ISSN: 3060-4613

MAKTABGACHA VA MAKTAB TA'LIMI VAZIRLIGI

O'zbekiston Milliy Pedagogika Universiteti



№10(4)
2026

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13.00.03 Maxsus pedagogika
13.00.04 Jismoniy tarbiya va sport mashg'ulotlari nazariyasi va metodikasi
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Pedagogika, psixologiya fanlariga ixtisoslashgan ilmiy jurnal

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Elektron nashr. 110 sahifa,
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"Maktabgacha va maktab ta'limi" jurnali

26.09.2023-yildan

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Litsenziya raqami: **№136361**

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NATURE OF SPEAKING IN EFL CONTEXTS: FLUENCY, ACCURACY, AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, speaking is a multidimensional activity that requires learners to use, monitor and adjust linguistic knowledge in real time. This article examines the relationship between fluency, accuracy and international communicative competence and proposes a seven-dimensional framework for analysing oral performance. It draws on communicative competence theory, speech-production models, the complexity–accuracy–fluency approach and research on English as an international language. A descriptive-analytical synthesis brings together phonological, lexical, grammatical, discourse, pragmatic and intercultural dimensions. The analysis suggests that fluency and accuracy are connected through lexical retrieval and proceduralisation, while international competence cannot be reduced to grammatical correctness or speech rate. The profiles and speech extracts used in the article are illustrative constructions, not empirical observations.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking, communicative competence, fluency, accuracy, lexical automatization, intercultural communication.

Annotatsiya: EFL sharoitida og'zaki nutq til bilimlarini real vaqt rejimida qo'llash, nazorat qilish va kommunikativ maqsadga erishishni ta'minlaydigan ko'p o'lchovli faoliyatdir. Maqolaning maqsadi ravonlik, aniqlik va xalqaro kommunikativ kompetensiya o'rtasidagi munosabatni tahlil qilish hamda og'zaki nutqni baholash uchun yetti o'lchovli modelni taklif etishdan iborat. Tadqiqot kommunikativ kompetensiya, nutq hosil qilish, murakkablik–aniqlik–ravonlik hamda ingliz tilining xalqaro muloqotdagi o'rni haqidagi ilmiy qarashlarga asoslangan. Tavsifiy-tahliliy yondashuv orqali fonologik, leksik, grammatik, diskursiv, pragmatik va madaniyatlararo jihatlar bir tizimga birlashtiriladi. Tahlil ravonlik va aniqlik leksik avtomatlashuv orqali o'zaro bog'lanishini, xalqaro kompetensiya esa faqat grammatik to'g'rilik yoki tez gapirish bilan belgilanmasligini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada keltirilgan profillar va misollar tushuntirish maqsadida tuzilgan bo'lib, empirik natijalar sifatida talqin qilinmasligi lozim.

Kalit so'zlar: EFL, og'zaki nutq, kommunikativ kompetensiya, ravonlik, aniqlik, leksik avtomatlashuv, madaniyatlararo muloqot.

Аннотация: В условиях изучения английского языка как иностранного устная речь представляет собой многомерную деятельность, требующую применения, контроля и корректировки языковых знаний в реальном времени. Цель статьи – проанализировать взаимосвязь беглости, точности и международной коммуникативной компетенции и предложить семиаспектную модель анализа устной речи. Исследование опирается на теории коммуникативной компетенции и порождения речи, подход "сложность–точность–беглость", а также работы об английском языке как средстве международного общения. Описательно-аналитический подход объединяет фонологический, лексический, грамматический, дискурсивный, прагматический и межкультурный аспекты. Анализ показывает, что беглость и точность связаны посредством автоматизации лексического извлечения, тогда как международная компетенция не сводится к грамматической правильности или скорости речи. Приведённые профили и примеры являются иллюстративными, а не эмпирическими данными.

Ключевые слова: английский язык как иностранный, устная речь, коммуникативная компетенция, беглость, точность, лексическая автоматизация, межкультурная коммуникация.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is often presented as one of four language skills, but it differs from reading, writing and listening because speakers must plan ideas, select words, organise grammar, articulate sounds and monitor the listener's response almost simultaneously. These processes operate under time pressure and make hesitation, repetition and self-repair natural features of spoken language rather than simple evidence of failure. Spoken English also has patterns that differ from written prose, including ellipsis, discourse markers, vague expressions and clause chaining. Therefore, assessing speaking only by written-language norms can misrepresent how oral communication works. [1]

The concept of communicative competence broadened the focus from grammatical knowledge to the ability to use language appropriately in social situations. Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance provided a useful account of linguistic knowledge, while Hymes argued that knowing a language also means knowing what is appropriate, feasible and actually used in a community.

