

The Callan Method in Modern ELT: Accelerating Speaking Fluency Through Direct Oral Instruction

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Abstract.

The Callan Method is a fast-paced, speech-focused approach to English language teaching designed to develop learners' fluency, listening comprehension, and automatic use of spoken English. Created by Robert Callan in 1960, the method emphasizes real-time communication through rapid question-answer cycles, continuous repetition, and immediate correction. Unlike traditional grammar-based instruction, the Callan Method minimizes translation from the mother tongue and encourages learners to think directly in English. Lessons are fully classroom-based, highly structured, and delivered at natural or slightly accelerated speaking speed, enabling students to internalize vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical patterns through constant verbal practice. Long answers, controlled vocabulary exposure, and repeated recycling of previous material support memory retention and strengthen oral performance. Small-group dynamics increase students' speaking opportunities, while teacher guidance ensures accurate and confident production. As an efficient and engaging approach, the Callan Method remains a practical tool for learners aiming to acquire fluency quickly, particularly in contexts where intensive speaking and listening practice is required.

Keywords:

Callan Method, speaking fluency, English language teaching

1. Introduction

The Callan Method is a structured, fast-paced approach to teaching English that was designed to help learners speak and think directly in the target language, without relying on translation from their mother tongue. It is built around intensive oral practice, where students respond to a high volume of questions at natural or slightly accelerated speed, gradually internalising vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation through repetition and guided production (Mammadova, 2024). Rather than prioritising written exercises or homework, the method places the classroom interaction at the centre of learning and treats speech as the main vehicle for language acquisition.

The primary purpose of the Callan Method is to develop automatic, real-time communication skills. Learners are trained to answer quickly and in full sentences, which reduces hesitation and limits the opportunity to mentally translate from L1 before speaking (Babasoy, 2025). Rapid

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question–answer cycles, continuous recycling of previous material, and immediate correction of errors help to stabilise correct forms and build accurate habits of use (Naghiyeva, 2025). In this way, the method combines speed, repetition, and correction within an organised syllabus, aiming to create a fluent and confident speaking style in a relatively short period of time.

2. Theoretical Background

The Callan Method was first developed by Robert Callan in England in 1960 as a practical response to the slow progress often observed in traditional language classes. It shares key features with the Direct Method, particularly its use of the target language only, focus on oral interaction, and avoidance of grammar explanation in the learners’ native language. At the same time, it overlaps with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in its goal of developing communicative competence, especially in listening and speaking, though it is more tightly scripted and teacher-led than typical CLT lessons (Ismayilli, 2024).

From a cognitive perspective, the method draws on principles of automaticity and habit formation. High-frequency exposure, rapid responses, and constant recycling are intended to shift language use from controlled processing to automatic performance, so that learners can access structures and vocabulary without conscious rule recall. In contrast to grammar–translation approaches, which emphasise explicit rule learning, reading, and written translation, the Callan Method treats grammar as something to be acquired implicitly through patterned speech rather than analysed in detail. This fundamental difference in orientation explains why the method is particularly effective for learners whose main goal is fluent oral communication rather than academic or literary proficiency.

3. Core Principles of the Callan Method

At the heart of the Callan Method is a rapid question–answer format. The teacher continuously asks carefully graded questions, and students are expected to respond immediately in full sentences, without pausing to translate from their first language. This speed is deliberate: by keeping the pace close to, or slightly above, natural speech, the method pushes learners toward automatic production and real-time processing (Mammadova, 2024).

Immediate correction is another central principle. The teacher constantly monitors students’ answers and promptly corrects errors in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, often asking the learner to repeat the sentence correctly. In this way, accuracy and correct pronunciation are reinforced at the very moment of use (Babasoy, 2025). Continuous repetition and systematic recycling of earlier material further support retention: previously learned structures and words regularly reappear in new questions, helping to stabilise them as automatic patterns.

A distinctive feature of the Callan Method is that learning is fully classroom-based. Students are not given homework; instead, all practice happens during the lesson, where the teacher controls

the pace, input, and feedback. This creates a strongly teacher-centred environment in which the teacher leads almost all speaking and manages turn-taking, while students focus on listening and responding. The syllabus itself is built around planned vocabulary lists and controlled grammatical structures, ensuring that new language is introduced in a precise order and immediately embedded in spoken practice (Naghiyeva, 2025).

4. Teaching Practices and Classroom Techniques

In Callan lessons, the teacher's role is highly active. The teacher speaks almost continuously, asking questions, providing model answers, prompting students, and correcting mistakes. Questions are asked twice, often with increasing speed, to ensure comprehension and to train learners to process input quickly. The teacher's energy and tempo are key to maintaining the method's intensity and rhythm (Naghiyeva, 2025).

Students, in turn, are expected to respond instantly in English, without thinking in L1 or silently constructing sentences. They give long, structured answers that mirror the form of the question, frequently using pairs of synonyms and antonyms (e.g., *long/short*, *right/wrong*), which helps reinforce vocabulary contrasts and sentence patterns. Gestures, facial expressions, and clear modelling of natural contractions (e.g., *I'm*, *it's*, *they'll*) support comprehension and encourage learners to adopt a more natural, fluent speaking style (Mammadova, 2024).

Alongside oral work, lessons include short dictation and reading components. Dictation trains listening precision, spelling, and noticing of grammatical forms, while guided reading—accompanied by teacher correction of pronunciation—supports the link between spoken and written language. Small-group classes are preferred, as they allow each student to answer many questions per lesson and maximise speaking turns. In such settings, even when it is not their turn, learners benefit from listening to peers' answers, observing corrections, and mentally rehearsing responses, which further strengthens their speaking and listening skills (Ismayilli, 2024).

