

METHODS FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract. Speaking is one of the most complex skills in English language learning because it requires learners to combine vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, interactional strategy and confidence in real time. This article analyses effective methods for developing students' oral speech skills in English classes at university level. The study is based on a review of CEFR-oriented speaking descriptors, British Council teaching resources and a model quasi-experimental classroom dataset involving interactive speaking methods. The proposed intervention includes role-play, information-gap activities, small-group discussion, debate, presentations, interviews, peer feedback and digital speaking practice. Statistical comparison of a model experimental group and a control group shows that systematic use of interactive methods can substantially improve speaking performance, especially fluency, interaction and confidence. The article provides tables, diagrams, a speaking assessment rubric and an implementation model that can be adapted for English language classes in higher education.

Keywords: Speaking skills, English language teaching, communicative competence, interactive methods, role-play, fluency, university students, CEFR, peer feedback.

1. Introduction

In the context of higher education, English speaking skills are essential for academic mobility, professional communication, international collaboration and access to global knowledge. However, speaking remains a difficult skill for many university students because it requires immediate language production, accurate pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary choice, turn-taking and psychological readiness to speak in front of others.

The need for targeted speaking instruction is especially relevant in Uzbekistan. The EF English Proficiency Index 2025 reports that the index is based on 2.2 million adult test takers in 123 countries and regions; Uzbekistan was classified at a low/very low proficiency level in recent reports, which indicates that classroom practice should place stronger emphasis on communicative performance rather than only grammatical explanation. British Council materials on Uzbekistan also identify the low level of English skills among school leavers entering higher education and the labour market as a national concern. Therefore, university English classes need systematic speaking methods that increase students' active participation and communicative confidence.

The purpose of this article is to systematize practical and evidence-informed methods for developing students' English speaking skills in university classes and to present a statistical model for evaluating their effectiveness.

Table 1. External context indicators used to justify the study

| Indicator | Value / emphasis | Pedagogical implication |
|--|---|--|
| EF EPI 2025 coverage | 2.2 million adult test takers; 123 countries/regions | English proficiency is globally benchmarked and comparable. |
| Uzbekistan EF EPI 2025 result | Rank 104 of 123; score 429 in public reports | University English courses need more communicative output practice. |
| British Council Future English in Uzbekistan | Low English skills of school leavers entering tertiary education/work identified as a problem | First-year university students may require speaking support. |
| CEFR speaking perspective | Spoken interaction and production are treated as central communicative activities | Speaking assessment should include interaction, fluency and coherence. |

2. Literature Review

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) views learners as social agents who use language for reception, production, interaction and mediation. For speaking classes, this means that learners should not only know vocabulary and grammar but should also be able to negotiate meaning, ask for clarification, respond to others and use appropriate strategies in real communication.

British Council LearnEnglish speaking resources are organized by CEFR level and emphasize noticing useful language, practising phrases in specific situations and using interactive exercises. This aligns with the classroom principle that students improve speaking when they repeatedly practise useful language in meaningful situations.

Recent empirical research also supports situated and interactive speaking instruction. Yan (2024) reported significant improvement in learners' speaking performance after eight role-play classes in a VR-enhanced situated learning environment, with progress in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Although advanced digital environments are not

always available, the core pedagogical principles—authentic context, collaboration, guided practice, reflection and feedback—can be applied in ordinary English classrooms.

