

Pedagogical Strategies and Digital Technologies for Developing EFL Speaking Skills: A Critical Review of Recent Research

Eylen Luzdely Rubio Zorrilla¹, Victor Manuel Tapia Ramírez², Antoni Alexander Campos Guamuro³, Nerio Burga Sagástegui⁴, Anabel Victoria Medina Condori⁵

¹eylenrubioz@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/871-662-871-662>

Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública "Nuestra Señora de Chota" Chota, Peru

²victorkratostapiaramirez@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/871-662-871-662>

Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública "Nuestra Señora de Chota" Chota, Peru

³antoncamposguamuro@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/871-662-871-662>

Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública "Nuestra Señora de Chota" Chota, Peru

⁴neriobs@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/871-662-871-662>

Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública "Nuestra Señora de Chota" Chota, Peru

⁵anavimc@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/871-662-871-662>

Escuela de Educación Superior Pedagógica Pública "Nuestra Señora de Chota" Chota, Peru

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Mastery of English speaking skills is essential for communicative competence and for personal and professional development. However, many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experience difficulties developing oral proficiency, which may limit their academic, occupational, and social participation. This review addresses the following question: How can speaking skills be improved among EFL learners? It aims to synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence, classify effective pedagogical strategies and technological tools, evaluate reported outcomes, and identify research gaps. Using a hermeneutic literature review, 24 recent empirical studies were selected from SciELO, Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD), Google Scholar, ALICIA, and RENATI according to relevance, recency, and academic rigor; foundational works were also consulted to frame key concepts and theories. The evidence indicates that podcasts, cooperative learning, project-based learning, role-play, digital

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Introduction

In today's globalized context, where physical and linguistic barriers are increasingly permeable, English has become an essential means of accessing international educational, professional, and cultural opportunities. Crystal (2003) emphasizes the global importance of English proficiency. Among the four language skills, speaking is particularly challenging for both teachers and learners because it requires not only As a global lingua franca, English occupies a prominent place in contemporary education systems. In Peru, Huamán-Rosales (2021) reports that many Basic Education graduates attain only a basic level of English despite the instructional time allocated to the subject in the national curriculum. The EF Education First (2025) report likewise assigns Peru a speaking score of 480, the lowest score among the language skills assessed. These findings support the need for pedagogical approaches that more effectively develop oral communication in secondary education.

This study examines the development of oral skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within formal educational settings, with particular attention to Basic Education learners in the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

This review addresses the limited comparative analysis of traditional pedagogical strategies, digital approaches, and artificial intelligence (AI) applications for developing EFL speaking skills in RBE. It considers psychological, educational, and social perspectives and has both theoretical and practical relevance. The general objective is to identify and analyze the main approaches, theories, pedagogical strategies, and technological tools used to improve EFL speaking skills. Specifically, the study seeks to categorize the principal approaches and theories, evaluate the

storytelling, mobile applications, and AI-supported tools can improve speaking performance when adapted to learners' needs and contexts. The review also identifies a need for research on kinesthetic and emotional dimensions, culturally diverse groups, long-term effects, and low-resource settings. Overall, technology-enhanced tools appear most effective when integrated with context-sensitive, interaction-focused pedagogy.

Keywords: EFL, speaking skills, pedagogical strategies, digital technologies, artificial intelligence

grammatical knowledge but also fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and pragmatic competence. Developing speaking skills is therefore central to communicative competence and to effective interaction in academic, professional, and social settings.

Despite sustained efforts to improve English teaching, oral communicative competence among students in Regular Basic Education (RBE) has remained limited in recent years.

reported effectiveness of pedagogical strategies and technologies, synthesize the findings, and identify research gaps.

