

# EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING MODEL IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' SPEAKING INSTRUCTION COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES

Yaxshigul Otamurodova Farxodovna  
Teacher of UzSWLU , Uzbekistan

**Abstract.** This study investigates the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in enhancing English language teachers' competence in teaching speaking skills. Grounded in constructivist learning theory, this research emphasizes how PBL can empower in-service teachers to design and implement more interactive, student-centered speaking activities. Conducted among 82 English language teachers undergoing professional development at the A. Avloniy National Institute for Pedagogical Skills in Tashkent, the study utilized a mixed-methods design to evaluate cognitive and affective impacts of the PBL-based training. The results revealed that PBL significantly improved participants' confidence, instructional creativity, and ability to scaffold communicative tasks. Recommendations are offered for integrating PBL modules into teacher training curricula, particularly in foreign language education.

**Keywords.** Problem-Based Learning, Speaking Instruction, English Language Teachers, Professional Development, Teacher Competence.

## 1. Introduction

Developing speaking competence is one of the most critical yet challenging aspects of English language teaching. In foreign language contexts, teachers often struggle to foster communicative competence due to rigid curricula, large class sizes, and limited access to interactive resources. In-service teacher training programs must equip educators with innovative strategies that go beyond traditional lecture-based instruction.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) presents a learner-centered methodology rooted in constructivist theory. It involves engaging learners in solving real-world problems that stimulate higher-order thinking, collaboration, and autonomous learning. While PBL has been extensively employed in medical and engineering education, its application in teacher education—particularly in the context of teaching speaking skills—remains underexplored.

### Rationale for the Study

This research is timely given the pressing need for modernized teacher education frameworks capable of adapting to the rapidly evolving educational landscape. The employment of PBL can aid in diversifying pedagogical strategies and engaging teachers in meaningful professional development. By addressing the gap in existing literature, this study aims to offer insights into how PBL can enhance the ability of

English language teachers to plan, facilitate, and assess speaking instruction in foreign language classrooms.

Moreover, the significance of speaking skills in language acquisition has been increasingly recognized. Comprehensively developing speaking competence not only boosts learners' linguistic abilities but also equips them with essential life skills, such as critical thinking and effective communication. Given the educational context in Uzbekistan, where language skills are pivotal in fostering international collaboration and understanding, this research is particularly relevant.

## **2. Literature Review**

The significance of speaking skills in English language learning has been widely acknowledged in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature. According to Richards (2008), speaking is not merely about linguistic knowledge but encompasses strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence as well.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of PBL**

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) originated in the educational paradigm shift during the 1960s and has become a prominent instructional strategy across various disciplines. Barrows (1986) posited that traditional, lecture-driven teaching leaves learners unprepared to tackle real-world problems effectively. PBL emerged as an innovative method aimed at cultivating not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Research, such as that conducted by Hmelo-Silver (2004), has substantiated that PBL not only facilitates cognitive development but also enhances metacognitive awareness, inquiry, and reflective practices among learners. The active engagement required in PBL promotes an environment where learners become autonomous investigators of their knowledge construction.

### **PBL in the Context of English Language Teaching**

Research indicates that PBL can significantly transform language learning into a more purposeful, communicative, and socially meaningful process (Yew & Goh, 2016). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), PBL encourages learners to engage in authentic communication while collaboratively negotiating meaning in English. By approaching language as a tool for problem-solving, learners are more likely to internalize linguistic and strategic abilities needed for effective communication.

Moreover, PBL ignites critical and creative thinking skills during the learning process. Engaging with open-ended problems allows learners to analyze, generate solutions, and articulate their reasoning, thus strengthening their cognitive engagement alongside linguistic proficiency. It creates an interactive environment where questioning, argumentation, clarification, and negotiation of meaning are paramount.

### **Current Research Gaps**

Several studies (Savery & Duffy, 1995; Belland et al., 2009) underscore PBL's effectiveness in enhancing teaching strategies, particularly for speaking skills. However, empirical research on PBL's effects on teachers' speaking instruction strategies—especially in foreign language settings—is limited. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring how PBL shapes the instructional competence of in-service English teachers in Uzbekistan.

### **Relevance to Uzbek Education**

As Uzbekistan aligns its national educational standards with global competency-based approaches, integrating innovative methodologies like PBL into teacher training becomes crucial. Enhanced English speaking competencies among teachers will not only improve classroom interactions but will also contribute to the larger goal of fostering English proficiency within the broader population.

### **3. Methodology**

A mixed-methods research design was selected to comprehensively evaluate the effects of the PBL model on teachers' speaking instruction competence. This design allows for triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a robust understanding of the research question.

