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INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS AT UZBEK UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. *This thesis examines innovative approaches to the development of speaking skills among university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Uzbekistan. In the context of globalization and digital transformation, communicative competence has become one of the key indicators of professional readiness and intercultural adaptability.*

Keywords: *EFL, speaking skills, communicative competence, innovation, task-based learning.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, English has emerged as the global lingua franca, serving as a bridge for international communication, science, and education. For Uzbekistan, where modernization of higher education is a strategic priority, improving English language proficiency — particularly speaking — is essential to preparing graduates for global engagement. However, traditional EFL instruction in many universities has long been dominated by grammar translation and passive memorization. Such approaches rarely provide students with opportunities to use English in authentic communicative contexts.

Developing speaking skills requires an environment that encourages expression, interaction, and creativity. In this regard, innovative pedagogical strategies and digital technologies can transform EFL classrooms into dynamic communicative spaces. The goal is not only to teach correct pronunciation and grammar but also to cultivate fluency, confidence, and cultural sensitivity. Thus, the issue of developing speaking competence in Uzbek universities is both pedagogical and socio-cultural, requiring a synthesis of traditional values and global methodologies [1].

MAIN PART

Speaking is one of the core components of communicative competence, enabling learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and engage in real-world interactions. According to Hymes’ communicative competence theory, linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient — effective communication requires sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic competence. In Uzbekistan’s context, English speaking proficiency enhances students’ academic mobility, employability, and participation in international programs.

Yet, many university students struggle with speaking due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom, anxiety, and lack of confidence. Traditional instruction focuses on form rather than function, emphasizing accuracy over fluency. Innovative approaches must therefore shift the pedagogical focus toward meaningful communication, active participation, and learner autonomy.





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One of the most effective innovations in EFL pedagogy is Task-Based Learning (TBL). This method engages students in communicative tasks that mirror real-life situations — such as interviews, problem-solving discussions, or project presentations. Rather than practicing isolated grammar structures, students use language to achieve specific goals, thereby acquiring fluency and confidence naturally [2].

TBL typically follows three stages: the pre-task phase (introduction and planning), the task cycle (communication and collaboration), and the post-task phase (reflection and feedback). Within Uzbek universities, integrating TBL can motivate students to move beyond rote learning and engage in purposeful language use. It also develops critical thinking, as learners analyze information, negotiate meaning, and construct responses collaboratively.

The integration of digital tools has revolutionized EFL speaking instruction. Video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Google Meet), speech recognition software, and AI-driven applications like Duolingo or ELSA Speak allow students to practice pronunciation, participate in discussions, and receive instant feedback. Moreover, using multimedia projects, podcasts, and digital storytelling promotes creativity while reducing speaking anxiety.

In Uzbekistan, where higher education institutions increasingly adopt blended and distance learning models, the use of digital resources aligns with the national goal of digital transformation in education. However, successful integration requires not just access to technology but also digital literacy among teachers. Therefore, professional development programs for EFL instructors are essential to ensure meaningful and pedagogically sound use of digital tools.

Collaborative learning environments significantly contribute to developing speaking proficiency. Group discussions, peer interviews, and role-playing create natural contexts for communication. Students learn to express opinions, listen actively, and adapt to different communicative roles. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach emphasizes authentic interaction over mechanical repetition, helping learners internalize language patterns through use rather than memorization [3].

In the Uzbek EFL context, such methods also support socio-cultural adaptation. When students work in pairs or groups, they not only practice English but also learn teamwork, tolerance, and intercultural respect. These soft skills are crucial for graduates in today’s globalized labor market.

An essential component of innovative EFL instruction is problem-based learning (PBL), which challenges students to solve real-world issues through dialogue and reasoning. For instance, students may debate environmental problems or propose solutions to social challenges using English. This approach not only improves speaking fluency but also promotes critical thinking and argumentation skills.

Reflection is equally important in this process. After communicative activities, teachers should guide students to evaluate their speech performance — what worked well, what was





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difficult, and how they can improve. Reflection turns experience into knowledge and enhances self-awareness, which is key for continuous linguistic growth.

CONCLUSION

Developing speaking skills among EFL students in Uzbek universities is a multifaceted task requiring pedagogical innovation, institutional support, and teacher professionalism. By implementing task-based, problem-oriented, and technology-enhanced learning, universities can create dynamic environments where students actively use English to think, communicate, and collaborate.

Innovation in EFL instruction is not limited to new tools but reflects a new educational philosophy — one that values communication over memorization, creativity over conformity, and interaction over isolation. Preparing students for the demands of the global world thus begins with cultivating their voices — confident, expressive, and open to dialogue.

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