Speaking Skills Development Framework

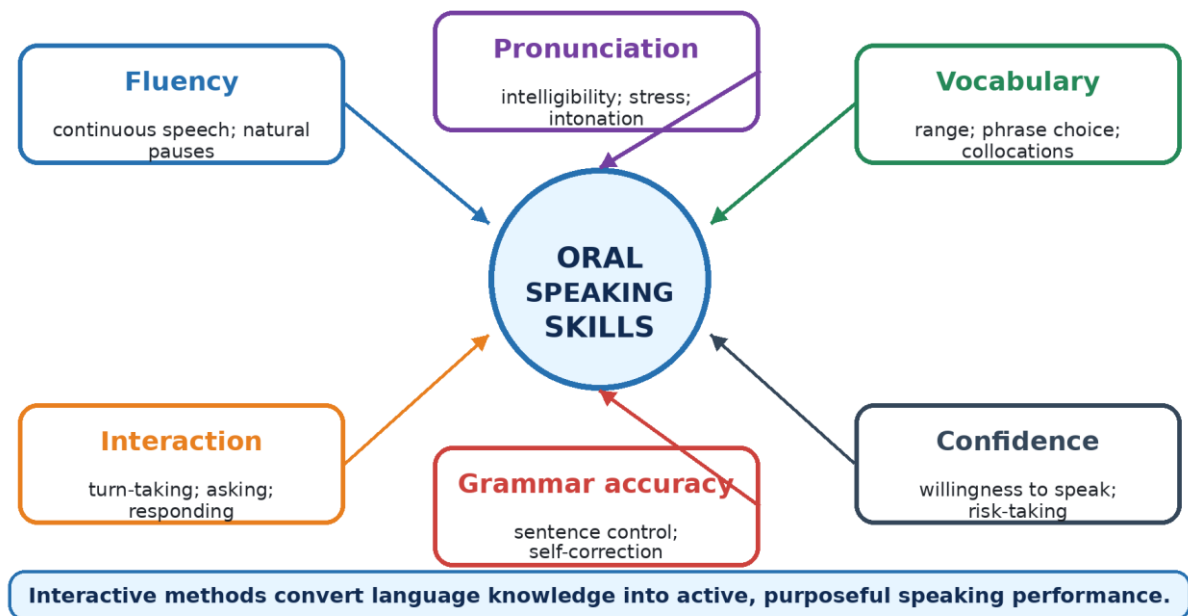


Figure 1. Speaking skills development framework for university English classes.

3. Materials and Methods

Research design. The article uses a mixed-method pedagogical model: (1) theoretical analysis of speaking skill components, (2) method selection according to communicative teaching principles and (3) statistical evaluation through a model quasi-experimental classroom dataset. The numerical data are presented as an illustrative pilot model that can be replaced with actual university data during institutional implementation.

Table 2. Rubric for evaluating students’ English speaking skills

| Criterion | Low performance | Medium performance | High performance |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| Fluency | Frequent pauses; speech is fragmented | Some hesitation; message mostly understandable | Smooth speech with natural pauses |
| Pronunciation | Many sounds/intonation patterns reduce intelligibility | Generally intelligible with occasional pronunciation problems | Clear pronunciation and appropriate stress/intonation |



| | | | |
|------------------|--|---|--|
| Vocabulary | Limited word choice; frequent repetition | Adequate vocabulary for familiar topics | Wide range of topic-related vocabulary and phrases |
| Grammar accuracy | Frequent basic errors interfere with meaning | Errors occur but message remains clear | Mostly accurate structures with self-correction |
| Interaction | Rarely initiates or responds | Participates when prompted | Initiates, responds and maintains conversation |
| Confidence | Avoids speaking; relies on native language | Speaks with support and preparation | Speaks actively and takes communicative risks |

Table 3. Interactive methods selected for speaking skill development

| Method | Main speaking function | Typical classroom task | Assessment focus |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Role-play | Practising language in social situations | Student A is a customer; Student B is a service provider | Fluency, appropriacy, pronunciation |
| Information-gap activity | Asking and answering for missing information | Students have different maps/timetables and must complete a task | Question forms, clarification, interaction |
| Small-group discussion | Expressing opinions and responding to others | Discuss a social, academic or professional problem | Turn-taking, argumentation, coherence |
| Debate | Structured persuasive speaking | Teams defend different positions | Argument quality, reaction, discourse markers |
| Presentation | Extended individual speech | Short academic or professional presentation | Organization, vocabulary, pronunciation |
| Interview task | Spontaneous interaction | Students interview classmates and report findings | Questioning, listening, summarizing |
| Peer feedback | Reflective accuracy development | Students use a simple checklist after speaking | Error noticing, self-correction, confidence |