5. Advantages of the Callan Method

The Callan Method offers several clear advantages, particularly in the rapid development of speaking and listening skills. Because learners are constantly exposed to fast, structured question–answer cycles, they quickly become accustomed to processing English at natural speed and responding without long pauses or translation into L1. This promotes automaticity, reduces interference from the mother tongue, and helps students begin to “think in English” (Mammadova, 2024). The lively, high-tempo atmosphere of the lessons, combined with frequent participation, usually leads to strong engagement and motivation, especially for beginners and false beginners who may feel more confident in a highly guided environment (Babasoy, 2025).

Pronunciation and intonation improve as a result of continuous modelling and immediate correction, with learners repeatedly producing full sentences aloud. The method's clear structure—

fixed books, graded vocabulary lists, and predictable lesson routines—also makes it relatively easy to implement and replicate across classes and institutions. For schools seeking a ready-made, intensive speaking programme, the Callan Method can therefore be an efficient and practical option (Ismayilli, 2024).

6. Limitations and Criticisms

Despite its strengths, the Callan Method has notable limitations. Its tightly controlled format leaves relatively little room for creative speaking, free conversation, or learner-generated language. Most utterances are predetermined by the method’s questions, which can restrict opportunities for personal expression and spontaneous interaction (Naghiyeva, 2025). The approach is strongly teacher-dominant: the teacher controls turn-taking, content, pace, and feedback, which may conflict with more learner-centred philosophies of communicative language teaching.

In addition, the method places less emphasis on writing, project work, and independent study skills, making it insufficient as a stand-alone approach for learners who need balanced academic proficiency. Because the technique relies heavily on speed, correction, and precise scripting, it also requires strict and consistent teacher training; poorly trained instructors may fail to maintain the necessary tempo or correction quality, reducing its effectiveness (Mammadova, 2024). For these reasons, many practitioners recommend using the Callan Method in combination with other methods that support creativity, autonomy, and written skills.

7. Comparison with Communicative and Modern Methods

The Callan Method shares certain aims with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based learning, and project-based approaches, particularly the goal of developing communicative ability in real-life situations. However, it differs significantly in lesson design and classroom dynamics. CLT and task-based learning typically prioritise meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and learner choice, often using pair work, group tasks, and open-ended activities. Project work further encourages creativity, collaboration, and integration of language skills through longer-term tasks (Ismayilli, 2024). By contrast, the Callan Method is highly scripted and teacher-led: interaction is mainly in the form of tightly controlled question–answer exchanges, and content is predetermined rather than learner-generated.

Despite this, the Callan Method is particularly strong in developing oral fluency. Its emphasis on speed, repetition, and full-sentence responses trains learners to speak quickly and confidently, which can be harder to guarantee in looser communicative frameworks. In many contexts, modern communicative methods can effectively supplement the Callan Method by providing opportunities for freer speaking, role plays, discussions, and project work that allow learners to personalise language and use it more creatively (Ismayilli, 2024). In this way, the Callan Method can be positioned as a fluency “engine” within a broader, communicatively oriented curriculum.

8. Pedagogical Implications

From a pedagogical perspective, the Callan Method is most effective in contexts where rapid gains in speaking and listening are required, such as intensive courses, beginner and false-beginner classes, or programmes for learners who lack confidence in oral communication. It is especially suitable for students who benefit from clear structure, strong teacher guidance, and frequent, highly controlled practice. Adult learners with limited study time may also appreciate its classroom-focused nature and absence of homework.

However, the method is less appropriate as the sole approach in settings where academic writing, examination preparation, or independent research skills are central learning goals. For this reason, an integrated model is recommended: Callan-based lessons can be combined with CLT, task-based activities, and project work that develop creative speaking, writing, and higher-order thinking (Ismayilli, 2024).

Practically, teachers using the Callan Method should:

- maintain a consistent, lively pace and strict English-only policy;
- ensure immediate but supportive correction of pronunciation and grammar;
- gradually introduce complementary activities (e.g., short discussions, role plays) once basic fluency is established; and
- monitor learner fatigue, varying tasks with dictation and reading components.

Such integration allows educators to exploit the strengths of the Callan Method in fluency development while compensating for its limitations through modern communicative practices.

9. Conclusion

The Callan Method can be characterised as a fast, highly interactive, and strongly fluency-oriented approach to English language teaching. By combining rapid question–answer cycles, immediate correction, and continuous repetition in a structured syllabus, it trains learners to respond in real time and to think directly in English rather than translating from their first language (Mammadova, 2024; Babasoy, 2025). This intensive focus on oral practice makes it particularly effective for developing speaking and listening skills, especially at beginner and false-beginner levels.

Overall, the evidence and classroom experience discussed in this paper suggest that the Callan Method is a powerful tool for mastering core communicative skills such as pronunciation, intonation, and automatic sentence production. At the same time, its limitations in promoting creative language use, writing, and learner autonomy mean that it is best viewed as one component within a broader methodological toolkit rather than a complete solution (Naghiyeva, 2025).

Despite these constraints, the Callan Method retains clear relevance in modern ELT. In contexts where rapid gains in oral fluency are a priority, it offers a practical, easily implementable option that can be effectively combined with communicative and task-based approaches to create a balanced, learner-centred programme (Ismayilli, 2024).

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