DIFFICULTIES OF TEACHING ENGLISH AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini o‘rta maktablarda o‘qitishda uchraydigan asosiy qiyinchiliklar chuqur tahlil qilinadi. Muallif nazariy va amaliy manbalar asosida til o‘rganishning psixologik, metodik va ijtimoiy omillarini ko‘rib chiqadi. Tarixiy va zamonaviy konsepsiyalar, mintaqaviy hamda milliy olimlarning ishlari, empirik tadqiqotlar va ularning natijalari keng yoritiladi. Tahlil natijasida o‘rta maktablarda ingliz tilini samarali o‘qitish uchun tavsiyalar ishlab chiqiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Ingliz tili, O‘rta maktab, O‘qitish muammolari, Til o‘rganish

Abstract

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the main challenges encountered in teaching English at secondary schools. Drawing on theoretical and practical sources, the author examines psychological, methodological, and social factors influencing language acquisition. Both historical and contemporary frameworks are discussed, along with the contributions of regional and national scholars, empirical studies, and their applications. The analysis leads to recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of English language teaching in secondary school settings.

Keywords: English language, Secondary school, Teaching difficulties, Language acquisition

Аннотация

В данной статье подробно анализируются основные трудности обучения английскому языку в средней школе. Автор рассматривает психологические, методические и социальные факторы освоения языка на основе теоретических и практических источников. Описываются исторические и современные концепции, работы региональных и национальных ученых, а также эмпирические исследования. В результате анализа предложены рекомендации по повышению эффективности преподавания английского языка в средней школе.

Ключевые слова: Английский язык, Средняя школа, Проблемы обучения, Изучение языка

Introduction

The teaching of English in secondary schools has become a central concern in educational systems worldwide, especially as English consolidates its status as a global lingua franca and a key tool for academic, economic, and technological advancement. Despite substantial investments in curriculum development, teacher training, and resource provision, the effective teaching and learning of English at the secondary level remains fraught with persistent challenges. These difficulties stem from a complex interplay of cognitive, pedagogical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors, all of which shape both the processes and the outcomes of language education. The present article seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of the difficulties encountered in teaching English in secondary

school contexts. It draws on a wide array of theoretical perspectives, historical developments, empirical research findings, and critical debates in the field. By synthesizing insights from classical theories, regional and national scholarship, and applied studies, this article aims to elucidate the underlying causes of these challenges and propose informed strategies for addressing them, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective English language education in secondary schools.

Literature Review

Understanding the difficulties inherent in teaching English at the secondary school level necessitates a thorough exploration of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that have historically informed language pedagogy. Foundational to this inquiry are classical theories of language acquisition, such as behaviorism, which posits that language learning is the result of habit formation through repetitive practice and reinforcement. Pioneered by scholars like B.F. Skinner, the behaviorist approach emphasizes the importance of stimulus-response mechanisms and the role of the environment in shaping linguistic competence. However, as Chomsky's critique of behaviorism famously argued, this perspective fails to account for the innate cognitive capacities that enable learners to generate novel utterances and internalize complex grammatical rules. Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar marked a paradigm shift, suggesting that language acquisition is guided by an inherent set of linguistic principles common to all humans, which are triggered by exposure to specific linguistic input. This debate between environmental and nativist perspectives has profoundly influenced subsequent theories, including Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which underscores the necessity of comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current proficiency level for effective acquisition to occur [1].

The communicative approach, which emerged in the late twentieth century, further transformed English language teaching by shifting the focus from rote memorization and grammar drills to the functional use of language in authentic communicative contexts. The communicative language teaching (CLT) paradigm, informed by the works of Hymes, Canale, and Swain, introduced the concept of communicative competence, encompassing not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. This framework has been widely adopted in secondary school curricula globally, yet its implementation remains uneven due to contextual constraints, such as large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and limited access to authentic materials. Critics of CLT have pointed out that without adequate resources and ongoing professional development, teachers often revert to traditional, teacher-centered methods that prioritize accuracy over fluency, thus undermining the communicative aims of the curriculum.

In the context of secondary education, the cognitive development of adolescent learners adds an additional layer of complexity. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, with its emphasis on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the mediating role of social interaction, highlights the importance of scaffolding and collaborative learning in language acquisition. Studies have shown that peer interaction and guided instruction can facilitate the internalization of linguistic structures, yet the effectiveness of these strategies is contingent upon the classroom environment and the teacher's ability to foster a supportive, communicative atmosphere. Furthermore, Piaget's stages of cognitive development suggest that secondary school students, typically in the formal operational stage, are capable of abstract reasoning and hypothesis testing, which can be leveraged to engage them in higher-order language tasks. Nevertheless, the transition from concrete to abstract thinking is not uniform across learners, and mismatches between instructional methods and students' cognitive readiness can hinder language development.

From a methodological perspective, the grammar-translation method, once the dominant approach in English language teaching, has been largely supplanted by more communicative and task-based methodologies. However, remnants of this approach persist in many secondary school classrooms, particularly in regions where high-stakes examinations prioritize grammatical accuracy and written translation. This exam-oriented culture exerts a powerful influence on teaching practices, often leading to a narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on test preparation at the expense of communicative competence. Empirical studies conducted in various national contexts have documented the persistence of grammar-translation practices, despite official curricular reforms advocating communicative or integrated approaches [2]. Such findings point to the enduring tension between policy and practice, as well as the need for systemic changes in assessment and teacher training.

