

PROBLEM-BASED TEACHING METHOD TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS OF B1-B2 LEVEL LEARNERS

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the development of communicative abilities of English language learners at the B1–B2 proficiency levels through the application of the problem-based teaching approach. The study explores contemporary educational methods that emphasize learner engagement, independent thinking, and active participation during the learning process. Through problem-based tasks, students are encouraged to analyze real-life situations, collaborate with their peers, and express their ideas in English.

The paper outlines the main theoretical principles of communicative language teaching and describes the role of problem-based learning in improving language interaction. Furthermore, it presents several practical classroom techniques and sample activities designed to enhance students' speaking performance and collaborative communication.

The findings of this methodological work can support English language teachers in designing more engaging and student-centered lessons. In addition, the suggested strategies may contribute to increasing learners' motivation and strengthening their overall communicative competence.

Keywords. Communicative competence, speaking development, problem-based learning, interactive instruction, and language communication.

Introduction. Several scholars point out that communicative competence involves the capacity to express opinions, take part in discussions, and interact effectively with others. For this reason, teachers are encouraged to apply innovative instructional strategies that motivate learners to speak and actively share their thoughts.

One of the approaches considered highly effective for strengthening communication skills is the Problem-Based Teaching Method. This approach introduces learners to authentic or simulated problems that require discussion, careful analysis, and cooperative problem-solving. While working on such tasks, students naturally use the target language to explain their ideas, ask questions, and clarify meanings. Consequently, this process contributes to the development of their speaking skills, critical thinking abilities, and self-confidence.

Among the four skills of language teaching, speaking should be the primary objective in language teaching. It is due to the fact that most of the students are expected to be able to communicate with foreigners, get a good job, and continue their studies. Good speaking activities can and should be highly motivating. If all the students are participating fully and if the teacher has set up the activity properly, the students will get tremendous satisfaction from it. Many speaking tasks (role-play, discussion, problem solving, etc.) are intrinsically enjoyable in themselves. According to Nunan, express ideas, thoughts, feelings, and reactions in an appropriate structure, speech sounds, and appropriate. There are also some characteristics of a successful speaking activity:

- 1) Learners talk a lot. As much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk.
- 2) Participation is even. Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants.
- 3) Motivation is high. Learners are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it.
- 4) Language is at an acceptable level. Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy.



Methodology. Problem-Based Teaching (PBT) is a student-centered instructional approach that enables learners to acquire knowledge and skills through meaningful and engaging tasks. This methodology emphasizes active participation, allowing students to explore concepts in context while simultaneously developing competencies that are essential for academic success and future professional life.

As noted by Goodman (2010), Problem-Based Teaching is grounded in the use of authentic activities and real-world problems that require learners to think critically and find solutions. These tasks are designed to resemble situations that individuals encounter outside the classroom, thereby increasing the relevance of learning. Typically, PBT involves collaborative work, where students function as a team and strive toward achieving shared objectives. In the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), PBT offers a distinctive and effective alternative to traditional teaching methods. It provides learners with opportunities to actively apply their language knowledge in practical situations, particularly when addressing real-life challenges. Through this approach, students are not only exposed to linguistic input but are also encouraged to use the language as a tool for communication and problem-solving.

Moreover, PBT contributes to the development of a wide range of transferable skills that are essential in modern society. These include effective communication and presentation abilities, organizational and time-management skills, as well as research and inquiry competencies. In addition, learners enhance their capacity for self-evaluation and reflection, improve their ability to collaborate within a group, and develop leadership qualities. Importantly, PBT also fosters critical thinking, enabling students to analyze problems, make decisions, and propose well-reasoned solutions.

