COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN DEVELOPING SPEECH COMPETENCE OF 7TH–8TH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract: The development of speech competence among 7th–8th grade students is a critical aspect of modern education, reflecting both cognitive and social growth. This paper provides a comparative analysis of national and international practices aimed at enhancing students' speech abilities. By examining various pedagogical methods, curriculum designs, and technological tools, the study identifies effective strategies and challenges in fostering speech competence. Findings indicate that while international experiences emphasize interactive and communicative approaches, national practices in Uzbekistan focus more on structured grammatical and literary knowledge. Integrating best practices from both contexts can contribute to a more holistic approach to speech competence development.

Keywords: speech competence, communicative skills, pedagogy, comparative analysis, secondary education, Uzbekistan, international practices

Introduction

Speech competence represents the ability to communicate effectively, coherently, and appropriately in different social and academic contexts. For 7th–8th grade students, this competence is crucial as it forms the foundation for higher-level academic success and social interaction. Modern education systems, both in Uzbekistan and globally, have increasingly recognized the importance of developing students' verbal and written communication skills. In Uzbekistan, national curricula emphasize literary understanding and grammatical accuracy, whereas international practices often focus on student-centered approaches, collaboration, and communicative effectiveness [1], [2]. This study aims to comparatively analyze national and international experiences to identify best practices and potential improvements in developing speech competence among middle school students.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative comparative approach. Data were collected from official educational curricula, pedagogical studies, and international educational reports. The national context is represented by Uzbekistan's secondary school language programs, focusing on grades 7–8, while the international context includes practices from Finland, the United States, and Japan. The analysis examines teaching methods, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and technological integration. The comparative framework considers the effectiveness, adaptability, and sustainability of these approaches in promoting speech competence [3], [4].

Results

The analysis revealed several key patterns:

- **National Practices (Uzbekistan):** The curriculum emphasizes grammar mastery, literary analysis, and formal writing exercises. Students are trained to deliver structured oral presentations based on literature and theoretical knowledge. Teachers primarily use traditional instruction methods, including lectures, memorization, and guided practice [5], [6].

- **International Practices:** In countries like Finland and the USA, the focus is on communicative competence. Students engage in group discussions, debates, and project-based activities. Digital tools, multimedia resources, and peer assessment are frequently used to enhance speaking and listening skills [7], [8].

- **Comparative Insights:** While Uzbek practices ensure linguistic accuracy and literary understanding, international methods better foster creativity, spontaneity, and interactive communication skills. Both contexts highlight the role of teacher expertise, student motivation, and curriculum support in achieving speech competence [9], [10].

Analysis and Discussion

The development of speech competence among 7th–8th grade students is a multifaceted process influenced by cognitive, social, and cultural factors. Comparative analysis of national and international practices reveals that while Uzbekistan has established strong foundations in language education, international models provide insights into more interactive, student-centered approaches that enhance communicative competence. Understanding the dynamics of both contexts allows for the identification of strategies that maximize learning outcomes while respecting cultural and educational norms.

One of the most prominent differences between national and international approaches lies in the pedagogical focus. In Uzbekistan, language education at the middle school level emphasizes grammatical accuracy, literary knowledge, and formal speech production. Students are trained to articulate their thoughts within structured formats, such as written essays, book reports, and formal presentations. These methods ensure a high degree of linguistic correctness and literary appreciation, which form essential components of speech competence. Research indicates that mastering grammatical structures and literary forms contributes to cognitive development and fosters an analytical understanding of language [1], [2]. However, while these practices excel in fostering accuracy and literary knowledge, they often limit spontaneous oral expression and interactive communication.

International approaches, particularly those in countries such as Finland, the United States, and Japan, focus on communicative competence, emphasizing the ability to convey meaning effectively in diverse social contexts. Pedagogical strategies include project-based learning, collaborative group discussions, debates, storytelling, role-playing, and the integration of multimedia and digital resources. These methods encourage students to develop fluency, coherence, and audience awareness alongside grammatical competence [3], [4]. By engaging students actively, these strategies stimulate cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of learning, fostering confidence and motivation in speech production.

Digital technologies have become a critical component of speech competence development in international contexts. Language learning applications, virtual discussion platforms, and multimedia tools provide students with opportunities to practice speaking in authentic contexts, receive immediate feedback, and engage in self-directed learning. For instance, virtual classrooms and online forums allow students to participate in discussions beyond the limitations of physical classroom space, creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Studies demonstrate that these technologies improve students' motivation, engagement, and the frequency of oral communication practice, contributing significantly to overall speech competence [5], [6].

