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Implementing communicative language teaching during a pre-service efl practicum: an action research case study in a kazakhstani secondary school

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Abstract

Background and purpose. This article explores the patterns of change in speaking behaviour, classroom engagement, and motivation among ninth-grade EFL learners (N = 26; two parallel classes, 9“B” and 9“V”) when communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) were systematically implemented during a seven-month teaching practicum at a secondary gymnasium in Almaty, Kazakhstan. **Materials and methods.** A qualitative practitioner action research design was employed. Data were collected through structured classroom observation, a reflective practicum diary, supervisory feedback records, and learner questionnaires administered at the start and end of the placement. Sources were triangulated to identify convergent patterns of change. **Results.** Convergent evidence across all four data sources indicated consistent positive changes in learners’ willingness to engage in spontaneous spoken interaction, sustained target-language use during collaborative tasks, and self-reported speaking confidence. These findings are consistent with those of comparable CLT implementation studies in secondary EFL contexts. **Conclusion.** Sustained and systematically implemented communicative instruction within a pre-service practicum context was associated with meaningful patterns of change in EFL learners’ speaking behaviour and motivational engagement at the secondary school level.

Keywords: action research, communicative language teaching, EFL speaking skills, secondary education, teaching practicum

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ ОРТА МЕКТЕПТЕ БАСТАПҚЫ ПЕДАГОГИКАЛЫҚ ПРАКТИКА КЕЗІНДЕГІ КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ТІЛДІ ОҚЫТУДЫ ЕНГІЗУ: ІС-ӘРЕКЕТТІК ЗЕРТТЕУ

Аңдатпа

Алғышарттар мен мақсат. Мақала педагогикалық практика (қазан–сәуір) кезеңінде коммуникативтік тілдерді оқыту (CLT) және тапсырмаға негізделген оқыту (TBL) әдістерін жүйелі қолдану барысында 9-сынып EFL оқушыларының (N = 26; 9 “Б” және 9 “В”) сөйлеу мінез-құлқындағы, сабаққа қатысуындағы және мотивациясындағы өзгерістердің бақыланған үлгілерін зерттеуге арналған іс-әрекеттік зерттеу. **Материалдар мен әдістер.** Зерттеуде деректерді триангуляциялау тәсілі қолданылған сапалық іс-әрекеттік зерттеу (action research) әдісі пайдаланылды. Деректер оқу үдерісін бақылау, практиканттың рефлексиялық күнделігі, әдіскердің кері байланысы және оқушыларға жүргізілген сауалнама негізінде жинақталды. **Нәтижелер.** Зерттеу нәтижесінде оқушылардың спонтанды ауызша қарым-қатынасқа түсуге дайындығының, топтық коммуникативтік тапсырмалар барысында ағылшын тілін тұрақты қолдануының және коммуникативтік сенімділік деңгейінің біртіндеп артқаны анықталды.



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Қорытынды. Зерттеу нәтижелері педагогикалық практика кезеңінде коммуникативтік оқыту әдістерін жүйелі қолдану жағдайында EFL оқушыларының сөйлеу мінез-құлқы мен оқу үдерісіне қатысуында байқалған өзгерістердің бар екенін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: іс-әрекеттік зерттеу; коммуникативтік тілдік оқыту; орта мектеп; педагогикалық практика; сөйлеу дағдылары

ВНЕДРЕНИЕ КОММУНИКАТИВНОГО МЕТОДА ОБУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКУ В ПЕРИОД ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКОЙ ПРАКТИКИ В КАЗАХСТАНСКОЙ СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЕ: ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ-ДЕЙСТВИЕ

Аннотация

Предпосылки и цель. Статья представляет собой исследование-действие, посвящённое изучению наблюдаемых закономерностей изменений в речевом поведении, вовлечённости в учебный процесс и мотивации учащихся 9-х классов (N = 26; классы 9 «Б» и 9 «В») при систематическом применении коммуникативного метода (CLT) и обучения на основе заданий (TBL) в период педагогической практики (октябрь–апрель). **Материалы и методы.** Применялся метод качественного исследования-действия (action research) с триангуляцией данных. Данные собирались посредством наблюдения за учебным процессом, рефлексивного дневника практиканта, отзывов методиста и анкетирования учащихся. **Результаты.** Зафиксированы устойчивые положительные изменения в готовности учащихся к спонтанному речевому взаимодействию, использовании английского языка в кооперативных заданиях и самооценке коммуникативной уверенности. **Заключение.** Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о наличии наблюдаемых изменений в речевом поведении и учебной вовлечённости EFL-учащихся в условиях систематического применения коммуникативных методов обучения в период педагогической практики.