At the B1-B2 level, suitable tasks may include narrating past events, expressing preferences, solving everyday problems, or discussing familiar issues. These activities require learners to integrate vocabulary, grammar, and discourse skills in order to achieve a communicative goal. Importantly, tasks should be structured in a way that gradually increases in complexity, allowing learners to build confidence while expanding their speaking abilities. Researchers in language education state that effective learning occurs when students are involved in activities that require them to think critically, exchange ideas, and cooperate with others. Interactive tasks, group discussions, and collaborative activities help students develop both their language competence and social skills. This approach encourages learners to work together to analyze and solve meaningful problems while using the target language.

The purpose of using problem-based teaching is to improve speaking communication skills

The main purpose of using the Problem-Based Teaching (PBT) method in language learning is to improve students' speaking and communication skills through active participation and meaningful interaction. In traditional language classes, students often focus mainly on grammar exercises and memorizing vocabulary, which may not provide enough opportunities to practice real communication.

Problem-Based Teaching creates situations in which learners must discuss problems, share opinions, and work together to find solutions. During this process, students naturally use the target language to explain ideas, ask questions, and respond to their classmates. This helps them develop fluency and confidence in speaking.

Another important goal of PBT is to encourage learners to think critically and express their ideas clearly. When students are involved in solving problems, they learn how to organize their thoughts, present arguments, and communicate effectively with others.

Furthermore, the use of problem-based tasks increases students' motivation because the activities are meaningful and related to real-life situations. As a result, learners become more engaged in the learning process and improve their communicative competence.



Application of PBT in Speaking comprehension**ACTIVITY 1: SOLVING A REAL-LIFE PROBLEM**

1. Level: B1 (Intermediate) – according to the CEFR framework
2. Objectives: By the end of this activity, students will be able to:
 - express opinions and ideas clearly in spoken English;
 - develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills;
 - use appropriate vocabulary related to real-life issues;
 - interact effectively in group discussions;
 - present ideas in a structured and logical way.
3. Skills Focus: Speaking (main skill), Listening (peer interaction), and Critical thinking
4. Materials: Whiteboard and markers, handouts with problem descriptions, paper and pens (Optional), presentation tools (slides/posters).
5. Procedure

Stage 1: Warm-up (5 minutes)

The teacher initiates a short discussion by asking:

“What are some common problems people face in daily life or at school?”

Students share ideas briefly. The teacher writes key vocabulary on the board (e.g., pollution, stress, rules, technology addiction).

Stage 2: Group Formation (3 minutes)

Students are divided into small groups of 3–5 learners. Each group is assigned a different real-life problem, such as: environmental pollution, school discipline issues, and excessive use of social media

Stage 3: Problem Analysis (10–15 minutes)

Each group discusses its assigned problem using guiding questions:

- What is the problem?
- What are the causes?
- Who is affected?
- Why is it important to solve it?

Students are encouraged to use English only during discussion.

Stage 4: Generating Solutions (10–15 minutes)

Students work collaboratively to suggest at least 2–3 possible solutions.

The teacher monitors and provides support where necessary, and evaluates each solution by discussing: advantages and disadvantages

Stage 5: Presentation (10 minutes)

Each group presents their ideas to the class:

- Explanation of the problem;
- Proposed solutions;
- justification of their best solution;
- Each presentation should last 2–3 minutes.

Stage 6: Feedback and Discussion (5–10 minutes)

Other students ask questions or give comments. The teacher provides constructive feedback on:

- language use;
- fluency;
- clarity of ideas.



7. Differentiation

Weaker students: provided with sentence starters (e.g., “I think that...”, “One solution could be...”). Stronger students: encouraged to give more detailed explanations and examples

8. Follow-up Activity. Students write a short paragraph or essay summarizing:

- the problem;
- the best solution;
- their personal opinion.

ACTIVITY 2: DEBATE AND DISCUSSION

Topic Example: “Should mobile phones be allowed in school?”

