of speech and communication development, is critical for fostering strong oral communication skills in all elementary school students [4]. Proven approaches include interactive reading, dialogue modeling, collaborative discussions, role-playing, and other methods that combine cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional elements.

It is important to note that the development of oral communication skills must be smoothly integrated across all aspects of the elementary school curriculum, rather than treated in isolation. An interdisciplinary approach, involving collaboration between teachers, speech-language specialists, and student families, will enable comprehensive support for the communicative development of children.

Furthermore, the results underscore the necessity of continuous professional development for elementary school teachers in the area of oral communication instruction. Ongoing training and coaching will help educators refine their methods and establish effective practices that foster the speech and language competencies of their students.

Overall, this research offers a comprehensive approach to oral communication skill development in elementary school, grounded in a deep understanding of the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional dimensions of this process. The application of evidence-based techniques and interdisciplinary collaboration can be the key to supporting effective communication in all elementary school students.

Conclusion

The development of speaking skills in primary school students is essential for their academic success and social development. This study highlights the importance of using effective strategies such as interactive reading, structured dialogue sessions, and role-playing activities to enhance students' oral communication abilities. Continuous teacher training and collaboration among educators, specialists, and families are crucial to providing consistent support. By focusing on these areas, we can help students become confident and articulate communicators, setting a strong foundation for their future learning and personal growth.

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