



**THE USE OF AFL STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EFL LEARNERS'
MOTIVATION AND SPOKEN SKILLS: AN ACTION RESEARCH
STUDY**

Huzeyfe Ahmet Demir

M.A THESIS

**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM**

GAZİ UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

AUGUST, 2025

TELİF HAKKI VE TEZ FOTOKOPİ İZİN FORMU

Bu tezin tüm hakları saklıdır. Kaynak göstermek koşuluyla tezin teslim tarihinden itibaren

On iki (12) ay sonra tezden fotokopi çekilebilir.

YAZARIN

Adı : Huzeyfe Ahmet

Soyadı : Demir

Bölümü : İngiliz Dili Eğitimi

İmza :

Teslim tarihi :

TEZİN

Türkçe Adı: EFL Öğrencilerinin Motivasyonunu ve Konuşma Becerilerini Artırmada Öğrenme İçin Değerlendirme (AfL) Stratejilerinin Kullanımı: Bir Eylem Araştırması

İngilizce Adı: The Use of AfL Strategies to Increase EFL Learners' Motivation and Spoken Skills: An Action Research Study

ETİK İLKELERE UYGUNLUK BEYANI

Tez yazma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyduğumu, yararlandığım tüm kaynakları kaynak gösterme ilkelerine uygun olarak kaynakçada belirttiğimi ve bu bölümler dışındaki tüm ifadelerin şahsıma ait olduğunu beyan ederim.

Yazar Adı Soyadı: Huzeyfe Ahmet Demir

İmza:

JÜRİ ONAY SAYFASI

Huzyefe Ahmet Demir tarafından hazırlanan “The Use of AfL Strategies to Increase EFL Learners’ Motivation and Spoken Skills: An Action Research Study” adlı tez çalışması aşağıdaki jüri tarafından oy birliği ile Gazi Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı’nda Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Müzeyyen Nazlı Güngör

(İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Ana Bilim Dalı, Gazi Üniversitesi)

Başkan: Prof. Dr. Gonca Yangın Ekşi

(İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Ana Bilim Dalı, Gazi Üniversitesi)

Üye: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Amanda Yeşilbursa

(İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Ana Bilim Dalı, Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi)

Tez Savunma Tarihi: 15/08/2025.

Bu tezin Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı’nda Yüksek Lisans tezi olması için şartları yerine getirdiğini onaylıyorum.

Prof. Dr. Osman Çimen

Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü Müdürü

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While writing these, I remember the year 2017 when I first got into university. On my way to Gazi University School of Foreign Languages in Gölbaşı, I used to dream about these days, finishing my master's thesis. As one can imagine, the journey at bus 104 not only got me to Gölbaşı but also 2025 when I am fulfilling my dreams. The reason I am able to put my joy into this paper right now is the help and support I get from people around.

The first person comes to my mind is my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Müzeyyen Nazlı Güngör. Without her help and guidance, I would be lost already. In addition, since 2017, she has prepared me for this day, and when I lost my way and burnt out, she, without thinking a second, stood by my side. Dear hocam, I know there is not such a strong adjective to describe your support for me, but I would like to thank you as always for being Nazlı Hoca and for being there for me when I need. Additionally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Amanda Yeşilbursa and Prof. Dr. Gonca Yangın Ekşi for serving as members of my thesis defense jury. Their insightful comments, constructive feedback, and valuable suggestions have significantly contributed to the refinement and improvement of this study. As a teacher travelling between Ankara and Osmaniye, I could not complete the program without the help of Ress. Asst. Dr. Fatıma Nur Fişne who did everything she could to arrange courses for me to catch up. Finally, I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Kadriye Dilek Bacanak, whose energy motivated me to travel between Osmaniye and Ankara.

Secondly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) for providing financial support during my graduate studies. This research was supported by the TÜBİTAK BİDEB 2210-A National Graduate Scholarship Program. The views expressed in this thesis are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of TÜBİTAK.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family, especially my sisters and my mother, for their unwavering support throughout my academic journey. I am deeply thankful to my sister Tuğba, who has stood by me both emotionally and financially and encouraged me to continue this thesis even in difficult times. I also sincerely thank my sister Esra, whose constant moral support I have always felt throughout this process. Most importantly, I am forever grateful to my selfless mother, whose presence has been a guiding light in my life.

In this journey, I would have gone crazy without my friends. First and foremost, I would like to thank Merve, Ogün, and Ertuğ — whom I consider siblings life has gifted me. I am deeply grateful that they became part of my life during my university years and, since then, have helped me grow as a person and uplifted my motivation in countless ways. I would also like to thank my academic sister Hatice for always coming to my aid throughout this journey and for being my guide in this master's thesis process. My heartfelt thanks also go to my dear colleagues Elif, Demet, Rabia, Kezban, and Gülendem for their constant support and encouragement. I am especially grateful for their thoughtful offers of Turkish coffee whenever I needed a morale boost — those moments meant more than words can express.

In addition, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our school principal, Mr. Ayhan Bozdoğan, and our vice principal, Mr. Cebail Durna, for their unwavering support throughout my master's thesis process. I am truly grateful for the encouragement they

provided and the facilitative environment they created, which made it possible for me to carry out this study with ease.

Last but by no means least, I would like to thank myself. Despite all the challenges, uncertainties, and emotional ups and downs I have faced over the past three years, I managed to persevere and complete this thesis with clarity, determination, and a sound mind. This journey has taught me resilience, patience, and the importance of self-belief. I am proud of the growth I have experienced along the way and grateful for the inner strength that carried me through to the end.



**EFL ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN MOTİVASYONUNU VE KONUŞMA
BECERİLERİNİ ARTIRMADA ÖĞRENME İÇİN DEĞERLENDİRME
(AFL) STRATEJİLERİNİN KULLANIMI: BİR EYLEM
ARAŞTIRMASI
(YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ)**

Huzeyfe Ahmet Demir
GAZİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ

Ağustos 2025

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen (EFL) lise öğrencilerinin konuşma becerilerini ve motivasyonlarını artırmak amacıyla Öğrenme için Değerlendirme (Assessment for Learning – AfL) stratejilerinin etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye’de bir devlet lisesinde gerçekleştirilen bu eylem araştırması, AfL stratejilerinin gerçek sınıf bağlamında nasıl uygulanabileceğini ve öğrenci çıktıları üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktadır. Araştırma, öğrencilerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirmede geleneksel ölçme-yargılayıcı yaklaşımların sınırlılıklarını ele alırken, AfL’nin dönüt, öz değerlendirme, akran geri bildirimi ve öğrenme hedeflerinin ortak belirlenmesi gibi öğelerini merkeze almıştır. Nitel veriler; öğrenci günlükleri, öğretmen yansıtma notları ve uygulama gözlemleri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, AfL uygulamalarının öğrencilerin konuşma kaygısını azalttığını, özgüvenlerini artırdığını ve etkileşimsel konuşma becerilerini geliştirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin öğrenme süreçlerine

daha aktif katıldığı ve dil öğrenimine yönelik motivasyonlarının güçlendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçları, Türkiye'deki yabancı dil eğitimi politikaları açısından önemli pedagojik çıkarımlar sunmakta ve öğretmenlerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik daha etkili, öğrenci merkezli değerlendirme stratejileri kullanmaları gerektiğine işaret etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışma hem uygulayıcı öğretmenler hem de politika yapıcılar için eyleme geçirilebilir öneriler sunmaktadır.



Anahtar Kelimeler : Öğrenme için Değerlendirme Stratejileri (AfL), konuşma becerileri, öğrenci motivasyonu, eylem araştırması, yabancı dil eğitimi

Sayfa Sayısı : viii + 213

Danışman : Doç. Dr. Müzeyyen Nazlı Güngör

**THE USE OF AFL STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EFL LEARNERS'
MOTIVATION AND SPOKEN SKILLS: AN ACTION RESEARCH
STUDY
(M.S. Thesis)**

Huzeyfe Ahmet Demir

GAZI UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

August 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies on improving the speaking skills and motivation of high school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Conducted as an action research project in one of Turkish state schools, the study investigates how AfL strategies—such as peer feedback, self-assessment, co-constructed learning objectives, and formative dialogue—can be meaningfully embedded into classroom practice. Addressing the limitations of traditional summative assessment approaches in speaking instruction, the research adopts a teacher-researcher stance to implement and observe AfL-based speaking activities. Data were collected through student reflection journals, teacher observation notes, and classroom interactions. Findings indicate that AfL strategies effectively reduced learners' speaking anxiety, boosted their confidence, and promoted more active participation in spoken interaction tasks. Students reported increased motivation and a stronger sense of agency in their learning process. The study can offer significant pedagogical implications for foreign language education in Türkiye, especially in the context of recent curriculum reforms that

prioritize communicative competence. It highlights the need for in-service teacher education in formative assessment literacy and presents AfL as a practical, learner-centered alternative to traditional evaluation models. Ultimately, this research provides actionable insights for EFL teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to enhance EFL learners' motivation and spoken skills through sustainable and context-responsive assessment practices.



