

READING TO SPEAK: INTEGRATING READING AND SPEAKING SKILLS FOR ESL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the major goals of English language learning. In the context of English as a Second Language, many learners complete years of formal education but still face difficulty in speaking English with confidence. This situation calls for classroom strategies that connect language input with oral production. Reading can play an important role in this process because it exposes learners to vocabulary, sentence patterns, grammar, pronunciation clues, discourse structure, and ideas. When reading is integrated with speaking, learners receive meaningful input and also get opportunities to use that input in oral communication. This paper examines the role of reading in improving speaking proficiency among ESL learners. It discusses how micro-skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and content knowledge gained through reading can support oral expression. The paper also presents a classroom activity based on formal and informal expressions to show how reading material can be converted into speaking practice. The study argues that the integration of reading and speaking helps learners move from passive understanding to active language use. It also strengthens fluency, accuracy, confidence, and communicative competence. The findings suggest that reading-based speaking activities can be an effective strategy for improving the speaking skills of ESL students.

KEYWORDS: Reading skill, speaking competence, ESL, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, micro-skills, communicative competence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has always searched for effective ways to improve learners' communicative ability. Among the four language skills, speaking receives special attention because it allows learners to express ideas, participate in interaction, and face academic, social, and professional situations with confidence. For many ESL learners, speaking remains the most difficult skill even after years of classroom instruction. They may understand English in reading and writing tasks, but they often hesitate when they have to speak.

Teachers play an important role in reducing this gap between knowledge and use. They design classroom strategies, guide learners, create interaction, and help students move from silence to speech. Technology and ICT-enabled classrooms have made language learning more interesting, but the role of the teacher remains essential. Technology can support learning, yet it cannot replace the teacher's ability to motivate, correct, organize, and encourage students.

The present paper focuses on the integration of reading and speaking skills. Reading is already a common classroom practice. In many classrooms, however, reading is used mainly for testing comprehension. Students read a passage and answer questions. This method helps them understand the text, but it often stops there. Reading can be used more creatively. It can provide vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation practice, ideas, and expressions that learners can later use in speaking.

The integration of reading and speaking gives learners a meaningful route to oral proficiency. When students read a text, they receive language input. When they discuss, retell, summarize, role-play, or respond to that text, they turn the input into speech. This movement from reading to speaking is useful because students are not asked to speak without support. They speak with the help of words, structures, ideas, and contexts gained from the reading material.

This paper studies how reading can strengthen speaking skills among ESL learners. It gives attention to the role of micro-skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, content knowledge, and formal and informal expression. It also discusses a classroom activity that combines reading and speaking in a simple and practical way.

2. IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English holds an important place in education, employment, administration, technology, and global communication. In India, it functions as a language of opportunity in many official, semi-official, academic, and professional contexts. The growth of multinational companies, digital industries, online services, and global business has increased the need for English communication skills among students.

Students who complete their graduation often understand the value of English when they prepare for interviews, competitive examinations, presentations, and workplace communication. Many job opportunities require the ability to speak English clearly and appropriately. This is true for students from arts and science colleges as well as those from technical and professional courses. The demand for English is therefore closely connected with employability and social mobility.

The modern job market expects graduates to communicate ideas, answer questions, participate in discussions, and present themselves with confidence. A student may have subject knowledge, but weak speaking skills can affect performance in interviews and professional situations. For this reason, speaking competence has become one of the most important concerns in English language classrooms.

The spread of information technology has also changed access to English learning. Learners can now use online videos, digital dictionaries, language apps, podcasts, e-books, and online classes. These tools provide wide exposure to the language. Yet students still need guided classroom practice to use English effectively. Without structured practice, exposure alone may not become communication.

English language teaching, therefore, should move beyond textbook reading and written examinations. It should help learners use English in meaningful situations. Reading, when connected with speaking, can serve this purpose. It gives learners both language material and communicative context.

3. A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

Change is a natural part of education. English language teaching has also undergone many changes in schools and colleges. Earlier, classrooms gave more importance to grammar, translation, and written examinations. Later, the focus moved toward communication, interaction, learner participation, and skill-based learning. This shift has become necessary because learners need English for real-life use.

In many ESL classrooms, students are exposed to teaching, learning, and assessment, but they still fail to attain the level of fluency required for interviews and public communication. This shows that the problem is not simply lack of instruction. It is also related to the type of classroom practice learners receive. If students only listen, copy, and write, they may not develop speaking ability. They need opportunities to use the language orally.

