

CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING THE SPEECH COMPETENCIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

Khumorakhon Buriyeva Ulmasboy kizi

UzSWLU Independent Researcher

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Abstract: This article examines the problem of assessing the speech competencies of secondary school students who study English at educational centers. Based on the analysis of theoretical approaches to communicative and speech competence and on the results of pedagogical experimental work, the article proposes a system of five assessment criteria – linguistic, communicative, pragmatic, sociocultural and strategic (compensatory) – together with their indicators and three levels of mastery (high, medium and low). The article also identifies the main linguistic, psychological and methodological difficulties that students face in oral communication and substantiates the role of combining formative and summative assessment. The results of the experiment conducted at Everest educational centers in Tashkent, Namangan and Samarkand showed that the systematic use of the proposed criteria contributed to an increase in the results of the experimental groups by 1.14–1.15 times compared to the control groups.

Keywords: speech competence, assessment criteria, indicators, levels of mastery, formative assessment, summative assessment, fluency, accuracy, coherence, educational centers, secondary school students, B1 level

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada ta’lim markazlarida ingliz tilini o’rganuvchi umumiy o’rta ta’lim maktabi o’quvchilarining nutqiy kompetensiyalarini baholash muammosi ko’rib chiqiladi. Kommunikativ va nutqiy kompetensiyaga oid nazariy yondashuvlar tahlili hamda pedagogik tajriba-sinov ishlari natijalari asosida beshta baholash mezonlari — lingvistik, kommunikativ, pragmatik, sotsiomadaniy va strategik (kompensator) mezonlar, ularning ko’rsatkichlari hamda o’zlashtirishning uchta darajasi (yuqori, o’rta va past) taklif etiladi. Shuningdek, o’quvchilarning og’zaki muloqot jarayonida duch keladigan asosiy lingvistik, psixologik va metodik qiyinchiliklari aniqlanadi hamda joriy va yakuniy baholashni uyg’unlashtirishning ahamiyati asoslab beriladi. Toshkent, Namangan va Samarqand shaharlaridagi Everest ta’lim markazlarida o’tkazilgan tajriba natijalari taklif etilgan mezonlardan tizimli foydalanish tajriba guruhlaridagi natijalarning nazorat guruhlariga nisbatan 1,14–1,15 baravar oshishiga yordam berganini ko’rsatdi.

Kalit so’zlar: nutqiy kompetensiya, baholash mezonlari, ko’rsatkichlar, o’zlashtirish darajalari, joriy baholash, yakuniy baholash, ravonlik, aniqlik, izchillik, ta’lim markazlari, umumiy o’rta ta’lim maktabi o’quvchilari, B1 darajasi.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается проблема оценивания речевых компетенций учащихся общеобразовательных школ, изучающих английский язык в образовательных центрах. На основе анализа теоретических подходов к коммуникативной и речевой компетенции, а также результатов педагогической экспериментальной работы предлагается система из пяти критериев оценивания: лингвистического, коммуникативного, прагматического, социокультурного и

стратегического (компенсаторного), с соответствующими показателями и тремя уровнями владения (высоким, средним и низким). Кроме того, выявляются основные лингвистические, психологические и методические трудности, с которыми сталкиваются учащиеся в процессе устного общения, и обосновывается значимость сочетания формирующего и итогового оценивания. Результаты эксперимента, проведённого в образовательных центрах Everest в Ташкенте, Намангане и Самарканде, показали, что систематическое применение предложенных критериев способствовало повышению результатов экспериментальных групп в 1,14–1,15 раза по сравнению с контрольными группами.

Ключевые слова: речевая компетенция, критерии оценивания, показатели, уровни владения, формирующее оценивание, итоговое оценивание, беглость речи, точность, связность, образовательные центры, учащиеся общеобразовательных школ, уровень В1.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the ability to express one’s thoughts orally and in writing clearly, logically and convincingly is considered one of the key competencies of a secondary school graduate. International organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD, as well as international assessment programmes such as PISA, PIRLS and IELTS for Schools, regard reading comprehension, expressing opinions and engaging in communication as core skills that determine students’ academic success and future competitiveness. In Uzbekistan, the importance of this issue is emphasized in the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System until 2030 and in the measures aimed at popularizing the learning of foreign languages [1; 2].