Key Words : Assessment for Learning Strategies (AfL), speaking skills, EFL learners, student motivation, formative assessment, action research

Page Number : viii + 213

Supervisor : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Müzeyyen Nazlı Güngör

CONTENTS

TELİF HAKKI VE TEZ FOTOKOPİ İZİN FORMU	iii
ETİK İLKELERE UYGUNLUK BEYANI	iv
JÜRİ ONAY SAYFASI	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ÖZ	ix
ABSTRACT	xi
CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER I	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	7
Significance of the Study	10
Aim of the Study	12
Operational Definitions	12
Chapter II	14
LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 The Relationship Between EFL Learners' Motivation and Spoken Skills	15
2.2 Spoken Skills in the CEFR and the Turkish K-12 Curriculum	20
2.3 Teaching and Assessing Spoken Skills	24
2.3.1 Social Constructivist Theory in Language Teaching and Assessment	24
2.3.2 Historical Shift of Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT	26

2.3.3 Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT.....	29
2.3.4 The Immerse Shift in Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT in Türkiye	31
2.3.5 Assessing Spoken Skills	35
2.3.5.1 <i>Assessment for Learning (AfL)</i>	35
2.3.5.2 <i>Assessment of Learning (AoL)</i>	37
2.4 Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies.....	39
2.4.1 Self-Assessment	49
2.4.2 Peer Assessment	50
2.4.3 Success Criteria and Learning Objectives.....	51
2.4.4 Teacher Feedback	51
2.4.5 Questioning Techniques	53
2.4.6 Technology-Enhanced AfL Practices	54
2.5 Action Research	54
2.5.1. Action Research Cycle	61
2.5.2 Previous Research Studies on Action Research for Spoken Skills	63
2.6 English Language Teaching and Assessment Policies in Türkiye.....	67
Chapter III	76
METHODOLOGY.....	76
3.1 Participants and Context.....	76
3.2 Research Design	78
3.2.1 Implementation of Exploratory Action Research (EAR)	80
3.2.1.1 <i>Observe</i>	82
3.2.1.2 <i>Plan</i>	84
3.2.1.3 <i>Act</i>	86
3.2.1.4 <i>Reflect and Recycle</i>	88
3.3 Data Collection Instruments	89
3.3.1 Researcher’s Journals.....	89
3.3.2 Focus-group Interviews	90

3.3.3 Students' Weekly Reflections.....	92
3.3.4 AFL Strategies Integrated Lesson Plans.....	94
3.4 Data Collection Procedure	97
3.5 Data Analysis.....	101
CHAPTER IV	107
FINDINGS	107
4.1 Findings from the 1 st Focus Group Interview	107
4.1.1 Emotional Barriers to Speaking	109
4.1.2 Challenges in Speaking	110
4.1.3 Motivating and Demotivating Factors	111
4.1.4 Feedback and Strategy Use	113
4.1.5 Preferred Learning Activities	115
4.2 Findings from the 2nd Focus group Interview.....	116
4.2.1 Psychological Empowerment through AfL Strategies.....	118
4.2.2 Increased Classroom Engagement and Motivation	119
4.2.3 AfL Strategies as a Tool for Emotional Relief.....	121
4.2.4. Positive Shift in Attitudes and Motivation.....	122
4.2.5 Contributions of AfL Activities to Speaking Skills	123
4.2.6 Interaction-Based Learning Environment Enhancing Oral Practice	125
4.2.7 Strategic Use of AfL to Improve Fluency, Accuracy, and Pronunciation	126
4.2.8 Holistic Support for Speaking Development	127
4.2.9 Enhanced Social Bonds and Interaction in the Classroom	128
4.2.10 Enjoyable and Participatory Learning Environment.....	128
4.3 Findings from the Researcher's Journals.....	130
4.3.1 Confidence Building through Interactive Activities	132
4.3.2 Motivation through Real-Life Relevance and Task-Based Design.....	134

4.3.3 Fluency and Strategy Development through Feedback and Reflection .	135
4.3.4 Clarity of Progress through Ongoing Assessment	136
4.3.5 Researcher’s Reflection	137
4.4 Findings from the Students’ Weekly Reflections	138
4.4.1 Emotional Safety and Motivation	139
4.4.2 Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback	140
4.4.3 Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve.....	142
4.4.4 Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity.....	143
4.5 Findings from the AfL Integrated Lesson Plans	144
4.5.1 Learner Engagement and Motivation	146
4.5.2 Functional Speaking and Real-World Application.....	148
4.5.3 Metacognitive Closure and Reflective Thinking	150
4.5.4 Formative Assessment as Instructional Design	151
CHAPTER V.....	153
DISCUSSION.....	153
5.1 RQ.1: Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies increase EFL learners’ motivation to speak?	154
5.2 RQ.2: If Yes, How Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners’ Motivation to Speak?	157
5.3 RQ.3: Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners’ Spoken Skills?	161
5.4 RQ.4: If Yes, How Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners’ Spoken Skills?.....	165
5.5 RQ.5: What Are the EFL Students’ Reflections on the Use of Action Research in This Study?	166
CHAPTER VI.....	170
CONCLUSION.....	170
6.1 Pedagogical and Practical Implications	170
6.2 Future Research Implications.....	174

6.3 Limitations of the Study	175
6.4 Conclusion	177
REFERENCES	179
APPENDICES	201
Appendix A. A sample of The Researcher’s Journal.....	202
Appendix B. A Sample of the 1 st and 2 nd Focus Group Interviews	204
1 st Focus Group Interview Questions	204
2 nd Focus Group Interview Questions	204
Appendix C. Samples of Students’ Weekly Reflections	205
Student 7	205
Student 12	205
Student 27	206
Appendix D. A Sample of AfL Integrated Lesson Plans	207
Week 3 Lesson Plan	207
Appendix E. The Samples of Peer Feedback and Self-assessment Checklists	210
A Peer Feedback Checklist.....	210
A Self-assessment Checklist	210
Appendix F. A Sample of CEFR A2-B1 Descriptors	211
Appendix G. A Sample of The Exit Ticket Reflections	212

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Participant Demographics</i>	78
Table 2 <i>Implementation of EAR in Data Collection Procedure</i>	81
Table 3 <i>AfL Strategies Integrated Lesson Plans and Weekly Distribution</i>	95
Table 4 <i>The Timeframe of Data Collection Procedure</i>	100
Table 5 <i>Thematic Analysis of the 1st Focus Group Interview</i>	108
Table 6 <i>Thematic Analysis of the 2nd Focus Group Interview</i>	117
Table 7 <i>Thematic Analysis of the Researcher's Journals</i>	131
Table 8 <i>Thematic Analysis of the Students' Weekly Reflections</i>	139
Table 9 <i>Thematic Analysis of the AfL Integrated Lesson Plans</i>	146

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1. Action Research Cycle (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18).....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Figure 2. Exploratory Action Research Process (Tamayo & Almeida, 2023, p. 6)</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Figure 3. Observe as an action research component</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Figure 4. Plan as an action research component.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Figure 5. Act as an action research component.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 6. Reflect and recycle as an action research component.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 7. Data Collection Procedure Cycle.....</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>Figure 8. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Figure 9. The comparison of the 1st & 2nd focus group interviews</i>	<i>129</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, fostering learners' intrinsic motivation and cultivating their communicative competence have become increasingly central to effective language teaching pedagogy. With the intensification of globalization (Cornelius-White, 2007; Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017) and proficiency in spoken English is no longer a luxury but a necessity (Selvi et al., 2024). Learners are expected not only to decode written texts or produce grammatically correct sentences but also to engage in authentic, meaningful spoken interactions across diverse contexts. As such, the responsibility lies in educators to design and facilitate learning environments that go beyond the transmission of language structures, instead nurturing learners' communicative confidence and sustained engagement. Within this intricate educational dynamic, the adoption of formative assessment strategies—particularly those aligned with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL)—has emerged as a forward-thinking solution. Rather than employing assessment solely as a metric of academic achievement, AfL reframes it as a pedagogical instrument intimately embedded in the process of instruction (Freestone et al., 2017). According to Black and Wiliam (2009), the hallmark of AfL is its orientation towards learning advancement. In contrast to traditional summative approaches that emphasize outcome-based evaluation, AfL fosters an ongoing

dialogue between teacher and learner, allowing for timely interventions and goal setting aligned with individual needs and capabilities. For example, it has been shown by K  ro  lu (2021) that digital AfL practices enhanced peer interaction and speaking collaboration, further contributing to communicative development.

