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KEY PROBLEMS AND FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENTS' SPEECH COMPETENCE IN MOTHER TONGUE LESSONS BASED ON THE 4C MODEL

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Abstract. The article examines the principal problems and influencing factors in improving students' speech competence in mother tongue lessons through the 4C model: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. The study is designed as an integrative literature review and pedagogical synthesis of fifteen international sources on twenty-first-century skills, oracy, dialogic teaching, cooperative learning, multilingual education, and the assessment of spoken language. The analysis shows that the effectiveness of a 4C-based approach is constrained when classroom interaction remains teacher-centred, assessment rewards reproduction rather than meaningful speech, speaking opportunities are distributed unequally, and teachers lack practical instruments for formative assessment. The article proposes a classroom model in which problem-based questioning, exploratory talk, creative oral production, peer interaction, and transparent speaking criteria are combined within mother tongue instruction. The findings suggest that speech competence should be treated not only as linguistic correctness but as the integrated ability to formulate, justify, adapt, and co-construct meaning in real communicative situations. Practical recommendations are offered for lesson design, assessment, teacher development, and the use of digital tools.

Keywords: 4C model, mother tongue education, speech competence, oracy, critical thinking,

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary language education is increasingly expected to develop not only knowledge of grammatical rules and literary norms but also the ability to use language purposefully in social, academic, and problem-solving situations. In this context, speech competence can be understood as a learner's capacity to formulate coherent ideas, select appropriate linguistic resources, listen and respond to others, justify a position, and adapt speech to the communicative purpose and audience. This broader interpretation is consistent with international competency-based approaches, which emphasise what learners can do with knowledge rather than what they can merely reproduce (1.2). Mother tongue lessons are particularly important because they provide the linguistic foundation through which students reason, negotiate meaning, construct identity, and participate in other subjects.

The 4C model brings together critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration as mutually reinforcing twenty-first-century competencies. In the Partnership for 21st Century Learning framework, communication includes clear oral, written, and non-verbal expression and effective listening, while collaboration includes respectful teamwork and shared responsibility (1). OECD frameworks similarly highlight critical and creative thinking, cooperation, and the capacity to act in complex contexts as central outcomes of modern education (2.3). These competencies are especially compatible with mother tongue education because classroom talk can simultaneously serve as a learning medium and as an object of learning.

A sociocultural perspective provides a theoretical explanation for this connection. Vygotsky's account of thought and language positions speech as socially rooted and central to the

development of higher mental functions (5). Mercer and colleagues further demonstrate that explicitly teaching learners how to reason through talk can improve the quality of group dialogue and cognitive performance (6.7). Thus, speech competence develops most productively when learners have repeated opportunities to explain, question, challenge, reformulate, and jointly construct meaning rather than only answer short teacher questions.

Despite the conceptual compatibility between the 4C model and mother tongue instruction, implementation is not automatic. In many classrooms, communication is reduced to recitation, collaboration becomes simple group seating, creativity is interpreted as entertainment, and critical thinking is treated as asking difficult questions without appropriate scaffolding. The central research problem of this article is therefore to identify the main barriers and influencing factors that determine whether 4C-oriented teaching genuinely strengthens students' speech competence. The purpose of the study is to synthesize international evidence and formulate an applicable pedagogical model for mother tongue lessons. The research questions are: (1) Which problems most strongly limit the development of speech competence in 4C-oriented lessons? (2) Which instructional and contextual factors influence outcomes? (3) How can the four competencies be integrated into lesson design and assessment?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used an integrative narrative review design combined with pedagogical content analysis. Fifteen international sources published between 1999 and 2026 were purposively selected because they address at least one of the following areas: 4C or twenty-first-century competencies; dialogic teaching and classroom talk; oral language/oracy; critical and creative thinking in language learning; cooperative learning; assessment of spoken language; or mother-tongue and multilingual education. The final corpus included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, OECD and UNESCO publications, the Education Endowment Foundation evidence synthesis, and the P21/Battelle for Kids framework (1-15).

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each source was coded according to the competency or pedagogical mechanism it emphasised: critical thinking, creativity, communication/oracy, collaboration, assessment, teacher practice, or language-of-instruction context. Second, reported barriers and enabling conditions were grouped into five categories: lesson design, assessment, participation structure, linguistic-psychological factors, and resources/teacher capacity. Third, the categories were mapped onto dimensions of speech competence: linguistic accuracy, coherence, argumentation, interactive listening-response, vocabulary flexibility, and expressive appropriateness. Because this article is a literature-based study rather than an experimental intervention, no original student performance data are reported; the tables and diagrams present a structured synthesis of the reviewed evidence.