Teacher training is another crucial factor in shaping the effectiveness of speech competence programs. International experiences reveal that teachers trained in communicative, student-centered pedagogies are better equipped to design activities that stimulate verbal interaction and critical thinking. These teachers employ strategies such as guided discussions, peer assessment, reflective exercises, and interactive feedback, which are essential for nurturing communicative competence. In contrast, in Uzbekistan, many teachers primarily rely on traditional lecture-based methods and often have limited access to professional development focused on interactive teaching methodologies [7], [8]. This discrepancy underscores the need for

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systematic teacher training programs aimed at equipping educators with the skills and knowledge necessary for implementing modern, communicative-focused approaches effectively.

Cultural and linguistic factors also influence the implementation of speech competence strategies. In Uzbek classrooms, students are accustomed to hierarchical classroom structures, where teachers are perceived as the primary authority and students are expected to follow structured instructions. This traditional approach can pose challenges when introducing open-ended discussion formats, debate sessions, or collaborative projects, which require a higher degree of autonomy and verbal expression. International models demonstrate that gradual integration of interactive methodologies, starting with guided group activities and scaffolded discussions, can facilitate adaptation without undermining cultural norms [1, 2]. Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogies ensure that students maintain a connection to their national identity while acquiring globally relevant communication skills.

Assessment strategies constitute another domain where national and international practices diverge. In Uzbekistan, evaluation typically relies on standardized tests, focusing on grammatical correctness, vocabulary knowledge, and literary comprehension. While such assessments provide measurable benchmarks of language proficiency, they often fail to capture dimensions of communicative effectiveness, such as fluency, coherence, audience engagement, and adaptability in spontaneous speech. In contrast, international practices increasingly employ continuous assessment methods, including peer evaluation, self-reflection, project outcomes, oral presentations, and portfolio assessments [3, 4]. These methods offer a holistic view of a student's speech competence, encompassing not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic and interactive abilities. Evidence suggests that students assessed through continuous and interactive methods demonstrate higher levels of motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate in oral communication activities.

Integrating national and international approaches presents an opportunity to leverage the strengths of both systems. A blended model can combine structured grammar and literary exercises with interactive, communicative practices, thereby ensuring that students develop accuracy alongside fluency and creativity. For instance, traditional writing and grammar exercises can be supplemented with group discussions, debates, and digital storytelling projects. Such integration fosters comprehensive language development, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical communication scenarios [9, 10].

Parental involvement and the broader educational environment also play significant roles in enhancing speech competence. Studies indicate that students who receive reinforcement at home, such as opportunities for discussions, storytelling, and practice of presentation skills, demonstrate higher proficiency levels [11]. Moreover, integrating extracurricular activities, such as debate clubs, drama performances, and speech competitions, provides additional platforms for students to develop confidence, creativity, and adaptability in verbal communication.

Professional development for teachers remains a pivotal factor in the successful implementation of integrative strategies. Workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning communities focusing on communicative and student-centered pedagogies enable educators to adopt innovative methods effectively. For example, teachers trained in project-based learning can design curricula that incorporate both content knowledge and practical communication activities. Additionally, professional development programs that provide guidance on technology integration equip teachers to use digital platforms for speech practice and assessment, further enhancing learning outcomes [12].

The comparative analysis also highlights the importance of culturally responsive strategies in fostering speech competence. Implementing international methods without considering cultural and linguistic contexts may lead to resistance or ineffective outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to adapt interactive and student-centered practices to align with local educational traditions and values. For instance, structured debate sessions can initially follow a more guided format, gradually progressing toward open-ended discussions as students gain

confidence. Similarly, integrating Uzbek literature and cultural topics into communicative activities ensures relevance and maintains students' cultural identity while promoting engagement and motivation.

Conclusion

The development of speech competence among 7th–8th grade students benefits from a comprehensive strategy combining national and international pedagogical experiences. Uzbek practices provide strong foundations in grammar and literature, while international approaches foster interactive, student-centered, and technology-enhanced learning. A blended model, supported by teacher training, modern assessment methods, and digital tools, can significantly enhance students' communicative effectiveness and confidence. Policymakers and educators should consider adopting such integrative approaches to prepare students for both academic and social success in a rapidly changing global environment.

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