The study employed a hermeneutic literature review. The core analysis comprised recent empirical studies reported in journal articles and theses, supplemented by books and other academic sources used to frame key concepts and theories. Sources were identified through SciELO, Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD), Google Scholar, ALICIA, and RENATI. Selection criteria included topical relevance, recency, and academic rigor, with emphasis on methodological practices, teaching strategies, technological tools, and materials for developing oral skills. The core review focused on studies published between 2021 and 2026; earlier foundational works were retained for conceptual framing. Studies from the Americas, Asia, and Europe were examined to provide a broad and current account of methodological strategies, affective factors, and technologies related to oral production. No original empirical data were collected.

The review was guided by a communicative perspective, which conceptualizes language learning as a process centered on meaningful interaction and authentic language use rather than on the

memorization of grammatical structures.

Speaking ability is central to communicative competence because it enables learners to perform effectively in authentic situations. Accordingly, this review offers a critical synthesis of the theoretical and methodological perspectives that support EFL speaking instruction. Its findings are intended to inform pedagogical practice and guide future research.

1. Speaking skills

1.1. Definitions

Safitriani and Jayadi (2021) describe speaking as the expression of learners' ideas, thoughts, and intentions through language. Speaking is also a communicative process in which vocal sounds are used to convey messages. Effective communication therefore depends on cooperation between speakers and listeners.

Domagala and Kontra (2016, as cited in Armijos, 2021) regard speaking as a central skill because it allows individuals to share ideas, opinions, and information with others, particularly when communicating in a language other than their mother tongue.

Baker and Westrup (2003) argue that speaking skills provide access to current information in fields such as education, science, technology, and health. Benlaghrissi and Ouahidi (2024) similarly emphasize the role of oral proficiency in meaningful academic and social participation. From this perspective, English proficiency can contribute to individual opportunity and to the social, economic, and political development of communities.

Likewise, Martínez (2020, as cited in Florez, 2022) describes speaking as an integral component of communication that cannot be separated from listening, reading, and writing.

The reviewed literature converges on the view that speaking involves more than sound production and vocalization; it is a complex cognitive and social process. The authors also portray speaking as a means of empowerment and access to global information. Nevertheless, the literature provides limited guidance on how the integration of speaking with the other language skills can be measured or developed in AI-assisted environments.

2. Main approaches and theories for developing speaking skills in EFL

Four reviewed studies adopted a communicative approach: Avellaneda (2024), García (2024), Florez (2022), and Cahuana (2024). Two studies, Armijos (2021) and García (2024), also incorporated a collaborative approach.

Two studies, Avellaneda (2024) and García (2024), drew on the theory of multiple intelligences.

Five studies were grounded in sociocultural theory: Dennis (2024), Julca (2022), Martínez (2024), Nhi and AlSaqqaf (2023), and Sun (2023).

Two studies, Avellaneda (2024) and Dila (2023), employed cooperative learning theory.

2.1. Main approaches

2.1.1. Communicative approach

Brumfit and Johnson (1979) present the communicative approach as a response to views of language that focus primarily on formal structures. Instead, the approach emphasizes communicative function, meaning making, and language use in authentic contexts. Richards (2017) likewise identifies meaningful communication as a central concern in language teaching.

Nunan (1991, as cited in Avellaneda, 2024) explains that the communicative approach engages learners in understanding, producing, and interacting in the target language while prioritizing meaning over form.

García (2024) found that students' pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary improved when activities were varied and informed by a detailed diagnosis of learners' needs. The study also suggests that information-gap activities facilitate knowledge internalization and more natural communication.

Florez (2022), by contrast, examined a communicative approach implemented through songs shared via WhatsApp. The intervention had a significant positive effect on speaking knowledge and practice. In the experimental group, 29.40% of learners reached the process level and 70.06% reached the achieved or outstanding levels. In the control group, 82.32% remained at the process level, whereas 17.64% reached the achieved or outstanding levels.

In Peru, Cahuana (2024) reported that 64.4% of a sample of 53 English teachers from private bilingual and non-bilingual institutions in Metropolitan Lima preferred the communicative approach. Frequently

used strategies included role-play, dramatization, language games, songs, and videos, which teachers considered useful for lesson planning.

