OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW SOLUTIONS: LA WORK IN GCSE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the traditional challenges and modern solutions connected with the work of Learning Assistants (LAs) in GCSE foreign language classrooms. In many schools, students experience difficulties in speaking, vocabulary acquisition, grammar usage, and classroom participation. Earlier, Learning Assistants often had unclear responsibilities and limited involvement in lesson planning, which reduced the effectiveness of language teaching. Modern educational approaches emphasize collaboration between teachers and LAs, communicative teaching methods, and the use of technology to improve learning outcomes. The article discusses how Learning Assistants help reduce learner anxiety, increase motivation, support weaker students, and create a more interactive classroom environment. The study also highlights the importance of proper training and structured cooperation between teachers and Learning Assistants in improving foreign language education.*

Keywords: *GCSE, foreign language education, Learning Assistants, communicative teaching, learner anxiety, classroom interaction, collaboration, educational technology, motivation, language acquisition.*

Annotatsiya: *Mazkur maqolada GCSE xorijiy til sinflarida Learning Assistant (LA) faoliyati bilan bog‘liq an’anaviy muammolar va zamonaviy yechimlar tahlil qilinadi. Ko‘plab maktablarda o‘quvchilar gapirish, lug‘at boyligini o‘zlashtirish, grammatika va dars jarayonida faol ishtirok etishda qiyinchiliklarga duch keladilar. Avvallari Learning Assistantlarning vazifalari aniq belgilanmagan bo‘lib, ular dars rejalashtirish jarayonida yetarli darajada ishtirok etmagan. Bu esa til o‘qitish samaradorligini pasaytirgan. Zamonaviy ta’lim yondashuvlari esa o‘qituvchi va LA hamkorligini, kommunikativ o‘qitish metodlarini hamda texnologiyalardan foydalanishni muhim deb hisoblaydi. Maqolada Learning Assistantlarning o‘quvchilar qo‘rquvini kamaytirish, motivatsiyasini oshirish, sust o‘zlashtiruvchi o‘quvchilarni qo‘llab-quvvatlash va interaktiv muhit yaratishdagi roli yoritilgan. Shuningdek, LAlarning samarali faoliyati uchun maxsus tayyorgarlik va o‘qituvchi bilan hamkorlik zarurligi ta’kidlangan.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *GCSE, xorijiy til ta’limi, Learning Assistant, kommunikativ o‘qitish, o‘quvchi xavotiri, sinfdagi hamkorlik, motivatsiya, ta’lim texnologiyalari, til o‘zlashtirish, interaktiv ta’lim.*

Аннотация: *В данной статье анализируются традиционные проблемы и современные решения, связанные с деятельностью Learning Assistants (LA) в классах иностранных языков GCSE. Во многих школах учащиеся сталкиваются с трудностями в говорении, усвоении словарного запаса, использовании грамматики и активном участии на уроках. Ранее обязанности Learning Assistants были недостаточно определены, а их участие в планировании уроков было ограниченным, что снижало эффективность обучения иностранным языкам. Современные образовательные подходы подчеркивают важность сотрудничества между учителями и LA, использование коммуникативных методов обучения и образовательных технологий. В статье рассматривается роль Learning Assistants в снижении тревожности учащихся, повышении*

мотивации, поддержке слабых учеников и создании интерактивной образовательной среды. Также подчеркивается необходимость профессиональной подготовки и тесного взаимодействия между учителями и Learning Assistants для повышения качества обучения иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: *GCSE, обучение иностранным языкам, Learning Assistants, коммуникативное обучение, тревожность учащихся, взаимодействие в классе, мотивация, образовательные технологии, усвоение языка, интерактивное обучение.*

Introduction

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is one of the most important educational qualifications in the United Kingdom. Introduced in 1986, GCSE examinations replaced the former O-Level and CSE systems and became a standardized qualification for secondary school students.[1] Today, GCSE subjects include English, Mathematics, Science, and a variety of foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and German. Success in GCSE examinations plays a significant role in students' future educational and professional opportunities.

Foreign language learning at GCSE level has always presented numerous challenges for students and teachers. Learners frequently experience problems related to vocabulary memorization, grammar usage, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and speaking confidence. Many students are afraid of making mistakes in front of their classmates, which limits participation and communication during lessons. In addition, large classroom sizes and limited lesson time often prevent teachers from providing individual support to every learner.

1. [1] Michael Long (1996). *The Role of the Linguistic Environment in Second Language Acquisition*

One important development in modern education is the increasing role of Learning Assistants (LAs) in foreign language classrooms. Learning Assistants help teachers manage classroom activities, support weaker students, encourage communication, and create a more positive learning environment. However, the role of LAs has changed significantly over time. In the past, their responsibilities were often unclear, and they were not fully integrated into the teaching process. Today, educational institutions increasingly recognize the importance of collaboration between teachers and Learning Assistants.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the old problems connected with LA work in GCSE foreign language classrooms and examine the modern solutions that improve language learning outcomes through collaboration, communicative teaching methods, and educational technology.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative analysis of classroom practices, modern educational approaches, and existing theories of second language acquisition. The article compares traditional problems in GCSE foreign language classrooms with modern strategies currently used in schools. Particular attention is given to the role of Learning Assistants in improving classroom communication, reducing learner anxiety, and supporting collaborative learning.

