How Do Interactive Classroom Activities Influence Students' Speaking Confidence in EFL Lessons?

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Abstract

This action research investigates how interactive classroom activities influence students speaking confidence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons at the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining classroom observations, student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, and a reflective teaching journal. Preliminary findings indicate that communicative activities such as role-plays, games, and group tasks significantly reduce student anxiety and foster greater willingness to speak in English. The research highlights the critical role of the teacher as facilitator in creating a supportive, low-stress communicative environment.

Keywords: *interactive activities, speaking confidence, EFL, action research, communicative language teaching, anxiety*

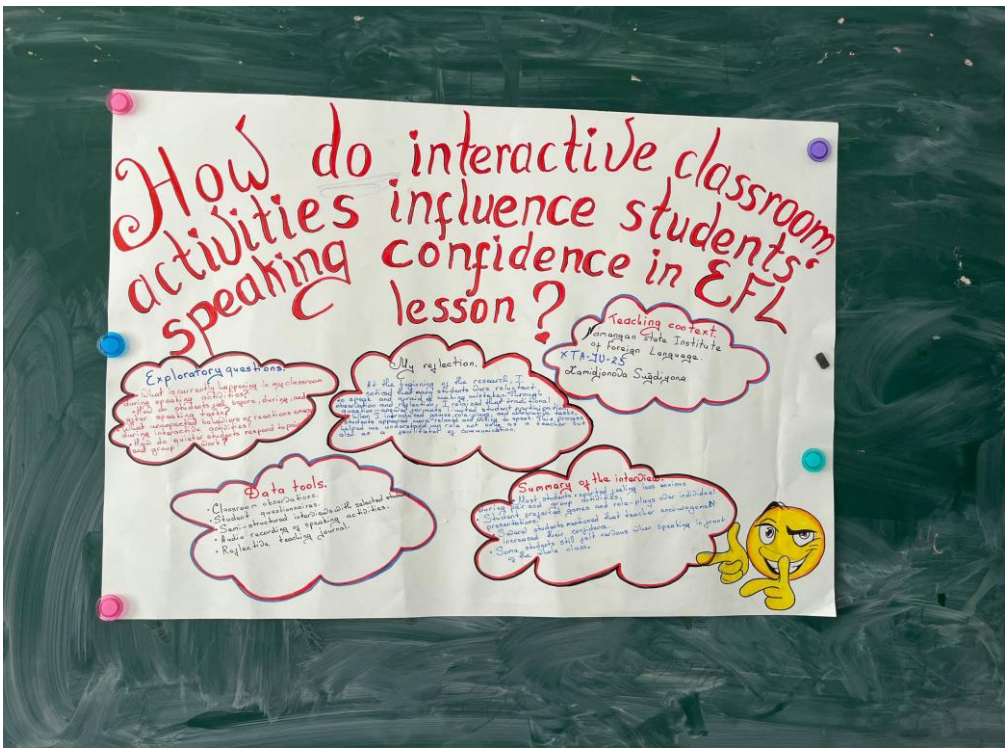


Figure 1. Research Concept Poster – Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages (XTA-JU-23)

1. Introduction

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners to develop. Unlike reading or writing, oral communication demands real-time language processing, emotional regulation, and social awareness — all simultaneously. For many students in Central Asian educational contexts, speaking in a foreign language in front of peers provokes significant anxiety, leading to avoidance behaviors, reduced participation, and limited progress in oral fluency.

Interactive classroom activities — including pair work, group discussions, role-plays, simulation games, and communicative tasks — have been proposed by researchers as powerful tools to reduce language anxiety and build learner confidence (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Dornyei, 2001). However, the specific dynamics of how these activities shape student confidence in a post-Soviet, Uzbek EFL context remain underexplored.

This action research project, conducted at the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages (group XTA-JU-23), seeks to bridge this gap by examining the lived experiences of both students and the teacher-researcher during interactive speaking activities.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What is currently happening in the classroom during speaking activities?
2. How do students feel before, during, and after speaking tasks?
3. What unexpected behaviors or reactions emerge during interactive activities?
4. How do quieter students respond to pair and group work?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speaking Anxiety in EFL Contexts

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is well-documented in the literature as a negative affective factor influencing language acquisition. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) identified three components of FLA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. In EFL classrooms, these fears are particularly salient during speaking tasks, where errors are immediately visible and socially evaluated.

2.2 Interactive Activities and the Affective Filter

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) posits that high anxiety, low motivation, or low self-confidence erect a mental barrier that prevents language input from reaching the language acquisition device. Conversely, a low affective filter — achieved through engaging, low-pressure, interactive tasks — facilitates acquisition. Role-plays, games, and structured pair activities are thus seen as vehicles for lowering this filter.

2.3 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes meaningful interaction as both the means and the goal of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Within CLT, the teacher role shifts from

authoritative instructor to facilitator of communication — a role that the teacher-researcher in this study consciously attempts to adopt.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts an action research design, which is a cyclical, practitioner-led inquiry process that integrates data collection, reflection, and pedagogical adjustment within the teaching context itself (Burns, 2010). Action research is particularly appropriate here because the primary aim is not generalizable theory but immediate, context-specific improvement in classroom practice.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages with group XTA-JU-23. Participants are undergraduate students enrolled in an English language program. The teacher-researcher (Xamidjonova Sug'diyona) is both the instructor of the class and the primary investigator, placing this study firmly within the tradition of insider action research.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

- Classroom observations — systematic field notes documenting student behavior and affective cues.
- Student questionnaires — structured surveys capturing self-reported anxiety and confidence levels.
- Semi-structured interviews with selected students — allowing deeper exploration of individual experiences.
- Audio recordings of speaking activities — providing objective data on linguistic output.
- Reflective teaching journal — maintained by the teacher-researcher throughout the study.

4. Preliminary Findings

4.1 Summary of Student Interviews

Interview data revealed several notable patterns. Most students reported feeling less anxious during pair and group activities compared to individual presentations. Students expressed a clear preference for games and role-plays over formal individual presentations. Several students mentioned that teacher encouragement significantly increased their confidence. However, a minority of students reported still feeling nervous when speaking in front of the entire class.

4.2 Teacher Reflection

At the beginning of the research, the teacher-researcher noticed that many students were reluctant to speak and were making mistakes. It became apparent that traditional question-and-answer methods created anxiety. Introducing student-partnering tasks, games, role-plays, and collaborative activities helped students appear more willing and able to speak. This process helped the teacher-researcher

understand her role not only as a teacher but also as a facilitator of communication.

5. Discussion

The preliminary findings are largely consistent with the existing literature on CLT and FLA. The preference for pair and group work over individual presentations aligns with Krashen's affective filter model. The effectiveness of teacher encouragement corroborates Dornyei's (2001) work on motivational teaching practice.

That some students still felt nervous before the whole class speaks to the complexity of FLA — it is not eliminated by interactive formats alone. A graduated exposure approach may be beneficial: beginning with dyadic tasks, progressing to small groups, and eventually to whole-class presentations as confidence builds.

6. Conclusion

This action research project provides evidence that interactive classroom activities — when thoughtfully designed and facilitated — can meaningfully improve students speaking confidence in EFL contexts. The role of the teacher as a supportive facilitator, rather than a corrective evaluator, appears to be central to this process. Future cycles of this action research will focus on refining activity design for persistently anxious learners.

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