

THE ROLE OF INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING CONFIDENCE

<https://doi.org/10.70728/phil.v05.i03.014>

Khamrayeva Khushbaroy

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7445-0153>

xushbaroyxamrayeva@gmail.com

Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur Universal Academy

Abstract: Speaking confidence is widely acknowledged as a crucial affective factor influencing learners' oral participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Despite adequate linguistic knowledge, many EFL learners refrain from speaking due to anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and limited opportunities for meaningful interaction. This study investigates the role of interactive activities in developing students' speaking confidence in an EFL classroom context. The research employed a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design involving an experimental group and a control group consisting of 60 secondary school EFL learners in Uzbekistan. Over a six-week intervention period, the experimental group was exposed to interactive activities such as role-plays, information-gap tasks, jigsaw activities, and debates, while the control group received traditional teacher-centered instruction. Data were collected using a speaking confidence questionnaire and a speaking performance rubric. Quantitative data were analyzed through paired and independent samples t-tests, with effect sizes calculated using Cohen's d. The results revealed a statistically significant increase in speaking confidence among students in the experimental group, with a large effect size, whereas no significant improvement was observed in the control group. Furthermore, role-play and information-gap activities demonstrated stronger effects on confidence development compared to debates. The findings suggest that interactive activities create supportive learning environments that reduce anxiety and encourage active oral participation. The study highlights the importance of integrating interactive pedagogy to foster confident and communicatively competent EFL learners.

Keywords: speaking confidence; interactive activities; EFL classrooms; speaking anxiety; willingness to communicate; communicative language teaching

Introduction

In recent years, low speaking confidence has been widely recognized as a persistent and global challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Despite sustained efforts to improve communicative competence, a considerable

proportion of EFL learners remain reluctant to participate in oral activities due to speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation. This phenomenon often results in classroom silence and passive learning behaviors, which significantly hinder the development of oral proficiency. Statistical evidence highlights the seriousness of this issue. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2023), although Uzbekistan has demonstrated gradual improvement in overall English proficiency, learners' speaking skills remain substantially weaker than reading and listening skills, particularly at the secondary school level. The report indicates that over 62% of Uzbek EFL learners deliberately avoid speaking English in class, primarily due to fear of making errors and peer or teacher judgment. These findings suggest that affective barriers, rather than linguistic limitations alone, play a decisive role in students' oral participation.

Empirical research from comparable EFL contexts further corroborates this problem. A large-scale classroom study by Liu and Jackson (2008) revealed that approximately 70% of EFL learners experienced moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, which directly restricted their willingness to speak in class. More recent evidence provided by Alrabai (2020) demonstrates that speaking anxiety accounts for nearly 45% of the variance in learners' willingness to communicate, underscoring the central role of speaking confidence in oral language development. Together, these studies confirm that speaking confidence is not a peripheral factor but a core determinant of communicative engagement.

In the Uzbek educational context, the issue is further compounded by instructional practices. A national pedagogical monitoring report published by the Uzbekistan Ministry of Preschool and School Education (2022) indicates that foreign language classrooms remain predominantly teacher-centered. The report shows that students engage in oral production for only 18-22% of total class time, while teachers account for more than 65% of classroom discourse. Such limited opportunities for student-student interaction significantly reduce meaningful speaking practice and, consequently, undermine the development of speaking confidence. Interactive activities have increasingly been proposed as an effective pedagogical response to these challenges. Activities such as role-plays, information-gap tasks, jigsaw activities, and debates are believed to create supportive learning environments that reduce anxiety, promote peer collaboration, and encourage active oral participation. However, despite the growing body of research advocating interactive pedagogy, several important gaps remain in the literature.

First, many existing studies prioritize speaking achievement-such as fluency or accuracy-while treating speaking confidence as a secondary or implicit variable. Second, there is a lack of systematic comparative research examining which types of interactive activities are most effective in enhancing speaking confidence. Third,

empirical evidence from Central Asian EFL contexts, particularly Uzbekistan, remains scarce, despite the region's distinctive socio-cultural norms that may influence classroom interaction and learner participation.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to provide empirical, classroom-based evidence on the role of interactive activities in developing students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms. Drawing on data collected from Uzbek secondary school learners during the 2024-2025 academic year, the study seeks to examine both affective and performance-related outcomes of interactive instruction.

