

The Effect of Active Education Based on Poetry Reading, Picture Reading, and Dramatization on the Speaking Skills of Fourth Grade Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of active education based on poetry reading, picture reading, and dramatization on strengthening the speaking skills of fourth grade elementary school students.

Method: This study was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of method with a pre-test-post-test design and a control group. The statistical population included all fourth grade male students in Nazarabad city in the academic year 2024-2025. Sampling was conducted using the convenience method and two selected classes, each containing 20 people, were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The research instrument included a researcher-made speaking skill checklist with twenty questions, whose validity was confirmed by 5 experts and its reliability, using Cronbach's alpha, was calculated as .87. The experimental group underwent active education based on poetry reading, picture reading, and demonstration during 10 sessions of 60 minutes. Examples of activities included performing poetry while observing the tone and rhythm, analyzing and retelling images based on "seeing, thinking, and saying," and performing short plays to enhance public speaking and speech coherence.

Results: Data were analyzed using univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS software. The findings showed that active education based on these three activities significantly improved the performance of students in the experimental group in all components of speaking skill, including coherent speaking, public speaking, speaking appropriate to the context and audience, observing tone and rhythm, and understanding visual messages.

Conclusions: The results show that active and interactive education is associated with significant improvements in students' speaking skills.

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Introduction

Education is recognized as one of the most fundamental pillars of social and cultural development in the contemporary world, and its function goes beyond the simple transfer of knowledge as it provides a platform for the development of linguistic, social, and critical thinking skills among the new generation (Azarmi et al., 2024). This important function necessitates rethinking about the methods and curricula, because traditional educational systems, relying on memorization and passive methods, no longer meet the complex needs of today's world (Salehi et al., 2024). For this purpose, paying attention to literacy with a new approach is an inevitable necessity. Meanwhile, language learning, and more specifically, paying attention to four main language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, is emphasized in the all educational programs in the world (Omidishal et al., 2024), because language skills are considered to be the main pillars of education in the primary school and play an important role in the academic and social success of students. The importance is also highlighted in documents of the Iranian educational system, including the Fundamental Transformation Document and the National Curriculum (National Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2022). Among the four language skills, “speaking” has a special place because it is the main tool for interpersonal communication and the transfer of ideas, and it is expected that students be able to express their thoughts, feelings, and views clearly and in standard language by the end of the primary school (Akbari Sheldareh et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of ‘speaking’, evidence shows that in practice, speaking skill education has received less attention and more focus has been on ‘reading and writing’ skills. This neglect can lead to consequences such as anxiety in ‘speaking’, decreased self-confidence, and weakness in presenting thoughts and academic failure (Danae Toos, 2011; Zandi, 2017). A review of the content of Persian textbooks also shows that although activities such as storytelling, picture reading and drama are foreseen to strengthen ‘speaking’, their implementation in the classroom is accompanied by shortcomings and the objectives of the curriculum are not fully achieved (Chekni, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, Neuman’s ‘Quality of Learning Experiences’ model (Neuman, 1990) provides a suitable framework for analyzing the effectiveness of educational activities. Neuman introduces four main dimensions for assessing the quality of the educational experience: educational content, supporting resources, flexibility of activities, and the educational relationships between teacher and student (Ahadian et al., 2019; Kyriacou, 2018; Maleki, 2015; Mardomi & Delshad, 2010). Each of these components shows why some activities do not lead to improvement in speaking skill in practice and what factors can limit the effective implementation of training.

Vygotsky's social interaction theory also states that language is the main tool for learning and that social interactions provide the basis for the development of speech skills. Based on the concept of the "zone of proximal development", a student can demonstrate abilities beyond his/her current level with the support of a teacher or peers (Vygotsky, quoted in Shoari-Nejad, 2022). Activities such as group discussions, role-playing, storytelling, picture description, and oral presentation help students develop speech skills by creating social interaction and the possibility of cooperative learning. These activities are most effective when they are designed and implemented in accordance with a student's language level and receive effective and timely feedback.

Based on these principles, the independent variable of the present study is active education based on "poetry reading, picture reading, and acting." These three educational skills, by creating active learning experiences, social interaction, stimulating cognitive motivation, and providing oral speech opportunities, pave the way for strengthening the skill of "speaking" and its components.