Later models included grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse components. These perspectives suggest that successful speaking involves more than producing grammatically acceptable sentences. [3] This issue is particularly important in EFL settings, where learners may use English more frequently with speakers whose first languages are not English than with native speakers. Research on English as a lingua franca therefore questions the assumption that native-like pronunciation should be the universal target. Instead, intelligibility, accommodation and successful negotiation of meaning are central criteria. In our view, teaching should retain attention to language form while evaluating whether learners can communicate clearly and adapt to different interlocutors. [4]

The research problem addressed here is that speaking is often evaluated through a simplified opposition between fluency and accuracy. Such a binary model overlooks lexical retrieval, pronunciation, discourse organisation, pragmatic appropriateness and intercultural flexibility. The aim is to develop a concise, multidimensional account of EFL speaking and to specify observable indicators that may support classroom assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The article addresses four questions: which dimensions contribute to oral competence; how fluency and accuracy can be both distinct and interdependent; why international competence differs from native-speaker proficiency; and how these dimensions can be examined in project-based speaking activities.

Its contribution is conceptual: it defines what teachers and researchers should observe before making claims about the effectiveness of a teaching method. The development of communicative competence theory can be understood as a widening of the object of analysis. Hymes emphasised that grammatical knowledge alone does not explain appropriate language use. Canale and Swain organised communicative competence into components, including grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, and subsequent work gave discourse competence a more explicit place. Bachman further highlighted the need to consider how these components interact in language use and assessment. For classroom practice, this means that a learner's performance should be considered as a coordinated activity rather than a list of isolated grammar points. [3]

Research on output and interaction explains why speaking can contribute to language development. Swain argued that producing language may push learners to process grammatical forms more precisely than comprehension alone requires. Long's interaction hypothesis emphasises clarification requests, confirmation checks and other negotiation moves that help interlocutors resolve misunderstandings. Speech-production models describe conceptualisation, formulation and articulation as connected processes, with monitoring operating alongside them. For EFL learners, limited automaticity may cause these processes to compete for attention, resulting in pauses or incomplete structures. [15]

Fluency, accuracy and complexity are frequently studied together. Skehan's work suggests that under time pressure, attention allocated to one performance dimension may temporarily limit another. However, the relationship is not permanently competitive. As language knowledge becomes more readily accessible, learners may improve both speed and correctness. Thus, fluency and accuracy should not be treated as mutually exclusive teaching goals. The pedagogical challenge is to create conditions in which learners can retrieve language efficiently while still monitoring meaning and form. [10]

Lexical knowledge is central to this relationship. Vocabulary competence includes breadth, depth and speed of retrieval. Conventional word combinations and formulaic sequences can be retrieved as units, reducing the need to construct every phrase from individual words. This can free attention for organising ideas and responding to others. In our interpretation, vocabulary teaching for speaking should therefore include useful chunks and collocations as well as individual words, and should provide repeated opportunities to use them in meaningful contexts. [7]

Pronunciation should be assessed according to its effect on communication. Munro and Derwing distinguish accent strength from comprehensibility and intelligibility; these aspects do not necessarily coincide. Jenkins's work on English as an international language similarly directs attention to phonological contrasts that carry a high functional load for understanding. A learner may have a noticeable accent yet communicate successfully. We argue that pronunciation instruction should prioritise the features that help listeners recover words, identify information focus and understand the intended message. [6]

Speaking also requires discourse competence: the ability to organise turns and extended contributions so that listeners can follow the argument. Cohesion is created through reference, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical ties, while conversation relies on turn-taking, repair and sequence organisation. Discourse markers such as 'well', 'so' and 'anyway' help speakers show how their contributions relate to earlier talk. Learners may produce correct sentences yet struggle to connect them into a coherent explanation; assessment should therefore include topic development, transitions and the management of interaction. [9]

Pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence concern how language forms function in particular relationships and settings. Requests, refusals and disagreements may be grammatically correct but sound too direct or inappropriate if they ignore status, context or politeness expectations. Pragmatic failure can be especially damaging because listeners may interpret an unintended tone as a personal attitude rather than a language-learning difficulty. In our view, teaching should expose learners to multiple ways of making requests, disagreeing and negotiating, followed by discussion of how context changes the effect of an utterance. [12]

