

**DESIGNING PROJECT-BASED TASKS FOR EFL SPEAKING: MODELS, STAGES,
AND CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES**

Xidirova Shaxlobonu Zafarjon kizi

Master's student, Chirchik State Pedagogical University

Email: xidirovashaxlobonu9@gmail.com

Academic Supervisor: **Saitkulova Nazokat Raxmonovna**

Abstract. Speaking is often seen as the most challenging skill for learners of English as a Foreign Language, especially in classrooms where students have few opportunities to interact and teaching focuses mainly on grammar drills. In such contexts, learners may know the language rules but still struggle to speak fluently and confidently. Project-Based Learning has gained increasing attention as an effective way to address this problem because it places speaking within meaningful, goal-driven activities that require learners to communicate for real purposes. This article synthesizes recent research on project-based language learning to illustrate how speaking projects can be systematically designed to support EFL learners' oral development. Grounded in constructivist and sociocultural views of learning, this article discusses key theoretical foundations, reviews major models of project-based speaking, and explains the main stages and classroom techniques involved in implementation. The reviewed studies indicate that well-designed speaking projects can improve oral proficiency, lower speaking anxiety, and increase learners' behavioral and cognitive engagement. Simultaneously, the findings suggest that learner agency does not develop automatically and needs to be intentionally supported through task design. The article concludes by considering the practical implications for EFL teachers and pointing to future research directions, particularly in relation to long-term speaking development, learner agency, and the use of emerging technologies.

Key words: Project-based learning, EFL speaking, oral communication, communicative competence, learner engagement, speaking assessment, technology-enhanced language learning.

Introduction

Speaking undoubtedly remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners to master. Classroom realities constantly reveal recurring problems, particularly limited learner-learner interaction, low speaking confidence, and heavy reliance on form-focused drills. These conditions significantly reduce opportunities for meaningful oral communication and discourage spontaneous language use. Consequently, learners may merely practice grammar yet still struggle to speak fluently and confidently in real-life communicative situations. Recent research indicates that PBL can create sustained interactions over time, situate speaking in purposeful, goal-driven tasks, and increase learner engagement, autonomy, and confidence in oral communication [14, 1]. Within well-designed projects, speaking functions as a tool for achieving concrete outcomes, such as negotiating meaning, presenting products, and collaborating with

peers, rather than as an isolated object of practice. The aim of this study is twofold. First, it synthesizes recent research on project-based learning for EFL speaking, with particular attention to oral performance, engagement, and self-efficacy outcomes. Second, it extensively presents practical models, implementation stages, and classroom techniques that can help teachers design PBL tasks to systematically support the development of EFL learners' speaking skills.

Theoretical foundations of project-based speaking

Project-Based Learning in Language Education. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is deeply grounded in constructivist and sociocultural views of learning, which hold that learners develop knowledge and skills through extended engagement in meaningful, goal-oriented activity. Rather than mastering discrete linguistic items in isolation, learners should work on complex projects that require planning, problem solving, and sustained communication over time. The core principles of PBL include authenticity, collaboration, and learner agency, typically operationalized through real-world-oriented tasks, group work, and opportunities for learners to make decisions about content and process [12, 2]. In language education, these principles align naturally with communicative goals, as they meaningfully foreground language use as a means of achieving socially and academically relevant results.

Speaking is a communicative and social skill. From this perspective, speaking is understood not as an isolated linguistic activity but as a communicative and social practice. Effective oral communication involves interaction, negotiation of meaning, and discourse management, drawing on both linguistic resources and pragmatic, strategic, and interpersonal skills [2, 1]. Learners can greatly develop speaking competence through participation in socially meaningful exchanges, role-taking, and co-constructing understanding with others. This approach is more effective than merely producing isolated sentences or decontextualized patterns. Project-based tasks create dialogic conditions in which learners must explain ideas, respond to peers, justify choices, and clarify misunderstandings to move the project forward. These demands mirror the dynamics of real-world communication and provide rich opportunities for fluency development, strategic language use, and integrating form and meaning.

Alignment with major frameworks. The previous paragraph ends by highlighting how PBL provides rich opportunities for fluency development, strategic language use, and the integration of form and meaning. Building on these inherent benefits, project-based speaking further strengthens its pedagogical grounding by closely aligning with major frameworks such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the action-oriented approach of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction and communicative competence, whereas the CEFR conceptualizes learners as social agents who use language to accomplish tasks in specific contexts [4]. PBL operationalizes these principles by organizing instruction around extended, purposeful tasks that require learners to plan, collaborate, and present outcomes to authentic or semi-authentic audiences. In this way, project work provides a concrete mechanism for implementing CLT and the CEFR in speaking classes,

moving beyond short, isolated activities toward integrated task-based cycles.