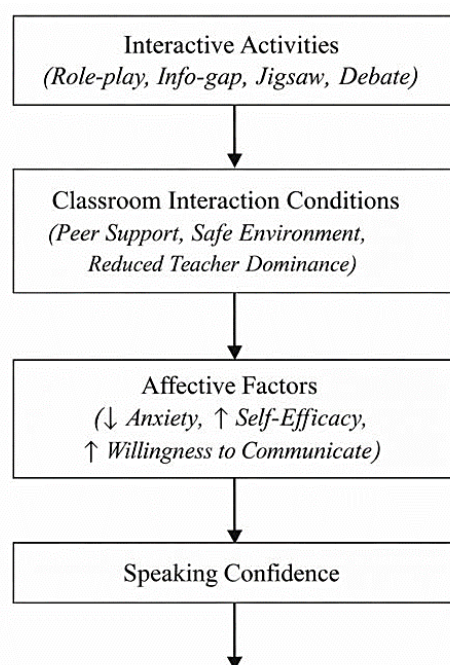


Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

Research Questions

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Do interactive activities statistically significantly improve students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms?

RQ2: Which types of interactive activities (role-play, debate, information-gap, jigsaw tasks) have the strongest effect on students' speaking confidence?

RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between changes in students' speaking confidence and their speaking performance, particularly in terms of fluency and accuracy?

Novelty and Practical Significance

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated analytical approach, which simultaneously examines interactive activity types, speaking confidence as an affective construct, and measurable speaking performance outcomes. Unlike previous research that considers these variables in isolation, this study proposes and empirically tests a comprehensive framework within an underrepresented EFL context. Practically, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based pedagogical

guidance for EFL teachers and curriculum designers in Uzbekistan and similar contexts, supporting the effective integration of interactive activities to foster confident and communicatively active learners.

Literature Review

Speaking confidence is widely recognized as a key affective factor influencing learners' oral participation in EFL classrooms. It refers to learners' belief in their ability to express ideas orally in a foreign language without excessive fear or hesitation. One of the most influential theoretical foundations of speaking confidence is self-efficacy theory, proposed by Bandura (1997), which emphasizes that learners' perceived capabilities strongly determine their motivation, persistence, and performance. In EFL contexts, students with high speaking self-efficacy are more likely to initiate communication, take risks, and sustain interaction even when linguistic difficulties arise.

Closely related to speaking confidence is the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC). MacIntyre et al. (1998) define WTC as an individual's readiness to engage in communication when given the opportunity. Numerous studies indicate that learners with higher speaking confidence demonstrate greater willingness to communicate, while those with low confidence tend to remain silent, regardless of their actual language proficiency. On the other hand, foreign language speaking anxiety has been identified as a major barrier to speaking confidence. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) argue that language-specific anxiety negatively affects learners' cognitive processing and performance. Speaking anxiety often stems from fear of negative evaluation, concern about making grammatical or pronunciation errors, and past negative classroom experiences. In teacher-centered classrooms, where errors are publicly corrected, anxiety tends to intensify, further suppressing learners' confidence and participation. Taken together, self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, and speaking anxiety form an interrelated affective system that directly shapes learners' speaking confidence and oral behavior in EFL classrooms.

Theoretical Foundations of Interactive Learning

Interactive learning is grounded in several well-established language learning theories that emphasize communication, collaboration, and meaningful use of language. From a socio-cultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs through social interaction and dialogic engagement. According to this view, language development is facilitated when learners collaborate with peers and receive scaffolding within their Zone of Proximal Development. Interactive activities create conditions in which learners jointly construct meaning, negotiate understanding, and gradually internalize linguistic forms. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach further supports interactive learning by prioritizing meaning-focused communication over isolated grammar practice. Littlewood (2004) emphasizes that

communicative activities provide learners with opportunities to use language for authentic purposes, thereby enhancing both communicative competence and learner confidence. In CLT-oriented classrooms, errors are viewed as a natural part of learning rather than as failures, which contributes to a psychologically safer learning environment. Similarly, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), as articulated by Ellis (2018), conceptualizes language learning as a process that emerges from completing meaningful tasks. Interactive tasks in TBLT encourage learners to focus on message conveyance rather than linguistic accuracy, reducing performance pressure and anxiety. This shift of focus is particularly beneficial for developing speaking confidence, as learners become more concerned with expressing meaning than with avoiding mistakes.