Despite domestic and international studies, it can be stated that most studies have either addressed the skill of 'speaking' generally or have focused on specific methods such as "storytelling and acting" and have less focused on a comprehensive evaluation of the set of activities foreseen in the fourth-grade Persian textbook. Focusing on this gap, the present study, for the first time, empirically examines the effect of active education based on poetry reading, picture reading, and acting on the speaking skill and its components and provides objective evidence for improving the quality of education. The findings can confirm the importance of using modern and active methods in teaching speaking skills. The speaking skill is not only a means of expressing thoughts and feelings, but also a platform for developing critical thinking, creativity, active listening ability, and social skills (Yarmohammadian, 2016). Domestic research has shown that interactive methods such as storytelling, role-playing, and drama can improve students' vocabulary, speech coherence, self-confidence, and oral presentation skills. Sadeghi and Ghasemi-Gourbandi (2020) showed that performing active storytelling can significantly improve the vocabulary and speech quality of fourth-grade students. Goodarzi and Ghaderi (2022) stated that storytelling with puppets strengthens the verbal abilities of children with special needs and justifies the use of active methods in education.

Rahimi Galugahi (2021) also showed that continuous teacher training and the implementation of projects such as "Readable" can improve students' ability to present coherent and effective speech. Sabzeh et al. (2025) also showed that the use of artistic activities such as picture reading, drama, poetry reading, and storytelling has significantly increased the learning of educational concepts in elementary school students. Analysis of the structure of stories in elementary school Persian books shows that if these stories are combined with drama methods, they will have a

deeper impact on students' linguistic and literary development (Chekni, 2018; Mohammadi et al., 2018).

Considering national research evidence and the importance of active learning, international research has also examined broader dimensions of the functions of drama in education. Gualdrón and Castillo (2018) emphasized that drama as a comprehensive method can increase learning motivation, develop emotional cooperation, and improve group interaction among language learners. Dawson and Kiger Lee (2018) also introduced “drama-based pedagogy” and showed that this approach has the ability to integrate different subjects and create an interdisciplinary learning framework. Sanchez et al.'s research (2022) showed that integrating drama into different subjects and grades can be a valuable tool for novice teachers in enhancing reflective practice and pedagogical creativity. The impact of drama is not limited to linguistic or social domains, but also includes cognitive dimensions and thinking skills. Hu and Shu (2025) showed that drama education improves students' critical thinking through collaboration and interaction. Research by Wulansari and Hardianto (2025) also revealed that role-playing, storytelling, and interactive games significantly increase students' language abilities and participation and improve their speaking skills.

Based on the national curriculum and related research, speaking skill consists of five main components: coherent speaking, speaking in public, speaking appropriate to the context and audience, observing the tone and rhythm of speech, and understanding the visual message (Akbari Sheldareh et al., 2023; Chekni, 2018). Considering these components and the existing research gap, the aim of the present study was to answer the following research question:

- How much can implementing educational methods based on poetry reading, picture reading, and drama improve the speaking skill of fourth grade elementary school students and its related components?

Research Method

This study is applied in terms of purpose and quantitative in terms of its data collection method. The research design was quasi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test and a control group. The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of purposeful implementation of poetry reading, picture reading, and dramatization activities in the fourth-grade Persian textbook on students' speaking skill.

Participants

The statistical population included all fourth-grade male students in Nazarabad city in the academic year 2024-2025. The convenience sampling method was used; for this purpose, a public school was randomly selected and two classes from the fourth-grade classes of the same school

were considered as the research sample. The two existing classes were randomly assigned as the experimental and control groups. However, as students in each class were not individually randomized, the research is considered a cluster randomization type at the class level. To ensure homogeneity, the pre-test was administered to the participants of both classes before implementing the study.

Instruments

The main research instrument was a researcher-made checklist of speaking skill. This checklist was designed based on theoretical foundations, components of the national curriculum, and research background. It consisted of 20 items with a five-point Likert scale (1 = very little to 5 = very much) and assessed five components of the speaking skill, including: coherence in speaking, speaking in public, speech appropriateness to context and audience, observance of tone and rhythm of speech, and understanding of visual messages. The content validity of the research instrument was confirmed by five experts in curriculum planning and language learning, and necessary amendments were made. To examine the reliability, the checklist was administered to a sample of 30 people and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .87, indicating the desired reliability of the instrument. The range of the total score of the instrument was between 20 and 100, with a higher score indicating greater speaking skills.