One of the most outstanding advancements of AfL is its emphasis on learner agency. Through mechanisms such as peer feedback, self-evaluation, and articulated success criteria, students are positioned not as passive recipients of instruction but as active participants in their educational journey. This paradigm shift is particularly potent in language classrooms where spoken output is often marred by performance anxiety, fear of error, or lack of confidence. Carless (2012) highlights the metacognitive benefits of AfL, underscoring its capacity to enable learners to reflect critically on their linguistic output and identify personal pathways for development. Such reflective practices nurture autonomy and resilience—qualities essential for communicative competence. Moreover, other benefits of AfL strategies can be observed in their implementation. AfL strategies address some of the emotional and psychological barriers that EFL learners frequently encounter, especially in relation to speaking. The oral mode, more than any other language skill, demands immediacy, spontaneity, and interaction. For learners operating in a foreign language, these demands can trigger apprehension and inhibit performance. By embedding assessment within a supportive and continuous instructional cycle, AfL transforms the classroom into a low-stakes, exploratory space. Reinders and Bal  ıkanlı (2011) note that when assessment is framed as formative rather than evaluative, learners exhibit greater risk-taking and are more willing to engage in communicative tasks. This aligns with Bennett’s (2011) assertion that AfL serves as a mechanism for learner empowerment rather than discipline, shifting the classroom culture from compliance to collaboration.

In the Turkish EFL context, the integration of formative assessment remains a relatively recent and evolving practice. Despite its inclusion in the Ministry of National Education’s curriculum guidelines, studies have revealed that teachers often lack sufficient training in

applying AfL techniques effectively (Ölmezer-Öztürk et al., 2021; Şahin & Yıldırım, 2016). As a result, classroom assessment in many public schools remains predominantly summative and test-oriented, offering limited space for reflective dialogue or oral performance tracking. However, recent research has shown that when implemented consistently, AfL can enhance student engagement, foster communication, and support learner autonomy (Köroğlu, 2021). These findings suggest that formative assessment has significant potential in Türkiye, particularly in addressing long-standing challenges in speaking instruction. The emphasis on formative assessment has also been explored extensively across European contexts. For example, Correia (2024) investigated the challenges faced by Portuguese EFL teachers in assessing speaking proficiency and emphasized the need for ongoing training in communicative-oriented assessment practices. Similarly, Burner (2015) examined formative assessment in EFL writing classrooms in Norway, revealing the potential of feedback and student involvement to enhance performance and motivation. These findings, though situated in different skill domains, offer valuable insights for the integration of AfL strategies in speaking instruction.

Broadening the focus to younger learners, Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2021) emphasized the importance of adapting assessment methods to the cognitive and emotional development of children, thereby aligning with AfL's learner-centered ethos. Their work underscores how assessment practices must be developmentally responsive if they are to support genuine learner growth. In a more theoretical contribution, Alderson, Brunfaut, and Harding (2015) theorized diagnostic assessment practices in second and foreign language settings, highlighting how detailed feedback and progress tracking can inform instructional decisions. Together, these perspectives support a view of formative assessment not merely as a technical tool, but as a dynamic and participatory process that fosters both academic and personal development.

Nonetheless, implementing such assessment models requires a strong foundation in teachers' assessment literacy (Güngör & Güngör, 2023). Tsagari and Vogt (2017)

conducted a comprehensive analysis of language teachers' assessment literacy across Europe. Their research revealed that although awareness of AfL principles is growing, significant gaps remain in the practical implementation of these strategies. The study emphasizes the need for targeted professional development initiatives to build educators' capacity in formative assessment design and execution. This issue is particularly salient in public education systems where institutional inertia and limited training opportunities can hinder pedagogical innovation (Pastore et al., 2025; Xi & Lo, 2025).

In light of these needs, the present study positions itself within this transformative potential by investigating how AfL strategies can be operationalized to enhance spoken language proficiency and learner motivation in an EFL context. Utilizing the methodological lens of action research, the project is grounded in real-world classroom practice and seeks to examine the interplay between instructional strategy and learner response. Action research, with its continuous cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, is ideally suited for educational inquiry. It enables teachers to function not merely as deliverers of content but as reflective practitioners capable of adjusting their methods in response to classroom dynamics.

As articulated by Burns (2009), action research offers a structured yet flexible framework through which educators can interrogate their own practices, implement targeted interventions, and generate contextually relevant knowledge. In the realm of language education, where learner needs are highly variable and classroom dynamics constantly evolving, such adaptability is invaluable. Through action research, teachers are not only empowered to innovate but also to document and analyze the effects of their innovations with scholarly rigor.

The present study leverages this methodological strength to explore the efficacy of AfL strategies in cultivating a more dialogic, learner-centered environment for spoken English instruction. It involves a range of activities designed to promote learner reflection,

including the co-construction of learning objectives, regular peer assessments, and structured feedback sessions. These components are intended not only to improve linguistic output but also to create a feedback-rich culture in which learners feel heard, supported, and invested in their own progress.

Importantly, the cyclical nature of action research aligns seamlessly with the continuous demands of spoken language development. Spoken proficiency does not emerge from isolated drills or one-off performances; it is honed through continuous practice, feedback, and revision. By situating AfL within an action research framework, this study captures the longitudinal and recursive nature of language acquisition, allowing for nuanced observations and timely adjustments to pedagogical practice.

Kemmis et al., (2014) emphasize that action research is not merely a methodological choice but a commitment to participatory and transformative education. In their view, the process of engaging in action research fosters a sense of professional agency and ethical responsibility among teachers. This orientation is particularly important in contexts like EFL education, where learner outcomes are influenced not only by instructional materials or curricular mandates but also by the relational and affective dimensions of teaching.

These methodological and pedagogical perspectives become even more relevant when situated within Türkiye's current educational policy landscape. This study is conducted within the framework of Türkiye's Ministry of National Education (MoNE), where recent curricular reforms have emphasized the integration of productive language skills, including speaking (MoNE, 2018). Furthermore, "The Century of Turkish Education Model" announced by MoNE very recently underlines the importance of spoken skills and the role of communication in English language (MoNE, 2023). These reforms mark a pivotal shift in national education policy, as speaking skills had historically been underemphasized in both teaching and assessment. The 2023 implementation of integrated language skill assessment, including speaking, has posed new challenges for both learners and educators

(Yang et al., 2012). Prior to this change, language education in Türkiye relied heavily on written grammar-based testing, which did not accurately reflect communicative competence (Kırkgöz, 2009). The transition to a more balanced, communicative approach reflects global trends in language education but also reveals infrastructural and pedagogical gaps within the system.

Moreover, policy documents such as the English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools (MoNE, 2018) place greater emphasis on functional language use and learner-centered pedagogy. However, teachers often report a lack of adequate training in speaking assessment, and schools vary widely in their ability to support communicative instruction (Ölmezer-Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). In this complex context, Assessment for Learning (AfL) offers a practical and flexible approach for teachers to support learners' spoken development while simultaneously aligning with national educational goals. The new focus on spoken production demands novel instructional approaches that address learners' needs and anxieties, especially in state school settings where access to communicative language environments may be limited.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform language pedagogy and assessment practices in Turkish secondary schools. Although numerous studies have been conducted on motivation and speaking in EFL contexts globally, the Turkish educational setting presents a unique blend of cultural, social, and institutional dynamics in terms of its impact on classroom practices and learner engagement. As highlighted by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2017), motivation is context-dependent and influenced by sociocultural variables, which makes it critical to investigate how AfL strategies operate within specific national settings.