Interactive Speaking Lesson Cycle

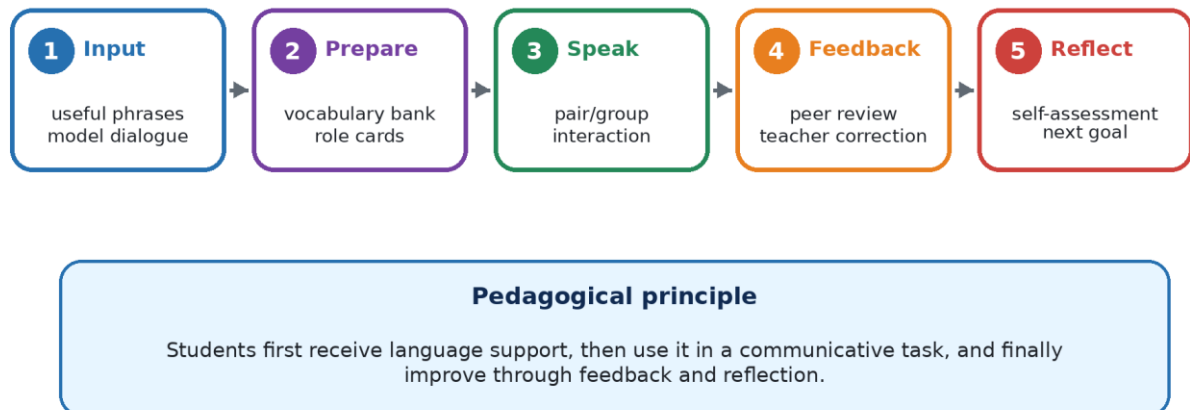


Figure 2. Interactive speaking lesson cycle used in the methodological model.

Method Matrix for Developing Speaking Skills

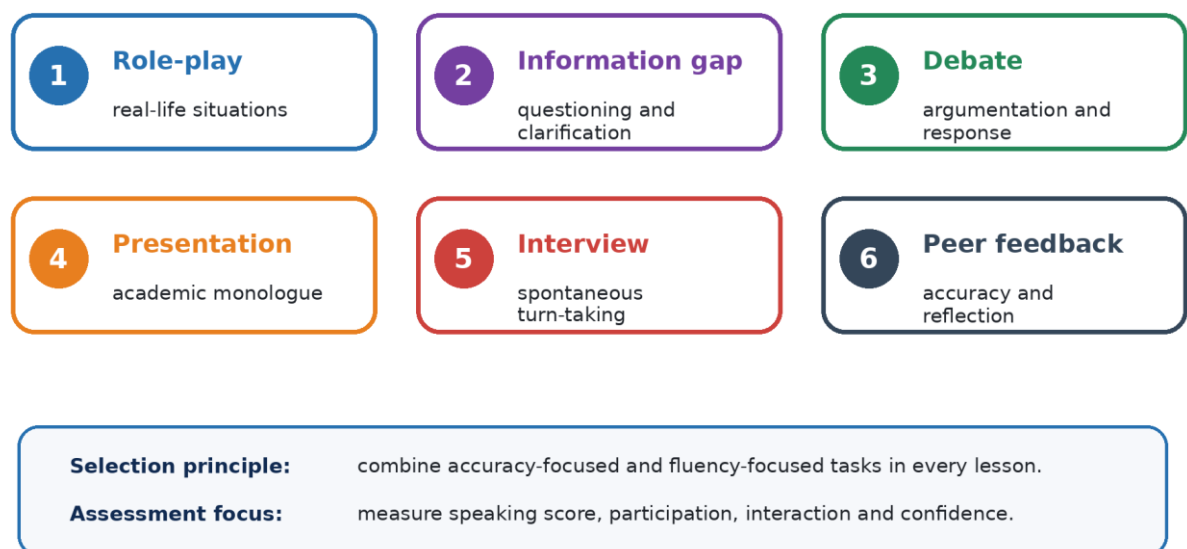


Figure 3. Method matrix for selecting speaking activities according to pedagogical purpose.

Table 4. Model quasi-experimental classroom design

| Parameter | Experimental group | Control group |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------|
|-----------|--------------------|---------------|



| | | |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Participants | 32 first-year university students | 32 first-year university students |
| Duration | 10 weeks; two 80-minute English classes per week | 10 weeks; two 80-minute English classes per week |
| Teaching approach | Role-play, pair work, information gap, debate, peer feedback | Textbook dialogue reading, teacher-led exercises, limited pair work |
| Assessment | Pre-test, weekly observation, post-test, feedback survey | Pre-test and post-test |
| Scoring scale | 0–100 speaking score based on six rubric criteria | 0–100 speaking score based on the same rubric |

4. Results and Statistical Analysis

The statistical model shows that both groups improved, but the experimental group demonstrated a considerably larger gain. The experimental group increased from 56.5 to 74.0 points, while the control group increased from 59.2 to 64.9 points. The larger gain in the experimental group indicates that repeated interactive speaking practice can strengthen not only language knowledge but also communicative readiness.