Procedure

The educational intervention was specific to the experimental group, designed by the researcher and implemented by a teacher in 10 sessions of 60-minute according to the regular weekly school schedule. The implementation of the intervention was designed based on Neuman's "Quality of Learning Experiences" framework and Vygotsky's "Principles of Social Interactionism" and consisted of three stages: a) introductory activity (reviewing the lesson, viewing a picture, asking a motivating question or a short conversation); b) main speaking activity (implementing end-of-lesson activities with an emphasis on group interaction, practice, and coherent oral expression); and c) educational feedback (providing individual and group feedback, correcting language errors, encouraging participation, and guiding speaking skills). For example, in the "Nature" lesson, students presented a structured oral report using lesson pictures that included coherence, appropriate tone, and attention to the context. In the control group, teaching was conducted according to the usual classroom routine and no additional intervention was performed.

The research implementation process was as follows: Before the intervention, both groups were assessed using the speaking skill checklist (pre-test). Then, the experimental group received 10 training sessions and the control group continued the usual training. After the end of the course, the checklist was administered again for both groups (post-test).

After collecting the post-test data, the analysis of the effect of active training based on poetry reading, picture reading, and dramatization on speaking skills was performed using SPSS version 26 software. In descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. To measure the effect of the intervention and control the effect of the pre-test, univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used. The assumptions of ANCOVA, including data normality and regression slope homogeneity, were reviewed and confirmed. In the results report, F indices, degrees of freedom (df), significance level (p), and effect size (η^2) were presented.

Results

In this study, the effect of active education based on poetry reading, picture reading and dramatization on the speaking skill of fourth grade elementary school students was examined. First, the status of the two experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test of the research variables was described, and then, the assumptions of the univariate analysis of covariance test were examined and the hypotheses were analyzed.

Descriptive Analysis of the Data

Table 1. The studied groups' statistics

Group	F	Percent
experimental	20	50
control	20	50
total	40	100

Table 2. Status of the experimental and control groups in the pre-test of speaking skill

Group	Status	No. of Qs	Min	Max	Mean
Experimental	Speaking coherently	3	3	15	7.45
	Speaking in public	5	5	19	12.25
	Speaking with context and audience	3	3	13	7.45
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	7	17	14.35
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	5	18	10.30
	General Speaking skill	20	22	76	50.70
Control	Speaking coherently	3	3	13	6.85
	Speaking in public	5	5	23	13.15
	Speaking with context and audience	3	3	13	7.45
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	7	17	14.10
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	6	14	10.25
	General Speaking skill	20	22	79	51.90

In the pre-test phase, the average overall speaking skill scores in the experimental group (50.70) and the control group (51.90) were below the theoretical average. Examination of each component showed that the performance of the two groups was similar at the beginning of the study. For example, the average score of the “coherent speaking” component in the experimental group was 7.45 and in the control group was 6.85, which indicates the initial homogeneity of the groups before the intervention. This homogeneity allows for the measurement of the real effect of targeted learning activities on the “speaking” skill.

Table 3. Status of the experimental and control groups in the post-test of speaking skill

Group	Status	No. of Qs	Min	Max	Mean
Experimental	Speaking coherently	3	6	15	11.25
	Speaking in public	5	10	25	17.40
	Speaking with context and audience	3	7	15	11.65
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	10	22	18.60
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	9	23	14.85
	General Speaking skill	20	44	94	73.75
Control	Speaking coherently	3	4	14	7.65
	Speaking in public	5	6	24	14.10
	Speaking with context and audience	3	4	14	8.50
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	8	17	14.45
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	7	15	11.20
	General Speaking skill	20	29	75	55.9

After implementing active poetry reading, picture reading, and acting training, the results showed that the experimental group had significant improvements in all components of the speaking skill. The average overall score of the speaking skill of the experimental group increased from 70.50 to 75.73, while the control group only increased from 90.51 to 90.55. These results showed that purposeful and interactive activities had a stronger effect on speaking components that require group interaction and structured oral expression, such as cohesion and public speaking, while the growth in components such as “tone and rhythm of speech” was relatively smaller, but still significant.