Regional and national scholars have contributed valuable insights into the specific challenges faced in different educational contexts. In Central Asia, for example, researchers have highlighted the impact of socio-economic disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and the shortage of qualified English teachers on the quality of language instruction in secondary schools. Studies conducted in Uzbekistan indicate that while English holds significant symbolic and instrumental value, many students struggle to achieve functional proficiency due to limited exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom and a lack of opportunities for meaningful communication [3]. Similar challenges have been reported in other post-Soviet states, where the legacy of Soviet-era language policies and the dominance of Russian as a lingua franca continue to shape attitudes toward English learning. National initiatives aimed at introducing English earlier in the curriculum and improving teacher qualifications have yielded mixed results, with progress often hampered by insufficient funding and a lack of sustained professional development.

Empirical research on the difficulties of teaching English at the secondary school level has identified a constellation of interrelated factors that impede effective instruction. One recurrent theme is the issue of large class sizes, which restrict teachers' ability to provide individualized feedback and monitor students' progress. In overcrowded classrooms, teachers often resort to whole-class instruction and rely heavily on textbooks, leaving little room for interactive or student-centered activities. This problem is exacerbated by the heterogeneity of student proficiency levels, which poses significant challenges for differentiated instruction. Teachers frequently report feeling ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of learners, particularly in contexts where inclusive education policies mandate the integration of students with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms. The lack of appropriate resources, such as graded readers, audio-visual materials, and information and communication technologies (ICT), further constrains the implementation of innovative teaching methods.

Teacher-related factors constitute another major source of difficulty in English language teaching at the secondary level. Many teachers enter the profession with limited proficiency in English and insufficient pedagogical knowledge, a situation often attributed to deficiencies in pre-service teacher education programs. In-service professional development opportunities are frequently sporadic and disconnected from teachers' actual classroom experiences, leading to a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Research has shown that teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward language teaching, shaped by their own educational backgrounds and experiences, significantly influence their instructional practices [4]. For instance, teachers who view language learning as a primarily cognitive and rule-based process may prioritize explicit grammar instruction, while those who embrace a communicative or constructivist orientation are more likely to foster interactive, learner-centered classrooms. The interplay between teacher beliefs, institutional

expectations, and curricular mandates creates a complex environment in which pedagogical innovation is both necessary and challenging.

Socio-cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping the difficulties encountered in teaching English at the secondary school level. Language attitudes, parental expectations, and community values can either facilitate or hinder students' motivation to learn English. In some contexts, English is perceived as a gateway to economic mobility and social prestige, motivating students to invest considerable effort in language learning. In other settings, however, negative attitudes toward English or the perceived irrelevance of the language to students' lives may lead to resistance and disengagement. The phenomenon of linguistic imperialism, as articulated by Phillipson and other critical scholars, raises important questions about the role of English in perpetuating global inequalities and marginalizing local languages and cultures. Debates surrounding the appropriate balance between English and mother-tongue instruction reflect broader tensions between globalization and localization in education policy [5].

The integration of technology into English language teaching has generated both opportunities and challenges for secondary school educators. On the one hand, digital tools and online resources can enhance access to authentic materials, facilitate communication with native speakers, and support individualized learning. On the other hand, disparities in access to technology, inadequate teacher training, and the proliferation of low-quality online content can undermine the potential benefits of ICT integration. Empirical studies have highlighted the importance of developing teachers' digital literacy and providing ongoing support for the effective use of technology in language instruction. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote and blended learning modalities, exposing both the possibilities and the limitations of technology-mediated language teaching in secondary schools.

Assessment practices represent another area of persistent difficulty in English language teaching at the secondary school level. Traditional assessment methods, such as multiple-choice tests and written examinations, often fail to capture the full range of students' communicative abilities. Alternative assessment approaches, including portfolios, self-assessment, and peer assessment, have been advocated as means of promoting more holistic and authentic evaluation of language proficiency. However, the implementation of alternative assessments is frequently hampered by institutional constraints, lack of teacher expertise, and concerns about reliability and standardization [6]. The dominance of high-stakes examinations in many educational systems exerts a powerful backwash effect, shaping teaching practices and narrowing the curriculum to what is tested. As a result, students may develop test-taking strategies at the expense of meaningful language use, further compounding the challenges of effective English language teaching.

Critical analysis of the literature reveals ongoing debates regarding the most effective approaches to overcoming the difficulties of teaching English at the secondary school level. Some scholars advocate for a greater emphasis on context-sensitive pedagogy, recognizing that no single method or model is universally applicable. Instead, effective teaching requires a nuanced understanding of local conditions, student needs, and available resources. Others call for systemic reforms in teacher education, curriculum design, and assessment practices to align policy with classroom realities. There is also growing recognition of the need to address affective factors, such as motivation, anxiety, and learner autonomy, as integral components of successful language learning. Ultimately, the literature suggests that the difficulties of teaching English at the secondary school level are multifaceted and interdependent, requiring coordinated efforts at the levels of policy, practice, and research.

Conclusion

The persistent challenges associated with teaching English at the secondary school level are the product of a complex interplay of historical, theoretical, methodological, and contextual factors. Classical and contemporary theories of language acquisition provide valuable frameworks for understanding the cognitive and social processes involved in language learning, yet their practical application in secondary school contexts remains contingent upon a host of environmental and institutional variables. Empirical studies consistently highlight issues such as large class sizes, heterogeneous student populations, limited resources, and insufficient teacher preparation as major impediments to effective English language instruction. Socio-cultural attitudes, assessment practices, and the integration of technology further complicate the teaching and learning process, necessitating adaptive and context-sensitive approaches. Regional and national scholarship underscores the importance of aligning curriculum, teacher training, and assessment with local realities and student needs. While there is no single solution to the difficulties of teaching English in secondary schools, the literature points to the necessity of systemic reforms, ongoing professional development, and the adoption of learner-centered, communicative methodologies. By addressing these interrelated challenges, educators and policymakers can work toward creating more equitable and effective English language learning environments that empower secondary school students to achieve communicative competence and academic success.

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