Types and Mechanisms of Interactive Activities

Interactive activities vary in structure, cognitive demand, and communicative purpose. Role-play activities allow learners to assume imaginary roles, which reduces personal exposure and fear of judgment. By speaking through a role, learners often feel less anxious and more willing to experiment with language. Information-gap tasks require learners to exchange missing information to complete a task. These activities naturally promote interaction and spontaneous speech, as communication becomes necessary rather than forced. Jigsaw activities foster collaborative learning by making each learner responsible for a specific part of the task, thereby increasing interdependence and participation. Debates, while cognitively more demanding, encourage extended speaking, argumentation, and critical thinking, contributing to advanced oral competence and confidence.

The effectiveness of interactive activities can be explained through several mechanisms: increased peer support, reduced teacher dominance, repeated speaking opportunities, and the normalization of errors as part of communication. These conditions collectively create a low-anxiety environment that supports the gradual development of speaking confidence.

Empirical Evidence and Research Gaps

Empirical studies generally report positive effects of interactive instruction on speaking skills. For example, Skehan (2009) found that task-based interaction enhances fluency and complexity, while Dao (2021) reported improvements in learners' oral engagement through collaborative tasks. However, findings related to speaking confidence are less consistent. Some studies report significant reductions in anxiety and increased confidence, while others indicate modest or context-dependent effects. Moreover, many studies examine interactive activities as a single category, without comparing the relative effectiveness of different activity types. Additionally, the relationship between increased speaking confidence and measurable speaking

performance remains underexplored, particularly in EFL contexts where socio-cultural factors discourage overt oral participation.

Notably, empirical research from Central Asian contexts, including Uzbekistan, remains limited. This gap highlights the need for classroom-based studies that consider both affective and performance-related outcomes within specific educational and cultural settings.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which interactive activities influence students' speaking confidence by reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to communicate. Enhanced speaking confidence, in turn, contributes to improved speaking performance, particularly in terms of fluency and accuracy.

Hypotheses:

- H1: Interactive activities significantly increase students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms.
- H2: Different types of interactive activities have differential effects on students' speaking confidence.
- H3: Increased speaking confidence is positively associated with improvements in speaking fluency and accuracy.

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design involving an experimental group and a control group. This design was selected to examine the causal impact of interactive activities on students' speaking confidence under authentic classroom conditions. The inclusion of a control group receiving traditional instruction strengthened the internal validity of the study and allowed for meaningful comparison.

Participants

The study was conducted at *Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur Universal Academy*, located in Andijan City, Andijan Region, Uzbekistan. The participants were 60 secondary school students aged 15-16 with an intermediate (B1) level of English proficiency.. Two intact classes were selected: one class (n = 30) was assigned to the experimental group, and the other (n = 30) served as the control group. Both groups followed the same curriculum and textbook to ensure instructional consistency.

Instruments

Several instruments were employed to collect reliable and valid data:

1. Speaking Confidence Scale-A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was developed based on self-efficacy and speaking confidence literature. The scale measured learners' confidence in expressing ideas, participating in discussions, and speaking without fear. The internal

consistency of the scale was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding 0.70.

2. Speaking Performance Rubric-An analytic rubric was used to assess students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and interaction. Each criterion was rated on a five-point scale by two trained raters to ensure objectivity.

3. Classroom Observation Checklist-An observation checklist was employed to record students' participation patterns, interaction frequency, and engagement during speaking activities.

Procedure

The intervention was conducted over a period of six weeks, with two English lessons per week. Prior to the intervention, both groups completed the speaking confidence questionnaire and a speaking performance task as pre-tests. During the intervention, the experimental group participated in lessons incorporating role-plays, information-gap tasks, jigsaw activities, and debates, with two to three interactive activities implemented in each lesson. The control group continued with traditional teacher-centered instruction. At the end of the intervention, both groups completed the same instruments as post-tests.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software. Paired samples t-tests were conducted to examine within-group changes in speaking confidence. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare post-test results between the experimental and control groups. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d to determine the magnitude of observed effects. The reliability of questionnaire data was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable.

Results

This section presents the quantitative findings of the study, focusing on changes in students' speaking confidence and differences between the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics and inferential test results are reported to address the research questions.

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Confidence

Figure 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of speaking confidence scores for the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention. Mean scores are presented to highlight overall trends in speaking confidence development across groups. The figure shows a substantial increase in mean confidence scores for the experimental group following the intervention, while only a slight change is observed in the control group.