2.1.2. Collaborative Approach

Johnson and Johnson (1989) explain that one individual's actions may promote, obstruct, or have no effect on another person's success. When pursuing a goal, individuals may therefore cooperate, compete, or work independently.

The collaborative approach was applied in the studies by Armijos (2021) and García (2024).

Valdez and Clevenger (2015, as cited in García, 2024) describe collaborative learning as a communication-based process through which learners address challenges, make decisions, and develop joint solutions. As a pedagogical approach, it supports the achievement of shared goals through coordinated work.

Because EFL learning requires interaction, collaboration is particularly relevant. Armijos (2021) used Padlet to create a virtual environment in which learners participated in role-plays and dialogues. The platform provided a supportive space for oral participation and reduced fear of embarrassment, although its usefulness for real-time interaction was limited. García (2024) also found that information-gap activities encouraged students to interact in English. The study emphasizes that teacher monitoring is essential during pair and group work to ensure equitable participation.

2.2. Main theories

2.2.1. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences

Gardner (1983) defines intelligence as an individual's capacity to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultural contexts. He further notes that this definition does not specify the origins of such capacities or the most appropriate means of assessing them.

Two studies in the review, Avellaneda (2024) and García (2024), drew on this theory.

In Ecuador, Avellaneda (2024) examined cooperative strategies for improving speaking skills. Think-pair-share, storytelling, and role-play had positive effects, and the study emphasized that topics, strategies, and materials should be adapted to learners' proficiency

levels and preferences. García (2024) highlighted the importance of intrapersonal intelligence, noting that learners who understand their own learning styles may perform better when working independently. The findings also showed that learners' needs varied across pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary. Accordingly, García recommends diversifying information-gap activities to accommodate differences in proficiency and engagement.

2.2.2. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

Vygotsky (1978) explains that each cultural function in a child's development appears twice: first at the social level and subsequently at the individual level. In other words, it first occurs interpsychologically and later intrapsychologically. This principle applies to voluntary attention, logical memory, and concept formation; thus, higher mental functions originate in social interaction.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory informed five of the reviewed studies: Dennis (2024), Julca (2022), Martínez (2024), Nhi and AlSaqqaf (2023), and Sun (2023).

Dennis (2024) investigated AI-powered speech recognition technology and concluded that meaningful interaction, personalized feedback, accessibility, and inclusive design improved learners' sound production and speaking skills. However, the technology did not consistently adapt to differences in age, proficiency, or cultural background. Similarly, Martínez (2024) found that SmallTalk2Me supported improvements in English speaking. Learners initially experienced hesitation, grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties, but the tool offered a low-pressure environment that reduced anxiety and strengthened confidence. Like AI-powered speech recognition, SmallTalk2Me provided immediate feedback on pronunciation and language structure without the social pressure of public correction.

Julca (2022) found a significant relationship between social-interaction activities and English speaking skills. Functionally oriented communicative activities supported linguistic competence by requiring learners to convey meanings and purposes. Nevertheless, the study identified limited use of communicative activities in daily teaching and insufficient adaptation to learners' proficiency levels.

Nhi and AlSaqqaf (2023) grounded their study in sociocultural theory and found that the Diagnosing,

Modelling and Sharing, Guiding, and Applying (DMGA) scaffolding model improved EFL speaking skills and helped learners gain the confidence needed to become more autonomous. Sun (2023) likewise emphasized the role of social interaction and context. The combination of automatic speech recognition (ASR) and peer correction improved second-language pronunciation and speaking performance. Although effective, ASR systems still demonstrated lower recognition accuracy than human assessment of speech.

2.2.3. Cooperative learning theory: David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Edythe J. Holubec

Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, and Roy (1984) define cooperative learning as the instructional use of small groups in which students support one another and provide feedback to enhance both individual and collective learning.

