

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO DEVELOP SPEAKING COMPETENCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Zilola Kuchkarova

MATESOL Candidate, Webster University Tashkent

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes and practices of EFL teachers in Uzbekistan regarding the use of formative assessment to improve students' speaking skills. The research explores how teachers implement oral feedback, dialogue journals, and peer evaluation in secondary school classrooms. A mixed-method approach was applied using surveys and semi-structured interviews with 25 English teachers. The results show that while most teachers recognize the value of formative assessment for enhancing speaking competence, challenges such as large class sizes, time constraints, and lack of professional training hinder its consistent application. The study concludes with recommendations for improving teacher training and institutional support for formative assessment practices.

Keywords: formative assessment, teacher perceptions, speaking competence, secondary education, Uzbekistan

Introduction

Formative assessment (FA) has emerged as a vital component of effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Unlike summative assessment, which evaluates learning at the end of a unit or term, FA focuses on ongoing feedback that helps learners reflect, adjust, and improve their language skills during the learning process (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In the context of speaking skills, formative assessment provides learners with real-time feedback that can foster confidence, increase participation, and develop fluency.

However, the success of FA in language classrooms largely depends on how teachers perceive and implement it. Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and instructional habits play a major role in whether FA techniques are regularly and effectively used (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). In Uzbekistan's secondary schools, EFL teachers often work with large class sizes, limited resources, and heavy curricula — all of which influence how they view and apply FA strategies.

This study investigates Uzbek secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of using FA to develop students' speaking competence. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the role of formative assessment in speaking instruction?
2. Which FA strategies do teachers find most practical or beneficial?
3. What challenges do they face when implementing FA in real classroom contexts?

Methodology

The study used a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design. A total of 25 EFL teachers from 10 different secondary schools across Andijan and Tashkent regions participated in the research. Participants had varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from 2 to 20 years.

Data collection instruments included:

- A structured questionnaire (with Likert-scale and open-ended items) to gather general attitudes and usage frequency of FA strategies.
- Semi-structured interviews to explore deeper insights about classroom realities, challenges, and individual beliefs regarding FA.

The FA techniques discussed included oral feedback during speaking tasks, the use of dialogue journals for self-reflection, and peer evaluation activities. The interviews lasted 20–30 minutes each and were audio recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data, while descriptive statistics summarized the survey responses.

Findings

The findings revealed that the majority of teachers (84%) viewed formative assessment as beneficial for improving speaking competence. They particularly valued oral feedback and peer evaluation for creating interactive, student-centered lessons. Teachers mentioned that FA helped students identify their weaknesses and improve their fluency gradually.

However, several challenges were consistently reported:

- **Large class sizes:** Teachers found it difficult to give individual feedback in crowded classrooms.
- **Lack of training:** Many teachers (68%) indicated they had not received formal training in formative assessment methods.
- **Time constraints:** Due to exam-focused curricula, teachers felt pressured to complete required topics rather than conduct ongoing formative tasks.

Despite these barriers, some teachers developed creative strategies to include FA in their lessons — such as giving brief oral comments after group discussions or assigning short speaking reflections at home.

Interview excerpts highlight these experiences. One teacher stated, *“I believe formative feedback is more helpful than final exams, but I don’t have enough time or training to use it properly.”* Another said, *“My students like peer feedback, but they are shy at first and need clear instructions.”*

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that while secondary school EFL teachers in Uzbekistan value formative assessment for enhancing speaking competence, they often struggle to implement it effectively due to contextual limitations. The findings emphasize the need for more targeted professional development focused on practical FA techniques for speaking instruction.

Additionally, school administrators and education policymakers should recognize the importance of FA by:

- Reducing teacher workload
- Encouraging smaller class sizes where possible
- Organizing regular in-service training sessions
- Providing simple, adaptable tools for assessing speaking in a formative way

By addressing these challenges, formative assessment can become a more realistic and impactful part of speaking instruction in Uzbek classrooms.