International and intercultural competence adds the ability to manage linguistic and cultural difference. It includes intelligibility, adjustment of speech, clarification and confirmation, flexible use of language, and willingness to understand unfamiliar accents. Such competence is not simply an advanced level of native-like performance. A speaker who uses sophisticated vocabulary but does not notice that a partner is confused may communicate less effectively than a speaker who paraphrases and checks understanding. Consequently, international competence must be observed in interaction, not inferred from a monologue alone. [13]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a conceptual and descriptive-analytical approach. Its main procedure is a critical synthesis of established research on communicative competence, speech production, fluency and accuracy, pronunciation, discourse, and English as a lingua franca. The purpose is to organise these perspectives into a practical framework rather than to report a completed classroom experiment. The proposed framework is designed for a university EFL context involving approximately 50–60 students at CEFR levels B1–C1. This is a suggested setting for future application, not a description of a cohort from which data were collected. Four task types are proposed: a three- to four-minute prepared presentation; an unrehearsed collaborative problem-solving task; a role-play involving interlocutors with different social status; and an interaction between speakers with different first languages. Each task places different demands on learners and makes different dimensions observable.

A future empirical study could record and transcribe performances, mark pauses, and combine quantitative measures with qualitative analysis. Possible indicators include speech rate, mean length of run, frequency and location of pauses, repair rates, errors per hundred words weighted by communicative consequence, lexical diversity, and discourse-marker use. Rater judgements could assess pragmatic appropriateness and interactional effectiveness. Combining methods is important because one numerical measure rarely explains why a performance succeeds or fails. [10]

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, the independence of the proposed dimensions is argued conceptually and requires empirical validation. Second, international competence is relational: it depends on how interlocutors respond to one another. Third, judgements of politeness and appropriateness may reflect raters' cultural assumptions. These limitations make the framework a basis for research and structured observation, not a validated diagnostic test.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Literature synthesis produces a seven-dimensional framework:

(1) fluency;

(2) accuracy;

(3) lexical competence;

(4) pronunciation and intelligibility;

(5) discourse competence;

(6) pragmatic competence; and

(7) international/intercultural competence.

The dimensions are related but not identical. Fluency mainly reflects the efficiency of processing in real time; accuracy concerns the appropriateness of forms; lexical competence supports both retrieval and precision; discourse and pragmatic competence organise meaning in context; and international competence concerns adaptation to interlocutors.

Table 1: **Seven dimensions of EFL speaking**

Dimension	Observable indicators	Communicative contribution
Fluency	Speech rate; pause location and length; repetitions; repairs	Supports sustained, listener-manageable turns
Accuracy	Tense, agreement, articles, word order, lexical choice	Protects meaning-bearing contrasts
Lexical competence	Range, collocations, formulaic sequences, retrieval hesitation	Enables precise and rapid expression
Pronunciation and intelligibility	Consonant contrasts, vowel length, stress, rhythm	Helps listeners recover the intended message
Discourse competence	Cohesion, topic development, transitions, turn-taking	Makes extended talk coherent and navigable
Pragmatic competence	Requests, refusals, mitigation, register, politeness	Matches language to social purpose and context
International/intercultural competence	Accommodation, clarification, paraphrase, tolerance of accents	Sustains communication across linguistic and cultural differences

The framework indicates that the dimensions should not be collapsed into a single score without explanation. A learner may speak quickly but make frequent grammatical errors; another may be accurate but pause so often that the listener struggles to follow the message. A third may be fluent and accurate but use an overly direct request in a formal setting. These profiles call for different teaching responses.

Table 2: **Indicators for the three central constructs**

Construct	What should be observed	Possible assessment evidence
Fluency	Continuity, pause position, repair and retrieval	Pause-coded transcript; speech rate; mean length of run
Accuracy	Grammatical, lexical and phonological choices that affect meaning	Error analysis weighted by communicative significance
International competence	Adjustment to partner, clarification, comprehension checks	Recorded interaction; successful negotiation; listener feedback

A key finding of the conceptual analysis is that lexical competence links fluency and accuracy. Ready access to vocabulary and formulaic sequences reduces the time spent searching for words, while precise lexical selection makes the message more informative. This relationship helps explain why repeated meaningful use of topic-related language may improve both continuity and precision. Nevertheless, lexical resources alone do not guarantee pragmatic appropriateness or intercultural sensitivity. [7]