Table 5. Pre-test and post-test speaking score comparison

| Group | n | Pre-test mean ± SD | Post-test mean ± SD | Mean gain | Paired t | p-value | Cohen's d |
|--------------|----|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------|
| Experimental | 32 | 56.5 ± 5.9 | 74.0 ± 6.9 | +17.5 | 22.71 | <0.001 | 1.42 |
| Control | 32 | 59.2 ± 7.8 | 64.9 ± 8.7 | +5.7 | 8.46 | <0.001 | 0.58 |

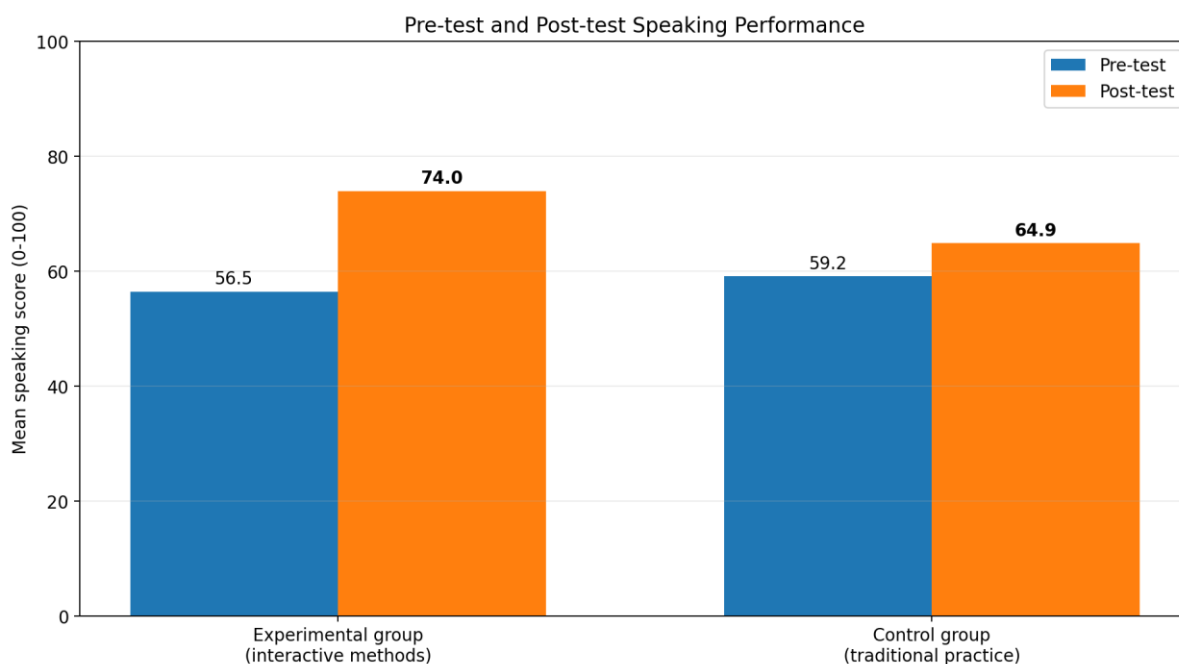


Figure 4. Comparison of pre-test and post-test speaking scores.

Table 6. Skill-dimension gains in the experimental group

| Skill dimension | Pre-test mean | Post-test mean | Gain | Interpretation |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|------------------------|
| Fluency | 56.2 | 75.8 | +19.6 | strong improvement |
| Pronunciation | 58.5 | 70.4 | +11.9 | noticeable improvement |
| Vocabulary | 57.0 | 73.2 | +16.2 | moderate improvement |
| Grammar | 55.4 | 69.1 | +13.7 | noticeable improvement |
| Interaction | 56.8 | 77.0 | +20.2 | strong improvement |
| Confidence | 54.7 | 76.5 | +21.8 | strong improvement |

