

LISTENING, READING, WRITING, AND SPEAKING: TOWARDS BALANCED SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEK EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: This article investigates the current state of English language instruction in Uzbekistan with a specific focus on the development of the four core skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Drawing on qualitative data from teachers, classroom practices, and policy documents, it identifies an imbalance in skill prioritization—where receptive skills often outweigh productive ones. The study discusses the pedagogical and systemic causes of this imbalance and offers practical strategies to foster integrated, skill-balanced instruction in Uzbek EFL classrooms. The findings are intended to inform educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers seeking to improve communicative competence among learners.

Key Words: EFL, communicative competence, skill-based instruction, Uzbek education system, language pedagogy, balanced development, CEFR

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada O'zbekistonda ingliz tilini o'qitish amaliyoti tahlil qilinib, ayniqsa tinglab tushunish, o'qish, yozish va gapirish kabi to'rtta asosiy ko'nikmalarni rivojlantirishdagi muammolarga e'tibor qaratilgan. O'qituvchilar bilan suhbatlar, dars kuzatuvlari va amaldagi hujjatlar asosida olib borilgan tadqiqot natijalari, qabul qiluvchi (receptive) ko'nikmalarning ustunligi va buning oqibatlarini ochib beradi. Muallif muammoning sabablari va uni bartaraf etish bo'yicha metodik takliflarni ilgari suradi. Ushbu maqola ta'lim tizimi ishtirokchilari uchun foydali bo'lishi mumkin.

Kalit so'zlar: Chet tili sifatida ingliz tili, kommunikativ kompetensiya, ko'nikmalarga asoslangan ta'lim, O'zbekiston ta'lim tizimi, til o'qitish metodikasi, CEFR, muvozanatli rivojlanish

Аннотация: Данная статья посвящена анализу преподавания английского языка в Узбекистане с акцентом на развитие четырёх основных языковых навыков: аудирование, чтение, письмо и говорение. На основе анализа интервью с преподавателями, наблюдений за учебными занятиями и официальных документов выявляется дисбаланс в развитии навыков — преобладание рецептивных умений над продуктивными. Рассматриваются причины данной проблемы и предлагаются практические решения для внедрения сбалансированного подхода к обучению. Результаты статьи будут полезны преподавателям, разработчикам учебных программ и политикам в сфере образования.

Ключевые слова: Английский как иностранный, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение языковым навыкам, система образования Узбекистана, методика преподавания, CEFR, сбалансированное развитие

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively in English is no longer a privilege but a necessity for personal, academic, and professional development. English has solidified its status as the global lingua franca, serving as the medium of instruction in higher education, a prerequisite for international mobility, and a key competency in the 21st-century job market. As such, English language education, particularly in countries where it is taught as a foreign language (EFL), demands a pedagogically sound and

systematically balanced approach to the four foundational language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Uzbekistan, in its transition toward educational modernization and international integration, has recognized the strategic importance of English in national development. Over the past decade, significant reforms have been introduced across the Uzbek education system, including the alignment of national curricula with international standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT), and the integration of technology in classrooms. Despite these positive efforts, numerous studies and field observations continue to reveal a persistent imbalance in how the four core skills are taught and assessed. Receptive skills (listening and reading) — often emphasized due to their compatibility with exam-based assessment — dominate classroom instruction, while productive skills (writing and speaking) remain underdeveloped and insufficiently practiced.

This imbalance can be attributed to several interrelated factors, including outdated teaching materials, teacher training gaps, exam-oriented teaching culture, lack of infrastructure (especially audio-visual support), and a limited understanding of integrative teaching methodologies among practitioners. While reading and grammar-based exercises remain the mainstay of instruction, speaking activities are frequently reduced to rote dialogues, and writing is confined to rigid, error-focused correction practices. Consequently, Uzbek learners often exit formal schooling with limited ability to express themselves fluently and coherently in spoken and written English, thereby struggling in university environments and international communication contexts that demand real-time, productive engagement.