Ключевые слова: исследование-действие, коммуникативное обучение языку, навыки устной речи, педагогическая практика, средняя школа

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of oral communicative competence among secondary school learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a persistent challenge in post-Soviet educational contexts, including Kazakhstan, where systemic reforms have formally endorsed learner-centred and communicative approaches yet classroom practice frequently continues to prioritise grammatical accuracy and written performance over spontaneous spoken interaction (Ghafar et al., 2023). This tension between policy intent and instructional reality is particularly salient during pre-service teaching placements, where student teachers must navigate institutional conventions while attempting to implement evidence-based communicative methodology.

The present study reports on a seven-month practicum placement (October–April) conducted by a fourth-year pre-service EFL teacher in two parallel ninth-grade classes at Gymnasium No. 62 in Almaty. The central research question addressed is: what patterns of change in learners' speaking behaviour, classroom engagement, and self-reported motivation were observed during the sustained implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) practices within a conventional secondary school environment? The study employs a qualitative action research framework, triangulating evidence from four data sources to document and interpret change over the course of the placement.



The study contributes to an emerging body of practitioner research that examines the feasibility and outcomes of communicative methodology in contexts where structural constraints – including large class sizes, high-stakes written examinations, and limited instructional autonomy – present significant obstacles to its implementation (Azizah et al., 2023; Negewo et al., 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching in Secondary EFL Contexts

Communicative language teaching has been widely recognised as an effective framework for developing spoken language competence in EFL settings (Hui & Yunus, 2023). Grounded in the principle that language learning is facilitated through meaningful interaction rather than through the isolated study of formal structures, CLT repositions the learner as an active participant in communicative exchanges and the teacher as a facilitator of interaction rather than the primary source of linguistic input (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025). Empirical evidence consistently supports the efficacy of CLT in improving speaking skills: Winarno et al. (2025) demonstrated that role-play activities embedded within a CLT framework produced statistically significant gains in speaking ability among Indonesian secondary school students, while Azizah et al. (2023) documented systematic shifts in teacher behaviour and learner participation when CLT principles were implemented in spoken language instruction at the secondary level.

A recurring finding in the literature concerns the role of reduced teacher talking time and increased opportunities for learner-initiated output in promoting fluency development. Ghafar et al. (2023), in a review of CLT implementation studies, identified the creation of low-stakes communicative contexts – in which learners are encouraged to prioritise meaning over grammatical accuracy – as a central mechanism underlying observed improvements

in spoken production. This insight informed the instructional design of the present practicum, in which fluency-first feedback protocols were adopted across all communicative task types.

2.2 Task-Based Learning and Learner Engagement

Task-based learning represents a methodologically coherent elaboration of CLT principles, organising instruction around the completion of purposeful communicative tasks graded to learners' developing proficiency (Rampeng et al., 2025). Rampeng et al. (2025) demonstrated that integrated active learning tasks in secondary EFL classrooms produced significant improvements in both speaking proficiency and learning motivation, attributing these gains to the increased sense of communicative purpose afforded by task-based instruction. Similarly, Shalaby and Badr (2024) found that constructivist learning activities – which share key design principles with TBL – substantially enhanced EFL speaking skills among secondary school learners, with effect sizes suggesting that task authenticity and learner agency are particularly powerful drivers of improvement.

The sequencing of tasks from structurally supported formats to progressively more open-ended communicative interaction has been identified as a critical design consideration (Gonfa, 2023). Gonfa's (2023) investigation of cooperative language learning in secondary EFL classrooms found that scaffolded task progressions – in which initial tasks provided clear structural support before requiring more autonomous production – were associated with greater speaking skill development than either unstructured free practice or purely form-focused instruction. This evidence base directly informed the practicum's instructional sequence, which moved from paired information-gap exercises and structured role-plays in the early weeks toward guided debates and open group discussions in the final phase of the placement.

2.3 Motivation, Affective Factors, and Classroom Climate



The relationship between affective classroom conditions and EFL speaking development has received substantial empirical attention. Lee et al. (2023) demonstrated that intercultural communicative competence and motivational engagement are mutually reinforcing in online EFL contexts, suggesting that tasks with genuine communicative value – tasks that learners perceive as purposeful and relevant – generate higher levels of intrinsic motivation and sustained participation. This finding resonates with broader theoretical accounts of motivation in language learning, which identify task value and perceived communicative competence as central predictors of engagement and persistence.