#### **Participants**

The study involved 82 in-service English language teachers from three regions of Uzbekistan: Tashkent city, Namangan region, and Bukhara region. All participants were enrolled in a professional development program at the A. Avloniy National Institute for Pedagogical Skills. The diversity in participants' backgrounds enriches the dataset while offering varied perspectives on the implementation of PBL in their teaching contexts.

**Instruments.** The study employed multiple instruments to ensure comprehensive and reliable data collection, capturing both quantitative changes in teachers' competence and qualitative insights into their professional experiences. Pre- and post-training surveys were administered to assess participants' levels of confidence and perceived competence in teaching speaking skills before and after the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) program. These surveys measured self-reported abilities in areas such as designing communicative tasks, facilitating student interaction, managing classroom discourse, and applying scaffolding techniques, thereby allowing for a systematic comparison of instructional growth over time. In addition, observational rubrics were used by facilitators to evaluate participants' performance during classroom simulations and microteaching sessions. These rubrics focused on key dimensions of effective speaking instruction, including clarity of task design, use of student-centered strategies, quality of questioning, interaction patterns, and responsiveness to learners' needs within PBL activities. To complement these structured measures, reflective journals were collected weekly from all participants. These journals

provided rich qualitative data on teachers' perceptions, challenges, emotional responses, and evolving pedagogical beliefs as they experimented with PBL in practice. Participants documented their successes, difficulties in managing group work, concerns about time constraints, and reflections on student engagement and learning outcomes. Together, the triangulation of survey results, observational evidence, and reflective narratives enhanced the validity of the study by offering a multidimensional understanding of how PBL influenced teachers' instructional competence and professional development in teaching speaking.

**Procedure.** The procedure was meticulously structured to ensure comprehensive engagement with the PBL methodology:

- i. **Introduction to PBL:** Participants were introduced to the PBL framework, focusing on the importance of experiential learning and collaborative problem-solving.
- ii. **Problem Scenarios:** Weekly sessions were organized around specific problem scenarios centered on speaking instruction, promoting applied learning.
- iii. **Collaboration and Guidance:** Facilitators played a key role in guiding discussions, assisting in the design of speaking activities, and employing scaffolding techniques to enhance participants' skills.
- iv. **Validation and Feedback:** After implementing speaking tasks, teachers engaged in peer feedback and microteaching sessions to refine their instructional strategies.

**Data Analysis.** Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests to identify statistically significant differences in pre- and post-training results. Qualitative data from reflective journals were examined through thematic coding, highlighting shifts in pedagogical thinking and classroom practices over time.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

This study aimed to uncover the operational effectiveness of the PBL model in developing English language teachers' speaking instruction competence. Through participant feedback and research findings, we identified significant improvements in various areas.

##### **Key Findings**

1. **Increased Confidence:** Participants reported a remarkable increase in their confidence levels when conducting speaking instruction, facilitating interactive activities, and employing innovative techniques.
2. **Enhanced Instructional Creativity:** Many teachers expressed satisfaction with the creative opportunities that PBL allowed, particularly in designing speaking tasks that reflect real-life contexts.

3. **Effective Scaffolding Practices:** Teachers noted a better understanding of how to integrate scaffolding into their speaking instruction, which significantly improved student engagement and participation.

### Challenges Identified

While several areas showed remarkable improvement, participants also highlighted challenges in implementing PBL, including:

- **Student Anxiety:** Some teachers reported difficulties in addressing student anxiety during speaking tasks, indicating a need for additional support strategies in teacher training.
- **Resource Limitations:** Limited access to appropriate materials and digital tools hampered some teachers' ability to implement PBL fully.
- **Cultural Constraints:** Participant feedback suggested that traditional teaching practices are deeply rooted, making it challenging for some educators to shift to a more learner-centered approach.

### Framework for PBL in Speaking Instruction

The development of a PBL framework for speaking instruction involved identifying several critical stages:

Stage	Description
<b>I. Problem Orientation</b>	Identification of key challenges in teaching speaking skills and formulation of authentic, real-life communicative problems to guide instructional design.
<b>II. Organizing the Learning Environment</b>	Planning collaborative learning structures, defining participant roles and responsibilities, and selecting appropriate pedagogical strategies, digital tools, and assessment approaches.
<b>III. Facilitating Group and Individual Investigations</b>	Conducting needs analysis of learners' speaking abilities, brainstorming instructional tasks, exploring possible solutions, and reflecting on existing teaching challenges.
<b>IV. Presentation and Feedback</b>	Implementation of microteaching sessions in which participants present designed speaking activities and receive structured feedback from peers and facilitators.
<b>V. Analysis and Evaluation</b>	Systematic review of instructional outcomes, assessment of participants' growth in communicative task planning and delivery, and identification of areas for further improvement.

