



STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACHES TO TEACHING SPEAKING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This article examines how student-centered approaches in English classrooms foster speaking proficiency. It explores the role of peer interaction, collaborative tasks, and learner autonomy in developing oral skills. The paper contrasts traditional teacher-fronted methods with student-centered instruction and demonstrates the latter's greater effectiveness in boosting learner engagement and confidence. The findings indicate that student-centered activities increase students' willingness to speak, improve fluency, and promote communicative independence.

Keywords: Speaking skills, student-centered learning, English classroom, learner autonomy, peer interaction, communicative competence, collaborative tasks.

Introduction

In contemporary foreign language education, speaking has emerged as one of the most essential yet challenging skills to develop. Traditional teacher-centered classrooms, where the instructor dominates interaction and students respond only when prompted, offer insufficient opportunities for genuine oral practice. Student-centered approaches, by contrast, position learners as active participants who direct their own communication, collaborate with peers, and take ownership of speaking tasks. Recent educational reforms in Uzbekistan, reflected in the Law "On Education" (2020), prioritize practical language use and communicative competence, making student-centered instruction increasingly relevant [1].



The present study investigates the role of student-centered approaches in developing speaking skills in the English classroom. It focuses on activities such as peer discussion, collaborative tasks, and learner-led interaction, asking how these approaches affect learner participation, fluency, and confidence in oral communication.

Literature review

Scholars have consistently argued that speaking develops most effectively through active, meaningful interaction rather than passive reception. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that language learning is fundamentally social, and that learners progress most within their zone of proximal development through peer collaboration [10, 86]. This underpins the value of student-centered activities in the speaking classroom.

Benson defines learner autonomy as the capacity to take control of one's own learning and links it directly to communicative development [2, 47]. Nunan similarly argues that when students make decisions about their learning tasks, they engage more deeply with language and achieve stronger speaking outcomes [6, 118]. Harmer emphasizes that student-centered tasks reduce excessive teacher talk and expand opportunities for learner speech, fostering greater participation and fluency [4, 271]. Thornbury adds that speaking improves most in classrooms where learners feel safe to take communicative risks without fear of immediate correction [8, 38].

Research methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive design combining classroom observation and critical literature review. English lessons incorporating student-centered speaking activities—peer discussion, collaborative storytelling, and learner-led tasks—were observed across several sessions. Key indicators tracked included the proportion of student talk time, length of oral contributions, willingness to speak without prompting, and quality of peer interaction. These observations were then interpreted against established theoretical frameworks in communicative and student-centered language teaching [4, 274], [6, 121].

Discussion

These results confirm that student-centered approaches transform speaking from a performance directed at the teacher into authentic peer communication. This shift



aligns with Vygotsky's account of social learning and Benson's framework of learner autonomy [10, 89], [2, 51]. However, the research also identified limitations: lower-proficiency learners occasionally disengaged when tasks exceeded their linguistic capacity. This supports Skehan's caution that fluency tasks require adequate scaffolding to benefit all learners equally [7, 101]. The teacher's role thus remains critical as a designer and facilitator who provides linguistic support and monitors equitable participation.

Results

The findings indicate that student-centered approaches had a clear positive effect on learners' oral development. Participation rates were notably higher during peer-led tasks than in teacher-fronted lessons, where only a small number of students typically responded. Students produced longer, more spontaneous contributions and demonstrated greater willingness to experiment with language when working collaboratively. Confidence levels also improved: learners appeared less anxious during peer interaction than during individual performance before the whole class, consistent with Thornbury's observations on error tolerance [8, 41]. Fluency also increased, as students focused on conveying meaning rather than producing isolated correct sentences.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that student-centered approaches substantially enhance speaking development in the English classroom by increasing learner participation, fluency, and confidence. When activities are purposefully designed and appropriately scaffolded, they position learners as genuine communicative agents rather than passive recipients of instruction. English teachers are encouraged to allocate greater emphasis to peer interaction, collaborative tasks, and learner-directed activities, while providing the linguistic support necessary for all proficiency levels to benefit. Future research may explore these approaches through broader empirical studies across diverse educational contexts.



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