Negewo et al. (2023), examining EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in secondary schools in Ethiopia, found a persistent gap between teachers' espoused communicative beliefs and their actual classroom practice, with anxiety about learner error and concern for curriculum coverage identified as primary inhibiting factors. This contextual parallel is relevant to the present study, in which the practicum teacher deliberately adopted fluency-first feedback and error tolerance norms as a mechanism for reducing learner anxiety and creating a classroom climate conducive to spoken risk-taking.

2.4 Reflective Practice and Practicum-Based Research

The value of structured reflective practice as a component of pre-service teacher development is well established in the literature (Farrell, 2015). Mahmud et al. (2023), examining the use of lesson study approaches in senior high school English classrooms, found that systematic collaborative reflection – in which teaching practice was iteratively analysed against observed learner outcomes – produced measurable improvements in students' communicative competence. The present study draws on this reflective tradition, employing a practicum diary and supervisor feedback cycles as both a professional development tool and a

primary data source for documenting instructional adjustments and their observed effects.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a practitioner action research design within the qualitative tradition of classroom-based inquiry (Farrell, 2015). Action research was selected as the methodological framework because the study's primary aim was not to isolate a single causal variable under controlled experimental conditions, but rather to document, interpret, and iteratively respond to the dynamics of a real classroom as communicative methodology was introduced and sustained across a full academic-year practicum. The cyclical structure of action research – encompassing planning, implementation, observation, and reflection – was operationalised through weekly lesson planning, structured classroom observation, reflective diary entries, and periodic supervisor feedback consultations.

In the absence of standardised pre- and post-test scores, the study relies on structured qualitative evidence triangulated across four data sources, treated as indicative of pedagogical change rather than statistically generalisable findings. This epistemological position is consistent with the interpretivist tradition in practitioner research, which prioritises the richness and contextual specificity of qualitative evidence over the generalisability claims associated with experimental designs (Negewo et al., 2023).

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Gymnasium No. 62 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, during a compulsory pedagogical practicum placement that ran from October to April. The practitioner – a fourth-year student enrolled in the “Two Foreign Languages” programme at Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University – was assigned sole instructional responsibility for two parallel ninth-grade EFL classes, designated 9“B” and



9“V”, with 13 learners enrolled in each class (total N = 26). The placement was conducted under the joint supervision of the school’s English language subject teacher and a university-appointed methodologist, both of whom conducted periodic lesson observations and provided structured formative feedback.

Both classes operated under the standard Kazakhstani secondary school English curriculum, with learners at an estimated A2–B1 proficiency level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale. The practicum context was characterised by the same structural constraints identified in comparable secondary EFL settings in the region: a grammar-translation instructional tradition, limited target-language use outside formal lessons, and assessment instruments weighted toward written grammatical accuracy.

3.3 Instructional Design

The instructional programme implemented across both classes was designed in accordance with CLT and TBL principles. Each lesson was structured around a three-phase sequence: a pre-task stage introducing relevant lexical or functional language; a task stage requiring genuine communicative engagement through information-gap exercises, structured role-plays, jigsaw activities, group discussions, or guided debates; and a post-task feedback stage in which communicative effectiveness rather than grammatical accuracy was foregrounded. This design reflects the task cycle framework identified in the empirical literature as effective for secondary EFL speaking development (Rampeng et al., 2025; Shalaby & Badr, 2024).

Task types were sequenced from structurally supported formats toward increasingly open-ended communicative activity across the seven-month placement. In the first eight weeks, instruction emphasised paired information-gap exercises and scripted role-plays that provided clear structural scaffolding. From the mid-point of the placement onward, tasks progressively required greater learner autonomy, culminating in unscripted group

debates and presentations in the final weeks. The same instructional sequence was applied in both 9“B” and 9“V”, enabling informal cross-class comparison of learner responses.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Four qualitative data collection instruments were employed and subsequently triangulated:

1. Structured classroom observation – lesson-by-lesson field notes documenting learner participation rates, patterns of target language use during collaborative tasks, instances of voluntary spoken initiation, and observable shifts in task engagement.

2. Reflective practicum diary – weekly structured written reflections by the practitioner, recording perceived changes in learner confidence and engagement, recurring pedagogical challenges, and specific adjustments made to lesson design in response to observed outcomes.

3. Supervisory feedback records – written and verbal formative evaluations provided by the supervising subject teacher and university methodologist following scheduled lesson observations.