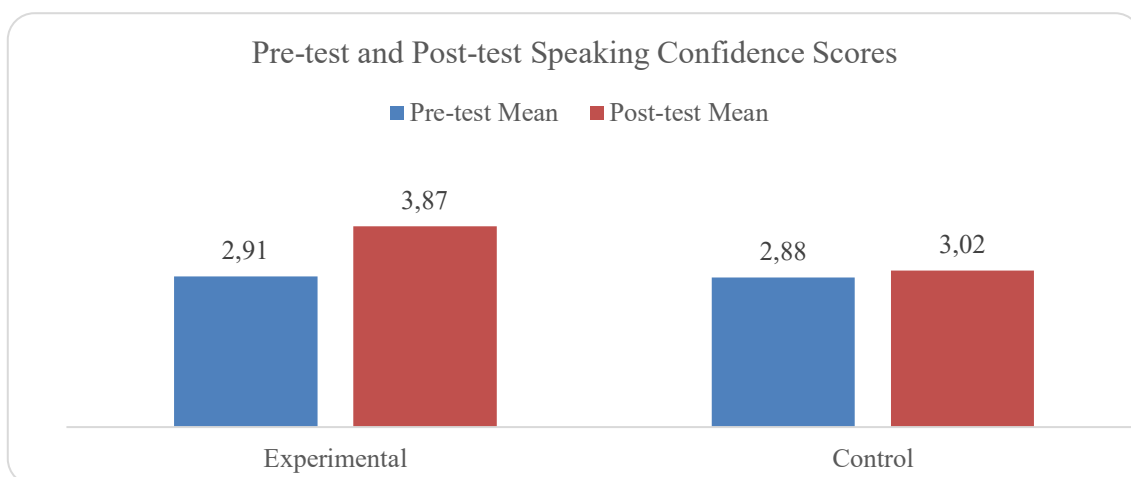


Figure 1. Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Confidence Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Figure 1, both the experimental and control groups demonstrated comparable levels of speaking confidence at the pre-test stage. Following the six-week intervention, the experimental group exhibited a substantial increase in mean speaking confidence scores, whereas the control group showed only a marginal improvement over the same period. Inferential Analysis: Effects of Interactive Activities on Speaking Confidence

To determine whether the observed changes were statistically significant, paired samples t-tests and independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. t-test Results for Speaking Confidence

Comparison	t	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
Experimental group (Pre-Post)	8.41	<.001	[0.72, 1.18]	1.54
Control group (Pre-Post)	1.36	.182	[-0.05, 0.32]	0.25
Post-test (Experimental vs Control)	6.02	<.001	[0.56, 0.92]	1.38

The paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant increase in speaking confidence in the experimental group ($t = 8.41$, $p < .001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.54$). In contrast, the change observed in the control group was not statistically significant ($p > .05$) and demonstrated only a small effect size.

An independent samples t-test comparing post-test scores between the two groups indicated a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group ($t = 6.02$, $p < .001$). The large effect size further confirms the strong impact of interactive activities on students' speaking confidence.

Comparative Effects of Different Interactive Activities

To explore whether different types of interactive activities had differential effects on speaking confidence (RQ2), mean confidence gains associated with each activity type were examined within the experimental group.

Table 3. Mean Confidence Gain by Activity Type (Experimental Group)

Interactive Activity	Mean Gain (ΔM)	SD
Role-play	1.05	0.38
Information-gap	0.89	0.41
Jigsaw tasks	0.83	0.36
Debate	0.67	0.44

The results indicate that role-play activities produced the highest mean gain in speaking confidence, followed by information-gap and jigsaw tasks. Debate activities, while beneficial, showed comparatively lower confidence gains, possibly due to higher cognitive and linguistic demands placed on learners.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results demonstrate that interactive activities had a statistically significant and practically meaningful effect on students' speaking confidence. Learners exposed to interactive instruction showed markedly greater improvement than those receiving traditional teacher-centered instruction. Among the activity types examined, role-play and information-gap tasks emerged as the most effective in fostering speaking confidence.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide strong empirical support for the effectiveness of interactive activities in enhancing students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms. The statistically significant improvement observed in the experimental group aligns closely with previous research that emphasizes the role of interaction in reducing affective barriers to oral communication (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Alrabai, 2020). Similar to earlier studies, learners exposed to interactive instruction demonstrated greater willingness to speak and higher levels of confidence than those receiving traditional teacher-centered instruction. The results are particularly consistent with studies grounded in socio-cultural and communicative theories, which argue that language learning is facilitated through meaningful social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Littlewood, 2004). The substantial effect sizes obtained in this study suggest that interactive activities do not merely produce incremental improvements but can lead to practically meaningful changes in learners' affective orientation toward speaking. However, unlike some studies that report only modest confidence gains, the present findings indicate a relatively strong impact, which may be attributed to the systematic and sustained integration of interactive activities over several weeks.