Using univariate analysis of covariance, they found that the difference between the groups after controlling for the pre-test effect in all components and the total score of the speaking skill was significant at the $P \geq .01$ level and showed a high effect size (η^2), which confirmed the practical importance of the results. These findings were consistent with Vygotsky’s theory about the importance of social interaction and feedback in the development of speaking skills and Neuman’s model in relation to the quality of the learning experience.

Table 4. Overall status of the experimental and control groups in the post-test of speaking skill

Group	Status	No. of Qs	Min	Max	Mean
Experimental	Speaking coherently	3	6	15	12.68
	Speaking in public	5	10	25	18.90
	Speaking with context and audience	3	7	16	13.02
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	10	22	18.77
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	9	23	16.17
Control	General Speaking skill	20	44	96	79.53
	Speaking coherently	3	34	15	9.6
	Speaking in public	5	6	25	15.82
	Speaking with context and audience	3	4	15	9.75
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	5	8	19	15.07
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	4	7	18	12.85
	General Speaking skill	20	29	84	63.08

The results showed that performing poetry reading, picture reading, and acting activities improved students' coherent speech skills, oral presentation skills in public, and visual message comprehension. Component analysis showed that poetry reading promoted speech coherence and improved tone and rhythm, and picture reading helped increase accuracy in visual message comprehension and effective retelling, and acting and role-playing also had a significant impact on public speaking and audience-appropriate expression. These findings confirm the importance of active and interactive teaching and indicate that the combined use of the three activities can be an effective tool for empowering students in speech skills. In addition, the large effect sizes in most components indicate that the practical effects of the intervention are significant for real classrooms.

Hypothesis Testing

Before conducting univariate analysis of covariance, the main assumptions including normality of data and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked and confirmed. This ensures that the implementation of ANCOVA is valid for evaluating the effect of active training on speaking skill.

Examining the Homogeneity of Groups in the Pre-Test

In order to control for initial differences and ensure the homogeneity of groups in the pre-test stage, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used. The results showed that the Wilk lambda value was $\lambda = .96$, $F = .79$ and $\text{Sig} = .58$. These values indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups in the pre-test; therefore, the two groups are homogeneous and comparable in terms of speaking skill.

*Covariance Test for Comparing Groups in the Pre-Test***Table 5. Multivariate analysis of covariance test**

Effect	Value	F	df	Df of Error	sig
Wilks' lambda	.96	.79	6	113	.58

These results show that there is no statistical difference between the groups in the pre-test, the value of Wilks' lambda is ($F = .79$ and $Sig = .58$) and the necessary conditions are met to examine the effect of the intervention.

Table 6. Comparison of the speaking subscales of the two groups in the pre-test

Change Sources	Dependent Variable	Sum Of Squares	Df	Mean of Squares	F-Ratio	Sig.
Group Effect	Coherent speaking	2.700	1	2.700	.244	.622
	Speaking in public	1.040	1	26.133	1.040	.31
	Speaking with context and audience	.675	1	.675	.675	.77
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	.208	1	.208	.028	.868
	Understanding visual message and reading images	1.408	1	1.408	.154	.695
	Speaking Skill	37.408	1	37.408	.138	.71
Error	Coherent speaking	1305.167	118	11.061		
	Speaking in public	2965.167	118	25.129		
	Speaking with context and audience	930.250	118	7.883		
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	885.783	118	7.507		
	Understanding visual message and reading images	1078.383	118	9.139		
	Speaking Skill	31883.917	118	270.203		
Total	Coherent speaking	10956	120			
	Speaking in public	27702	120			
	Speaking with context and audience	10171	120			
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	26611.4	120			
	Understanding visual message and reading images	17765	120			
	Speaking Skill	441539	120			
Corrected Total	Coherent speaking	1307.867	119			
	Speaking in public	2991.30	119			
	Speaking with context and audience	930.925	119			
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	885.992	119			
	Understanding visual message and reading images	1079.792	119			
	Speaking Skill	319213.325	119			