Alongside general secondary schools, educational centers have become an important part of the learning environment of many students. Working in small groups, applying an individual approach, creating a free communication environment and using interactive methods give educational centers considerable opportunities for developing students’ speaking skills [14; 15]. However, the effectiveness of this process largely depends on how students’ progress is measured. In practice, assessment of speaking is often limited to a general impression of the teacher or to tests that check grammar and vocabulary rather than real communicative ability. As a result, neither the teacher nor the student receives clear information about which components of speech competence have been developed and which require further work.

The aim of this article is to substantiate a system of criteria, indicators and levels for assessing the speech competencies of secondary school students in educational centers and to present the results of its approbation.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of communicative competence was introduced by D. Hymes, who argued that knowing a language means not only knowing its grammar but also knowing when, where and how to use it appropriately [3]. M. Canale and M. Swain described communicative competence as consisting of grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic components, later complemented by discourse competence [4]. These ideas were further developed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which describes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and provides scales for fluency, accuracy and coherence of spoken production [5; 6].

Oral speech competence can be defined as the ability to carry out effective and appropriate oral exchanges in a particular context. According to W. Gudykunst and Y. Kim, it has two main dimensions: effectiveness, i.e. the ability to achieve one’s communicative goals, and appropriateness, i.e. the ability to meet the norms and expectations of the communicative situation [7]. B. Spitzberg and W. Cupach distinguish three components of communication competence – motivation, knowledge and skill [8]. The cooperative principle and conversational maxims of P. Grice, the speech act theory of J. Austin and J. Searle, the theory of high- and low-context cultures of E. Hall and the interaction adaptation theory of J. Burgoon show that a competent speaker not only produces correct utterances but also adapts them to the listener, the purpose and the cultural context [9–13].

In language testing, L. Bachman and A. Palmer, as well as S. Luoma, stress that speaking assessment must be based on explicit criteria and descriptors that reflect the construct being measured [16; 17]. P. Black and D. Wiliam showed that formative assessment, which provides students with regular feedback, has a significant positive effect on learning outcomes [18]. Nevertheless, the analysis of the literature shows that the criteria for assessing the speech competencies of secondary school students in the specific conditions of educational centers have not been sufficiently developed.

METHODS

The research was conducted in the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 academic years at Everest educational centers in Tashkent, Namangan and Samarkand. A total of 720 students of grades 10–11 took part in the pedagogical experiment: 360 students were assigned to the experimental groups and 360 students to the control groups. The experiment was organized in four stages: diagnostic and prognostic, organizational and preparatory, practical, and generalizing.

Theoretical methods (analysis, comparison, modelling), empirical methods (interviews, questionnaires, observation, classification), prognostic methods (expert evaluation) and methods of mathematical and statistical analysis were used. Students’ speech competencies were assessed by means of questionnaires, preliminary and final tests and observation sheets. In the experimental groups, assessment was carried out on the basis of the proposed criteria and combined formative assessment (regular feedback during lessons) with summative assessment (final tests at the end of each stage).

RESULTS

On the basis of theoretical analysis and practical experience, five criteria for assessing the speech competencies of secondary school students in educational centers were developed. Each criterion includes a description of its content, a set of indicators and three levels of mastery (Table 1)

Table 1.