Evidence from recent reviews. Recent reviews of project-based language learning (PBL) indicate that such approaches can improve oral proficiency, enhance learner motivation, and foster deeper cognitive and emotional engagement with language learning [8 ,6]. These findings suggest that PBL addresses many of the interactional and affective limitations identified in traditional drill-oriented speaking instruction. Building on this empirical base, the following sections synthesize key insights from recent PBL studies and propose practical models, stages, and techniques for designing project-based speaking tasks in EFL classrooms.

Models for designing project-based speaking tasks

Stoller’s project-based language learning model. Stoller’s widely cited model conceptualizes project work as a sequence of structured phases: topic selection, planning, research, production, and presentation with reflection. Organizing projects in this way provides clear scaffolding for both teachers and learners while ensuring sustained language use at each stage [11]. Throughout the cycle, learners repeatedly revisited core ideas through brainstorming, negotiating roles, reporting findings, drafting, and rehearsal. These recursive opportunities to discuss, refine, and rehearse project content support both fluency and accuracy in speaking as learners cycle between exploratory talk and more formal, audience-oriented oral production.

Action-oriented scenario model. Action-oriented PBL models frame classroom work as participation in real-world scenarios. Tasks are designed around communicative goals that require learners to draw on multiple modes of language use, including interaction (e.g., planning meetings and negotiations), production (e.g., pitches, reports, and presentations), and mediation (e.g., summarizing, explaining, and adapting information for others). In such scenarios, learners collaborate to solve problems or complete complex products that resemble authentic communicative events rather than simply performing isolated role plays [4]. This approach operationalizes the CEFR view of learners as “social agents,” situating speaking in purposeful, context-rich activity.

Technology-enhanced PBL models. Recent work in PBL emphasizes technology-mediated project designs, including mobile-assisted projects, AI-supported speaking practice, and virtual or blended exchange. These models extend speaking opportunities beyond the classroom by enabling asynchronous voice and video tasks, multimodal project products, and interaction with geographically distant partners [5 ,1]. For example, learners may record iterative drafts of spoken products, receive automated or peer feedback, and then revise their performance, thereby increasing the quantity and quality of oral practice.

Model selection criteria: Choosing an appropriate PBL model requires careful attention to contextual variables. Key considerations include learners’ proficiency levels and strategic competence, institutional constraints such as timetables, class sizes, and technology access, and assessment requirements (e.g., a focus on interactional competence versus monologic performance). No single model is universally optimal; rather, effective PBL design involves

selecting and adapting frameworks so that project demands are challenging yet feasible and speaking outcomes remain central and accessible in the local context.

Stages of project-based speaking tasks

Stage 1. Project launch and driving questions. Projects typically commence with a clear communicative problem or driving question that provides learners with a compelling rationale for speaking English. At this stage, the teacher clarifies the overall purpose of the project, the expected final products (e.g., presentation, debate, digital artifact), and group roles and responsibilities. Making goals, timelines, and audience expectations explicit helps learners understand why speaking is necessary and how it will be used, which in turn increases participation and reduces confusion or off-task talk.

Stage 2. Input and language scaffolding: Once the project focus is established, learners receive targeted linguistic and strategic support from the teacher or facilitator. This may include work on key discourse functions (e.g., suggesting, agreeing, disagreeing politely), speaking strategies (e.g., asking for clarification, paraphrasing), and formulaic expressions that can be immediately recycled in project interactions. Carefully chosen input texts, models, and speaking frames provide a repertoire of language that learners can draw upon during collaborative work. Such scaffolding helps learners participate more confidently and accurately, especially at lower proficiency levels.

Stage 3. Collaborative project work. The core of project-based speaking development occurs during the structured group work. Here, interaction is organized through purposeful patterns, such as information gaps, role-based discussions, jigsaw tasks, and problem-solving activities linked directly to the project outcome. These structures ensure that each learner has unique information and a reason to contribute, thereby increasing meaningful talk. Research indicates that such collaborative formats can promote gains in fluency, complexity, and interactional competence as learners negotiate meaning, co-construct content, and manage discourse over extended stretches of time [14]

Stage 4. Rehearsal, feedback, and revision: As the project product takes shape, learners engage in rehearsal cycles for key speaking tasks (e.g., group presentations, pitches and debates). Rehearsal allows them to refine their ideas, improve their organization, and work on accuracy and pronunciation while gradually building confidence. Peer and teacher feedback at this stage can be balanced to address both fluency (e.g., overall comprehensibility and pacing) and form (e.g., recurrent grammatical or lexical issues), guiding learners toward more polished and effective oral performance [8]