By integrating student voice through weekly reflections and teacher insights via reflective journals, this study captures a comprehensive picture of the teaching-learning process. The findings aim to offer practical implications for curriculum designers, EFL teachers, and

teacher educators in developing more learner-responsive methodologies that enhance motivation and communicative competence.

In summary, this study aspires to contribute valuable insights into pedagogical practices that support EFL learners in achieving greater fluency and confidence in their spoken English. By embracing AfL strategies within a framework of action research, the proposed investigation seeks not only to address pressing challenges in EFL education but also to empower learners to become more effective communicators in an increasingly interconnected world.

Statement of the Problem

The international shift from measuring what learners know to how well they use language has put formative assessment at the centre of speaking instruction. Conceptual models such as Wiliam's "embedded formative assessment" and Carless's "learning-oriented assessment" argue that feedback, dialogic goal-setting, and learner self-regulation are essential for sustained oral development (Wiliam, 2011; Carless, 2015). Empirical studies largely support these claims yet also reveal that formative speaking tasks frequently leave learners unsure of success criteria. For example, Tunisian undergraduates valued oral presentations as assessment-for-learning but reported only moderate awareness of how their work was judged (Mabrouk, 2023). Comparable findings from Indonesian classrooms show that regular oral-corrective feedback and peer dialogue raise fluency and confidence, but teachers struggle to maintain depth once class sizes and workloads rise (Mahmudah & Anggunsari, 2023). Collectively, literature signals a persisting gap between AfL's theoretical promise and its classroom enactment, especially for the interactive, time-intensive nature of speaking.

Implementation challenges become more acute in test-driven settings. Cross-context research identifies limited professional development, high-stakes accountability, and rigid

timetables as the principal brakes on formative innovation, often forcing teachers to default to summative “correct-or-grade” routines even when they endorse AfL philosophically. Such tensions are documented in studies of large-scale exam systems and online courses alike, where feedback is welcomed by learners yet truncated by institutional constraints (Höl, 2023). These structural obstacles underscore call for context-sensitive research that goes beyond demonstrating the benefits of AfL to map how teachers can weave it sustainably into everyday speaking lessons.

Türkiye illustrates this dilemma in sharp relief. Following the Ministry of National Education’s 2023 regulation that formally mandates assessment of speaking and listening across grades, communicative competence has become a stated national priority (MoNE, 2023). However, recent surveys show that many Turkish EFL teachers still regard their language-assessment literacy as insufficient—particularly for real-time oral performance—and request further training in designing rubrics, orchestrating peer feedback, and interpreting spoken-language evidence (Ballıdağ & İnan-Karagül, 2021; Mutlu, 2025). Pressure to prepare pupils for external exams reinforces summative habits and limits opportunities for continuous feedback (Höl, 2023). For learners, these conditions translate into heightened speaking anxiety and modest self-confidence, as recent high-school data confirm (Zambak, 2024).

Taken together, the global research gap on actionable AfL routines for speaking, the systemic constraints documented in Turkish schools, and the affective hurdles learners face converge on a common problem: effective formative assessment of oral skills is promoted by policy but remains under-realised in practice. Action research offers a viable route for addressing this problem because its continuous cycles allow teachers to test, observe, and refine AfL strategies within their own constraints, generating locally grounded knowledge that can feed back into both classroom practice and wider policy (Burns, 2009). The present study directly addresses this multi-layered gap by investigating how Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies can be meaningfully integrated into

speaking instruction within a Turkish high school EFL context. Unlike much of the existing literature that either remains conceptual or reports on challenges without offering actionable solutions, this research adopts a practitioner-oriented action research design to generate pedagogically grounded, context-responsive insights. It not only explores the theoretical alignment between AfL principles and speaking skill development but also documents the lived realities of a Turkish EFL classroom—marked by time constraints, exam-driven curricula, and teacher assessment literacy needs.

Through continuous cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, the study positions the classroom itself as a site of professional learning and innovation. In doing so, it empowers the teacher-researcher to trial and refine AfL strategies such as structured peer feedback, self-assessment checklists, and formative speaking rubrics. These practices are not only evaluated for their impact on students' spoken performance and confidence, but also for their feasibility and sustainability in real instructional settings. By foregrounding teacher agency and contextual sensitivity, the study responds to repeated calls in the literature for research that bridges the gap between assessment theory and classroom enactment (Burns, 2009; Carless, 2015).

Furthermore, the study contributes to the relatively scarce body of empirical work on AfL in speaking—not as an abstract ideal but as an adaptable pedagogical process. Its findings are expected to inform both national policy efforts around communicative language teaching in Türkiye and international conversations about how formative assessment can be localized without losing its core developmental purpose. In short, this study does not merely highlight the problem—it actively works toward a sustainable and scalable solution by placing AfL into the hands of practitioners navigating the complex terrain of language education.

Significance of the Study

As discussed in the previous section, the integration of spoken skills into both instruction and assessment in Turkish high schools represents a significant transformation in language education policy (MoNE, 2023). The recent emphasis on productive skills, particularly speaking, has brought new expectations for both teachers and learners, challenging long-established practices that prioritized written accuracy and test-oriented instruction (Çimen & Yeşilyurt, 2023). This change, while promising, has introduced a variety of implementation issues—ranging from teacher preparedness to students’ motivational readiness to adapt to new forms of participation (Ballıdağ & İnan-Karagül, 2021).

In this context, the importance of this study lies in its potential to offer new insights into how students in public schools respond to the introduction of speaking as a central component of language learning. While educational policies may set out clear goals, the realities of classroom dynamics often reveal unforeseen difficulties. Students may struggle with the sudden expectation to speak in a foreign language, especially when their previous learning experiences have not equipped them with the confidence or strategies to do so (Zambak, 2024). Moreover, the varying backgrounds of students—culturally, socially, and economically—can lead to very different experiences with speaking tasks (Akkuş, 2021). Some learners might thrive, while others may become even more disengaged or anxious.

This study addresses a crucial question that many educators currently face: how can teachers effectively support students in developing speaking skills in an environment that has only recently begun to value oral communication? Rather than treating this as a technical challenge, the study explores the motivational and emotional dimensions of language use (Boudreau et al., 2018; Lee & Coniam, 2013). It aims to uncover how learners feel about speaking, what encourages them to take risks, and which strategies create a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable and motivated to express themselves.

By focusing on Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies, this research offers a timely response to these concerns. AfL does not treat assessment as a final judgement but as an ongoing process that helps students understand their learning and build on their strengths (Wiliam, 2011). In classrooms where speaking has traditionally been a source of stress or uncertainty, AfL provides a way to reframe speaking tasks as opportunities for growth rather than performance (Winstone et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in Turkish high schools, where many students are still adjusting to the idea that speaking is as important as grammar or reading in English language learning (Zambak, 2024).

Furthermore, the significance of this study also lies in its use of a classroom-based, practice-oriented methodology. Action research makes it possible to work closely with learners, observe how they react to new strategies, and adjust teaching approaches based on their feedback and participation (Burns, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014). This responsiveness is key in understanding not only what works, but why it works in a given setting. Rather than imposing solutions from outside, the study aims to generate solutions from within the classroom, making the findings more meaningful and applicable for teachers working in similar contexts.

Finally, this research has broader implications beyond a single school or group of students. It contributes to a growing effort to rethink how language skills are taught and assessed in Türkiye. By closely examining how students respond to AfL in speaking activities, this study provides evidence that can guide teacher training, curriculum design, and future research (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020). It highlights the need for more flexible, student-centered approaches that consider the realities of the classroom and the voices of learners themselves.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate if Assessment for Learning strategies have any impact on EFL learners' motivation and if so, in what ways they affect the motivation. To be able to provide a clearer framework, the following questions will be asked and answered:

1. Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies increase EFL learners' motivation to speak?
2. If yes, how do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies affect EFL learners' motivation to speak?
3. Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies affect EFL learners' spoken skills?
4. If yes, how do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies affect EFL learners' spoken skills?
5. What are the EFL students' reflections on the use of action research in this study?