The online learning situation during lockdown also changed the teaching-learning process. Teachers began to use digital platforms, online materials, recorded classes, and interactive tools. This situation created both challenges and opportunities. It pushed teachers to rethink classroom strategies and make learning more dynamic. It also showed that students need active tasks rather than passive reception.

A learner-centred approach is important in this context. The focus has to move from the teacher's explanation to the learner's performance. The teacher should create situations where students read, think, discuss, question, respond, and speak. Speaking cannot grow in a silent classroom. It needs interaction and repeated use.

Skill integration is one useful method in modern English language teaching. Language skills are often taught separately for convenience, but in real life they work together. A person reads a message and replies orally. A student reads a story and narrates it. A candidate reads a question and answers it in an interview. A worker reads instructions and explains them to others. Reading and speaking are therefore naturally connected.

The present study follows this integrated approach. It considers reading as a base for developing speaking competence among ESL learners, especially final-year college students who are preparing to enter the job market.

4. SPEAKING SKILL

Speaking is a productive skill. It requires learners to produce language rather than only recognize it. When students speak, they have to choose words, arrange sentences, pronounce sounds, maintain rhythm, respond to listeners, and express meaning in a suitable manner. Speaking therefore involves both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence.

Linguistic competence includes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language according to situation, purpose, relationship, and context. A student should know how to speak formally in an interview, politely in a request, confidently in a presentation, and naturally in a conversation. Speaking is not merely the production of sounds. It is the use of language in social life.

Harmer observes that speaking is the skill in which students produce the language themselves. This makes it different from receptive skills such as listening and reading. Speaking demands active control over language. A learner may recognize a word while reading but may fail to use it while speaking. This gap between recognition and production is a common problem among ESL learners.

Speaking has two major dimensions: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy refers to the correct use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Fluency refers to the ability to continue speaking smoothly and meaningfully. A good speaking classroom should support both. If teachers focus only on accuracy, students may become afraid of making mistakes. If they focus only on fluency, students may continue to use incorrect forms. Reading-based speaking tasks can help balance both because they provide correct models and also encourage oral use.

Speaking is especially important for final-year students. Many of them face interviews, group discussions, seminars, viva voce examinations, and workplace communication soon after graduation. Their future opportunities may depend on their ability to speak clearly. This creates a need for classroom strategies that build confidence and reduce hesitation.

5. READING SKILL

Reading is one of the most useful sources of language input. People read for many purposes: to get information, follow instructions, enjoy a story, understand a notice, prepare for an examination, or learn new ideas. In the classroom, reading is usually connected with comprehension. Students are asked to read a passage and answer questions. This is useful, but reading has a wider role in language development.

Reading helps learners observe vocabulary, spelling, sentence patterns, grammar, punctuation, connectors, and discourse organization. It also gives them content for speaking. A student who has read a story, article, dialogue, or passage has something to say. Reading reduces the pressure of speaking because learners are not forced to create ideas from nothing. The text supports them.

Reading also improves pronunciation when used with loud reading, choral reading, and teacher modelling. Students can notice word stress, sentence stress, pauses, and intonation. Repeated reading helps them become familiar with the rhythm of English. This familiarity later supports speech.

Another important function of reading is vocabulary growth. Learners acquire many words incidentally through reading. When words appear in context, students understand their meaning more naturally. They also learn how words combine with other words. Such knowledge is useful for speaking because fluent speech depends on ready access to vocabulary and expressions.

Reading also develops background knowledge. Students who read regularly gain ideas about people, places, events, social situations, and cultural practices. This knowledge gives them content for discussion. A student with rich reading experience is more likely to speak with confidence because he or she has both language and ideas.

6. THE LINK BETWEEN READING AND SPEAKING

Reading and speaking support each other. Reading gives input, and speaking turns that input into use. When learners read a text, they encounter new words, structures, and ideas. When they speak about the text, they practise those words and structures in a meaningful way. This process helps language move from passive knowledge to active competence.

Students often face a gap between what they want to say and what they can say. This gap occurs because they may lack vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or confidence. Reading can reduce this gap by supplying language material. For example, after reading a short story, students can retell the story, describe characters, discuss events, express opinions, or change the ending. These tasks give them speaking practice within a known context.