4. Learner questionnaires – brief structured surveys administered at the commencement and conclusion of the practicum, eliciting learners’ self-reported speaking confidence, enjoyment of communicative tasks, and preferences regarding lesson activity types. The learner questionnaire consisted of five closed-ended items addressing: (1) self-reported speaking confidence; (2) willingness to participate in communicative activities; (3) comfort with making mistakes while speaking English; (4) frequency of English use during pair and group work; and (5) enjoyment of communicative classroom tasks.

Triangulation across these four sources was applied as a validity strategy: findings that appeared consistently across independent data sources were accorded greater evidential weight than those identifiable in only one instrument



(Gonfa, 2023). Qualitative data were analysed through thematic coding: observation notes and diary entries were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring patterns, which were then cross-checked against supervisory feedback and questionnaire responses to confirm convergence. The practicum extended from October to April and involved four English lessons per week across two ninth-grade classes. Reflective records were maintained throughout the placement, with twelve structured diary entries selected for analysis due to their completeness and relevance to the research questions. Although learner attendance varied slightly across the practicum period, all 26 participants contributed to at least one stage of the data collection process.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Reflexivity

The study was conducted within the framework of a compulsory pedagogical practicum at Gymnasium No. 62 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The implementation of communicative activities took place during regularly scheduled English language lessons under the supervision of the school's designated practicum mentor and a university-appointed methodologist. As the activities formed part of normal classroom instruction and no sensitive

personal data were collected, participation posed no foreseeable risks to learners. All questionnaire responses were collected anonymously and reported in aggregated form to ensure participant confidentiality.

Given the dual role of the practitioner as both teacher and researcher, several measures were taken to mitigate potential confirmation bias. Findings were triangulated across four independent data sources and discussed periodically with the university practicum supervisor and the school mentor. Reflective diary writing was additionally employed to encourage critical self-evaluation throughout the practicum period.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Observed Changes in Learner Speaking Behaviour

Table 1 presents a structured qualitative comparison of four behavioural and attitudinal indicators across the start and end of the practicum in both 9“B” and 9“V”. Given the absence of standardised measurement instruments, the indicators reported reflect convergent evidence drawn from all four data sources rather than scores derived from a single assessment tool.

Table 1. Qualitative indicators of learner change over the practicum period (October–April)

Indicator	Start of practicum (October)	End of practicum (April)
Willingness to speak unprompted	Low – brief, hesitant responses; most learners waited to be called on	Moderate to high – increased voluntary participation; longer spoken turns in pair and group tasks
Use of English during collaborative tasks	Inconsistent – frequent code-switching to Kazakh or Russian	More sustained – English maintained for the duration of most communicative tasks
Self-reported speaking confidence	Predominantly “low” or “medium” on learner questionnaires	Shift toward “medium” and “high” ratings; increased readiness to initiate interaction
Learner agency in communicative tasks	Passive; heavily reliant on teacher scaffolding and prompting	Active and learner-directed; reduced dependence on teacher prompting



Classroom observation notes document a progressive increase in learner-initiated spoken contributions across both classes, with the most marked shift occurring from approximately the midpoint of the placement onward. This pattern is consistent with the observation that communicative task familiarity – once learners have internalised the interactional conventions of a given task type – reduces the cognitive and affective load associated with spoken production, thereby releasing attentional resources for communication rather than task management (Rampeng et al., 2025). Early-practicum observation notes were characterised by recurring references to minimal responses, extended wait times, and learner reversion to Kazakh or Russian during paired activities; by the final weeks of the placement, the same observers' notes consistently recorded unprompted contributions, sustained target-language use, and learner-initiated topic extensions during group tasks.

Reflective diary entries corroborate this trajectory, documenting the practitioner's iterative adjustments to task scaffolding in response to observed learner difficulty. In the early phase of the practicum, tasks were progressively restructured to reduce ambiguity and increase structural support following observations that open-ended formats produced learner disengagement rather than communicative risk-taking. This responsive adaptation of task design reflects the reflective practitioner orientation identified by Farrell (2015) and Mahmud et al. (2023) as a central mechanism through which practicum experience translates into improved instructional decision-making.

Illustrative excerpts derived from reflective records and anonymised learner feedback further support these observations. One learner noted, "I feel more comfortable speaking English when working in groups." Reflective diary records from Week 6 indicate that "several learners who had initially avoided voluntary participation began initiating short responses

during pair work." Supervisor observation notes additionally documented that "students demonstrated greater willingness to maintain English during collaborative tasks compared to the beginning of the placement."