The research focuses on several important aspects:

- classroom interaction;
- student participation;
- communicative teaching methods;
- emotional support for learners;
- collaboration between teachers and Learning Assistants;
- use of educational technologies.

The study also examines theoretical perspectives such as Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996), Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982),

and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), which explain the importance of interaction, emotional comfort, and guided support in language learning.

Main Part

Traditional Problems in GCSE Foreign Language Classrooms

For many years, foreign language classrooms faced several serious challenges. One of the most common problems was students' fear of speaking. Learners often worried about making grammatical mistakes, forgetting vocabulary, or pronouncing words incorrectly. Because of this fear, many students avoided classroom participation and remained silent during speaking activities.

Another significant issue was the teacher-centered nature of traditional classrooms. Teachers were usually responsible for large groups of students and had limited opportunities to provide individual attention. Stronger students participated actively, while weaker or shy learners often remained unnoticed. As a result, many students gradually lost confidence and motivation.

In earlier educational systems, Learning Assistants were not fully integrated into classroom activities. Their responsibilities were often unclear, and they rarely participated in lesson planning. In some classrooms, LAs simply observed lessons or supported only one student with special educational needs. Consequently, their potential contribution to foreign language learning remained limited.

Limited practice opportunities also represented a major problem. Speaking and listening activities require regular interaction and communication practice; however, classroom time was often insufficient. Students therefore struggled to develop fluency and communicative competence.[2]

2. [2] Stephen Krashen (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.*

Another challenge involved learner anxiety and emotional pressure. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, stress and fear negatively influence language acquisition. Many GCSE students experienced nervousness before examinations, especially during speaking assessments. This emotional barrier reduced participation and slowed language development.

Modern Solutions and the Changing Role of Learning Assistants

Modern educational approaches have introduced several effective solutions to these traditional problems. One of the most important changes is the increased collaboration between teachers and Learning Assistants. In successful GCSE foreign language classrooms, teachers and LAs now work together before lessons begin. They discuss lesson objectives, classroom activities, and students who may require additional support.

Learning Assistants also contribute to creating a supportive and positive classroom atmosphere. Instead of correcting every mistake immediately, they encourage students through positive feedback and motivation. Expressions such as "Good attempt," "Excellent progress," and "Keep trying" help learners feel more comfortable when speaking a foreign language.

Small-group learning has become another important strategy. Learning Assistants often work with smaller groups of students during pair work, role-plays, and communicative activities. In smaller groups, learners feel less anxious and more willing to participate in discussions. This approach improves speaking fluency and communication skills.

Technology also plays an important role in modern foreign language education. Digital platforms, language-learning applications, online speaking activities, and interactive educational tools provide students with additional opportunities to practice outside the classroom. Learning Assistants frequently guide students in using these resources effectively.

Furthermore, Learning Assistants help weaker learners through scaffolding techniques. When students struggle with vocabulary or grammar,

LAs provide immediate explanations and guidance without interrupting the flow of the lesson. This support allows learners to remain engaged and continue participating actively.

Practical classroom activities such as presentations, debates, role-plays, peer feedback sessions, and speaking clubs have also become valuable solutions. These activities encourage students to use language actively rather than memorizing rules passively. As a result, learners develop greater confidence and communicative competence.[3]

Results and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Learning Assistants can significantly improve the quality of GCSE foreign language education when their role is clearly defined and professionally supported. Students who receive LA support often demonstrate greater classroom participation, improved speaking confidence, and stronger motivation.

The collaborative model between teachers and Learning Assistants creates a more interactive learning environment. Students benefit from additional explanations, emotional support, and increased opportunities for communication practice. These improvements align with communicative language teaching principles and modern second language acquisition theories.

However, several limitations still exist. The effectiveness of Learning Assistants depends greatly on professional training and pedagogical understanding. Without proper preparation, some LAs may rely excessively on translation rather than communicative interaction. Financial limitations in some schools may also reduce opportunities to employ and train qualified Learning Assistants.

3. [3] Lev Vygotsky (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.*

Despite these challenges, the integration of Learning Assistants into GCSE foreign language classrooms represents an important educational innovation. Their contribution supports not only academic achievement but also students' emotional well-being and confidence in language learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of Learning Assistants in GCSE foreign language classrooms has developed significantly from the past to the present. Traditional educational models often limited student interaction, increased learner anxiety, and provided insufficient individual support. Today, modern teaching approaches emphasize collaboration, communication, and learner-centered instruction, where Learning Assistants play an essential role.

Learning Assistants help create supportive classroom environments, encourage participation, reduce fear of mistakes, and improve communication skills through interactive activities and individual guidance. Their work contributes directly to students' academic performance, confidence, and motivation.

Although some challenges remain, including the need for professional training and financial support, Learning Assistants continue to represent one of the most effective modern solutions to long-standing problems in foreign language education. Future educational development should therefore focus on strengthening teacher-LA collaboration, improving professional preparation, and expanding opportunities for communicative language learning in GCSE classrooms.

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