According to the data in Table 6, the test values obtained for each of the variables are as follows: coherence in speaking ($F = .244$ and $Sig = .62$), speaking in public ($F = 1.04$ and $Sig = .31$), speaking with context and audience ($F = .086$ and $Sig = .77$), observing tone and rhythm in speaking ($F = .028$ and $Sig = .87$), understanding visual messages and reading pictures ($F = .154$ and $Sig = .70$), and speaking skills in public ($F = .138$ and $Sig = .71$). Given the lack of significant differences between the groups in the pre-test stage, it can be claimed that the two groups are homogeneous in terms of initial performance in the dependent variable. This is one of the basic prerequisites for performing univariate analysis of covariance.

Checking compliance with the assumptions of ANCOVA

Before performing univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), the basic assumptions of this test, including normality of data distribution, equality of univariate covariance matrices, and homogeneity of regression slopes, were examined. The results showed that all the assumptions were valid and the necessary conditions for performing the main analysis were met.

Normality of Data Distribution

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of the distribution of scores of speaking skill subscales. As can be seen in Table 7, the significant values for all subscales in both the experimental and control groups and in both the pre-test and post-test stages are greater than .05.

These results show that there is no significant difference between the data distribution and the normal distribution; therefore, the distribution of scores of all variables is normal and the use of parametric tests, including ANCOVA, is permissible and appropriate.

Table 7. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to examine the normality of the test data

	Subscale	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	Exp. Group	Control Group
Pre-test	Speaking coherently	K-S	.825	.747
		Sig.	.504	.632
	Speaking in public	K-S	1.341	.86
		Sig.	.055	.45
	Speaking with context and audience	K-S	.611	.849
		Sig.	.849	.467
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	K-S	1.283	1.229
		Sig.	.083	.90
Post-test	Understanding visual messages and reading images	K-S	.835	.759
		Sig.	.489	.612

	Subscale	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	Exp. Group	Control Group
Post-test	Speaking skills	K-S	.618	.613
		Sig.	.84	.847
	Speaking coherently	K-S	1.249	.838
		Sig.	.101	.484
	Speaking in public	K-S	1.113	.927
		Sig.	.168	.357
	Speaking with context and audience	K-S	1.129	.793
		Sig.	.109	.556
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	K-S	1.237	1.259
		Sig.	.093	.092
	Understanding visual messages and reading images	K-S	.992	.729
		Sig.	.279	.662
	Speaking skills	K-S	1.032	.931
		Sig.	.238	.351

Homogeneity of Univariate Covariance Matrices

To examine the equality of the univariate covariance matrices of the groups, the M Box test was used. The results of this test showed that the significance value was equal to .086, which is greater than the .05 level. This finding indicates that the assumption of equality of univariate covariance matrices is valid and there is no significant difference between the univariate covariance structure of the variables in the two groups. As a result, one of the basic assumptions of multivariate analysis of covariance was confirmed.

Table 8. M-box

M Box	33.1502
F	8.132
DF1	15
DF2	5.60
Sig	.086

Homogeneity of the Regression Slopes

To examine the homogeneity of the regression slopes, the interaction effect of group $\times$ pretest was tested in the ANCOVA model. The results showed that this interaction was not significant in any of the variables ($p > .05$); this indicates that the relationship between the covariate variable (pretest) and the dependent variable was the same in both groups and the effect of the pretest was applied similarly to the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes is also valid.

Table 9. Analysis of covariance for between-group effects

Change Sources	Dependent Variable	Sum Of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean of Squares	F-Ratio	Sig	Eta Square
Group Effect	Coherent speaking	285.208	1	285.208	36.057	.001	.234
	Speaking in public	285.208	1	285.208	12.139	.001	.093
	Speaking with context and audience	320.133	1	320.133	49.952	.001	.297
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	410.700	1	410.7	55.42	.001	.318
	Understanding visual message and reading images	330.008	1	330	39.736	.001	.252
Error	Coherent speaking	933.383	118	7.91			
	Speaking in public	2772.383	118	23.49			
	Speaking with context and audience	756.233	118	6.40			
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	880.467	118	7.46			
	Understanding visual message and reading images	979.983	118	8.3			
Total	Coherent speaking	16115	120				
	Speaking in public	39215	120				
	Speaking with context and audience	16626	120				
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	35632	120				
	Understanding visual message and reading images	26569	120				
Corrected Total	Coherent speaking	1218.592	119				
	Speaking in public	3057.592	119				
	Speaking with context and audience	1067.367	119				
	Appropriate tone and rhythm	1291.167	119				
	Understanding visual message and reading images	1309.992	119				
	Coherent speaking						
	Speaking in public						

