

TEACHING ENGLISH TO UPPER-GRADE STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. *This study examines the main challenges encountered in teaching English to upper-grade students and identifies effective solutions for improving learning outcomes. The research focuses on issues such as low student motivation, limited speaking practice, overemphasis on grammar, insufficient use of technology, and psychological barriers that prevent learners from actively participating in class. A qualitative approach, including classroom observation and teacher interviews were used to collect data. The findings find that communicative methods, task-based learning, the integration of digital tools, and increased group-work activities significantly enhance student engagement and language proficiency. The study recommends adopting modern teaching strategies that promote communication, reduce fear of making mistakes and create a more interactive learning environment.*

Keywords: *English language teaching, upper-grade students, challenges at teaching, communicative methods, task-based learning, digital tools, student motivation.*

INTRODUCTION.

In this modern world English language stands as a vital tool around the whole world. For upper secondary school students, especially, a robust command of the language is essential for success in future academic pursuits and effective professional communication. However, the instruction of English at this advanced stage frequently encounters several significant issues: Key problems include: low student motivation, limited practical speaking opportunities, an overemphasis on grammatical structures (often at the expense of communicative competence), and the insufficient integration of modern educational technologies. To sum up, this paper aims to analyze the primary difficulties inherent in the process of teaching English to upper secondary students and to propose effective and contemporary solutions to address them.

Objective: The primary goal of this research is to identify the main challenges encountered when teaching English to upper secondary students and to investigate methods for overcoming these obstacles through the application of modern pedagogical approaches and technology integration.

1.MAIN PART

1-Problem: Low Student Motivation

The majority of upper secondary students often fail to fully appreciate the real-life relevance of English. For many, language acquisition is narrowly associated only with school assignments, making it difficult for them to connect the learning process to their personal, professional, and life needs. Consequently, a large number of students participate passively in lessons and show little proactive engagement in developing practical linguistic skills. One of the essential contributors to this low motivation is the students' exposure to rote learning and memorization methodologies. Lessons are frequently focused on recalling and internalizing complex grammatical rules, while opportunities for practical application of vocabulary, communicative practice, or actual language production remain scarce. As a result, students possess a theoretical understanding of the language but are often unable to utilize it effectively in real-life contexts. Furthermore, psychological factors significantly contribute to declining motivation. Some students avoid active participation in class due to an

intrinsic fear of making mistakes or the self-limiting belief, "I cannot speak." This fear of failure severely restricts speaking practice and acts as a significant impediment to the students' self-development and progress (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). At last, low motivation reduces the overall effectiveness of the English learning process in upper secondary education, preventing students from adequately developing their linguistic competencies. Addressing this psychological and pedagogical hurdle is therefore considered one of the most critical issues in advanced language instruction.

2 - Problem: Limited Speaking Practice

One of the central difficulties in teaching English in upper secondary schools is the insufficient provision of oral speaking practice. In many classroom settings, the teacher often dominates the conversation, leaving students to assume the role of passive observers. Consequently, students are deprived of sufficient opportunities for language production, hindering the adequate development of their practical application skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

This issue is associated with several interrelated factors:

1. Fear of Error: Students often attempt to avoid mistakes when expressing their thoughts. This fear of linguistic error results in reluctance to speak in class, thereby severely limiting their actual speaking practice.
2. Methodological Approach: Many educators rely heavily on teaching methodologies centered on grammatical rules and written exercises. This focus deprives students of the chance to engage in real-life communicative tasks (Ellis, 2003).
3. Classroom time and resource constraints: Because of the limited time given for class sessions, there is insufficient opportunity for every student to engage in individual speaking practice. As a result, only a few highly active students participate regularly, while the majority remain passive.

Outcome: Limited speaking practice severely impedes the development of communicative proficiency among upper secondary students. Students struggle to express their ideas fluently, are slow to respond in conversations, and are consequently unprepared for real-life language use. Therefore, the implementation of interactive methodologies that actively increase oral practice and encourage student involvement is crucial.

2.MAIN PART

Solutions for Low Motivation and Limited Speaking Practice

Solution 1: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a methodology oriented towards equipping students with the ability to use the language effectively in practical situations. The core objective of this approach is to ensure active student participation throughout the lesson and to fully engage them in oral speaking practice. CLT stimulates passive students in the classroom because lessons are structured around interactive activities such as role-plays, debates, discussions, and storytelling. Through this mechanism, students are encouraged to utilize the language in practice without being overly preoccupied with the fear of making errors. Enhancing motivation also can be a good sample here. When students use the language by connecting it to real-life scenarios, they perceive the acquisition process as engaging and purposeful. Tasks such as "ordering food in a restaurant" or "applying new vocabulary through negotiation" significantly boost their intrinsic motivation. Moreover, developing speaking skills CLT provides students with opportunities for sustained oral production, simultaneously helping to improve their fluency and the accuracy of their expression (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Thus, CLT not only serves to enhance student motivation but also fundamentally strengthens oral communication skills, making it a critical factor in the effective language acquisition of upper secondary students.

Solution 2: Task-based learning (TBL) and Pair/group work.

Task-based learning (TBL) is a methodology that directs students to perform authentic, real-world tasks. TBL actively encourages students to participate in speaking practice and effectively minimizes passivity.

Practice through tasks help students to apply the language within a real context while completing the assigned tasks. Examples include preparing a small group project presentation, conducting peer interviews, or engaging

in mini-role-plays to consolidate vocabulary. Pair and group dynamics can be a good example too. Working in pairs or groups maximizes the talking time available to each student, ensuring active participation. Simultaneously, this method promotes peer collaboration, idea exchange, and spontaneous language use (Ellis, 2003).

Incentivizing motivation also crucial because when students observe their success in completing tasks, they realize that using the language practically is both interesting and useful, which in turn fuels their motivation.

Conclusion

One of the major challenges in teaching English to upper-grade students is low student motivation and limited speaking practice. Low motivation leads to passive participation in class and reduces opportunities for students to use the language actively. At the same time, fear of making mistakes hinders the development of their speaking skills.

To address these issues, it is recommended to implement Communicative language teaching (CLT) and Task-based learning (TBL), as well as pair and group work. CLT methods actively engage students in the classroom, increase speaking practice, and enhance motivation. TBL and group activities allow students to use the language in real-life contexts and develop their ability to express themselves freely.

Thus, ensuring effective English language learning for upper-grade students requires the use of interactive, communicative, and task-based teaching methods. These approaches not only improve students' speaking skills but also significantly enhance their interest in and motivation for learning the language.

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