The differential effects of activity types also merit discussion. Role-play and information-gap tasks were found to generate higher confidence gains than debates. This finding partially contrasts with research highlighting the benefits of debates for advanced speaking skills, yet it is consistent with studies suggesting that cognitively demanding tasks may initially increase anxiety among intermediate learners. Role-play activities, in particular, appear to reduce personal risk by allowing learners to speak through assigned roles, thereby lowering fear of negative evaluation. Similarly, information-gap tasks create a natural need for communication, shifting learners' attention from form to meaning and reducing performance pressure.

From a mechanistic perspective, several factors help explain these outcomes. First, interactive activities foster a psychologically safe learning environment, where errors are treated as part of communication rather than as failures. Second, peer support and collaboration reduce the dominance of teacher evaluation and encourage shared responsibility for communication. Third, interactive tasks provide rehearsal time and repeated speaking opportunities, which gradually build confidence through successful experiences. Finally, reduced anxiety allows learners to allocate more cognitive resources to message formulation, resulting in more fluent and confident speech.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that speaking confidence should be viewed as a central instructional goal rather than a secondary by-product of speaking practice. For teachers, this means rethinking classroom interaction patterns and moving away from predominantly teacher-fronted discourse toward learner-centered communicative engagement.

Implications

The results of this study have several practical implications for EFL teaching and classroom practice.

First, speaking lessons should be designed around a progressive interactional sequence:

warm-up → guided interaction → freer speaking → reflection. Warm-up activities help lower anxiety and activate background knowledge, guided interaction provides structured support, freer speaking allows learners to express ideas autonomously, and reflection encourages self-awareness and confidence building.

Second, the selection of interactive activities should be based on clear pedagogical criteria. Activities should be age- and proficiency-appropriate, promote equal participation, and minimize fear of negative evaluation. For intermediate learners, role-plays and information-gap tasks may be particularly effective, while more cognitively demanding activities such as debates can be introduced gradually as confidence increases.

Third, assessment practices should align with confidence-oriented instruction. The use of analytic speaking rubrics focusing on fluency, interaction, and comprehensibility-rather than exclusively on grammatical accuracy-can reduce anxiety and encourage risk-taking. Additionally, combining peer feedback with constructive teacher feedback helps learners perceive evaluation as supportive rather than punitive, further reinforcing speaking confidence.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to one educational institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the intervention period was relatively short, and longer-term effects of interactive instruction on speaking confidence were not examined. Third, random assignment of participants was not feasible due to institutional constraints, which may have introduced uncontrolled variables. Finally, the study relied primarily on quantitative measures; incorporating qualitative data such as interviews or learner reflections could provide deeper insights into learners' experiences.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of interactive activities in developing students' speaking confidence in EFL classrooms and found that interactive instruction leads to statistically significant and practically meaningful improvements in learners' confidence. The findings demonstrate that speaking confidence is closely linked to classroom interaction patterns and can be effectively fostered through structured communicative activities. Among the activity types examined, role-play and information-gap tasks emerged as particularly effective in supporting confidence development. Overall, the study underscores the importance of integrating affective considerations into speaking instruction. Future research may extend this work by exploring long-term effects, diverse educational contexts, and qualitative dimensions of speaking confidence.

References

- Alrabai, F. (2020). Exploring the effects of anxiety-reducing strategies on EFL learners' speaking skills and anxiety. *System*, 94, 102327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102327>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dao, P. (2021). Task-based language teaching and EFL learners' oral engagement: Evidence from classroom interaction. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(4), 580-599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820943562>

Ellis, R. (2018). *Reflections on task-based language teaching*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/ELLIS5130>

EF Education First. (2023). EF English Proficiency Index. Retrieved from <https://www.ef.com/epi/>

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>

Littlewood, W. (2004). The task-based approach: Some questions and suggestions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 319-326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.319>

Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 71-86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x>

MacIntyre, P. D. (2007). Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(4), 564-576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00623.x>

MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a second language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x>

Skehan, P. (2009). Modelling second language performance: Integrating complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexis. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 510-532. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp047>

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Uzbekistan Ministry of Preschool and School Education. (2022). *National pedagogical monitoring report on foreign language instruction*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan.