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# THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS IN EFL ORAL COMMUNICATION

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**ABSTRACT**

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) have become an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because they encourage learners to think critically while using the target language. Although speaking instruction has traditionally focused on developing pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, effective oral communication also requires learners to analyze information, evaluate ideas, and produce meaningful responses. This paper examines the importance of HOTS in EFL oral communication by synthesizing three complementary theoretical perspectives: Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Mayer's (2002) Cognitive Theory of Learning, and Ellis's (2003) Second Language Acquisition framework. It also reviews findings from the empirical studies of Yin et al. (2024) and Jannah et al. (2026), which investigate the integration of HOTS into speaking instruction and assessment. The analysis suggests that cognitively engaging speaking activities enhance learners

**Keywords**

: higher-order thinking skills, oral communication, EFL, speaking, critical thinking, communicative competence

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## Introduction

Oral communication is one of the main objectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because it enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, and participate effectively in academic and professional contexts (Ellis, 2003). While speaking instruction has traditionally focused on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, successful communication also requires learners to analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, and produce meaningful responses. These abilities are closely associated with higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), which represent the highest levels of cognitive learning in Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised Bloom's Taxonomy.

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the role of HOTS in EFL speaking. Studies by Yin et al. (2024) and Jannah et al. (2026) demonstrate that integrating higher-order thinking into speaking instruction and assessment promotes learners' cognitive engagement and communicative competence. Despite these contributions, a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the relationship between HOTS and oral communication remains limited.

Therefore, this paper examines the importance of higher-order thinking skills in EFL oral communication by synthesizing relevant theoretical perspectives and recent empirical studies. It aims to demonstrate that developing HOTS can contribute to more effective speaking instruction and meaningful language learning.

## Literature Review

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) have become an important concept in modern education because they encourage learners to move beyond memorization and engage in deeper cognitive processes. According to Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised Bloom's Taxonomy, the highest levels of cognition include analyzing,

evaluating, and creating. These cognitive processes enable learners to interpret information, solve problems, justify opinions, and generate original ideas. In EFL speaking, HOTS support learners in producing meaningful responses and participating actively in communication rather than simply recalling memorized language.

The relationship between cognition and language learning is further explained by Mayer's (2002) Cognitive Theory of Learning. Mayer (2002) states that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively select, organize, and integrate new information with their existing knowledge. Applied to speaking instruction, this suggests that learners develop language more effectively when they process ideas critically and communicate meaningful messages instead of focusing only on linguistic accuracy.

Similarly, Ellis (2003) emphasizes that second language acquisition develops through meaningful interaction. Learners improve their language proficiency by negotiating meaning, exchanging ideas, and participating in authentic communication. Therefore, speaking activities that require learners to think critically while interacting with others contribute to both language development and cognitive growth.

Recent empirical studies support these theoretical perspectives. Yin et al. (2024) propose that speaking assessment should evaluate learners' ability to organize ideas, justify arguments, and demonstrate critical thinking in addition to linguistic competence. Likewise, Jannah et al. (2026) report that integrating HOTS into speaking instruction encourages greater learner engagement and promotes more meaningful classroom interaction. Although these studies examine different aspects of speaking, they consistently demonstrate that higher-order thinking enhances learners' oral communication and should be considered an essential component of EFL speaking instruction.

## Methodology

This study employed a narrative literature review to examine the role of higher-order thinking skills in EFL oral communication. Rather than collecting primary data, the paper synthesizes theoretical and empirical evidence from previously published studies. The theoretical discussion is based on Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Mayer's (2002) Cognitive Theory of Learning, and Ellis's (2003) Second Language Acquisition framework. To support the theoretical analysis, two recent empirical studies by Yin et al. (2024) and Jannah et al. (2026) were reviewed because they directly investigate the integration of higher-order thinking skills into EFL speaking instruction and assessment. The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify common findings regarding the relationship between HOTS and oral communication.

## Results and Discussion

The reviewed literature demonstrates that higher-order thinking skills play a significant role in the development of oral communication in EFL learning. Although the selected empirical studies focus on different aspects of speaking, both indicate that learners perform more effectively when speaking activities require them to analyze information, evaluate ideas, and construct meaningful responses instead of relying on memorized language.

According to Jannah et al. (2026), incorporating HOTS into speaking instruction increases learners' cognitive engagement and encourages more active classroom participation. Students become more confident in expressing opinions, defending arguments, and responding to different perspectives. These findings suggest that speaking activities requiring analytical and evaluative thinking contribute to both language development and critical thinking.

Similarly, Yin et al. (2024) argue that speaking assessment should extend beyond evaluating pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. They emphasize that learners' ability to organize ideas logically, support opinions with evidence, and demonstrate critical thinking should also be considered important indicators of speaking proficiency. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive evaluation of communicative competence.

The theoretical perspectives discussed in this paper help explain these findings. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) describe analyzing, evaluating, and creating as the highest cognitive processes, which encourage learners to engage actively with knowledge rather than simply recall information. Mayer (2002) explains that meaningful learning occurs through the active organization and integration of new knowledge, while Ellis (2003)

emphasizes that language acquisition develops through meaningful interaction. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that cognitive engagement and language learning are closely interconnected.

Overall, the reviewed evidence indicates that integrating higher-order thinking skills into speaking instruction enables learners to communicate more effectively by encouraging them to think critically while using English. Therefore, HOTS should be regarded as an essential component of EFL oral communication rather than an additional classroom objective.

## Conclusion

Higher-order thinking skills have become an important element of effective EFL speaking instruction because they encourage learners to use language thoughtfully and purposefully. Theoretical perspectives proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), Mayer (2002), and Ellis (2003), together with the empirical findings of Yin et al. (2024) and Jannah et al. (2026), demonstrate that cognitive engagement contributes significantly to the development of oral communication.

The reviewed literature suggests that learners develop stronger communicative competence when speaking activities encourage them to analyze information, evaluate different viewpoints, and generate meaningful responses. Integrating higher-order thinking into speaking instruction not only improves language proficiency but also promotes critical thinking and meaningful learning. Therefore, EFL teachers should consider HOTS an integral part of speaking instruction to better prepare learners for effective communication in academic and real-life contexts.

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