Operational Definitions

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language. It refers to the study or teaching of English in countries where English is not the primary or native language. People learning English in this context often do so for reasons such as academic purposes, travel, work, or communication in international settings.

Assessment for Learning (AfL): "Assessment for Learning, which can be called a Formative Assessment" (Green, 2018, p. 2) is an educational term that focuses on the process and feedback in the assessment of language skills and components.

Spoken Skills: In this study, spoken skills refer to learners' ability to produce oral language fluently, accurately, and appropriately in a variety of contexts. Spoken skills include both spoken interaction (dialogues, role-plays) and spoken production (presentations, monologues), as categorized in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020).

Formative Assessment: Formative assessment refers to a range of evaluative procedures conducted during the learning process. It aims to provide ongoing feedback to learners and teachers to modify teaching and improve student learning outcomes (Wiliam, 2011). It is closely aligned with the principles of Assessment for Learning.

Speaking Anxiety: Speaking anxiety in this study is understood as learners' emotional discomfort, hesitation, or fear associated with speaking in a foreign language. It includes feelings of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and concern over negative evaluations by peers or the teacher (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Motivation in Language Learning: Motivation is defined as the internal drive or desire to initiate and sustain language learning behavior. In line with Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, it encompasses learners' ideal L2 self, learning experiences, and attitudes toward the language learning environment. EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language. It refers to the study or teaching of English in countries where English is not the primary or native language. People learning English in this context often do so for reasons such as academic purposes, travel, work, or communication in international settings.

Ministry of National Education (MoNE): The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is the central governmental body responsible for the development, implementation, and oversight of national educational policy in Türkiye. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, MoNE designs curricula, determines learning outcomes across grade levels, regulates assessment procedures, and publishes official language education frameworks—such as the English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools (MoNE, 2018) and the recently introduced *The Century of Turkish Education* (MoNE, 2023). MoNE also administers nationwide exams and teacher training programs that influence the practical implementation of foreign language education in public schools. For the purposes of this study, MoNE serves as the official authority that shapes both the pedagogical expectations and assessment standards guiding the use of speaking skills and formative assessment practices in EFL classrooms.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a range of relevant studies will be critically examined and categorized under thematic subheadings to establish a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for current research. While a substantial body of scholarly work has addressed EFL learners' motivation and spoken language development across diverse educational contexts, the unique challenges and opportunities presented within the Turkish setting remain comparatively underrepresented in the literature (Güleçoğlu & Öztürk, 2021). Specifically, there exists a noticeable gap in studies that explore the intersection of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies and the development of spoken English skills among EFL learners in Türkiye (Çayır, 2024; Tunçer & Merç, 2023).

This gap created by the fact that there are not enough studies to investigate AfL strategies and spoken skills is particularly pressing in light of the increasing emphasis on formative, learner-centered approaches to language assessment, which position AfL as a transformative tool for promoting both linguistic competence and learner agency. Scholars such as Black and Wiliam (2009), Andrade and Cizek (2010), and Carless (2015) have demonstrated the efficacy of AfL in fostering active learning environments, enhancing student motivation, and improving communicative competence. Additionally, Fulcher (2015) highlights the importance of aligning assessment with communicative language

teaching principles to ensure that learners are not only tested on what they know but also on how effectively they can use the language in real contexts. Yet, despite its demonstrated potential in international educational contexts, the integration of AfL within the framework of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) remains limited and under-researched (Kara et al., 2017).

This study aims to fill this void by examining how AfL strategies influence EFL learners' motivation and spoken language performance in state high schools in Türkiye. By focusing on this interplay, the present research not only seeks to contribute to the global body of knowledge on AfL in language education but also to offer contextually grounded insights that can inform curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practice in Türkiye as the country continues to reform its language education policies to better align with communicative and student-centered paradigms (Kırkgöz, 2017). In doing so, the literature review will address key areas such as learner motivation, the nature of spoken English skills, the theoretical underpinnings of AfL, and the use of action research as a methodology in EFL contexts. This structured approach will ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current academic landscape, highlight relevant debates and methodological trends, and situate the present study within both national and international scholarly conversations.

2.1 The Relationship Between EFL Learners' Motivation and Spoken Skills

To gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical framework underlying this study, it is essential to review and emphasize the existing literature related to EFL learners' motivation and spoken language skills. Motivation has long been recognized as a critical determinant of language learning success, as it influences learners' attitudes, engagement, and perseverance in acquiring new linguistic competencies (Ushioda, 2017). Research consistently highlights that learners who exhibit positive attitudes toward language

learning are more likely to succeed in developing their skills, particularly in spoken communication. Such attitudes foster increased effort, resilience, and openness to learning opportunities, enabling learners to overcome challenges and achieve their language learning goals (Gardner, 2010).

Conversely, a lack of motivation or the presence of negative attitudes can hinder progress and lead to diminished performance in spoken language proficiency. Learners who perceive language learning as irrelevant, overly challenging, or unenjoyable may experience decreased engagement, anxiety, and ultimately, failure to achieve communicative competence (Liu & Jackson, 2008). This underscores the importance of fostering positive attitudes and sustained motivation within the language learning process, particularly in the EFL context, where exposure to the target language is often limited to classroom settings. By reviewing studies on this topic, the interplay between motivation, attitudes, and spoken skills can be better understood, providing a robust foundation for exploring strategies to enhance language learning outcomes.

Genç and Aydın (2017) revealed that learners with positive attitudes toward language learning possess significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation, which provides a distinct advantage in their language acquisition journey. Intrinsic motivation, characterized by a genuine interest and enjoyment in the learning process, fosters deeper engagement with the material and a greater willingness to overcome challenges. Consequently, learners who approach language learning with enthusiasm and optimism are more likely to persist through difficulties and take ownership of their progress. The more learners cultivate a positive attitude toward language learning, the more likely they are to set realistic goals, practice consistently, and actively seek opportunities to apply their skills.

Furthermore, a positive outlook can influence learners' interactions with peers, teachers, and the learning environment. It encourages collaboration, receptiveness to feedback, and a willingness to experiment with language use, all of which are essential for mastering a new

language (Dörnyei, 2001). Recognizing the critical role of attitude in language learning highlights the need for educators to create supportive, engaging, and inclusive classroom environments that nurture positivity and intrinsic motivation among learners.

From another perspective, Kara et al. (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study with 66 preparatory class students at Marmara University to explore the challenges faced in EFL speaking classes. Drawing on both quantitative questionnaire data and qualitative open-ended responses, the researchers identified three major categories of obstacles: personal, educational, and social. The findings indicated that educational and social factors—such as grammar-heavy curricula, limited opportunities for speaking practice, and a lack of support from students' home environments—were far more influential than personal variables like motivation or anxiety. Notably, the study emphasized that the absence of meaningful communicative contexts and authentic interaction in class settings plays a key role in learners' reluctance to speak. These results underscore the systemic nature of speaking-related challenges in Turkish EFL classrooms and highlight the pressing need for assessment practices that are both communicative and learner-centered. Among these, personal factors, particularly anxiety, have been highlighted as the most influential barrier to effective participation and progress in speaking activities. Anxiety often stems from fear of making mistakes, negative self-perception, or the pressure of speaking in front of others, leading to reduced confidence and limited willingness to communicate.

Educational factors, such as teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and assessment practices, also play a critical role in shaping learners' experiences. Traditional teaching approaches that prioritize rote learning over communicative competence can hinder learners' ability to practice and improve their speaking skills. Similarly, a lack of constructive feedback or opportunities for interaction within the classroom may prevent students from gaining the confidence needed to speak fluently and effectively.

Social factors add another layer of complexity, as they involve external influences on learners' language development (Kara et al., 2017). Elements such as the availability and quality of English lecturers, as well as exposure to the language outside the classroom, are crucial in creating an environment conducive to language acquisition. English lecturers serve not only as educators but also as role models and motivators, directly affecting learners' attitudes and proficiency. Limited exposure to authentic language use in real-world contexts, whether through media, social interactions, or immersive experiences, can restrict learners' ability to internalize language structures and develop fluency.

By categorizing these challenges, researchers have provided valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of difficulties in EFL speaking classes. The interplay between personal, educational, and social factors underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to address these challenges. Interventions such as anxiety-reduction techniques, communicative teaching practices, and increased opportunities for language exposure can significantly enhance learners' speaking abilities and overall language competence (Mai, 2016).

