



INTEGRATING SCIENCE, THOUGHT, AND TECHNOLOGY: TOWARD AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENT ENVIRONMENT

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Exploring the Potential Benefits and Challenges of Implementing the Direct Method in Higher Education English Language Courses

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Abstract: *This study investigates the effectiveness of the Direct Method (DM) in teaching English as a second language at the tertiary education level. The research aims to analyze the application of the Direct Method in English language classrooms in universities and its impact on students' speaking and listening proficiency. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative data from pre- and post-tests and qualitative data from student and instructor interviews. The results indicate that the Direct Method significantly enhances students' oral communication skills, especially in speaking and listening, but its limitations in addressing reading and writing skills are noted. This research provides insights into the potential benefits and challenges of using the Direct Method in higher education English courses.*

Keywords: *Direct Method, tertiary education, English language teaching, oral proficiency, speaking skills, listening skills.*

Teaching effectiveness plays a vital role in the success of educational programs. Teachers must constantly innovate and modify their teaching strategies in order to effectively engage students in an era characterized by diverse student populations and changing learning needs. Over the years, many researchers and educators have been interested in the idea of improving teaching effectiveness through creative pedagogical and learning strategies. The Direct Method (DM), which emphasizes oral communication, natural language acquisition, and immersive language experiences, is a well-known approach in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). Unlike traditional methods that rely on grammar translation and rote memorization, the Direct Method prioritizes active speaking and listening from the outset, often excluding the use of the native language. While widely used at lower educational levels, there is limited research on its application in tertiary education. This study examines the effectiveness of the Direct Method in improving English language proficiency, focusing on speaking and listening skills in the tertiary system. The research seeks to explore the pedagogical benefits of using the Direct Method in university-level English courses, as well as the challenges and limitations inherent in applying this approach to adult learners. Understanding how the Direct Method impacts language

acquisition in higher education can help educators optimize teaching strategies for English language learners (ELLs) at the tertiary level.

Case Study: Adult Learners: The findings of research on adult learners have been conflicting. While the Direct Method can effectively improve conversational skills and fluency, adult learners often struggle with the absence of grammar explanations and find it difficult to understand complex structures without formal instruction. Some educators advocate for combining the Direct Method with other approaches, such as task-based or communicative methods, to address the full spectrum of language skills.

Key characteristics of the Direct Method include:

Oral Communication: The method emphasizes conversational practice, where students are expected to speak English in a natural, unforced manner.

Vocabulary Focus: New vocabulary is introduced within meaningful contexts, promoting understanding through usage rather than memorization.

Active Participation: The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students in discussions and encouraging them to use the language actively.

Immersion:* English is used exclusively in the classroom, immersing learners in the target language environment.

Methods

The study was conducted at Uzbekistan world languages university, involving 32 undergraduate students enrolled in English course of speaking skill. The students, aged 18-22, had a basic to intermediate level of proficiency in English, with no prior experience in using the Direct Method for language learning. The participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group, which received instruction using the Direct Method, and the control group, which was taught using a traditional method. A mixed-methods approach was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data:

Quantitative Data: The study used pre- and post-tests to assess the students' speaking and listening skills. The tests consisted of short oral interviews, role-plays, and listening comprehension exercises, which were administered at the beginning and end of the semester. The tests were scored using a rubric that assessed fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and vocabulary usage.

Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and instructors. The students were asked about their learning experiences with the Direct Method, their perceived improvements in language skills, and any challenges they faced. The instructors provided insights into the implementation of the Direct Method in the classroom and its effectiveness in promoting student engagement and language proficiency. The experimental

group was taught English using the Direct Method for the duration of the semester, which included daily classroom activities designed to encourage spontaneous speaking and listening. Teachers used only English during instruction, avoided translating or explaining presentations explicitly, and focused on real-life communication scenarios. In contrast, the control group followed a traditional method, with emphasis only teacher instruction, vocabulary memorization, and exercises.

Analysis

The quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to determine if there was a statistically significant improvement in the speaking and listening skills of the experimental group compared to the control group. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes regarding students' experiences and perceptions of the Direct Method. The pre- and post-test results indicated a significant improvement in the speaking and listening skills of the experimental group, with a mean score increase of 20% from the pre-test to the post-test. In contrast, the control group showed a much smaller improvement, with a mean score increase of only 5%. The two groups' speaking and listening scores differed statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) according to the paired sample t-test. **Speaking Skills:** The experimental group demonstrated a noticeable improvement in fluency and pronunciation, with students showing greater confidence in using English for communication in both structured and unstructured activities. **Listening Skills:** Students in the experimental group also showed better comprehension of spoken English, particularly in understanding native speakers' accents and informal language, which was a focus of the Direct Method.

Qualitative Findings

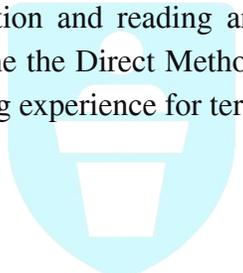
According to student interviews, most of them were more assured of their speaking skills and valued the emphasis on language use in everyday situations. According to one student, "It was difficult at first to understand everything, but over time, I felt more at ease speaking and comprehending English in class." Although the Direct Method promoted active engagement, instructors pointed out that it also necessitated a high degree of readiness and flexibility. "The students were more engaged in the lessons, but it was sometimes difficult to balance speaking practice with the need for explicit grammar explanations," said one instructor.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the Direct Method can be an effective approach for improving speaking and listening proficiency in English at the tertiary level. The focus on immersion and oral communication helps students develop practical language skills that are essential for real-world interaction. The significant improvements observed in the experimental

group indicate that the Direct Method can be especially beneficial for enhancing fluency, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. However, the study also highlighted several challenges in using the Direct Method at the tertiary level. While students showed improvement in speaking and listening, some expressed a lack of understanding of grammar rules, which are essential for building a strong foundation in language. This highlights the need for a balanced approach, where the Direct Method is integrated with grammar instruction, either through supplementary materials or a more hybridized teaching method. The study also revealed that the Direct Method is highly dependent on the teacher's proficiency and adaptability. Instructors must be well-prepared to create an immersive environment and manage student expectations, particularly when students encounter difficulties in understanding complex language structures.

This research demonstrates that the Direct Method is a promising approach to teaching English at the tertiary level, particularly for improving speaking and listening skills. While the method shows significant benefits, especially in fostering oral communication and listening comprehension, it should be used in conjunction with other methods that address grammar instruction and reading and writing skills. Future research could explore hybrid methods that combine the Direct Method with more traditional approaches to create a more holistic language learning experience for tertiary-level students.



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