The distinction between speed and fluency is also important. Pauses at clause boundaries may reflect normal planning, whereas long pauses inside a phrase can indicate that the speaker has begun an utterance before its form is ready. A fast speaker may still be difficult to understand if articulation is unclear or ideas are poorly connected. Therefore, teachers should not reward speed in isolation. In our view, the best indicator of fluency is not simply how quickly a learner speaks, but how effectively the learner maintains a comprehensible contribution. [10]

Accuracy should likewise be evaluated by communicative consequence rather than by counting every error equally. Some errors, such as a missing negation or misplaced nuclear stress, can reverse or obscure meaning; others, such as a missing third-person singular ending, may leave the message recoverable. A balanced assessment can record error frequency while also considering whether an error prevents the listener from identifying the intended proposition. This approach avoids treating all deviations as equally serious. International competence differs because it is demonstrated through responsiveness to another person. Accommo-

dation may involve slowing down, replacing an idiom, choosing a more familiar word, or making a reference explicit. Negotiation may involve asking for clarification, checking understanding, or paraphrasing a key term. Such moves are not signs of weak English; they are resources for maintaining shared understanding. Assessments based only on prepared monologues cannot adequately measure them. [5] To clarify the framework, five hypothetical profiles can be used. These examples are constructed for analytical purposes and do not represent actual students or measured outcomes.

Table 3: **Illustrative profiles (not empirical data)**

Profile	Performance pattern	Likely pedagogical response
A	Fluent but grammatically inaccurate	Focus on high-value grammar and self-monitoring without suppressing communication
B	Accurate but hesitant	Build lexical retrieval speed through repeated, meaningful speaking tasks
C	Fluent and accurate	Extend discourse organisation, audience awareness and task complexity
D	Accurate but pragmatically inappropriate	Practise register, mitigation and context-sensitive speech acts
E	Fluent, accurate and adaptive across language backgrounds	Maintain interactional challenge and encourage reflection on intercultural strategies

Profile A illustrates that grammar errors do not always prevent understanding when the message is well sequenced and the errors do not obscure key contrasts. Profile B shows the opposite pattern: correct forms may coexist with clause-internal pauses and repeated words, increasing the listener's processing effort. Profile C demonstrates a more balanced performance in which formulaic expressions and clear discourse organisation support communication. These examples show why a single fluency–accuracy score may conceal important differences. Profile D highlights the limits of grammatical accuracy. A sentence such as 'Give me your opinion now' may be structurally correct but inappropriate when addressed to a visiting professor in a formal context. A mitigated alternative–'Could you share your opinion on our project when you have a moment?'–better reflects the relationship and communicative purpose. Profile E illustrates international competence: speakers check understanding, paraphrase unfamiliar expressions and make key information explicit. The interaction succeeds not because every speaker sounds native-like, but because they cooperate to maintain shared meaning. Project-based learning provides opportunities to exercise several dimensions together. Planning requires learners to retrieve topic-specific vocabulary; collaborative decision-making encourages clarification and repair; presentations develop extended discourse; and discussion with an authentic audience requires attention to register and listener needs. These task features correspond to the framework, but they should be treated as opportunities for development rather than proof that project work automatically improves every dimension. [14]

For example, a project on local water quality might require students to gather information, discuss findings, prepare recommendations and present them to classmates. During group work, the teacher can observe turn-taking, clarification requests and the use of topic-related vocabulary. During presentations, the teacher can assess coherence, intelligibility and the organisation of information. A short reflection after the task can help learners identify which expressions caused hesitation and which communication strategies helped the group resolve misunderstandings. Project work may be particularly useful for fluency, discourse competence and international competence because it involves sustained talk and genuine interdependence. However, morphological accuracy may not improve sufficiently if learners focus exclusively on completing the project. Teachers can address this limitation through brief focus-on-form episodes, feedback on recurring errors and opportunities to revise a spoken explanation. The combination of meaning-focused work and targeted language feedback is more defensible than assuming that communication alone will resolve every linguistic difficulty. The proposed framework also suggests that assessment tasks should be varied. A prepared presentation cannot reveal all the interactional strategies needed in spontaneous conversation. A role-play can make politeness and register visible, while a collaborative task can reveal how learners repair misunderstandings. An interaction with speakers from different language backgrounds is especially relevant for international competence. Using several task types provides a more balanced picture than relying on one oral test.