1. Objectives. By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

- Express and justify their opinions clearly
- Develop critical thinking and argumentation skills
- Use persuasive language and appropriate vocabulary
- Listen actively and respond to others respectfully

3. Materials: whiteboard/markers, debate topic cards, paper and pens for notes, timer (optional)

4. Procedure

Step 1: Introduction (5–7 minutes). The teacher introduces the topic: “Should mobile phones be allowed in school?” Brief class discussion: Ask students what they think about the topic. Write key vocabulary on the board (e.g., distraction, learning tool, communication, rules)

Step 2: Group Formation (3 minutes). Divide students into two main groups:

- Group A (For) – supports the idea
- Group B (Against) – opposes the idea

Step 3: Preparation Stage (10 minutes)

Each group prepares their arguments: Students should:

- Brainstorm ideas
- Write at least 3–4 strong arguments
- Prepare examples or real-life situations. Decide roles: Speaker(s), Note-taker

Teacher support: Guide students with questions:

- *Why are phones useful/harmful?*
- *What happens in real schools?*

Provide useful phrases:

*I believe
that... In my
opinion...*

One important reason is...

However, I disagree because...

Step 4: Debate Stage (15–20 minutes). Structure of Debate:

1. Opening Statements (2–3 min per group). Each group presents their main position.
2. Argument Round (5–7 minutes).
 - Students present their arguments.
 - Opposing group listens carefully.
3. Rebuttal (5–7 minutes).



- Groups respond to each other's points;
- Students challenge ideas politely
- 4. Closing Statements (2–3 minutes). Each group summarizes their position.
- 5. Rules of Discussion:
 - Speak one at a time
 - Respect others' opinions
 - Use English as much as possible
 - No interrupting
 - Support ideas with reasons

ACTIVITY 3. PBT ACTIVITY: PLANNING A TRIP (GOING AWAY)

1. Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Talk about travel plans using *going to / will*;
- Practice real-life communication at the airport;
- Improve speaking, listening, and role-play skills.

2. Speaking Task: Airport Role-Play. As part of the project, students must act out a short dialogue at the airport.

Airport Situation

Students imagine they are at the airport:

- Checking in;
- Asking questions;
- Going through security.

Step 2. After planning the trip. Role-Play Task (15–20 minutes): Each group prepares a short airport dialogue (1–2 minutes)

Students choose roles: Passenger, Airline staff, Security officer.

Performance

Groups perform in front of the class

Encourage: natural speaking, eye contact, simple acting.

5. Useful Expressions: At the Airport

- *I'd like to check in*
- *Where is my gate?*
- *What time is boarding?*
- *Can I take this bag?*
- *Excuse me...*
- *Could you help me?*
- *Thank you / You're welcome*

7. Expected Outcome:

Students will:

- Use English in a real-life situation (airport)
- Feel more confident speaking
- Learn practical travel communication

Conclusion. In conclusion, the development of speaking skills at the B1-B2 level represents a significant stage in language learning, as learners move toward more independent and meaningful communication. This study has demonstrated that effective speaking instruction requires a balanced combination of methodological approaches, appropriate assessment strategies, and learner-centered practices. Traditional methods alone are no longer



sufficient to meet the demands of modern language education; therefore, integrating innovative approaches is essential for improving learners' communicative competence.

Furthermore, the implementation of interactive teaching methodologies, such as Project-Based Learning and task-based instruction, has proven to be highly effective in enhancing speaking abilities. These approaches create meaningful learning environments where students engage in real-life communication, collaborate with peers, and apply their language knowledge in practical contexts. Such experiences are particularly valuable at the B1-B2 level, where learners need to develop fluency, coherence, and confidence in expressing their ideas.

Another important aspect identified in this study is the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a sole evaluator. By providing guidance, scaffolding, and constructive feedback, teachers can create supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety and encourage participation. This is especially important for speaking activities, as learners often face psychological barriers that limit their willingness to communicate. Digital tools enable learners to record, review, and improve their speaking performance, while also allowing teachers to provide more detailed and individualized feedback. This contributes to a more flexible and learner-centered approach to language instruction.

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