For practical transfer to mother tongue lessons, the synthesis followed three criteria: pedagogical feasibility in ordinary school settings, direct relevance to spoken language development, and compatibility with curriculum-based instruction. Evidence from foreign-language studies was used only where the mechanism—such as exploratory talk, peer interaction, critical questioning, or formative oral assessment—was transferable to first-language pedagogy. This distinction is important because mother tongue instruction has different linguistic starting conditions, but many interactional principles are shared across language-learning contexts (9.10.12).

Table 1. Alignment of the 4C model with speech competence in mother tongue lessons

4C component	Speech mechanism	Typical classroom task	Observable indicator
Critical thinking	Reasoning, evidence, comparison, justification	Defend or challenge an interpretation; explain cause-effect relations	Claims are supported with reasons; counter-arguments are addressed
Creativity	Idea generation, flexible wording, alternative perspectives	Retell from another viewpoint; create an ending; produce a short oral scenario	Original ideas; varied vocabulary; adaptive expression
Communication	Clear formulation, listening, turn-taking, audience awareness	Mini-presentation, structured dialogue, oral summary, interview	Coherence, intelligibility, appropriate register, active listening
Collaboration	Co-construction of meaning, negotiation, shared responsibility	Pair reasoning, jigsaw discussion, group problem solving	Balanced participation, response to peers, negotiated conclusion

Source: compiled by the author based on (1-9).

Figure 1. Conceptual integration of the 4C model and speech competence

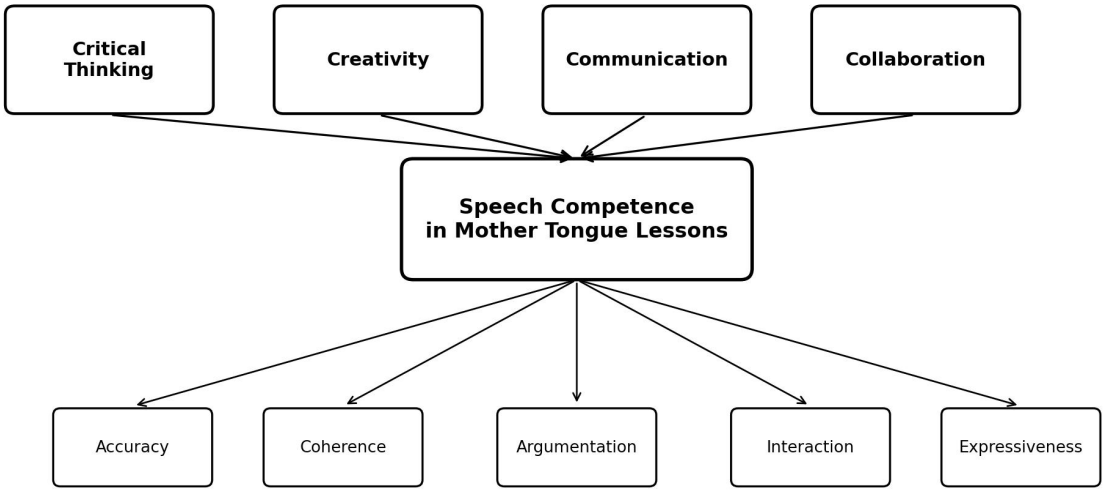


Figure 1. Conceptual integration of the 4C model and speech competence (author synthesis).

3. RESULTS

The literature synthesis indicates that the first and most persistent problem is the mismatch between competency-oriented goals and teacher-centred classroom interaction. Speech competence cannot develop sufficiently when most lesson time is occupied by teacher explanation and students mainly provide brief, predetermined answers. Research on exploratory talk shows that learners benefit when they are taught explicit ground rules for reasoning together, such as

giving reasons, asking for clarification, considering alternatives, and reaching a shared conclusion (6). Related classroom studies demonstrate that structured dialogue can transform language from a channel for reproducing information into a tool for thinking (4.7). In mother tongue lessons, this means that the quantity of student talk is not enough; the quality and cognitive purpose of talk must also be designed.

The second major problem concerns assessment. Traditional language assessment often prioritises written grammar, spelling, factual recall, or teacher-controlled questioning. These measures provide limited information about the learner's ability to sustain a coherent oral explanation, adapt to a partner, use evidence, or repair misunderstanding. Mercer, Warwick, and Ahmed's oracy assessment work demonstrates the value of a multidimensional framework for spoken language rather than a single global score (8). When assessment criteria are invisible or narrowly linguistic, learners may focus on avoiding errors rather than developing ideas. A 4C-oriented system therefore requires criteria that cover both linguistic quality and communicative-cognitive performance.