Reading also helps students notice language patterns. They see how sentences are formed, how ideas are connected, and how expressions are used. When these patterns are repeated in classroom speaking activities, students gradually begin to use them in their own speech. Repetition becomes meaningful because it is tied to content.

The relationship between reading and speaking is reciprocal. Better reading can lead to better speaking because it increases vocabulary and content knowledge. Better speaking can also motivate reading because students realize that reading gives them something to express. A classroom that connects the two skills becomes more active and communicative.

Nunan states that learners should be given maximum opportunities to practise the target language in meaningful contexts and situations. Reading-based speaking tasks provide such contexts. A story, passage, dialogue, or article gives learners a situation. The teacher can then design speaking tasks from that material.

7. MICRO-SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH READING

Reading helps learners develop several micro-skills that are useful for speaking. The most important among them are vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, content knowledge, and discourse awareness.

Vocabulary is essential for speech. A learner may have ideas but may remain silent due to lack of words. Reading introduces learners to new words in meaningful contexts. It also shows collocations, phrases, idioms, and formal and informal expressions. When teachers connect reading with oral practice, students learn to use new words in speech.

Grammar is also strengthened through reading. Students see how tenses, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and sentence structures function in context. Grammar learned through isolated rules may remain mechanical. Grammar observed in reading and practised in speaking becomes more natural.

Pronunciation can be improved through reading aloud. Students learn how to pronounce words, where to pause, and how to use tone. Reading aloud also helps shy learners because they speak from a text before moving to freer expression. This can serve as a bridge between silence and spontaneous speech.

Content knowledge is another important micro-skill. Students need ideas in order to speak. Reading gives them information, examples, stories, and viewpoints. It prepares them for discussion, debate, narration, and presentation.

Discourse awareness refers to the ability to organize speech. Reading helps students understand beginnings, transitions, examples, explanations, and conclusions. When students read well-organized texts, they learn how to arrange their own spoken ideas.

Grabe identifies component skills in reading, including automatic recognition, vocabulary and structural knowledge, discourse knowledge, background knowledge, synthesis, evaluation, and metacognitive awareness. Among these, vocabulary and structural knowledge have a direct influence on speaking achievement. Students who read regularly gain language resources that support oral expression.

8. CLASSROOM INTEGRATION OF READING AND SPEAKING

The integration of reading and speaking can be done through simple classroom activities. The teacher should select reading materials that are suitable for the learners' level, interest, and purpose.

Short stories, dialogues, newspaper reports, interviews, biographies, advertisements, notices, and workplace conversations can all be used.

One effective method is story-based speaking. Students first look at pictures related to a story and guess the events. This pre-task activity creates curiosity and prepares them for reading. During the reading task, students match pictures with the storyline. This helps them understand sequence, action, and vocabulary. After reading, they retell the story in pairs or groups. They may also describe a character, change the ending, or act out a scene.

This kind of activity develops vocabulary and sentence patterns through repeated exposure. Students read, listen, speak, and repeat without feeling that they are memorizing. The story gives them a meaningful context. Words become memorable because they are connected with events and images.

Another useful activity is dialogue reporting. Students read a short conversation and then report it in their own words. For example, after reading a conversation between a customer and a shopkeeper, they can explain what the customer wanted and how the shopkeeper responded. This develops both comprehension and oral expression.

Reading aloud is also useful for pronunciation. The teacher can model a passage first. Students then read it individually, in pairs, or as a group. The teacher can focus on word stress, sentence stress, pauses, and intonation. This activity is especially useful for learners who hesitate to speak spontaneously.

Discussion-based reading is another method. Students read a short passage on a familiar topic and then answer opinion-based questions orally. For example, after reading a passage on mobile phone use, students can discuss its advantages and disadvantages. This helps them move from text comprehension to personal expression.

9. ACTIVITY: FORMAL AND INFORMAL EXPRESSIONS

The following classroom activity integrates reading and speaking skills. It helps students understand formal and informal expressions and use them appropriately in oral communication.

The class is divided into two groups. Group A receives formal expressions, and Group B receives informal expressions for similar situations. The teacher cuts the expressions into separate slips and distributes them to students. Each student reads the expression silently and then moves around the class to find the matching expression. After pairing, students stand in two lines, one for formal expressions and one for informal expressions. Each pair reads aloud the matched expressions. The teacher checks the answers and explains the difference in tone, usage, and context.