In addition, the relationship between psychological factors and spoken language development has garnered attention across EFL research. For instance, Liu and Jackson (2008) stated in the context of Chinese EFL learners that learners have been demotivated to speak English primarily due to foreign language anxiety, which is often linked to learners' fear of negative evaluation, lack of self-confidence, and classroom apprehension. Their findings resonate with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) foundational work on foreign language classroom anxiety, which categorized anxiety into communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Amoah and Yeboah (2021) similarly found that psychological barriers, particularly anxiety, were among the most significant demotivators in Chinese EFL classrooms. In their study, students frequently expressed hesitations and disengagement during oral tasks,

particularly when teacher expectations and peer judgment were perceived as threats. The emotional weight of speaking in a foreign language thus emerges as a significant determinant of learners' willingness to engage with spoken tasks.

Research by Chan and Wu (2004) supports this view, showing that Taiwanese learners with higher anxiety levels tend to avoid communicative activities in English, even when their linguistic competence would otherwise permit participation. This highlights the pervasive role of affective filters in spoken performance and draws attention to the critical need for emotional scaffolding in EFL classrooms.

Aydin (2012) highlighted six primary causes contributing to learners' demotivation, ranging from issues in the teaching profession to curriculum design. In addition, Aydin emphasized the importance of considering the demotivation experienced by teachers, which can significantly impact the quality of instruction and the overall learning environment. Teachers' demotivation often arises from systemic and organizational challenges, including inadequate compensation, excessive workload, and strained communication with school administrators.

A research by Ushioda (2011) underlined that without motivation, success in language learning becomes highly unlikely; in other words, motivated learners demonstrate greater persistence and achieve higher levels of language proficiency. This finding reinforces the argument that motivation is not a peripheral element but a central component of successful language learning. Similarly, Ushioda (2011) stresses the role of learner autonomy and personalized goal setting in sustaining long-term motivation in language education, arguing that learners must see the relevance of language use in their lives beyond the classroom.

Overall, these studies collectively emphasize the necessity for instructional approaches that go beyond cognitive factors and consider the emotional and psychological dimensions of language learning. Effective language teaching, particularly in speaking-focused contexts,

should be grounded in motivation-sensitive pedagogy, where both learners' affective needs and cognitive capacities are supported in tandem.

2.2 Spoken Skills in the CEFR and the Turkish K-12 Curriculum

To fully understand the concept of spoken skills, it is essential to examine the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a widely recognized framework for assessing and describing language proficiency. The CEFR provides a comprehensive scale of language performance, ranging from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient user), which serves as a reference point for curriculum development, assessment, and teaching practices across Europe and beyond (Council of Europe, 2020). Spoken skills are central to the CEFR, which divides them into two main categories: Oral Interaction and Oral Production.

Oral Interaction refers to the ability to actively participate in conversations, collaborate effectively, and respond appropriately to others. This skill encompasses several sub-skills, such as turn-taking, negotiating meaning, asking and answering questions, and resolving misunderstandings. It reflects communicative competence in dynamic and socially situated contexts, encouraging learners to engage in meaningful exchanges. Oral Production, on the other hand, focuses on the ability to speak continuously and clearly on specific topics. This skill involves organizing thoughts coherently, using appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures, and tailoring speech to different audiences or purposes. The CEFR descriptors outline developmental progressions for these competencies at each level, offering clear benchmarks for learner achievement.

In the Turkish context, the Ministry of National Education has adapted the CEFR's categories and descriptors to shape the national K-12 English language curriculum (MoNE, 2018). This alignment reflects an effort to internationalize language education while responding to the specific linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical needs of Turkish

learners. The revised curriculum emphasizes communicative competence, especially in speaking, by integrating task-based learning, real-life scenarios, and performance-based assessments. Students are encouraged to develop spoken fluency through activities such as role-plays, classroom discussions, interviews, and project presentations. As Solmaz (2019) highlights, communicative-based curricula have positively influenced learner engagement and speaking performance in state schools where CEFR standards are faithfully applied. Moreover, the K-12 curriculum outlines specific speaking outcomes for each grade level, often mapped to CEFR levels. For example, by the end of Grade 10, learners are expected to perform spoken tasks aligned with A2-B1 descriptors, including describing experiences, expressing opinions, and interacting in routine social exchanges. This scaffolded approach provides a structured pathway for developing oral skills across school years, ensuring learners are gradually exposed to more complex communicative tasks. Some studies indicate that this progression supports learner autonomy and improves spoken language retention over time. For instance, Darıyemez (2023) implemented a 10-week quasi-experimental flipped-classroom intervention with Turkish EFL secondary school students ($n=28$ in the experimental group). His study found that when speaking practice was scaffolded with pre-class input and followed by peer and teacher feedback, learners demonstrated significant gains in both autonomy and willingness to communicate, along with reduced speaking anxiety. These improvements suggest that a progressive curriculum aligned with CEFR speaking descriptors—when combined with structured reflection opportunities—can foster learner confidence and sustained oral production. Similarly, Bekleyen and Selimoğlu (2016) examined autonomous language learning among Turkish university EFL students ($n=230$) through questionnaires and interviews. Their study revealed that learners who engaged in autonomous activities, such as self-monitoring and goal setting, demonstrated higher levels of motivation and retention in language skills. While this research was not speaking-specific, it provides strong evidence that scaffolded progression—organizing tasks by increasing complexity over time—directly supports

learner autonomy, which is a key predictor of long-term proficiency. These empirical findings highlight that curriculum-aligned progression paired with formative feedback and student involvement can enhance oral communication skills, reduce anxiety, and support learner autonomy—confirming the theoretical rationale behind structured speaking development in CEFR-framed curricula.

Furthermore, as well as integrating the principles of CEFR, the Turkish Ministry of National Education has undertaken significant steps to reform English language teaching and assessment practices, particularly in relation to productive skills such as speaking. One of the most notable advancements came with the 2018 English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools, which explicitly emphasized the development of communicative competence and the integration of CEFR-aligned performance objectives for each grade level. For instance, by Grade 10, students are expected to achieve speaking outcomes that reflect A2–B1 levels, including participating in short conversations, describing everyday experiences, and expressing personal opinions. Building upon these curricular reforms, a major policy shift occurred in 2023 when MoNE formally included speaking skills in the national assessment framework. Previously, high-stakes evaluations focused almost exclusively on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, often neglecting students' oral competencies. With the introduction of this reform, however, students are now assessed through a combination of written and oral examinations and speaking proficiency has become an official component of semester evaluations. These speaking exams are typically carried out as performance-based tasks—such as role-plays, picture-based dialogues, or opinion sharing—administered by classroom teachers and scored with structured rubrics. This shift signals a broader transition from traditional, test-centric assessment models to more formative, skill-based evaluation practices. In line with global trends, MoNE's updated approach recognizes the need to evaluate learners' communicative abilities, not just their grammatical knowledge. Teachers are now encouraged to provide ongoing, in-class oral assessments that are both process-oriented

and aligned with real-life language use, echoing CEFR's descriptors for spoken interaction and production.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in implementing CEFR-aligned speaking instruction and assessment across all Turkish schools. Factors such as class size, teacher training, instructional time, and limited access to authentic language input can constrain the effective development of oral skills. As Kara et al., (2017) emphasize, while curricular reform has elevated the importance of speaking, systemic support and professional development are crucial to ensure successful classroom implementation. Moreover, research by Solak and Bayar (2015) reveals that regional disparities in educational resources often result in unequal access to quality spoken language instruction.

Assessment practices aligned with CEFR levels are also increasingly integrated into the Turkish education system to evaluate students' oral competencies (Ünlücan-Tosun & Glover, 2020). In addition to written examinations, oral exams and performance-based tasks are being implemented more consistently, especially in pilot programs and language-oriented high schools. These assessments encourage learners to demonstrate both fluency and accuracy in real-time communication, helping teachers monitor progress and provide formative feedback. As Rea-Dickins (2004) and Kormos (2014) argue, formative speaking assessments serve as powerful tools to guide instructional improvement while also enhancing learner motivation and self-regulation.