A third problem is unequal participation. Whole-class discussion frequently allows a small group of confident students to dominate while less confident learners remain listeners. Collaboration does not solve this by itself; poorly structured group work may reproduce the same imbalance. The literature on cooperative learning suggests that positive outcomes depend on task interdependence, role clarity, accountability, and sufficient duration (10.15). In mother tongue lessons, pair rehearsal, rotating roles, timed turns, and reporting responsibilities can distribute speaking opportunities more equitably. This is especially important for students who experience anxiety, limited academic vocabulary, or fear of negative evaluation.

The fourth problem relates to the tension between linguistic correctness and meaningful speech. Teachers may interrupt frequently to correct grammar or pronunciation, which can fragment the learner's message and reduce willingness to speak. Conversely, a complete absence of feedback can allow persistent inaccuracies to remain unnoticed. The reviewed evidence supports a balanced approach in which communication is first allowed to develop, followed by focused feedback on a small number of high-value language features. Oral-language evidence also shows that purposeful curriculum-linked interaction, vocabulary development, questioning, modelling, and feedback can positively affect learning outcomes (9).

The fifth problem is the superficial implementation of critical thinking and creativity. Asking students to 'be creative' or 'think critically' is insufficient unless tasks contain genuine choice, ambiguity, evidence, and a reason to communicate. OECD work on creativity and critical thinking stresses the need for classroom environments where students generate, evaluate, and improve ideas (3.13). Language-classroom research likewise shows that critical thinking emerges through carefully scaffolded listening and speaking tasks, while limited authentic materials and weak assessment design can constrain it (11.12). Therefore, 4C integration requires a task architecture, not merely the use of four labels in a lesson plan.

Finally, contextual factors determine whether these practices can be sustained. Teacher knowledge of dialogic pedagogy, class size, available time, curricular pressure, quality of textbooks, digital access, and the linguistic diversity of learners all influence implementation. UNESCO's recent guidance on mother-tongue and multilingual education emphasises that learners benefit from strong foundations in a language they understand and from pedagogies that respect linguistic trajectories (14). For mother tongue lessons, this implies that 4C activities should develop standard academic speech without devaluing legitimate dialectal or multilingual resources that learners bring to the classroom.

Table 2. Key problems, influencing factors, and 4C-based responses

Problem cluster	Influencing factors	Effect on speech competence	Recommended 4C response
Teacher-centred interaction	High teacher-talk ratio; closed questions; limited wait time	Short answers; weak reasoning and coherence	Exploratory questions, think-pair-share, student-led dialogue
Assessment mismatch	Emphasis on recall and written correctness	Students avoid risk; oral progress remains invisible	Analytic speaking rubric; peer/self-assessment; recorded oral portfolio
Unequal participation	Confidence gap; group dominance; anxiety	Limited practice for quieter learners	Assigned roles, timed turns, pair rehearsal, collaborative accountability
Weak task authenticity	Single-answer exercises; little choice or audience	Low motivation; formulaic speech	Debate, problem solving, storytelling, interview, audience-specific tasks
Insufficient teacher/resources support	Limited training; large classes; lack of materials or digital tools	Inconsistent implementation	Micro-routines, reusable task templates, targeted professional development

Source: author synthesis based on (3.6.8-15).

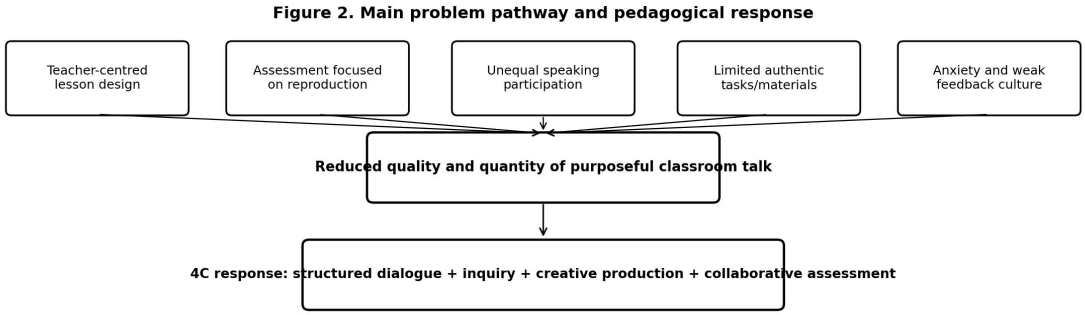


Figure 2. Main barriers and a 4C-based pedagogical response (author synthesis).

4. DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the 4C model is most useful when it is interpreted as a design logic for classroom discourse rather than as four separate skills taught in isolation. Communication is the visible performance layer, but its quality depends on the other three competencies. Critical thinking supplies reasons and criteria; creativity expands possible meanings and formulations; collaboration creates the social conditions in which ideas are tested, refined, and negotiated. In this sense, speech competence is both an outcome of the 4C model and the medium through which the model operates (1.2.4).

For mother tongue education, the pedagogical implication is that a lesson should move through a sequence of cognitive and communicative actions. A productive cycle may begin with an open problem or text-based dilemma, continue with individual idea generation, proceed to paired or small-group reasoning, and culminate in a public oral product such as a defended interpretation, mini-debate, oral summary, or collaborative presentation. Reflection and feedback should then focus on both content and speech. Such sequencing is consistent with sociocultural theory because learners first externalise thinking in social interaction and gradually gain control over more sophisticated forms of language and reasoning (5.6).

The findings also underline the importance of explicitly teaching the language of thinking and interaction. Students need discourse moves such as 'I agree because...', 'The evidence suggests...', 'Another interpretation is...', 'Could you clarify...?', and 'Our group concludes...'. These expressions are not rigid templates; they function as scaffolds that make reasoning, listening, and collaboration visible. Over time, scaffolds can be reduced as learners internalise the patterns. International research on dialogic learning demonstrates that such norms are teachable and can influence the quality of reasoning (6.7).

Assessment should be redesigned accordingly. A practical analytic rubric can include five dimensions: accuracy and appropriateness of language; coherence and organisation; evidence and reasoning; interaction/listening; and expressive flexibility. Each dimension can be scored with brief descriptors, but the rubric should also generate formative feedback. This avoids the common problem of assessing 'speaking' as a vague impression. The oracy literature argues for multidimensional assessment precisely because effective spoken communication combines linguistic, cognitive, physical, and social-interactional features (8).

Digital tools can support the model but should not replace purposeful interaction. Audio and video recording can make repeated oral performance, self-analysis, and portfolio assessment more feasible. Shared documents and learning platforms can help groups prepare evidence and roles before speaking. A systematic review of technology-enhanced cooperative language learning found positive effects on language proficiency and social outcomes, although much of the experimental evidence comes from higher education and therefore requires cautious transfer to school settings (10). The key principle is that technology should increase the frequency, quality, or feedback value of student talk rather than simply digitise worksheets.

The international literature also reveals an implementation risk: competency language may appear in curriculum documents without changing classroom routines. OECD analyses show that creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration are increasingly represented in curriculum expectations, but successful enactment depends heavily on teacher practice and supportive learning environments (2.3.13). Thus, professional development should provide teachers with concrete lesson routines, sample questions, assessment exemplars, and opportunities to analyse classroom talk. One-off theoretical training is less likely to change practice than iterative planning, observation, and reflection.

The present review has limitations. The 15-source corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive, and several studies concern English as an additional or foreign language rather than mother tongue education. Their findings were used at the level of transferable mechanisms, not as direct evidence of identical outcomes in Uzbek-language classrooms. Future research should test the proposed model through classroom-based quasi-experimental or design-based studies, using pre/post measures of oral coherence, vocabulary range, argument quality, interaction, and student participation. It would also be useful to examine whether the 4C model has different effects across primary and secondary grades, class sizes, and urban-rural contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

Improving students' speech competence through the 4C model requires more than adding communicative activities to a traditional lesson. The central challenge is to redesign the classroom so that students regularly think through language, create with language, communicate for real purposes, and collaborate through structured talk. The review identified five interconnected barriers: teacher-centred interaction, assessment mismatch, unequal participation, weak task authenticity, and insufficient methodological/resource support. These barriers reduce both the quantity and the quality of meaningful student speech.

An effective 4C-based mother tongue lesson therefore needs four conditions. First, tasks should contain a genuine intellectual problem and more than one defensible response. Second, interaction should be structured so that every student has a reason and opportunity to speak. Third, assessment should capture coherence, reasoning, interaction, and linguistic quality rather than only correctness. Fourth, teachers need practical dialogic routines and feedback tools that can be used consistently within existing curriculum time. When these conditions are present, the four Cs become mutually reinforcing: critical thinking deepens content, creativity diversifies expression, communication organises meaning, and collaboration provides a social space for speech to develop. The proposed framework can serve as a methodological basis for designing and empirically testing mother tongue lessons aimed at developing students who can speak accurately, coherently, independently, and responsively in real communicative situations.

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