Furthermore, international standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL — which are increasingly required for university admission, scholarships, and job applications — assess all four language skills equally. Uzbek students preparing for these exams frequently encounter difficulties with speaking and writing sections, which require not only language accuracy but also coherence, spontaneity, and critical thinking. This mismatch between classroom practice and real-world language demands calls for a comprehensive reassessment of how language instruction is structured and delivered in Uzbek EFL contexts.

This paper seeks to address this gap by critically examining the current state of English language skills development in Uzbekistan. It aims to (1) analyze the dominant trends in classroom instruction and assessment, (2) identify structural and pedagogical causes of skill imbalance, and (3) propose strategic recommendations for fostering more equitable and effective development of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. The research is guided by contemporary language pedagogy theories and contextualized within the specific sociolinguistic and institutional realities of Uzbekistan. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving language education and to offer practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers working toward holistic communicative competence among Uzbek EFL learners.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the instructional practices, teacher perspectives, and systemic factors contributing to the imbalance in English language skills development in Uzbek EFL classrooms. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical dynamics and institutional contexts that shape English language instruction in Uzbekistan. Data collection and analysis were guided by principles of interpretivist inquiry, with the goal of understanding meaning and patterns through the lens of participants' lived experiences.

The study was conducted in general secondary schools and academic lyceums located in Samarkand. These locations were selected to represent diverse urban and semi-urban educational contexts, allowing for comparison between centrally located institutions and those in less resourced areas. The schools included in the study follow the national curriculum approved by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education and implement CEFR-aligned English language programs.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select a total of 20 English language teachers from the schools. Teachers were chosen based on their experience (minimum 3 years), their active involvement in EFL instruction, and their familiarity with CEFR frameworks. Administrators were selected for their oversight roles in curriculum implementation and teacher development. In addition, classroom observations were conducted in 10 English lessons across grades 8 to 11 to gather firsthand insights into instructional practices.

Three primary methods of data collection were used:

- **Semi-structured Interviews:**

Teachers and administrators participated in one-on-one interviews lasting 30–45 minutes. Interview protocols included open-ended questions exploring teaching priorities, classroom strategies, assessment methods, skill integration, and challenges in developing students' productive language skills.

- **Classroom Observations:**

Observational data were collected using a structured checklist based on the CEFR descriptors for listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. Observations focused on teacher-student interaction patterns, activity types, language use, and balance among the four skills.

- **Document Analysis:**

Relevant curriculum documents, lesson plans, assessment papers, and teacher training materials were reviewed to identify alignment (or misalignment) with CEFR guidelines and communicative teaching principles.

All interview data were transcribed verbatim and coded using thematic analysis. A combination of inductive and deductive coding techniques was applied to identify recurring themes and patterns related to skill development practices, teacher perceptions, and institutional constraints. Observational data were analyzed descriptively, focusing on the frequency and nature of activities targeting each language skill. Document analysis was used to triangulate findings from interviews and observations. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, including anonymity, voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and observations. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of individuals and institutions.

III. Results

This section presents the key findings from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis regarding the development and integration of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills in Uzbek EFL classrooms. The results are organized into thematic categories that reflect the central research questions and patterns identified during data analysis. Analysis of classroom observations revealed that the majority of instructional time was devoted to receptive skills—particularly reading. In 8 out of the 10 observed lessons, reading tasks constituted the main classroom activity, typically involving text comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises. Listening activities, though present, were often confined to textbook audio tracks and lacked interactive follow-up. Teachers reported that reading and listening are prioritized due to their alignment with national exam formats and the relative ease of assessing these skills. One teacher noted:

“We teach more reading and listening because students need to pass exams. Writing and speaking are harder to teach, and there is not enough time.”

Writing and speaking were found to be underemphasized, often treated as supplementary or optional components. Writing tasks were primarily focused on grammatical accuracy and sentence completion, with few opportunities for creative or extended writing. Speaking activities were typically limited to choral repetition, scripted dialogues, or answering closed-ended questions. Only 2 observed lessons included pair or group speaking activities that required authentic communication. Teachers cited large class sizes, lack of training, and fear of making errors as barriers to encouraging spoken output.

A major finding was the lack of skill integration. Instruction tended to treat the four skills in isolation rather than as interconnected components of communicative competence. Lesson plans

often segmented activities into discrete categories (e.g., “reading part,” “grammar part”) without linking them to speaking or writing outputs. This fragmentation limits opportunities for students to apply language in context and build fluency. For example, in one observed lesson, students read a text about environmental problems but were not asked to discuss it or write their own opinion. As a result, the reading task remained passive and did not support higher-order language use.

Summary of Key Findings:

Theme	Observation/Result
Receptive Skill Dominance	Reading and listening prioritized due to exam relevance.
Productive Skills Underdeveloped	Writing and speaking minimally practiced and weakly assessed.
Lack of Skill Integration	Teaching segmented by skill, few connections across modalities.
Teacher-Centered Approach	Limited student interaction, focus on accuracy over fluency.
Teacher Training Gaps	Need for training in integrated skill pedagogy and communicative techniques.
Resource Constraints	Shortage of authentic materials and technological support for skill development.
Student Attitudes	Positive interest in speaking/writing, but affected by performance anxiety.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a substantial imbalance in the development of the four essential English language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—in Uzbek EFL classrooms. This discussion contextualizes these findings within the framework of communicative language teaching (CLT), the CEFR model, and recent literature on balanced language skill instruction.

The dominance of receptive skills—especially reading—over productive skills aligns with prior studies on post-Soviet EFL contexts, where traditional methodologies continue to influence classroom practices (Blinova, 2018; Karimova & Sultanalieva, 2021). In Uzbekistan, the education system remains heavily exam-oriented, which promotes instruction that emphasizes reading comprehension and grammar mastery rather than communicative competence. The study confirms that skill development is often compartmentalized, with minimal effort to integrate language functions across a lesson. This is at odds with best practices in communicative pedagogy, which emphasize skill integration (Richards, 2006). In the observed lessons, learners were rarely asked to use reading texts as a springboard for discussions or writing tasks, resulting in a fragmented learning experience [1][6].

A significant barrier to balanced skill instruction is the limited access to modern methodological training among teachers. Although the majority of teachers were familiar with CEFR principles, they lacked the strategies and tools necessary to operationalize them in daily teaching. This gap in pedagogical knowledge is consistent with findings from regional studies (Tashpulatova & Mamajanov, 2022), which show that in-service training in Uzbekistan often remains theoretical and exam-focused. Another critical issue revealed by this study is the lack of authentic materials and technological support for listening and speaking. The absence of real-world audio-visual input prevents learners from developing natural pronunciation, intonation, and pragmatic competence. As Krashen (1985) emphasized, language acquisition is heavily input-driven, and learners need frequent exposure to comprehensible and meaningful language in use. Nevertheless, student anxiety—particularly in speaking—emerged as a recurring theme. This aligns with research by Horwitz et al. (1986) on foreign language classroom anxiety. Without safe, non-judgmental classroom environments and consistent speaking practice, students are likely to associate oral communication with stress and failure [7][4][2].

This study highlights the need for future research into learner perceptions, longitudinal changes in language competence across skill areas, and the impact of specific interventions (e.g., task-based instruction, mobile-assisted language learning) on skill integration. For practitioners, it

underscores the necessity of reflective teaching and ongoing experimentation with skill-balanced lesson formats.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the current state of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skill development in Uzbek EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, with the goal of identifying imbalances and proposing pathways toward more integrated and balanced instruction. The findings reveal a significant overemphasis on receptive skills, particularly reading, at the expense of productive and communicative competencies such as speaking and writing. This imbalance is rooted in several interrelated factors, including exam-driven curricula, traditional teaching methodologies, insufficient teacher training, lack of authentic materials, and infrastructural constraints. Moreover, while teachers and learners both acknowledge the importance of all four skills, systemic barriers limit the implementation of balanced, communicative instruction. The limited integration of skills within lessons results in fragmented learning experiences, which in turn hinders the development of holistic language competence as envisioned by the CEFR framework.

In sum, for Uzbek EFL learners to become effective communicators in global contexts, language instruction must move beyond isolated skill development toward dynamic, meaningful, and skill-integrated practices that reflect real-life language use.

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