

## TEACHER DEVELOPMENT - EXPLORATORY ACTION RESEARCH: EVIDENCE FROM ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract.** Teacher development in English language teaching is no longer limited to formal training or prescribed methodologies. Increasingly, teachers are expected to reflect on their own practice and adapt to the realities of their classrooms. One approach that supports this process is Exploratory Action Research (EAR), which allows teachers to investigate their teaching while continuing their everyday work. This article explores the role of EAR in supporting professional development, with a particular focus on the Uzbek educational context. It also presents a small-scale classroom inquiry into student participation in speaking tasks. The findings suggest that EAR can help teachers better understand their learners, make more informed decisions, and gradually improve classroom interaction. At the same time, certain practical challenges remain, including time limitations and a lack of institutional support.

### Introduction

In recent years, the idea of teacher development has changed quite significantly. Rather than simply attending training sessions or following fixed methodologies, teachers are now expected to take a more active role in shaping their own professional growth. This is especially true in English language teaching, where classroom situations are often unpredictable and influenced by many factors, such as student motivation, language level, and cultural expectations.

In Uzbekistan, educational reforms have introduced more modern approaches to language teaching, including communicative methods and student-centered learning. However, in practice, many teachers still face difficulties applying these ideas in real classrooms. This creates a gap between theory and practice.

One way to address this issue is through Exploratory Action Research (EAR). What makes EAR particularly useful is that it does not require teachers to step outside their daily work. Instead, it encourages them to reflect on what is happening in their own classrooms and gradually make sense of it. This article explores how EAR can support teacher development and presents a small classroom-based example to illustrate its potential.

Methodology

Research Context

This small-scale inquiry was conducted at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University, where I work with second-year PRESETT students. The participants consisted of a group of pre-service English language teachers with an upper-intermediate level of English. As future educators, their classroom participation is particularly important, as it contributes not only to their language development but also to their emerging professional competence.

### Research Question

During several lessons, I noticed that although students were generally capable, their participation in speaking activities was uneven. While some students contributed actively, others remained silent. Rather than making assumptions, I chose to explore this issue more systematically. The guiding research question was:

*Why do some PRESETT students hesitate to actively participate in speaking tasks during English lessons?*

### Data Collection

To gain a better understanding of this issue, I used several practical and manageable methods:

- Classroom observation during speaking activities
- Short anonymous student questionnaires
- Informal conversations with students after class
- Reflective teaching notes written after each lesson

These methods were selected because they could be incorporated into regular teaching without interrupting the learning process.

Table 1

### *Factors Influencing Student Participation in Speaking Activities*

Factor	Description
Fear of making mistakes	Students avoid speaking due to a lack of confidence
Uneven participation	More confident students tend to dominate discussions
Task clarity	Instructions are sometimes not fully understood
Classroom environment	Students feel more comfortable in smaller groups

Table 2

### *Instructional Changes and Observed Outcomes*

Change Implemented	Observed Outcome
Increased pair and group work	Greater participation from less confident students
Clearer task instructions	Reduced confusion during activities
Supportive and non-judgmental feedback	Lower anxiety when speaking
Reduced teacher talk time	More opportunities for student interaction

First, many students were afraid of making mistakes. Even when they knew the answer, they preferred to stay silent rather than risk saying something incorrectly. This suggests that confidence plays a bigger role than language ability. Second, I realized that some of my speaking tasks were not as clear as I thought. In a few cases, students were unsure what exactly they were supposed to do, which reduced their willingness to participate. Another important factor was the classroom atmosphere. Students seemed much more comfortable speaking in pairs or small groups than in front of the whole class. Finally, I noticed that I was speaking more than I expected. This limited the amount of time students had to actually use the language.

### Discussion

What this small study showed me is that student participation is not determined by a single factor. It is influenced by a combination of emotional, methodological, and environmental elements. Before doing this inquiry, I might have assumed that students were simply not motivated. However, the findings suggest a more complex situation. Exploratory Action Research helped me look at my teaching more critically and avoid making quick assumptions. It also allowed me to test small changes, such as giving clearer instructions and increasing pair work, which led to noticeable improvements.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Exploratory Action Research can be a useful tool for teacher development, especially in contexts like Uzbekistan, where teachers are adapting to new educational approaches. It does not require complicated procedures, but it does require attention, reflection, and willingness to question one's own practice. Although this was a small-scale study, it showed that even simple forms of inquiry can yield meaningful insights. For teachers, this kind of process can be an important step toward becoming more confident and independent professionals.

### References

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