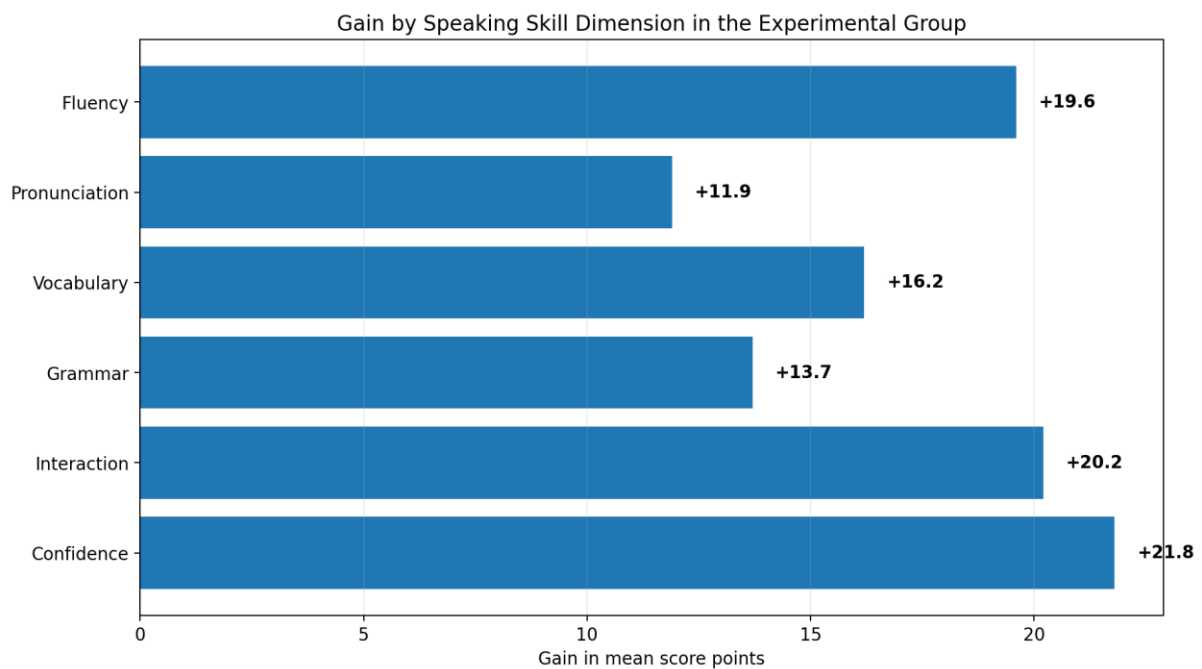


Figure 5. Speaking skill gains after systematic use of interactive methods.

Table 7. Student feedback on speaking readiness

| Survey item | Before intervention (%) | After intervention (%) | Change (percentage points) |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Confidence to speak | 38 | 72 | +34 |
| Willingness to ask questions | 42 | 76 | +34 |
| Comfort in pair work | 51 | 83 | +32 |
| Ability to keep conversation | 35 | 68 | +33 |
| Motivation for English | 47 | 80 | +33 |