By confirming all the assumptions, the implementation of univariate analysis of covariance to examine the effect of the educational intervention was found to be statistically valid and reliable. After controlling for the effect of pre-test scores, univariate analysis of covariance was performed to compare the performance of the experimental and control groups in the components of the speaking skill. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 10. The results showed that the group effect was significant in all components of the speaking skill ($p < .001$); To be more precise: Speaking coherently: $F = 36.057$, $\eta^2 = .234$; Speaking in public: $F = 12.139$, $\eta^2 = .093$; Speaking appropriate to the context and audience: $F = 49.952$, $\eta^2 = .297$; Appropriate tone and rhythm: $F = 55.420$, $\eta^2 = .318$; Understanding visual messages and reading pictures: $F = 39.736$, $\eta^2 = .252$.

The eta squared (η^2) values indicate that the effect size of the educational intervention is moderate to high in all components. In particular, the largest effect size is related to the components of “appropriate tone and rhythm” and “speaking appropriate to the context and audience”, which indicates the profound effect of dramatic activities and poetry reading on the expressive and situational dimensions of students’ speech.

In general, the results of the univariate analysis of covariance showed that active education based on poetry reading, picture reading, and drama had a significant and significant effect on improving the speaking skill of fourth grade elementary school students. Controlling for the effect of the pre-test and the initial homogeneity of the groups provides confidence that the differences observed in the post-test were due to the educational intervention, not the initial differences between the groups. These findings emphasize the effectiveness of active and art-based approaches in language teaching and show that learning based on experience, interaction, and creative expression can play an effective role in developing students’ speaking skills.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of active education based on poetry reading, picture reading and drama on the speaking skill of fourth grade elementary school students. The results of univariate analysis of covariance showed that after controlling for the effect of the pre-test, the performance of students in the experimental group in all components of the speaking skill was significantly better than that of the control group. These findings do not simply indicate the effectiveness of an educational intervention, but also show how the quality of the learning experience and the nature of classroom interactions can redefine the path of speech skills development.

The findings of this study also showed that active education based on poetry reading, picture reading and dramatization has a significant and strong effect on improving the speaking skill of fourth grade elementary school students. After controlling for the pretest effect, the observed

differences between the experimental and control groups in all components of the speaking skill were significant, indicating that the improvement in students' speaking performance was the result of a purposeful, interactive, and experiential learning process. This finding supports the view that oral skills are developed not through passive and memory-based exercises, but rather in the context of activities that provide opportunities for social interaction, personal expression, experience of communicative roles, and receiving effective feedback. The significant improvement in speech coherence showed that active instruction allows students' transition from scattered and reactive speech to purposeful and organized speech. Poetry reading with a rhythmic structure, picture reading with a semantic sequence, and presentation with narrative logic, all three implicitly strengthen the skill of "organizing meaning." This finding is consistent with the research of Sabzeh et al. (2025) and Rahimi Galugahi (2021). The distinctive feature of this research is that speech coherence is not the product of direct practice, but rather the result of the student being in meaningful speech situations. This is consistent with Vygotsky's view that language development is the result of purposeful social action, not explicit teaching of rules.

The significant growth in public speaking ability also showed that speech anxiety decreases when the student experiences the role of "learning agent." The findings of this study are consistent with those of Goodarzi and Ghaderi (2022) and Mohammadi et al. (2018). However, there is an important distinction; in this study, public speaking was not formed as an independent goal, but as a natural consequence of participating in meaningful group activities. This result showed that speech confidence cannot be taught directly, but must be cultivated in the context of successful communication experiences. The results related to "speaking appropriate to the context and audience" were theoretically very meaningful because they showed that the students were able to move beyond the level of mere expression and reach the level of "communicative action." This result is consistent with the research of Gualdron and Castillo (2018) and Dawson and Kiger Lee (2018). Moreover, the distinctive findings of this study are that speaking ability was strengthened within the framework of the formal curriculum and using Persian textbook activities, and not through extracurricular programs or interventions outside the classroom. This indicates that students' communication weaknesses are due to the way the content is implemented, rather than due to a lack of content.

The strong effect of the intervention on tone and rhythm of speech also showed that the metalinguistic components of language are strongly dependent on the emotional and physical experiences of learning. This finding is consistent with the results of Hu and Shu (2025), who consider drama as a tool for linking language and emotion. However, the difference of the present study is that tone and rhythm of speech were measured as an independent component and showed that active learning can also strengthen the aesthetic and expressive aspects of language; aspects that are often overlooked in traditional education.

The significant improvement in “visual message comprehension and picture reading” also showed that picture reading leads to the development of speaking skills when it goes beyond the level of superficial description and becomes “spoken interpretation”. This finding is consistent with that of Chekni (2018) and Sabzeh et al. (2025), but the present study shows that picture reading alone is not enough and the greatest effectiveness is achieved when it is accompanied by dialogue, role-playing and educational feedback. This result is consistent with Neuman’s model of the quality of learning experiences, which emphasizes the interaction between content, activity and educational relationship.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the present study were in line with a large part of national and international literature, but its prominence lies in its integrated and curriculum-oriented view of the speaking skill. This study showed that active learning is most effective when it is based on activities in the textbook, designed within a specific theoretical framework, and finally implemented in a coherent and purposeful manner. From this perspective, this study did not simply demonstrate the effectiveness of several teaching methods, but rather presented a practical model for improving the quality of Persian language teaching in elementary school and emphasized that the development of students' speaking skills requires, more than anything else, a change in "how to teach", not "what to teach". The findings of this study show that improving students' speaking skill depends on the quality of the design of speaking-oriented learning situations, rather than on increasing oral exercises or teaching time. The results clearly indicate that when activities such as poetry reading, picture reading, and dramatization are implemented as purposeful and structured learning experiences, they can meaningfully enhance various dimensions of the speaking skill. Therefore, the role of the teacher in teaching Persian is upgraded from that of an executor of predetermined activities to that of a designer of speaking experiences; a role in which guiding the thinking process, organizing meaning, and purposeful expression of students is the focus.

From a curriculum planning perspective, the results of this study show that the main challenge in teaching speaking skill is not a lack of content or activity, but rather a lack of coherence in educational implementation. Speaking activities are effective when they are part of a meaningful learning chain that includes mental preparation, active interaction, and guided feedback. This finding emphasizes the need to move away from a list-based view of the curriculum and move toward designing coherent educational scenarios in which art and language are used not as decorations but as primary mediators of learning. Significant improvements in components such as coherence of speech, audience fit, tone, and comprehension of visual message indicate that speech evaluation should go beyond the level of general and intuitive judgment and become a tool for educational feedback. Such an approach can simultaneously play a measuring and

teaching role and help the student on the path to gradual improvement of communicative competence.

The basic practical message of this study for teachers, curriculum planners, and educational policymakers is that the transformation in teaching the speaking skill is achieved not by adding new content or increasing teaching hours, but by rethinking the logic of educational design and paying attention to the quality of the learning experience. Emphasis on active education based on interaction, art, and real communication situations can pave the way for developing students' communication competence in elementary school; a competence that, beyond the classroom, forms the foundation for their effective participation in future social and educational situations.

Given the limitations of this study, including the limited sample size to male students in one school and the short intervention period, it is suggested that future research design blended and interdisciplinary learning programs in which poetry reading, picture reading, and drama are used in interaction with other creative and linguistic activities to increase the richness of the learning experience. It is also necessary to develop comprehensive and dynamic assessment tools that can measure the multidimensional effects of active learning beyond quantitative scores and at cognitive, linguistic, and interactive levels. On the other hand, professional empowerment of teachers in the field of designing and implementing targeted and interactive speaking activities can play a decisive role in the effectiveness of this approach. Finally, conducting longitudinal and medium-term studies to examine the sustainability, depth, and transfer of the effects of art- and language-based active learning on students' speaking skills and critical thinking can help enrich the research literature in this area and improve curriculum planning decisions.

Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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