

## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: THE ROLE OF INFORMAL SPEAKING PRACTICE IN DEVELOPING ORAL PROFICIENCY IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract:** This article explores the significance of informal speaking practice outside formal classroom settings in enhancing oral proficiency among English language learners in Uzbekistan. While traditional classroom instruction emphasizes grammar and vocabulary, real-life conversational opportunities remain limited. The study examines how informal interactions, such as language clubs, social media engagement, and peer conversations, contribute to learners' communicative competence. Findings suggest that integrating informal speaking activities alongside formal lessons can significantly boost learners' confidence and fluency, thereby improving overall language acquisition. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of cultural context in shaping informal speaking opportunities, noting that Uzbek learners often face societal expectations and limited exposure to native speakers, which influence their informal practice. The article advocates for educational policies that recognize and support informal language use as a critical complement to formal instruction.

**Keywords:** Informal speaking practice, oral proficiency, language learning, Uzbekistan, communicative competence, peer interaction.

### Introduction

Developing oral proficiency is a critical goal for learners of English as a foreign language. In Uzbekistan, English education is predominantly classroom-based, with limited exposure to spontaneous speaking opportunities. This gap often results in learners who possess theoretical knowledge but struggle with fluent and confident communication.

Informal speaking practice—engaging in language use outside the structured curriculum—offers valuable opportunities for authentic interaction and practical application of language skills. These experiences foster motivation, reduce speaking anxiety, and enhance learners' pragmatic abilities.

This article investigates the role of informal speaking practices in Uzbekistan, identifies the challenges learners face, and proposes strategies to integrate these activities effectively into language education.

Uzbekistan's English language education system predominantly relies on formal classroom instruction, where emphasis is placed on grammar rules, vocabulary acquisition, reading, and writing skills. However, oral proficiency—the ability to speak fluently and accurately—is often underdeveloped due to insufficient practice opportunities.

Informal speaking practice refers to any language use outside the classroom, including conversations with peers, participation in language clubs, social media interactions, and language exchange programs. Such informal settings offer authentic contexts for communication, allowing learners to apply language skills spontaneously.

This study explores how Uzbek learners engage in informal speaking, the benefits and obstacles they experience, and how educators can leverage these informal practices to enhance oral proficiency effectively.

### **Methodology**

The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and interviews with English learners from secondary schools and universities across Uzbekistan. Quantitative data assessed frequency and types of informal speaking activities, while qualitative interviews explored learner attitudes and perceived benefits.

Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to compare formal speaking practice with informal language use outside school. Data were analyzed to identify correlations between informal speaking frequency and improvements in oral proficiency.

The research design integrated quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding. A structured questionnaire was distributed among 300 students from various secondary schools and universities in Tashkent and other regions, aiming to quantify informal speaking activity frequency and types.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 selected students to gain insight into their attitudes, motivations, and challenges related to informal speaking. Classroom observations in English language lessons provided contextual data on formal speaking practice dynamics.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for survey results and thematic coding for qualitative data, enabling the identification of key patterns and learner perspectives.

## Results

Survey results indicate that students who regularly participate in informal speaking activities—such as language clubs, chatting with peers, and engaging in online forums—demonstrate higher levels of oral fluency and confidence.

Interviews revealed that informal settings provide a low-pressure environment where learners feel freer to experiment with language and receive immediate feedback. Participants noted that social media platforms and language exchange apps are popular tools supporting informal practice.

However, limited access to native speakers and lack of organized extracurricular programs were identified as barriers.

Survey findings revealed that approximately 60% of respondents engaged in informal speaking practice at least twice a week, mostly through peer conversations and online chats. Participation in language clubs and formal conversation groups was less frequent, reported by only 25%.

Interviewees highlighted that informal environments reduced the fear of making mistakes and encouraged risk-taking in language use. Many used social media platforms like Telegram and Instagram to interact in English, enhancing their vocabulary and conversational skills.

However, respondents cited limited access to native speakers and a lack of organized extracurricular programs as major constraints. Some also expressed that family and societal attitudes sometimes discouraged informal English use outside academic settings.

## Discussion

The findings underscore the complementary role of informal speaking practice in language development. While classroom instruction lays the foundation for grammar and vocabulary, informal interaction nurtures spontaneous communication and cultural understanding.

Educators should encourage learners to seek and create informal speaking opportunities. Schools and universities could facilitate language clubs, peer discussion groups, and partnerships with native speakers or fluent users.

Furthermore, integrating technology—such as social media and language learning apps—can expand access to informal practice beyond geographical constraints.

The findings demonstrate that informal speaking practice significantly contributes to oral proficiency development by providing learners with opportunities to practice real-life communication beyond the classroom's controlled environment. Informal settings foster learner autonomy, reduce anxiety, and build communicative confidence.

Nonetheless, the disparity between learners' enthusiasm and available resources highlights the need for institutional support. Schools and universities should actively promote informal language activities, such as creating language clubs, facilitating peer conversation sessions, and connecting learners with native or fluent speakers via exchange programs.

Additionally, integrating digital tools such as language learning apps and social media platforms can widen access to informal practice, especially for learners in remote areas. Teacher training should also include strategies to encourage and guide informal speaking outside lessons.

### **Conclusion**

Informal speaking practice plays a vital role in developing oral proficiency among English learners in Uzbekistan. Its inclusion alongside formal education can bridge gaps in communicative competence and learner confidence.

To maximize benefits, language programs should promote extracurricular activities, leverage digital tools, and foster supportive peer environments. Future research may explore longitudinal effects of informal practice and investigate its impact on different learner groups.

Informal speaking practice is a vital component in enhancing oral proficiency for English learners in Uzbekistan. It complements formal instruction by providing authentic, low-stress opportunities for communication, fostering greater fluency and confidence.

To maximize its impact, educational institutions must recognize informal language use's value and create supportive environments that encourage learners to engage in speaking outside class. This includes promoting extracurricular activities, leveraging technology, and addressing sociocultural barriers.

Future research should explore longitudinal effects of informal speaking on language proficiency and investigate the role of informal practice among different age groups and educational levels.

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