

# The Role of Formative Assessment in Developing Speaking Skills of Uzbek EFL Learners

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**Abstract:** This study explores the role of formative assessment (FA) in improving the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Uzbekistan. The research focuses on how self-assessment, peer feedback, and teacher-led formative strategies impact learners' fluency, accuracy, and overall confidence in oral communication. A mixed-method study was conducted at a secondary school involving 30 pre-intermediate learners. Data were collected through observation, speaking tasks, and surveys. The findings reveal that regular use of formative assessment helps increase student motivation, speaking performance, and classroom participation. The paper concludes with recommendations for EFL teachers and policymakers to integrate formative practices in English language teaching.

**Keywords:** Formative assessment, speaking skills, EFL, Uzbekistan, feedback, oral communication.

**Introduction:** In the modern EFL classroom, the development of speaking skills is crucial for learners' communicative competence. In Uzbekistan, English has become a key subject in the curriculum, yet many students struggle to express themselves orally due to a lack of real-life speaking opportunities and constructive feedback. Traditional summative tests often fail to support learners' ongoing development in spoken English. Formative assessment (FA), which emphasizes ongoing feedback and learner reflection, offers a promising alternative.

This study aims to examine how formative assessment can enhance the speaking skills of Uzbek EFL learners. It focuses on three main questions:

1. How does formative assessment affect students' speaking fluency and confidence?
2. What types of formative assessment strategies are most effective?
3. What are learners' perceptions of formative feedback?

In recent years, the importance of English language education in Uzbekistan has grown rapidly due to educational reforms and global integration efforts. According to the Presidential Decree No. PF-187 (2021), the country has adopted strategies to enhance foreign

language learning from early education stages, with a strong emphasis on English proficiency for international competitiveness. Despite these developments, many students still lack confidence and fluency in real-life communication. This situation demands more responsive assessment approaches tailored to learners' progress rather than high-stakes exams alone.

Globally, formative assessment has been emphasized by international organizations such as the OECD, which highlights its role in improving learning outcomes and student engagement. In line with this, the Uzbek national curriculum has started integrating formative elements into the English subject standards; however, classroom implementation remains limited and inconsistent. Therefore, a deeper exploration of FA's practical impact on speaking skills is both timely and relevant in the Uzbek EFL context.

## Literature Review

Formative assessment (FA) has gained prominence as a pedagogical tool in recent decades. Black and Wiliam (1998) define formative assessment as all activities undertaken by teachers and/or students to provide information that can be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities. In the context of speaking skills, FA is used to provide immediate,

constructive feedback that helps learners self-correct and grow in confidence.

According to Harmer (2007), speaking is a productive skill that involves fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and interaction. Traditional testing methods often ignore these dimensions. Nunan (2004) supports the integration of formative techniques such as reflective tasks, peer correction, and performance-based speaking tasks, which provide learners with low-stakes opportunities to practice and improve.

In Uzbekistan, language instruction in schools is often assessment-driven, and summative assessment remains dominant (Yuldasheva, 2022). However, research suggests that incorporating FA can improve learner autonomy and oral performance (Tashkent State Pedagogical University Study, 2021). The current study builds upon this foundation by focusing on the practical impact of FA in secondary EFL classrooms.

Formative assessment is also closely linked to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which prioritizes meaningful interaction and real-life communication (Hymes, 1981; Savignon, 1991). Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis supports the idea that learners acquire language when they receive comprehensible input slightly above their current level ( $i+1$ ). Formative strategies, such as scaffolded feedback and peer dialogues, serve as channels for delivering this input in interactive and low-pressure settings. When learners engage in reflective speaking tasks with immediate feedback, they not only improve their language accuracy but also develop communicative competence.

Furthermore, the CEFR framework, widely used in Uzbekistan, outlines specific descriptors for spoken interaction and production. Aligning formative tasks with these descriptors ensures that learners are assessed based on realistic, communicative goals. Researchers like Butler et al. (2015) argue that such alignment leads to greater learner autonomy and language transfer.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-method design. A total of 30 pre-intermediate level students from a public secondary school in Andijan participated in the research. The study lasted for 6 weeks during which learners engaged in weekly speaking tasks assessed formatively using different strategies: oral feedback, peer assessment, and self-assessment checklists.

Data collection tools included:

- Pre- and post-speaking tests (measuring fluency, accuracy, and interaction),
- Student questionnaires (to capture perception and

motivation), and

- Classroom observation notes by the teacher-researcher.

The intervention emphasized low-stakes oral practice with consistent feedback. Peer and self-assessments were guided by rubrics aligned with CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) speaking descriptors. Data were analyzed both quantitatively (test score improvement) and qualitatively (student reflections).

The speaking tasks included a variety of communicative activities such as role-plays (e.g., booking a hotel room), pair discussions on familiar topics, short storytelling, and problem-solving tasks. These were intentionally designed to promote interaction and reduce anxiety, encouraging authentic use of language in classroom settings. Each task was followed by structured peer feedback, using checklists containing criteria such as pronunciation, use of connectors, vocabulary range, and turn-taking skills.

The rubrics used for both peer and self-assessment were adapted from CEFR A2-B1 speaking descriptors, ensuring alignment with learners' proficiency levels. The researcher provided models and examples of constructive feedback prior to implementation to guide students in using the rubrics effectively.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the pre- and post-tests revealed a significant improvement in students' speaking performance. On average, learners showed a 22% increase in fluency scores and a 17% improvement in accuracy. Peer and self-assessment activities contributed to higher engagement and motivation. Students reported that feedback from both peers and the teacher helped them identify weaknesses and build confidence.

Classroom observations indicated that students became more willing to participate in speaking tasks over time. Initially, many were hesitant or shy, but after two weeks of regular formative feedback, most began to speak more actively. Students mentioned that they appreciated being corrected during practice rather than being judged in final exams.

Students' qualitative responses indicated that they valued the chance to correct themselves without the fear of being graded. One student wrote in the questionnaire, "I feel more relaxed to speak when I know it's for practice and not for a mark." Another stated, "My partner helped me understand my mistake, and I didn't feel embarrassed."

Although the school was located in an urban setting, the results raise questions about how such practices

would work in rural areas, where exposure to English and teaching conditions may differ significantly. Further investigation into FA practices across urban and rural contexts in Uzbekistan could provide more inclusive insights.

These findings align with the work of Black & Wiliam (1998), who emphasized the importance of feedback in promoting learning. Similarly, Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that formative assessment supports self-regulated learning, which was evident in the way students used feedback to prepare for the next speaking tasks.

The study confirms that FA not only improves speaking competence but also fosters learner autonomy and self-confidence, which are often lacking in exam-focused environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

Formative assessment, when applied thoughtfully in EFL classrooms, has a clear and measurable impact on speaking skill development. Uzbek EFL learners benefit from timely, constructive feedback and the opportunity to reflect on their own progress. This study demonstrates that FA strategies such as peer feedback, teacher scaffolding, and reflective speaking tasks promote fluency and engagement.

## **Recommendations**

- For teachers: Use oral feedback consistently, design peer/self-assessment activities, and create safe speaking environments.
- For policymakers: Encourage in-service teacher training on formative techniques and reduce reliance on summative-only approaches.
- For researchers: Further studies on long-term effects of FA in rural vs. urban settings in Uzbekistan are encouraged.

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