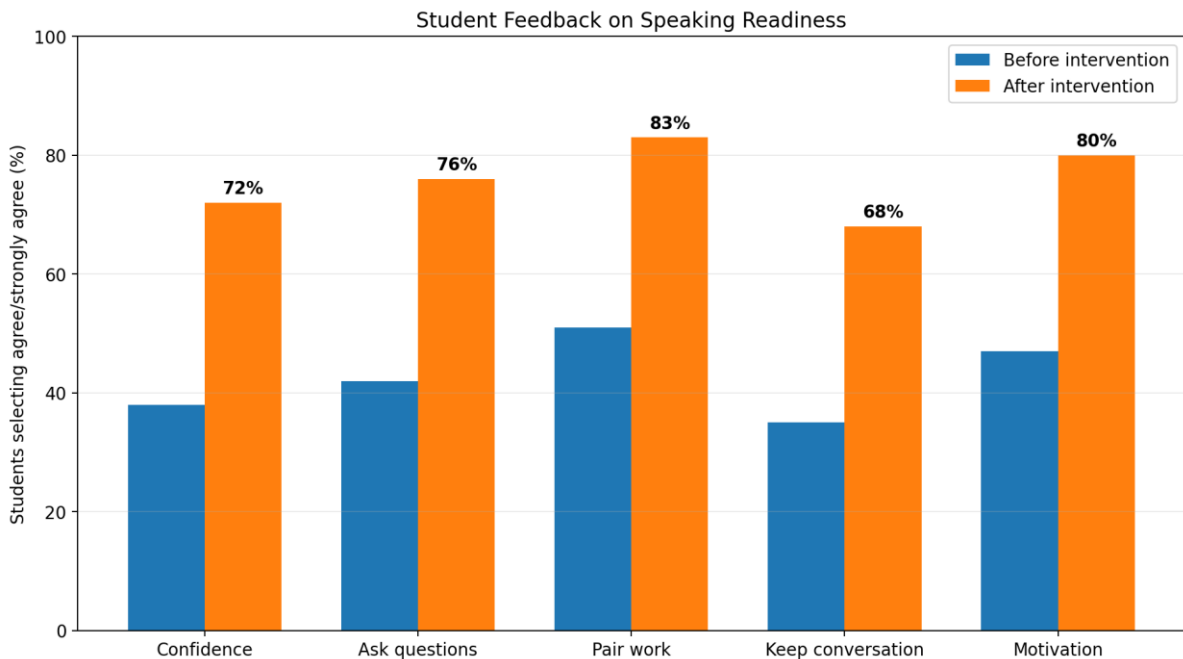


Figure 6. Students' self-reported readiness to speak before and after intervention.

5. Discussion

The results demonstrate that speaking development depends on frequent, structured and low-anxiety opportunities for oral communication. The largest gains were observed in interaction, fluency and confidence, which are the areas most directly affected by role-play, information-gap tasks and peer-supported speaking. Pronunciation and grammar also improved, but these gains were more moderate because accuracy develops gradually and requires targeted corrective feedback.

The pedagogical value of interactive methods lies in their ability to create a reason for communication. In traditional instruction, students may repeat dialogues without negotiating meaning. In interactive speaking tasks, students must ask questions, clarify misunderstanding, react to partners, use discourse markers and maintain conversation. This makes speaking practice closer to real communication.

The teacher's role changes from lecturer to facilitator, observer and feedback provider. The teacher prepares useful phrases, models the task, monitors performance, records common errors, organizes peer feedback and gives delayed correction. This approach reduces fear of mistakes and increases the amount of student speaking time.

Classroom Interaction Pattern: From Teacher-Centred to Communicative

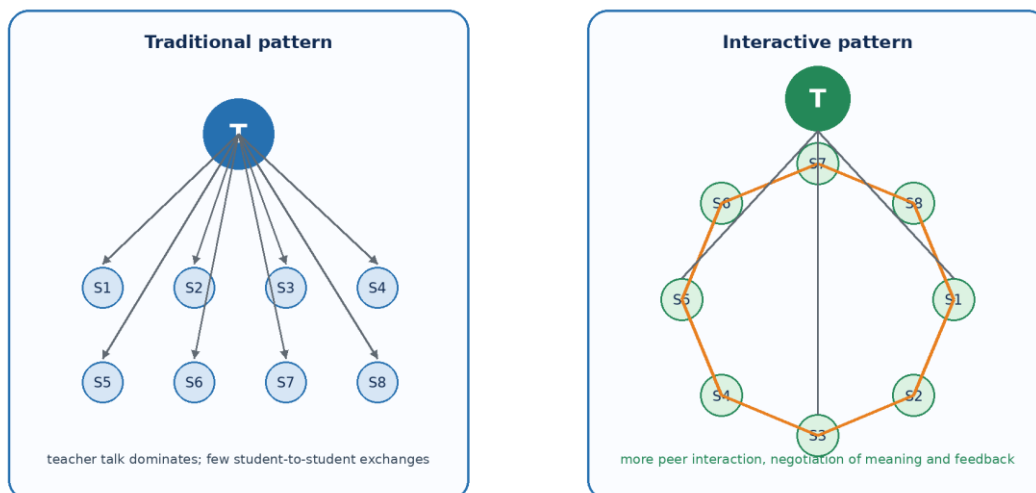


Figure 7. Classroom interaction pattern: teacher-centred vs interactive speaking class.