Avellaneda (2024) and Dila (2023) applied this theory and highlighted its value for developing social skills, teamwork, and academic performance through positive interdependence and individual accountability. Jacobs, Power, and Inn (2002) similarly identify these principles as central to effective cooperative learning.

Johnson et al. (1994, as cited in Avellaneda, 2024) describe cooperative learning as a planned system of interactions that promotes reciprocal influence among group members. In Avellaneda's (2024) study, jigsaw, think-pair-share, storytelling, and role-play improved learners' speaking skills.

Dila (2023) also drew on cooperative learning theory and examined peer teaching, a strategy in which students alternate between teacher and learner roles. Speaking scores increased from 30 on the pretest to 66.8 on the posttest, indicating substantial improvement after the intervention.

A notable gap is the growing emphasis on digital tools at the expense of oral interaction in realistic or simulated environments. Although digital settings may reduce the affective filter, they do not necessarily prepare learners to negotiate meaning, manage misunderstandings, and cooperate with peers in face-to-face interaction. Future studies should therefore examine whether gains achieved in low-pressure digital environments transfer to authentic communication.

3. Strategies for developing speaking skills

3.1. Collaborative and interactive strategies

Several reviewed studies examined collaborative and interactive strategies, including Dila (2023), Julca (2022), Nhi and AlSaqqaf (2023), and Cahuana (2024).

Dila (2023) investigated whether peer teaching improved speaking skills among students at MA DDI Lombo'na. Khusniyah (2019) defines peer teaching as a strategy for delivering content with support from classmates. Some students assume the role of presenters, while others receive and respond to the material. Learners who teach their peers first receive guidance from the teacher. Although peer teaching is well established in English language education, Dila's study provides additional evidence of its usefulness for speaking practice.

Julca (2022) examined the influence of communicative activities on the English speaking skills of elementary-level students at the Language Center of Universidad Privada del Norte. Thornbury (2005, as cited in Julca, 2022) argues that communication-centered activities should require learners to produce authentic, personal, and original language. Such practice supports autonomy, fluency, and automaticity in oral communication.

Nhi and AlSaqqaf (2023) investigated whether the DMGA scaffolding model improved EFL speaking skills among English for Specific Purposes learners at a public university in Vietnam. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) define scaffolding as temporary adult support that helps learners complete tasks, including problem solving, that they could not yet perform independently.

Cahuana (2024) conducted a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental study of the teaching strategies used by 53 primary-level English teachers in private bilingual and non-bilingual schools in Metropolitan Lima. Participants reported using role-play, dramatization, language games, songs, and videos. Teachers in non-bilingual institutions reported greater knowledge and management of these strategies. Drawing on Anijovich and Mora (2010), Cahuana conceptualizes teaching strategies as the decisions teachers make to guide instruction and promote learning.

Overall, peer teaching, communicative activities, scaffolding, games, and other playful dynamics promoted active participation, autonomy, creativity, authentic language use, and improved speaking performance. However, the studies paid limited

attention to emotional and cultural influences, learners' perceptions beyond functional outcomes, and teacher-reported implementation challenges. The predominance of descriptive quantitative designs also limited methodological diversity and in-depth qualitative interpretation.

3.2. Context-based and meaningful strategies

Context-based strategies were examined by Astuti and Chakim (2023), Firdaus (2023), Benlaghrissi and Ouahidi (2024), and Shi et al. (2024).

Astuti and Chakim (2023) investigated digital storytelling in secondary EFL classrooms. They describe it as an engaging approach that integrates technology into narrative speaking activities. Digital storytelling can therefore support both subject knowledge and oral-language development.

In Indonesia, Firdaus (2023) examined project-based learning among eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Darul Arqom Karanganyar. Project-based learning organizes instruction around concepts, stages, benefits, challenges, and assessment. Holm (2011) emphasizes its focus on sustained inquiry and meaningful products, while the SEAQIL Team (2020) provides guidance for higher-order-thinking-oriented project implementation. Together, these sources highlight the need to align project design, classroom procedures, and assessment.