Group A	Group B
I prefer watching TV on weekends.	I enjoy watching TV on weekends.
I purchased a new car last month.	I bought a new car last month.
Could you please tell him I called her?	Tell him I called her.
The experiment was carried out by me.	I did that experiment.
The meeting will commence right on time.	The meeting will start right on time.
I need your assistance in drafting the mail.	I need your help in drafting the mail.
We are fortunate to have a supportive manager.	We are lucky to have a supportive manager.
I would like to know about you.	I want to know about you.

This activity is useful because it makes students read, compare, speak, listen, and correct themselves. It also teaches them that language changes according to situation. A phrase used in a friendly conversation

may not suit a formal interview. A formal expression may sound unnatural in casual talk. Students learn appropriateness along with vocabulary.

The activity also encourages movement and participation. Since students have to find their matching pair, they read their slips repeatedly and speak to classmates. Repetition happens naturally. The words and expressions remain in memory for a longer time because students use them in an interactive context.

After the matching task, the teacher can extend the activity. Students can create short dialogues using the formal expressions. They can also convert formal expressions into informal ones and informal expressions into formal ones. This extension gives further speaking practice and strengthens flexibility in language use.

10. ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher's role is central in reading-speaking integration. The teacher selects the text, prepares the task, models pronunciation, guides interaction, and gives feedback. The teacher also creates a safe environment where students are willing to speak without fear.

Many ESL learners hesitate because they fear mistakes. The teacher should treat mistakes as part of learning. Immediate correction may be useful during controlled practice, but constant interruption can reduce confidence. During fluency activities, the teacher can allow students to speak first and give feedback later.

The teacher should also balance individual, pair, and group activities. Some students may feel nervous when speaking before the whole class. Pair work allows them to practise in a safer space. Group work helps them learn from peers. Individual presentation can be introduced gradually after students gain confidence.

ICT tools can also support the teacher. Short videos, audio clips, digital stories, online articles, and visual prompts can make reading-speaking tasks more interesting. However, technology should support the strategy rather than dominate it. The teacher remains the planner and facilitator of learning.

11. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The integration of reading and speaking has several implications for ESL classrooms. First, reading should not be limited to comprehension questions. It should become a source for oral tasks. Every reading passage can lead to speaking activities such as retelling, discussion, role play, questioning, summarizing, and opinion sharing.

Second, vocabulary teaching should be connected with use. Students should not merely write meanings. They should use new words in sentences, dialogues, and short speeches. This helps vocabulary move into active speech.

Third, pronunciation practice can be included through loud reading and repetition. Teachers can select short passages and guide students in stress, rhythm, and intonation. This helps students become more confident in oral production.

Fourth, formal and informal language should be taught consciously. Students preparing for interviews, presentations, and workplace communication need to know how to choose suitable expressions. Reading materials can provide examples of both formal and informal usage.

Fifth, assessment should include oral performance. If speaking is treated as an important classroom goal, students will take it seriously. Teachers can assess retelling, pair conversation, short presentations, reading aloud, and group discussion.

Finally, classroom materials should be chosen according to learner needs. Final-year college students may benefit from texts related to interviews, workplace communication, social issues, biographies, technology, and everyday situations. Familiar and useful topics encourage participation.

12. CONCLUSION

Speaking competence is one of the major needs of ESL learners, especially college students who are preparing for employment and higher studies. Reading can play a major role in improving speaking because it provides vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation models, content, and discourse patterns. When reading and speaking are integrated, students receive language input and also get opportunities to use that input in meaningful communication.

The study shows that reading-based speaking activities help learners improve fluency, accuracy, confidence, and appropriateness. Story reading, picture matching, retelling, dialogue reporting, loud reading, discussion, and formal-informal expression activities can make the classroom more active and communicative. Such activities allow students to practise speaking with support from the text.

Lechmann observes that reading is one of the best ways to learn new words because it supports incidental vocabulary acquisition. This vocabulary growth becomes useful when learners are encouraged to speak. Ideas can be expressed with less hesitation when students have enough words and structures. Reading therefore becomes more than a comprehension exercise. It becomes a foundation for oral proficiency.

The integration of reading and speaking offers a practical and effective strategy for ESL classrooms. It helps students move from passive understanding to active communication. It also gives teachers a flexible method to improve different micro-skills of speaking. When used regularly, this approach can help learners become more confident, accurate, and fluent speakers of English.

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