In summary, the CEFR and its integration into the Turkish K-12 curriculum underscore the significance of spoken language development in EFL education. By addressing both oral interaction and oral production, the framework provides a structured and transparent system that supports learners in becoming confident and effective communicators across proficiency levels. The curricular and assessment alignment between the CEFR and Turkish education policy signifies a commitment to elevating the status of spoken English in classroom practice, while also highlighting the need for continued investment in teacher

training and resource development to bridge implementation gaps and ensure equitable access.

2.3 Teaching and Assessing Spoken Skills

2.3.1 Social Constructivist Theory in Language Teaching and Assessment

Social constructivism, grounded in the influential work of Vygotsky (1978), views learning as a socially mediated process whereby knowledge is constructed through interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. In this perspective, learners do not acquire language in isolation but co-construct meaning through contextualized experiences with others. Central to this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. This concept is particularly relevant to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, where speaking skills can be enhanced through scaffolded, interactive tasks that push learners beyond their current linguistic capabilities with the support of teachers and peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

In language education, social constructivism has underscored the need for dialogic instruction, in which the classroom becomes a space for shared meaning-making rather than unidirectional transmission of content. Mercer (2000) emphasizes that dialogic interaction fosters not only linguistic competence but also cognitive development, as learners verbalize thoughts, test hypotheses, and receive feedback. Similarly, van Lier (2004) introduces the concept of *affordances*, suggesting that learners are more likely to take up opportunities for language use when their environment encourages active participation and engagement. This is directly tied into the design of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies, which prioritize learner agency, collaboration, and real-time feedback.

When applied to the teaching and assessment of spoken English, social constructivism provides a compelling rationale for formative practices such as peer-assessment, self-evaluation, and teacher-student dialogue. According to Donato (2004), collaborative dialogue among learners leads to co-construction of linguistic knowledge, particularly in oral tasks where negotiation of meaning is essential. In this sense, spoken language instruction benefits from a social constructivist approach that sees language not only as content to be learned but as a medium for learning.

This theoretical grounding is also evident in AfL's alignment with constructivist values. AfL redefines assessment from a judgmental endpoint to an ongoing, formative process embedded within instruction. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their spoken performance, set goals, and make adjustments based on feedback—a cycle that mirrors the recursive learning model described by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). In addition, AfL's emphasis on success criteria and student involvement resonates with Alexander's (2008) notion of dialogic pedagogy, which posits that shared classroom discourse enhances not only subject mastery but learner identity and motivation.

In practical terms, AfL strategies operationalize social constructivism by enabling learners to interact with content, peers, and feedback in a way that promotes ownership of learning. For example, peer-assessment creates a reciprocal learning environment where students both give and receive constructive insights, which leads to increased critical thinking and language awareness (Topping, 2018). Self-assessment promotes metacognition and supports the kind of reflective practice that is central to constructivist views of language development (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

The relevance of these ideas is especially salient in the Turkish EFL context, where educational reforms have begun to embrace communicative and student-centered methodologies such as the change in English Language Teaching Curriculum (MoNE, 2018) and recently, The Century of Turkish Education (MoNE, 2023), both of which emphasize productive language use, functional communication, and formative assessment

principles. Yet, despite curriculum alignment with frameworks like the CEFR, implementation gaps persist in how speaking is taught and assessed. Here, the application of social constructivist-informed AfL practices can bridge the theory-practice divide, particularly when embedded within action research cycles that allow for continuous reflection and adaptation by educators (Burns, 2009). Such a framework not only supports student learning but also contributes to teacher professional development and systemic change. To summarize, social constructivism offers a robust theoretical foundation for integrating AfL strategies in the teaching and assessment of spoken English. It reconceptualizes the classroom as a collaborative, learner-driven environment, where oral communication is not simply practiced but meaningfully developed. In doing so, it equips both learners and teachers with tools to navigate the complexities of language learning in dynamic, socially rich ways.

2.3.2 Historical Shift of Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT

One of the earliest and most long-standing approaches in foreign language instruction, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), placed a dominant emphasis on reading and writing while paying little to no attention to spoken communication. Rooted in classical language instruction (notably Latin and Ancient Greek), GTM viewed language primarily as a system of rules and vocabulary to be memorized. Speaking was rarely practiced and often considered irrelevant (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In this approach, students were typically trained to translate written texts and recite grammar rules rather than communicate orally. Typical classroom practices included sentence translation, grammar exercises, and vocabulary lists, with almost no room for oral drills or communicative activities. As a result, spoken skills—particularly pronunciation, fluency, and turn-taking—were neglected entirely.

Emerging in the mid-20th century as a reaction to GTM, the Audiolingual Method (ALM) sought to prioritize listening and speaking through repetitive oral drills and pattern practice. Based on behaviorist learning theory and structural linguistics, ALM introduced spoken elements into the classroom; however, these were largely mechanical and decontextualized. Learners were expected to mimic and repeat structures rather than engage in authentic spoken exchanges (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Drills such as minimal-pair repetition, substitution drills, transformation drills, and chain drills were central to classroom practice. For example, a teacher might say, “He is a teacher,” and students would respond with variations such as “She is a teacher,” “They are doctors,” and so on. Although ALM brought speaking into the language classroom, the emphasis was on accuracy and automatization, with little concern for communicative intent or meaning negotiation.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) represented a paradigm shift by emphasizing functional and communicative competence. Unlike its predecessors, CLT recognized spoken interaction as a central goal of language education. The focus turned toward fluency, interaction, and the ability to use language in real-world contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980). Learners were encouraged to speak, ask questions, and use language meaningfully in tasks that mirrored real-life communication. Common speaking activities in CLT classrooms include role-plays, pair interviews, problem-solving tasks, storytelling, and information-gap exercises. For instance, in an information-gap task, Student A may have a train schedule while Student B has a list of arrival times, and they must ask and answer questions to complete the missing information. These activities aimed to develop discourse management, interactive listening, and functional language use, marking a clear departure from scripted drills.

Building on CLT, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasized the use of language as a means to complete meaningful tasks. In TBLT, speaking was no longer an isolated skill but an integral part of accomplishing communicative objectives. Learners

were required to engage in negotiation, clarification, and interaction to complete tasks (Ellis, 2003). Classroom applications include tasks such as planning a holiday, conducting surveys, giving directions, or organizing an event. For example, students might be asked to design a weekend itinerary for tourists visiting their city, presenting and justifying their choices to peers. TBLT places a premium on fluency, while post-task stages may involve language focus or corrective feedback for improved accuracy. Unlike ALM, speech here is emergent, context-driven, and oriented toward achieving specific outcomes.

The CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach combines subject matter learning with foreign language instruction. While its primary focus is often on content acquisition, CLIL naturally promotes speaking as learners are expected to discuss and present ideas related to academic subjects in the target language. According to Dalton-Puffer (2007), CLIL classrooms often provide extended speaking opportunities, though the success of these depends largely on the teacher's ability to scaffold interaction and manage cognitive load. CLIL can take two main forms:

Language-driven CLIL focuses on language development using content as a medium. For example, in an English lesson themed around the environment, students might participate in a debate on climate change, give short oral presentations on recycling, or conduct peer interviews about eco-friendly habits. The primary aim remains linguistic development. Content-driven CLIL, on the other hand, centers on learning subject matter through English. In a biology-integrated CLIL lesson, students might explain the process of photosynthesis in English, collaborate to create concept maps, or simulate a scientific experiment using appropriate terminology. Here, speaking emerges through content discussion and conceptual clarification. In both variations, scaffolded oral production is crucial. Teachers often use sentence starters, discussion prompts, and visual organizers to reduce the cognitive load and facilitate spoken output (Tezer, 2024). Group work, collaborative projects, and oral presentations are central to the CLIL classroom.

In recent decades, the post-method era has highlighted the importance of teacher autonomy, context-sensitivity, and the integration of various approaches. Speaking is no longer addressed through a single pedagogical lens but is embedded across eclectic instructional strategies. Modern frameworks such as the CEFR and project-based learning position oral interaction and production as core competencies. Teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that foster learner voice, authentic communicative intent, and continuous speaking practice, particularly through formative assessment and reflective dialogue (Littlewood, 2014). Classroom practices may include student-led conferences, peer feedback sessions, oral portfolios, and task-based video journals, which allow students to track their own development while practicing real-life communication. In this framework, speaking is understood not merely as performance but as a process of meaning-making and identity formation.