Stage 5. Public product and reflections. Projects culminate in a public product or performance, such as a live presentation, debate, poster session, or digital artifact shared with an internal or external audience. This “public” dimension raises the stakes and often increases engagement, as learners perceive a real communicative purpose in their work. Following the performance, guided reflection through discussion, journals, or self-assessment checklists helps learners

evaluate their speaking processes and outcomes, recognize progress, and set future goals. Thus, reflection consolidates learning and feeds forward into subsequent project cycles.

Classroom techniques for effective project-based speaking

Effective implementation of project-based speaking tasks depends not only on the overall design but also on the micro-techniques teachers use to structure interactions, distribute participation, and support language development. The following clusters of techniques translate PBL principles into daily classroom practice.

Interaction design techniques: Interaction design focuses on creating conditions for rich and purposeful talk. Techniques such as jigsaw speaking, debate rotations, and problem-solving meetings ensure that learners hold complementary information or positions and must communicate to advance the project. These formats increase the number of speaking turns, promote negotiation of meaning, and require learners to manage discourse collaboratively rather than relying on teacher-led patterns.

Techniques for increasing participation. Because project work can easily be dominated by more proficient or confident learners, explicit participation structures are essential in the classroom. Role cards can assign rotating responsibilities (e.g., moderator, summarizer, time-keeper), while speaking quotas and accountability logs make individual contributions visible and expected. Such tools help redistribute talk time and encourage quieter learners to participate, thereby supporting more equitable interactions [10]

Language-focused techniques: Language support is crucial for communicative project work. Planned focus-on-form moments, targeted pronunciation support, and training in discourse markers (e.g., for sequencing, contrast, or stance) allow learners to refine their accuracy and coherence without interrupting communicative flow. Correction is selective and purposeful, prioritizing recurrent or communicatively significant issues rather than treating every error, so that learners maintain confidence while gradually upgrading their spoken language skills.

Technology-supported techniques: Technology can extend and diversify opportunities for oral practice in language learning. Audio and video drafts, mobile recording tools, and AI chatbots for rehearsal enable learners to practice outside of class time, review their own performance, and receive feedback in low-stakes contexts. These technology-mediated techniques tend to increase overall practice time and can reduce performance anxiety by allowing repeated private rehearsal before public speaking [5]. When integrated thoughtfully, they complement in-class interaction and help sustain project-related speaking beyond the physical classroom.

Research-based impacts on EFL speaking development

A growing body of empirical work indicates that project-based approaches can positively influence multiple dimensions of EFL speaking performance and engagement. Synthesizing these findings helps clarify not only what project-based speaking can achieve but also under

what conditions it is most effective.

Speaking proficiency gain. Studies consistently report measurable improvements in fluency, complexity, and interactional competence when learners engage in well-designed project-based speaking tasks [14 ,3]. These gains are typically attributed to the extended, meaning-focused interaction that projects require, which pushes learners to mobilize their linguistic resources over longer discourse turns and across different communicative events. Repeated cycles of planning, collaboration, and performance create opportunities for proceduralization of language, leading to more automatic retrieval, varied structures, and effective management of turn-taking and negotiation of meaning.

Effective outcomes. Beyond linguistic gains, project-based speaking has been shown to reduce speaking anxiety and enhance motivation [9]. Working toward concrete, socially meaningful outcomes can shift learners' focus from "performing English correctly" to "achieving a communicative goal," which often lowers affective filters. Collaborative structures, shared responsibility, and the possibility of rehearsing and revising spoken output further contribute to a safer and more supportive environment for risk-taking in the target language.

Engagement dimensions. Research on engagement suggests that project-based speaking is particularly effective in fostering behavioral and cognitive engagement. Learners tend to participate more actively in project tasks and invest greater mental effort in planning, problem solving, and meaning making [13]. However, agentic engagement—learners' proactive contribution to shaping the learning process —often remains limited unless explicitly fostered. Without deliberate design features such as the choice of topics, negotiation of project goals, or student input into assessment criteria, learners may remain largely compliant rather than genuinely agentic participants in project work.

Conditions for success. Across these studies, several enabling conditions recur: tasks that are authentically framed and clearly meaningful to learners; explicit, ongoing scaffolding of both language and processes; and structured and transparent assessment procedures. When these conditions are in place, project-based speaking is more likely to translate into durable gains in proficiency, positive affect, and sustained engagement. Conversely, projects that lack a clear communicative purpose, sufficient support, or coherent assessment risk becoming unfocused group work with limited pedagogical impact.