The analysis supports three main interpretations. First, fluency and accuracy can vary independently in a particular performance, but their development is connected to processing efficiency and lexical automaticity. Second, communicative success depends on more than the grammatical quality of individual sentences: discourse organisation and pragmatic choices shape how the message is interpreted. Third, international competence is a distinct, interactional dimension because it concerns how speakers manage difference and maintain understanding, rather than how closely they approximate a single native-speaker model. [11]

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These interpretations have implications for both teaching and assessment. Teachers should avoid using speech rate as the sole proxy for fluency, raw error counts as the sole measure of accuracy, or accent similarity as the main criterion for pronunciation. Instead, assessment should consider whether the listener can recover the message, whether the speaker organises ideas coherently, whether language choices suit the context and whether participants can resolve misunderstandings. This is consistent with broader approaches to speaking assessment that combine observable performance with carefully defined criteria. The framework is not a claim that all seven dimensions are entirely independent or equally important in every task. Their relevance changes according to the communicative purpose. A short information exchange may require little extended discourse, while a formal presentation places greater demands on organisation. Similarly, a task with familiar interlocutors may not fully reveal a learner's ability to accommodate an unfamiliar accent. The assessment design must therefore match the construct it claims to measure. The practical value of the model lies in making feedback more specific. Instead of telling a learner simply to 'speak better', a teacher can identify a target: reduce long pauses inside phrases, improve retrieval of collocations, clarify the structure of a presentation, practise indirect requests or check a partner's understanding more actively. In our view, this dimensional feedback is more likely to guide improvement because it connects assessment evidence to a manageable learning objective.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented EFL speaking as a multidimensional construct involving fluency, accuracy, lexical competence, pronunciation and intelligibility, discourse competence, pragmatic competence and international/intercultural competence. These dimensions differ in nature and should not be collapsed into a single undifferentiated score. Fluency reflects the efficiency of real-time production; accuracy concerns the forms selected to convey meaning; and international competence is visible in the ways speakers adapt, clarify and cooperate across linguistic and cultural differences. The central conclusion is that fluency and accuracy are neither identical nor permanent opposites.

Under time pressure, attention to monitoring may reduce the resources available for planning, but increased automaticity and readily accessible lexical sequences can support both continuity and precision. International competence, meanwhile, cannot be inferred from either dimension: it requires interaction and responsiveness to another speaker. The seven-dimensional framework offers a basis for designing speaking tasks and assessment criteria in university EFL contexts. Project-based learning can create useful conditions for extended production, negotiation, vocabulary use and audience awareness, provided that tasks are carefully designed and supported by targeted feedback. Since no empirical dataset was collected for this conceptual article, the proposed model and illustrative profiles require future classroom validation. The next step is to apply the framework to recorded learner interactions and examine which dimensions develop under different instructional conditions.

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13.00.00 Pedagogika fanlari
13.00.01 Pedagogika nazariyasi. Pedagogik ta’limotlar tarixi
13.00.02 Ta’lim va tarbiya nazariyasi va metodikasi (sohalar bo‘yicha)
13.00.03 Maxsus pedagogika
13.00.04 Jismoniy tarbiya va sport mashg‘ulotlari nazariyasi va metodikasi
13.00.05 Kasb-hunar ta’limi nazariyasi va metodikasi
13.00.06 Elektron ta’lim nazariyasi va metodikasi (ta’lim sohalari va bosqichlari bo‘yicha)
13.00.07 Ta’limda menejment
13.00.08 Maktabgacha ta’lim va tarbiya nazariyasi va metodikasi
13.00.09 Ijtimoiy pedagogika
07.00.00 Tarix fanlari
19.00.00 Psixologiya fanlari
01.00.00 Fizika-matematika fanlari
02.00.00 Kimyo fanlari
03.00.00 Biologiya fanlari
09.00.00 Falsafa fanlari
10.00.00 Filologiya fanlari
11.00.00 Geografiya fanlari

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2026. №10(4)

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"Maktabgacha va maktab ta'limi" jurnali 26.09.2023-yildan
O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti Adminstratsiyasi huzuridagi
Axborot va ommaviy kommunikatsiyalar agentligi tomonidan
№C–5669363 reyestr raqami tartibi bo'yicha ro'yxatdan o'tkazilgan.
Litsenziya raqami: № 136361.

Manzilimiz: Toshkent shahar, Yunusobod tumani
19-mavze, 17-uy.