**Criteria for developing and assessing the speech competencies of secondary school students
in educational centers**

Criterion	Content	Indicators	High level	Medium level	Low level
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Linguistic	the student’s ability to use language units correctly and appropriately	range of vocabulary; correct use of grammatical structures; phonetic accuracy; logical sentence construction	uses complex language units freely	can use basic grammatical and lexical units	many errors; limited expression
Communicative	the ability to express one’s thoughts freely and clearly in communication	active participation; asking and answering questions; developing a dialogue and a monologue; adapting to the speech situation	communicates independently and fluently	communicates with the teacher’s help	passive; has difficulty expressing ideas
Pragmatic	the level of effective use of speech in practical situations	correct assessment of the situation; goal-oriented speech; choosing a style suitable for the audience; using speech strategies	manages speech according to the situation	adapts in simple situations	speech does not fit the situation
Sociocultural	observing social and cultural norms in speech	following speech etiquette; elements of intercultural communication; understanding social roles; culture of	consciously applies cultural norms	follows basic norms	errors in speech etiquette

		communication			
Strategic (compensatory)	the ability to overcome difficulties in speech	using synonyms, explanations and paralinguistic means; repairing breakdowns; solving speech problems independently	overcomes difficulties independently	partially compensates	speech stops

The criteria were supplemented by three integrated indicators widely used in international speaking assessment – fluency, accuracy and coherence. Fluency reflects the ability to speak at a natural pace without unnecessary pauses; accuracy reflects the correct use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; coherence reflects the logical organization of ideas and the use of linking devices. For each indicator, descriptors of the high, medium and low levels were formulated, which allowed teachers to give students specific and understandable feedback.

During the experiment, the main difficulties that students face in developing speech competencies were identified and grouped into three categories (Table 2).

Table 2.

Difficulties in developing the speech competencies of secondary school students

Type of difficulty	Manifestation	Ways of overcoming
Linguistic	limited active vocabulary, grammatical errors, problems with pronunciation and with building complex sentences	vocabulary work in context (Quizlet), speaking-to-text practice (Speechnotes), guided speaking tasks
Psychological	fear of making mistakes, anxiety, lack of confidence, low motivation to speak	work in small groups and pairs, game-based tasks (Kahoot!), a supportive atmosphere and positive feedback
Methodological (didactic)	predominance of reproductive exercises, insufficient speaking time, lack of clear assessment criteria	communicative and task-based activities, gradual increase in task complexity, criteria-based formative assessment

These difficulties are closely interrelated and have a complex impact on the process of developing speech competencies. For this reason, an integrative approach was applied: linguistic

support, psychological comfort and methodologically sound task design were provided simultaneously.

At the generalizing stage of the experiment, the results of the experimental and control groups were compared. In the 2023–2024 academic year, the results of the experimental groups according to the criteria for developing speech competencies were on average 1.15 times higher than those of the control groups, and in the 2024–2025 academic year they were also 1.15 times higher. Similar positive dynamics (1.14–1.15 times) were observed for the use of digital tools, blended learning models and level-based methods of developing language skills.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that explicit criteria and indicators make the assessment of speaking more objective and transparent. When students know in advance what is expected of them – for example, to use linking words, to ask follow-up questions or to explain a word they do not know – they focus their efforts on these aspects and monitor their own progress. This is consistent with the conclusions of P. Black and D. Wiliam about the role of formative assessment [18] and with the descriptor-based approach of the CEFR [6], and it supports our earlier findings on the use of blended learning at level B1 [19].

The inclusion of pragmatic, sociocultural and strategic criteria is especially important. Traditional tests mainly check linguistic knowledge, while real communication requires the ability to adapt speech to the situation and the interlocutor and to overcome communication breakdowns. The proposed system allows these components to be assessed and developed purposefully. At the same time, the criteria can be adapted to the practice of general secondary schools, where the use of portfolios and diagnostic maps can make the monitoring of students’ speech development regular and systematic.

CONCLUSION

The assessment of the speech competencies of secondary school students in educational centers should be based on a system of clearly defined criteria, indicators and levels. The proposed system includes linguistic, communicative, pragmatic, sociocultural and strategic (compensatory) criteria, each with its own indicators and three levels of mastery, as well as the integrated indicators of fluency, accuracy and coherence. The combination of formative and summative assessment, together with taking into account the linguistic, psychological and methodological difficulties of students, contributed to a higher level of speech competencies in the experimental groups.

It is recommended to introduce diagnostic maps and a monitoring system for assessing students’ speech competencies, as well as individual portfolios that include oral and written tasks and the results of self-assessment.

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