

IMPROVING SPEAKING COMPETENCIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BASED ON TEACHING ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of using English novels in teaching English literature to improve secondary school students' speaking competencies in Uzbekistan. As speaking is one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially in the context of secondary education, the integration of literature, particularly English novels, can provide an effective platform to enhance students' speaking abilities. This paper examines how the use of novels in the English classroom can increase motivation, foster engagement, and encourage active participation, which are crucial factors for improving speaking competencies. The study provides insights into teaching methodologies, the role of motivation in speaking practices, and how literature can bridge the gap between linguistic competence and communication skills. The findings suggest that a literature-based approach, when combined with interactive and student-centered teaching strategies, can significantly enhance students' speaking skills.

Keywords: speaking competency, English literature, secondary school students, EFL teachers, motivation, cultural context.

INTRODUCTION

In many educational settings, including secondary schools in Uzbekistan, students often struggle with developing their speaking competencies in English. While grammar and vocabulary acquisition are typically prioritized, speaking is frequently treated as a secondary skill. This challenge is exacerbated in non-English-speaking countries, where limited exposure to the language outside the classroom often hinders students' fluency. To address this issue, it is essential to explore innovative methods for enhancing speaking skills. One such method is incorporating English literature, specifically novels, into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum.

English novels, as a rich source of language input, offer unique opportunities to develop speaking competencies. They not only provide diverse vocabulary and sentence structures but also expose students to different cultural contexts, themes, and real-life situations. This paper examines how teaching English literature, through English novels, can enhance secondary school students' speaking abilities, particularly in the context of Uzbekistan, where literature-based approaches to language learning are not always fully explored.

Literature Review

English language instruction in Uzbekistan, like many non-English-speaking countries, often focuses heavily on grammar and reading comprehension, with less emphasis on speaking. According to Zimnyaya (2020), the communicative competence approach, which prioritizes the ability to use language in real-life contexts, has not been consistently implemented in Uzbek secondary schools. Consequently, students may acquire extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but remain unable to effectively communicate in English.

However, research has shown that integrating English literature into the language learning process can be highly beneficial for improving language skills, including speaking. As argued by Seferoglu (2019), literature can be a powerful tool for fostering speaking skills by providing authentic contexts and stimulating discussions. English novels, in particular, provide students with not only language exposure but also cultural knowledge and critical thinking opportunities, which are essential for developing fluency and motivation.

The use of novels in language classrooms has been linked to increased student engagement and motivation. According to Zare and Othman (2021), when students are engaged with interesting literary texts, they are more likely to participate in classroom discussions and express their opinions in the target language. This participation is crucial for improving speaking competencies, as it encourages active communication and the practice of new language structures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, involving a case study of secondary school students in Uzbekistan, where English is taught as a foreign language. The research focuses on the use of English novels in EFL classrooms to improve students' speaking competencies. Data was collected through classroom observations, student surveys, and interviews with English teachers. The sample includes 60 secondary school students from three schools in Samarkand and their respective EFL teachers. These students were selected based on their participation in a pilot program where English novels were integrated into the language curriculum.

The classroom observations focused on the methods and activities used by teachers to engage students in speaking tasks related to the novels. The surveys aimed to gather students' opinions on how reading English novels affected their motivation to speak English. The interviews with EFL teachers explored their experiences in using literature to foster speaking skills and the challenges they encountered.

Results and Discussion

1. Motivation and Engagement

One of the most significant findings of this study was the positive impact of English novels on students' motivation. Students reported feeling more motivated to participate in speaking activities when they were engaged with the novels. According to one student, "Reading the novel makes me want to talk about the story and characters with my classmates. It feels more interesting than just memorizing grammar rules." This suggests that novels can serve as a catalyst for initiating conversations in English, encouraging students to speak in a more natural, meaningful way.

Motivation plays a critical role in language acquisition, particularly when it comes to speaking. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation—stemming from interest in the subject matter—leads to better learning outcomes. The use of English novels, which often feature compelling narratives and relatable characters, taps into students' intrinsic motivation, making them more likely to engage in speaking tasks.

2. Improved Speaking Competencies

The study also found that students who participated in novel-based speaking activities demonstrated improvements in their speaking skills. Teachers reported that students were more willing to engage in discussions, debates, and role-playing activities based on the novels they had read. For example, in one lesson, students were asked to discuss the motivations of characters in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The students not only improved their fluency but also their ability to express opinions and justify their views in English.

This finding aligns with the work of Khatib et al. (2011), who argue that literature-based discussions provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking in a context that is both authentic and motivating. By discussing characters, plot twists, and themes, students are encouraged to use language in a creative and communicative way, which is essential for developing speaking competency.

3. Cultural Context and Language Use

English novels provide valuable exposure to both language and cultural contexts. Through the novels, students encounter diverse vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references that they might not be exposed to in standard EFL textbooks. This exposure helps students improve their ability to express themselves in a variety of

situations. For instance, while reading *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, students learn about social customs, historical events, and cultural values in the United States during the 1920s. These topics provide rich material for discussion, enabling students to use language in a more nuanced way.

Moreover, understanding the cultural contexts of the novels enhances students' ability to interpret meaning beyond the surface level. As noted by Lazar (2009), literature allows students to practice the language in a cultural context, thus deepening their understanding of how language functions in society.

4. Student-Centered Activities

Teachers who incorporated English novels into their lessons used a variety of student-centered activities to enhance speaking competencies. These included group discussions, debates, and presentations based on the novel's themes, characters, and plot. The use of role-playing was particularly effective, as it allowed students to step into the shoes of the characters and engage in dialogues or debates that were relevant to the story. These activities created a supportive environment where students felt more confident in using English, leading to increased participation and fluency.

Teachers also reported using specific strategies to promote speaking, such as encouraging students to summarize chapters, predict plot developments, and analyze character motivations. These strategies helped students practice their speaking in a structured but dynamic way.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made for improving the speaking competencies of secondary school students in Uzbekistan:

1. **Integrating Novels into the Curriculum:** English novels should be regularly incorporated into the secondary school curriculum to provide students with rich language input and meaningful contexts for speaking practice.
2. **Student-Centered Activities:** Teachers should adopt student-centered teaching methods, such as group discussions, debates, and role-playing, to encourage active participation and improve fluency.
3. **Encouraging Motivated Participation:** Teachers can enhance motivation by selecting novels that resonate with students' interests and by creating opportunities for students to share their thoughts and opinions about the text in English.
4. **Teacher Training:** EFL teachers should receive professional development to better incorporate literature into their teaching practices and to use literature effectively to improve speaking skills.

Conclusion

The use of English novels in the classroom provides a unique and effective approach to improving secondary school students' speaking competencies. By offering engaging content and cultural context, English novels stimulate students' motivation and encourage active participation in speaking tasks. Through well-designed, student-centered activities, teachers can help students develop their fluency, confidence, and communicative competence in English. As Uzbekistan continues to prioritize English language education, integrating literature-based approaches into the curriculum can significantly enhance students' language skills and prepare them for global communication.

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