Benlaghrissi and Ouahidi (2024) examined mobile-assisted project-based learning. In this approach, learners take an active role over an extended period by selecting a topic, planning, conducting research, and producing a product, presentation, or performance in response to an authentic question or challenge.

Digital storytelling and project-based learning provide meaningful contexts in which learners use language for clear and authentic purposes. Digital storytelling offers technology-mediated narrative practice, whereas project-based learning promotes sustained inquiry and production. Evidence from Shi et al. (2024) further supports project-based learning for public-speaking development. Nevertheless, many technology-intensive strategies may be difficult to implement in rural Peruvian settings because of unreliable internet access and limited digital literacy. Research should therefore evaluate contextualized, low-resource alternatives alongside AI-supported applications.

4. Techniques for developing speaking skills

Brown (2007) defines techniques in English language teaching (ELT) as the specific activities implemented in the classroom. Richards (2017) similarly emphasizes the importance of aligning classroom procedures with communicative objectives.

The review identified a range of speaking techniques used in different national contexts, including those examined by Munawaroh (2022), Hasanah (2023), Florez (2022), and García (2024).

In Indonesia, Munawaroh (2022) examined role-play in the communicative class of the ASYEE (As-Syaf'iyyah English Excellent) course at Darussalam Boarding School during the 2021/2022 academic year. The classroom action research involved 23 learners and two intervention cycles. The proportion of students meeting the minimum mastery criterion increased from 28% at baseline to 92% after the first cycle and 100% after the second. Brown (2004, as cited in Munawaroh, 2022) describes role-play as a common communicative activity that allows learners to assume different characters, exercise creativity, and use language imaginatively.

Hasanah (2023) examined the effect of songs on the speaking ability of Grade XI students in Indonesia. Sánchez (2014) and Díaz (2015) note that songs provide authentic exposure to pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures while reducing attitudinal barriers to foreign-language learning. In Peru, Florez (2022) investigated the use of songs delivered through WhatsApp among third-year secondary students in Cusco. Bravo (2015, as cited in Florez, 2022) emphasizes that repetition and rhythm make songs memorable and useful for language practice.

García (2024) evaluated the effects of information-gap activities on the speaking skills of first-year secondary students at Unidad Educativa Leonardo Da Vinci. A pretest-posttest design and an analytic rubric were used to assess pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary. Pronunciation and fluency improved significantly, whereas accuracy and some dimensions of fluency showed less progress. The author therefore recommends activities that target these specific areas. Drawing on Gardner (1983), the study also relates information-gap work to linguistic-verbal intelligence.

Across contexts, role-play, songs, and information-gap activities improved oral performance by increasing

motivation, creativity, authentic language contact, pronunciation practice, and fluency. These techniques share a contextualized, meaningful, and learner-centered orientation. However, the reviewed studies devoted little attention to learners' cultural backgrounds and affective filters, and few used longitudinal designs capable of establishing whether gains were sustained.

5. Technological resources for developing speaking skills

5.1. Digital platforms and applications

Kholodniak (2026) characterizes digital platforms for language education as multimodal and interactive virtual environments that integrate advanced digital functions.

The reviewed studies used a variety of digital platforms and applications, including Padlet, TikTok, YouTube, podcasts, smartphone-based tools, and SmallTalk2Me. Relevant studies include Armijos (2021), Hongsa et al. (2023), Madhavi et al. (2023), Martínez (2024), Mudhsh et al. (2024), and Rabie (2023).

Abulrahman (2018, as cited in Rabie, 2023) defines podcasting as a series of digital audio broadcasts that can be downloaded and played on portable devices. Podcasts provide learners with authentic listening material and flexible opportunities for repeated practice. Benkaret (2024) likewise identifies podcasts as a resource for developing EFL speaking skills.