### Implications for Teacher Education

The findings from this study have significant implications for teacher education programs in Uzbekistan and beyond:

1. **Integration of PBL Modules:** Teacher training institutions should include PBL modules specifically targeting speaking instruction within their curricula. This will equip future educators with the skills necessary to foster effective communication among their students.

2. **Development of Real-World Scenarios:** Curriculum designers must integrate authentic, real-world scenarios that encourage teachers to experiment with

communicative techniques. This could involve collaboration with local businesses or community organizations to create meaningful learning experiences.

3. **Policy Support for Professional Development:** National education policies should promote competency-based professional development frameworks that emphasize problem-solving and collaboration. Investing in continuous professional growth will ultimately lead to improved educational outcomes for students.

### **5. Conclusion and Implications**

This study concludes that the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model is an effective framework for significantly enhancing in-service English teachers' speaking instruction competence. PBL facilitates a transformative shift toward reflective, interactive, and student-centered teaching practices, underscoring its potential impact on language education.

#### **Summary of Key Contributions**

1. **Empowerment of Teachers:** By adopting PBL, teachers reported feeling more empowered to create engaging, innovative activities that resonate with students' real-life experiences.

2. **Cultivation of Communication Skills:** The use of real-world problems enhanced the relevance of speaking instruction, motivating both teachers and learners to engage actively with the language.

3. **Development of Supportive Networks:** Collaborative elements of PBL foster a culture of peer support and continuous improvement, essential for sustained professional growth.

#### **Future Directions for Research**

Future research could explore the longitudinal impacts of PBL training on classroom outcomes or compare its effectiveness with other models, such as inquiry-based learning or flipped classrooms. Additionally, studies can investigate the systemic barriers that hinder the broader implementation of PBL methodologies in various educational contexts.

#### **References**

1. Barrows, H. S. (1986). A taxonomy of problem-based learning methods. *Medical Education*, 20(6), 481–486.
2. Belland, B. R., Ertmer, P. A., & Simons, K. D. (2009). Perceptions of the value of problem-based learning among students with special needs and their teachers. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 3(2).
3. Brush, T., & Saye, J. W. (2009). The impact of scaffolding on student achievement in technology-enhanced problem-based learning environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 57(4), 341–356.

4. Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn? *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(3), 235–266.
5. Ismoilova, B. (2020). The role of innovative teaching methods in developing speaking skills. *Uzbekistan Journal of Language Teaching*, 5(1), 28–36.
6. Davlatov, A. (2021). Strategies for enhancing communicative competence through PBL in language education. *Journal of Pedagogical Sciences*, 3(2), 45–53.
7. Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Savery, J. R., & Duffy, T. M. (1995). Problem-based learning: An instructional model and its constructivist framework. *Educational Technology*, 35(5), 31–38.
9. Yew, E. H. J., & Goh, K. (2016). Problem-based learning: An overview of its process and impact on learning. *Health Professions Education*, 2(2), 75–79.
10. Maslak, M. A. (2018). The impact of professional development on teachers' pedagogy. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 30(1), 78–97.
11. Alimov, A. (2020). New approaches to language teaching in Uzbekistan. *Journal of Educational Research*, 12(3), 45–58.
12. Nurmatov, N. (2021). Interactive methods in teaching English language: A case in Uzbekistan. *Language Learning Journal*, 5(4), 123–135.
13. Karimov, D. (2019). Implementing competency-based education: Challenges and opportunities in modern classrooms. *Uzbek Journal of Education*, 2(2), 23–36.
14. Shodmonova, S. (2022). Factors influencing teacher performance in language instruction. *Central Asian Journal of Innovation, Technology, and Education*, 2(1), 17–27.
15. Khakimov, I. (2021). Virtual learning environments and their role in language teaching. *Journal of Modern Education*, 1(3), 50–65.
16. Dautova, H. (2020). Teacher perception of innovative methodologies in language education. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Education and Social Science*, 5(2), 99–110.

17. Abdurakhmonov, U. (2021). Professional development for English language teachers: A systematic review. *Education Research Review*, 7(2), 14–30.
18. Voss, M. A., & Kummer, T. (2018). The role of collaborative learning in effective online education. *Journal of Distance Education*, 33(4), 134–148.
19. Tellis, W. M. (2020). Problem-based learning: Integrating theory and practice. *Journal of Educational Research*, 10(2), 55–70.
20. Yuldasheva, S. (2021). Innovative teaching strategies for fostering speaking skills. *Uzbek Language Teachers' Forum*, 4(1), 29–40.
21. Khamraev, A. (2021). Empirical Evidence of PBL in Teacher Training: Lessons and Insights. *Uzbekistan Education Journal*, 6(3), 50–67.
22. Ibrahim, A. (2019). Developing critical thinking skills through PBL in language courses. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 5(5), 87–95.