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RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a proposal for the research which is to study the effectiveness of communicative activities used in the upper secondary schools of Uzbekistan. It considers the questions to answer, the participant and the methodology to use for the research. The background research on the current topic area is reviewed and the issues are released. Tools of data collection, ways of analyzing the data, and potential problems to encounter are analyzed. The article can be used as a proposal for primary research in the examining the effectiveness of speaking activities in upper secondary schools.

Keywords: Research proposal, speaking activities effectiveness, upper secondary schools, research background, data collection, data analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, there has been a growing interest in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Uzbekistan. The special attention to teaching EFL in general and to oral skills in particular has been paid since a new national educational standard based on the Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching, and assessment was adopted (CMRUz, 2013). Before the classes were carried out by the teacher-centred approach where dominated the Grammar-Translation Method and most activities were dedicated to practicing of grammar and translating the text (Hasanova, 2007). However, the new standard reformed the whole EFL teaching system in Uzbekistan, moving communicative competence to the foreground.

English in Uzbekistan is taught as a third language, and learners have few chances to communicate in this language outside the classroom. For this reason, it is essential to adopt more and, of course, appropriate speaking activities into the classroom, creating opportunity for students to use what they have learned. The right choice of activities has an inseparable role in reaching the effectiveness of teaching process (Legutke and Thomas, 2014). So, the purpose of the research is to discover the oral activities and speaking teaching techniques in English classroom at Uzbek

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upper secondary schools and their effectiveness at improving the students` speaking skills.

Research questions

The research will try to answer the following questions:

1. What oral activities are currently being used by teachers in the higher secondary schools of Uzbekistan?
2. Do teachers feel these activities are effective in developing of learners` communicative competence?
3. What is the learners` attitude towards these activities?/How do learners respond to these activities?

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Speaking mirrors the student's success in learning a language, as it covers almost all language systems. Therefore, it is one of the skills which is always challenging for language learners. And, it can be improved not just by doing a lot of short incoherent speaking in the classroom; but rather by providing interesting activities and appropriate techniques that can make the process of learning enjoyable (Sharma, 2018). The teacher today has the access to the large number of publications offering a range of activities for communication in the classroom. But some researchers doubt whether any speaking activities used by teachers really lead to changes in the classroom learning process (Legutke and Thomas, 2014). It is important for the teacher to define what sort of activities might be useful for learners before organizing the lesson.

In fact, the approach that most language teachers adopt is often determined by the coursebook their language programs use. The approaches in the published materials can have limitations. According to McCarthy and O`Keefe (2004) the limitations are: insufficient emphasis on teaching communication strategies, a lack of authenticity, and problems with teaching certain skills.

Goh and Burns (2012) distinguish three main types of speaking tasks that make different demands on learner`s skills and linguistic knowledge. They are communication-gap tasks, discussion tasks, and monologic tasks. While Littlewood (1981) differentiates two main categories of communicative activities, such as, functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Equally, useful speaking tasks include discussions and problem solving tasks, as well as talks or other kinds of extended discourse. There are many creative activities for the development of speaking worked out by the experienced practitioners which typically involve learners in some pair or group interaction. One of the basic principles for

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planning these kind of activities to encourage learners to use the target language, create situations in which they experience need in communication and rise the personal motivation to talk to one another (Goh and Burns, 2012). Neither of the teaching speaking activities can be exactly evaluated as the best, or the worst for the particular context. In considering the communicative activity it is important for the teacher to determine what is hoped to achieve through the activity in the classroom (Littlewood, 1981).

Whatever activity is used in the classroom, the teacher`s role is crucial. Students cannot reach any development in speaking without the teacher`s facilitating practice and learning, and the teacher`s providing input and feedback (Legutke and Thomas, 2014). On the other hand, teachers need to be clear about the learners` level of competence and their language needs, and be able to provide activities appropriate for their students.

METHODOLOGY

This is going to be a qualitative study aimed to identify the productiveness of activities. The flexibility and deepness of a qualitative research is essential, as the data is going to be collected among the teachers who have different experience, background, and education. Additionally, the data is going to be collected by the use of documents, observation, and questionnaire techniques.

The data that is assumed to be collected are followings:

- Review of the coursebook and teachers` lesson plans;
- Class observation;
- Questionnaire among students and English teachers of Uzbek upper-secondary schools.

Participants

Participants mainly are going to be from the public school №14 located in Tashkent region, Uzbekistan. The classes of two teachers of 10^{th} grade will be observed, and thirty upper-secondary-school students will be questioned. In order to learn more about the speaking activities commonly used in upper secondary schools of Uzbekistan, twelve teachers from other schools will be questioned too. In total, there are going to be forty-four participants.

Data collection

Data for the research will be collected from the public school №14. It is important to highlight that all state schools in Uzbekistan follow the syllabus implemented by the government according to the CEFR. Teachers` lesson planning is

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based on the coursebook content worked out by the Ministry of Education of Uzbekistan (DPRUz, 2012).

The primary tool of the data collection will be a review of documents about TEFL in Uzbekistan and teachers` lesson plans, and the observation. It is necessary for determination types of activities commonly used in the classroom designed due to the governmental constraints. Firstly, the researcher will review the lesson plans of upper secondary school teachers and the coursebook contents. Secondly, the researcher will carefully consider the several lessons of two different classes to reveal whether the teachers introduce the extra speaking activities into the classroom, or they are just limited to the coursebook activities. The observation will occur through the listening of audio recordings taped without the presence of the observer. This method of observation can have possible advantages; for example, the group dynamics the researcher is attempting to study will not be affected by the researchers` presence, researcher can listen the recordings more then once to find out more information about participants.

The next tool for the research is going to be the questionnaires among fourteen teachers from different backgrounds; and among thirty upper secondary school students. After observing several lessons of two different classes the researcher creates questionnaire to find out the reasons of activity choice and how the teachers and students feel about the used activities.

Possible problems

All data that I am going to collect will be gathered online. During my academic year at the university I may not be able to go to Uzbekistan. Therefore, the questionnaires and teachers` lesson plans will be exchanged through email. Also, I will not be able to observe the classes personally; however, two teachers of upper-secondary school agreed to tape several audios of their classes.

Another thing that can be issue is learners` capability to understand the questions and answer them in English. Therefore, the questionnaire will be designed in three languages: English, Uzbek, and Russian.

As the data for the research is proposed to be collected from the teachers and students of school №14, ethical approval from the school will be provided before I start the collection of data.

Data analysis

The overview of the coursebook contents and the lesson plans give some idea about the teaching constraints approved by the policymakers. The next step is observation: that helps to find out whether teachers really follow their lesson plan covering all activities assumed there. Having some knowledge about the current

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situation in upper-secondary English classrooms, researcher can create the questionnaire for both teachers and learners. The questions will be oriented to deriving the teachers` and students` attitude towards the speaking activities they use.

Consequently, putting together all analysis researcher is considering to find out the productivity of the classroom activities in developing the communicative competence of learners. Then, recommend the speaking activities that can be successfully implemented for the chosen content based on the analysis and reviewed literature.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current work was to define the aims, questions, and methodologies of the research. Also, it describes the context and participants of the research, as well as the process of data collection. This work is a strategic plan for the future dissertation, following which the researcher is going to find out about the speaking activities that currently used in Uzbek upper-secondary schools. Also, the study will discover whether students and teachers feel the activities` productiveness enough to enable students communicate according to their level.

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