Maxwell (2019, as cited in Armijos, 2021) presents Padlet as an accessible, user-friendly platform for teachers and learners. Its virtual boards support images, videos, GIFs, links, and audio recordings, making the tool suitable for multimodal speaking activities.

Putri (2022, as cited in Hongsa et al., 2023) describes TikTok as a platform for creating and sharing short videos and communicating through direct messages. Launched in China in 2016, the platform grew rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been used by educators and content creators to distribute educational and scientific material as well as entertainment.

Baranovskaja and Skorupa (2011, as cited in Martínez, 2024) argue that the SmallTalk2Me AI application can increase learner engagement and educational outcomes by providing personalized English-speaking practice.

Madhavi et al. (2023) identify YouTube as a widely accessible platform that allows users to view, create, and share videos. Teachers can use clips, films, trailers, and music videos to provide linguistic input and contexts for speaking practice. Learners who experience anxiety when speaking before teachers or peers may also record and submit videos, thereby practicing oral production in a lower-pressure setting.

5.2. Artificial intelligence

Several studies examined AI-supported resources, including Dennis (2024), Kadaruddin (2023), Martínez (2024), Sun (2023), and Zou et al. (2023).

Boucher (2020, as cited in Kadaruddin, 2023) defines an AI system as one that perceives and responds to its environment and acts with some autonomy to achieve specific objectives. Russell and Norvig (2016, as cited in Zou et al., 2023) similarly describe AI as computational systems designed to perform tasks associated with human intelligence.

Zhao et al. (2021, as cited in Dennis, 2024) concluded in a meta-analysis that AI-assisted tools can improve fluency and pronunciation accuracy while reducing anxiety among second-language learners.

Martínez (2024) identifies SmallTalk2Me as an AI-supported tool designed to strengthen learners' oral communication skills.

Suvorov (2014, as cited in Sun, 2023) describes automatic speech recognition (ASR) as a form of computer-assisted pronunciation training technology that transcribes and decodes speech, thereby supporting independent language practice across a range of topics.

Final reflections

The reviewed studies confirm that speaking is a central component of communicative competence in EFL learning and an essential consideration in English language teaching. Mastery of speaking is reflected in the development of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary. It also provides access to specialized pedagogical and scientific information. The evidence suggests that oral production improves most effectively when practical tools are aligned with coherent theoretical and pedagogical frameworks.

The categorization of approaches and theories reveals a shift from traditional methods toward learner-centered instruction. Communicative language

teaching and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory remain prominent, particularly because they emphasize social interaction and the negotiation of meaning. Collectively, the reviewed perspectives show that speaking develops through meaningful communication in cognitive and social contexts rather than through repetition alone.

The identified strategies included cooperative learning, project-based learning, role-play, songs, information-gap activities, digital storytelling, podcasts, mobile applications such as TikTok, Padlet, and YouTube, and AI-supported tools such as SmallTalk2Me and ASR systems. The evidence suggests that context-based strategies are most effective when combined with technologies that reduce speaking anxiety, support personalized feedback, and promote learner autonomy. Technology should therefore complement, rather than replace, meaningful interaction.

The review also suggests a contextual divide in access

to technology. Studies conducted in better-resourced settings more often examined AI, specialized applications, and paid multimedia platforms, whereas studies from lower-resource settings relied more heavily on free platforms, peer teaching, songs, and adaptable communicative activities. Further research is needed on the long-term sustainability of digital interventions and their feasibility in settings with limited connectivity, equipment, or technical support.

In conclusion, many of the reviewed studies used virtual environments and AI-supported tools, but relatively few examined face-to-face interaction in authentic situations. Innovative technologies and collaborative methodologies can work synergistically by personalizing practice, providing timely feedback, and increasing opportunities for oral production. Their pedagogical value, however, depends on contextual adaptation and on their integration with interaction-focused teaching that prepares learners for real-world communication.

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