Assessment of project-based speaking

Assessing project-based speaking requires moving beyond a narrow focus on final performances to capture the richness of learners' processes and development. Therefore, effective assessment combines process and product evaluations in an integrated system. On the process side, teachers gather evidence of ongoing participation, such as contributions during planning meetings, problem-solving discussions, and rehearsal sessions. This can be documented through observation notes, participation logs or learner self-reports. Such process-oriented assessment reinforces the message that sustained engagement and collaboration are valued outcomes in their

own right. On the product side, final speaking performances—whether live presentations, debates, or digital artifacts—are evaluated using clear criteria that reflect both communicative effectiveness and relevant linguistic features. Rubrics aligned with CEFR descriptors help operationalize expectations for fluency, range, accuracy, interaction, and coherence, thereby increasing transparency and consistency [4]. When learners are familiar with these descriptors, they can better understand their target performance levels and monitor their own progress. Furthermore, peer and self-assessments play complementary roles. Inviting learners to evaluate their own and their peers' contributions encourages reflection, metacognitive awareness, and shared responsibility for learning. When carefully scaffolded and aligned with teacher-designed rubrics, these forms of assessment can deepen learners' understanding of quality in spoken performance and support a more learner-centered assessment culture within project-based classrooms.

Pedagogical implications for EFL teachers

The adoption of project-based speaking necessitates a fundamental reorientation of teachers' professional roles and classroom practices. Rather than acting primarily as transmitters of knowledge, teachers become designers of learning environments and facilitators of complex communicative activities. This involves crafting coherent project scenarios, sequencing stages, integrating language support, and orchestrating interaction patterns that maximize opportunities for meaningful discussions. In practical terms, teachers face several challenges. Time management is critical: projects must be planned so that each stage (launch, input, collaboration, rehearsal, and performance) has sufficient time for both speaking practice and reflection without overwhelming the syllabus. Curriculum alignment is equally important; projects need to be mapped onto curricular objectives and assessment requirements so that project-based speaking is seen as central rather than peripheral. Working with mixed-proficiency groups presents additional complexity, requiring strategies such as differentiated roles, tiered language support, and flexible grouping to ensure that all learners are appropriately challenged and able to contribute. Despite these challenges, evidence suggests that project-based speaking is feasible across all educational levels. In secondary settings, projects can connect language learning with subject content, local issues, or school events, thereby increasing their relevance. In higher education, projects can be linked to disciplinary communication, academic literacies, or professional scenarios. In both contexts, teachers who gradually integrate project-based elements—starting with smaller projects or project-like units—can build experience and confidence before moving toward more extensive implementations.

Research gaps and future directions

Although research on project-based speaking in EFL contexts is expanding, several gaps remain in the literature. Longitudinal studies that trace learners' speaking development across multiple project cycles are still relatively rare; consequently, our understanding of long-term trajectories and the sustainability of gains in fluency, complexity, and interactional competence is limited. Similarly, while engagement outcomes are frequently reported, the agentic dimension of engagement has not been explored in sufficient depth, particularly in relation to how project

design might strengthen learners' capacity to initiate ideas, negotiate goals, and influence classroom decision-making. Another emerging frontier is the use of **AI and other digital tools** in speaking projects. While initial studies point to the potential of AI-mediated rehearsal, automated feedback, and virtual collaboration, the pedagogical and ethical implications of these tools—especially in diverse EFL contexts—remain underexplored. Future research would benefit from context-sensitive designs that compare different project models, examine differential effects for learners at varying proficiency levels, and investigate how teacher beliefs and institutional cultures shape the implementation and effectiveness of project-based speaking.

Conclusion

Project-based speaking tasks offer a structured yet flexible pathway from controlled practice to communicative performance in EFL classrooms. By organizing instruction around meaningful projects, teachers can create conditions in which learners repeatedly plan, negotiate, rehearse, and perform spoken language to achieve authentic goals. However, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on the interplay of several elements: well-articulated models, carefully staged design, and evidence-based classroom techniques that distribute participation, scaffold language, and integrate appropriate use of technology. When these components are thoughtfully aligned, project-based learning can support the sustainable development of speaking skills, foster positive affective dispositions, and deepen learners' engagement with the target language. Simultaneously, the ongoing refinement of practice and further empirical research—particularly on learner agency, long-term outcomes, and technology-rich designs—remain essential for realizing the full potential of project-based speaking in diverse EFL contexts.

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