4.2 Self-Reported Motivation and Confidence

Learner questionnaire data indicate a consistent directional shift in self-reported speaking confidence across both classes. At the commencement of the practicum, the majority of respondents in both 9 "B" and 9 "V" self-reported speaking confidence levels in the "low" or "medium" categories. By the end of the placement, responses in both classes showed a marked redistribution toward "medium" and "high" confidence ratings, with a parallel increase in reported enjoyment of communicative task types relative to grammar-focused activities. These findings align with those of Shalaby and Badr (2024), who documented significant improvements in EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs following sustained exposure to constructivist communicative learning activities, and with Fauzi and Ridwan's (2025) finding that CLT implementation was associated with increased learner motivation and willingness to communicate in secondary EFL settings.

The relationship between task design and motivational outcomes merits particular attention. The sequential progression from structurally supported to more open-ended communicative formats appears to have been a critical factor in the observed motivational trajectory: learners who initially reported reluctance to engage in spontaneous spoken interaction became progressively more willing to participate as their cumulative experience of successful communicative task completion built self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2023). This pattern is consistent with social cognitive accounts of language learning motivation, in which perceived communicative competence functions



as a mediating variable between instructional design and learner engagement.

4.3 Discussion: Implications for CLT Implementation in Secondary EFL Contexts

The convergent pattern of findings across observation, diary, supervisory feedback, and questionnaire data suggests that sustained and systematically implemented communicative instruction is associated with observable changes in learner speaking behaviour and motivational orientation within a single academic-year practicum, even in a context characterised by structural constraints on communicative practice. This conclusion is consistent with the broader empirical literature on CLT effectiveness in secondary EFL settings (Hui & Yunus, 2023; Winarno et al., 2025), while the practicum-specific framing of the study extends that literature by situating the implementation within the particular constraints and affordances of a pre-service teacher placement.

The findings suggest that task sequencing – specifically the progression from scaffolded to autonomous communicative formats – may have contributed to the observed patterns of change. This interpretation is consistent with Gonfa's (2023) conclusions regarding cooperative language learning and with Rampeng et al.'s (2025) evidence on integrated active learning tasks. Taken together, these studies suggest that the design of the task progression, rather than any individual task type, is the primary pedagogical lever available to the communicative practitioner.

The documented role of reflective practice in enabling responsive instructional adjustment represents a further contribution of the present study. The practitioner's systematic use of a reflective diary and supervisor feedback cycles allowed pedagogical decisions to be grounded in observed learner response rather than in pre-specified lesson plans, an approach that Mahmud et al. (2023) and Farrell (2015) identify as central to the development of effective teaching judgement during the practicum period.

4.4 Limitations

Several limitations constrain the interpretive scope of the present findings. The absence of standardised pre- and post-test measures of speaking proficiency means that observed changes cannot be attributed to communicative instruction with quantitative precision; maturation, increased English exposure through other curricular sources, and motivational factors unrelated to instructional design cannot be controlled for in a single-arm qualitative study. The practitioner's concurrent roles as instructor and primary observer introduce a risk of confirmation bias in data interpretation, which the triangulation strategy partially but not fully mitigates. Finally, the findings are grounded in a specific institutional and curricular context and should not be generalised to secondary EFL settings in which structural conditions differ substantially.

5. CONCLUSION

Triangulated qualitative evidence from classroom observation, a reflective practicum diary, supervisory feedback, and learner questionnaires indicates consistent positive changes in learners' willingness to engage in spontaneous spoken interaction, their sustained use of English during collaborative tasks, and their self-reported speaking confidence and motivational engagement.

These findings extend the empirical literature on CLT and TBL effectiveness in secondary EFL contexts (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025; Rampeng et al., 2025; Winarno et al., 2025) by providing a situated, longitudinal account of communicative methodology implementation within the specific constraints of a pre-service practicum placement. The study suggests that meaningful patterns of change in communicative behaviour were observed within a single practicum cycle in the context of instruction systematically designed around graded task progressions, fluency-first feedback protocols, and reflective adaptation of lesson design.

The implications for teacher education programme design are twofold. First, practicum



placements should be conceptualised not merely as sites for the application of pre-acquired methodological knowledge, but as active learning environments in which reflective practice and instructional experimentation can themselves generate evidence-based pedagogical development. Second, pre-service teachers should receive targeted preparation in the design of graded communicative task sequences and

fluency-first feedback approaches prior to placement, in order to maximise the communicative value of their practicum experience for both themselves and their learners. Future research employing mixed-methods designs with standardised speaking assessments would strengthen the evidential basis for the conclusions advanced here.

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