Table 8. Ten-week speaking development plan for university English classes

| Weeks | Main method | Speaking objective | Output product |
|-------|--|--|--|
| 1–2 | Diagnostic interview + pair introduction | Identify baseline fluency and confidence | Short self-introduction and partner report |
| 3–4 | Information-gap tasks | Improve questioning and clarification | Completed task sheet and oral report |
| 5–6 | Role-play and situational dialogue | Practise functional language in realistic contexts | Recorded role-play performance |
| 7 | Small-group discussion | Develop turn-taking and opinion exchange | Group summary and peer feedback |
| 8 | Mini-debate | Strengthen argumentation and response | Two-minute position statement |
| 9 | Presentation with Q&A | Build academic speaking and audience interaction | Three-minute presentation |
| 10 | Post-test and reflection | Measure progress and set future goals | Speaking portfolio and post-test score |

Implementation Model for Speaking Skill Development

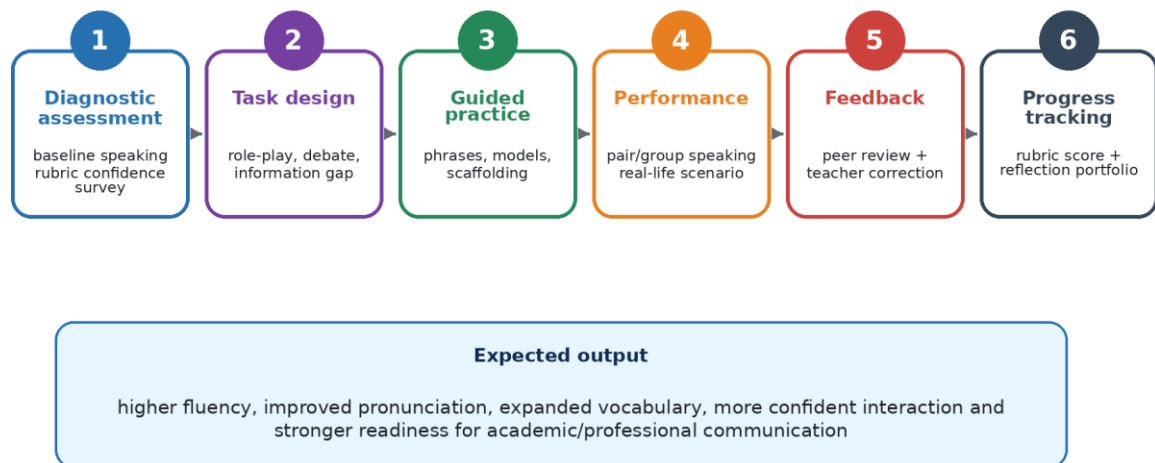


Figure 8. Implementation model for developing speaking skills in English classes.

6. Practical Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed for university English teachers:

- Start every speaking module with a diagnostic task and a clear rubric.
- Use a short input stage before speaking: phrases, model dialogue and pronunciation focus.
- Combine pair work and group work to increase student speaking time.
- Use role cards and information gaps so that students have a real communicative purpose.
- Provide delayed correction after fluency practice, not during every utterance.
- Include peer feedback checklists to develop learner autonomy.
- Record selected speaking tasks and use them for reflection.
- Evaluate both performance scores and affective indicators such as confidence and motivation.

Table 9. Risks and control measures in speaking-skill instruction

| Risk | Possible effect | Control measure |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Students are afraid of making mistakes | Low participation and silence | Use pair work first; allow preparation time and delayed correction |
| Dominant students speak too much | Unequal participation | Assign roles: speaker, questioner, summarizer, observer |



| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Tasks become uncontrolled and noisy | Weak accuracy and classroom management | Use time limits, clear output product and monitoring checklist |
| Vocabulary is insufficient | Students switch to native language | Provide phrase banks and pre-task vocabulary scaffolding |
| Assessment is subjective | Unclear progress measurement | Use rubric-based scoring and two assessors when possible |

7. Conclusion

Developing students' speaking skills in English classes requires more than vocabulary memorization and grammar explanation. Students need repeated opportunities to speak in meaningful situations, receive feedback and reflect on their progress. Interactive methods such as role-play, information-gap activities, discussion, debate, interviews, presentations and peer feedback create the communicative conditions necessary for oral performance.

The statistical model presented in this article indicates that systematic implementation of interactive methods can produce substantial gains in speaking scores, especially in fluency, interaction and confidence. For university English teachers, the most effective approach is to integrate structured task design, CEFR-oriented assessment, supportive feedback and progress tracking. The proposed framework can be adapted to different university specializations and proficiency levels.

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