2.3.3 Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), spoken skills are classified into two distinct but complementary categories: oral interaction and oral production (Council of Europe, 2020). Oral interaction refers to real-time, two-way communication that involves turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, clarification, and collaborative construction of discourse. This mode of speaking requires learners not only to express themselves but also to actively listen and respond to others in dynamic communicative situations. It is inherently dialogic and situational. Typical classroom activities that promote oral interaction include information-gap tasks, role-plays, peer interviews, simulated dialogues, and debates. For example, in a “Find Someone Who” activity, students walk around the classroom asking their peers questions like “Have you ever been abroad?” or “Do you like cooking?”—practicing both question formation and responsive listening. These types of tasks support fluency, discourse management, and

pragmatic awareness, as learners must use language appropriately based on context and interlocutor cues.

On the other hand, oral production refers to monologic speaking, where learners produce extended stretches of speech independently. This includes giving presentations, narrating a story, describing a process, or expressing a personal opinion without immediate input from a conversation partner. CEFR descriptors emphasize the ability to organize content logically, use cohesive devices, and sustain speech over time. Classroom activities targeting oral production often include individual presentations, storytelling exercises, show-and-tell sessions, poster talks, or video blogs (vlogs). For instance, students might prepare a two-minute speech on their favorite hobby, structuring it with an introduction, body, and conclusion. These tasks help learners build confidence, expand lexical range, and refine pronunciation and intonation over time. While oral interaction fosters spontaneous, responsive speaking, oral production develops planned, coherent speech. A well-balanced speaking curriculum integrates both, allowing learners to practice the spontaneity of dialogue as well as the structure of monologue. In effective classroom practice, these two dimensions often overlap; for example, a peer presentation (oral production) may be followed by a Q&A session (oral interaction), thereby creating a communicative continuum.

Over the years, numerous approaches have been proposed to teach these skills, ranging from the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method to more contemporary communicative approaches. However, as Bygate (2009) argued, traditional methods often fell short of addressing the authentic, interactive nature of spoken language. They tended to prioritize grammatical accuracy and controlled drills over spontaneous and meaningful communication.

The main criticism of these earlier methods lies in their neglect of the communicative function of language. In EFL contexts such as Türkiye, this issue is particularly salient, where instruction has historically emphasized reading and writing at the expense of

speaking. Research by Thornbury (2017), and Goh and Burns (2012) has further confirmed that speaking instruction often lacks coherence and systematic progression, resulting in fragmented learning experiences for students. The disconnect between pedagogical practices and real-life communication demands has fueled a growing consensus for the need to adopt more communicative, fluency-focused instruction in EFL classrooms.

2.3.4 The Immerse Shift in Teaching Spoken Skills in ELT in Türkiye

Efforts to integrate spoken language skills into English Language Teaching (ELT) in Türkiye have historically followed a fragmented trajectory, shaped by shifting policy priorities and exam-oriented teaching traditions. Until the early 2010s, the national curriculum and assessment practices were largely grammar-based and focused on reading and writing, with speaking often relegated to the periphery of classroom instruction (Bayyurt & Altınmakas, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2007). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) had been formally encouraged since the 1997 curriculum reform, yet its implementation remained uneven due to teachers' limited training in oral skills pedagogy and a lack of assessment tools (Coşkun, 2013).

In 2013, a revised CEFR-aligned national curriculum was introduced for primary and secondary education, emphasizing the importance of integrated language skills, including speaking and listening (MoNE, 2013). While this was a pivotal step in policy terms, classroom realities often fell short of these goals. Teachers struggled to implement communicative activities in large, mixed-ability classrooms, and the national assessment system continued to prioritize written exams (Güngör & Güngör, 2019). Moreover, high-stakes university entrance exams, which excluded speaking entirely, reinforced a culture of test-oriented teaching that marginalized oral communication skills.

Despite these systemic limitations, some local initiatives and professional development programs—such as the British Council-supported *Teaching for Success*—began to promote

oral fluency and learner interaction in the late 2010s (Bayyurt & Altınmakas, 2012). These efforts, however, remained largely voluntary and lacked institutional enforcement.

A true turning point arrived in 2023, when the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) introduced new directives mandating the integration of all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—into classroom assessment frameworks. According to the updated regulations, foreign language examinations in secondary schools would be conducted in two stages: a written test and a practical component assessing speaking and listening:

Examinations for Turkish, Turkish Language and Literature, and Foreign Language courses are conducted in two stages: written and practical. [...] The teacher administers practical exams that assess listening and speaking skills separately, and these exams are scored individually. The final exam score is calculated by combining the scores from the practical exams and the written exam. (MoNE, 2023, p. 2)

This policy represented a major shift from previous practices that had sidelined oral performance due to its logistical challenges and perceived subjectivity in grading. Teachers were now explicitly instructed to design performance-based tasks—such as role-plays, interviews, discussions, and peer dialogues—as part of their summative assessment processes. In effect, speaking skills transitioned from being an optional add-on to a core dimension of language proficiency within Türkiye’s formal education system.

The 2023 reform also aligned with a growing recognition in the literature that spoken production requires formative, dialogic environments supported by scaffolding, peer interaction, and self-reflection (Andrade, 2019). Teachers were encouraged to adopt an Assessment for Learning (AfL) approach to oral tasks—emphasizing continuous feedback and student agency in the learning process (Black & Wiliam, 2009). In this way, the reform did not merely change the structure of assessment, but challenged teachers to shift their

pedagogical stance from knowledge transmission to facilitation of communicative competence.

By embedding speaking within both instruction and assessment, the 2023 directives have the potential to redefine classroom culture—enabling a more immersive, participatory language learning experience for Turkish learners. However, as Güngör and Güngör (2023) underline, the success of such reforms depends not only on policy design but also on sustained teacher support, manageable classroom conditions, and assessment literacy.

Despite the promising nature of this reform, the transition has not been without its challenges. Teachers in Türkiye have expressed concerns over limited assessment literacy, particularly in evaluating spontaneous spoken performance in a fair and consistent manner, often citing a lack of professional development opportunities and clear criteria (Kara et al., 2017). Recent findings highlight that many EFL teachers in Türkiye struggle with designing reliable oral assessments due to limited institutional support and insufficient training in assessment literacy. Many educators lack formal training in assessing oral proficiency, and existing tools are often poorly aligned with communicative goals. As Bailey and Corrales (2020) have observed, without a strong foundation in formative and summative speaking assessment techniques, teachers are left to improvise, leading to inconsistency in grading and uncertainty in feedback.

Students, too, face significant psychological and contextual barriers. Foreign language speaking anxiety remains a persistent issue, particularly in high-stakes testing environments or when classroom cultures do not foster risk-taking (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Feelings of inadequacy, limited exposure to authentic communication scenarios, and the fear of peer judgment often prevent learners from actively engaging in speaking tasks. These emotional and social barriers can be especially pronounced in large classrooms, where individual speaking opportunities are scarce.

Moreover, institutional constraints such as overcrowded classrooms and time limitations frequently hinder the application of student-centered speaking tasks, despite teachers'

willingness to implement them (Solak & Bayar, 2015). Teachers frequently report difficulties in managing pair or group work, incorporating communicative activities, and delivering individual feedback under such conditions. As Solmaz (2019) noted, even when teachers are pedagogically committed to communicative instruction, structural issues often force them to revert to traditional, teacher-centered methods.

Nonetheless, emerging practices and technological innovations offer pathways forward. A noteworthy dimension of this innovation is the increasing integration of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and speech recognition technologies into classroom practice. MALL refers to the use of handheld digital devices—such as smartphones and tablets—to support language learning anytime, anywhere, enabling context-sensitive, personalized engagement with oral input and output. A systematic literature review examining pronunciation-focused MALL interventions concluded that mobile-based tools significantly improve L2 learners' pronunciation performance and foster positive learner attitudes toward this mode of practice (Permatasari, 2024). These tools harness interactive prompts, gamification, and mobility to boost speaking accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and learner confidence.

Closely linked to MALL is the adoption of speech recognition technologies, which provide real-time, AI-driven feedback on learners' spoken performance, including pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. For instance, studies on ELSA Speak demonstrate its effectiveness in enhancing pronunciation and reducing speaking anxiety: Indonesian EFL learners using the app showed significant post-test improvement compared to pre-test, and participants reported increased confidence and engagement (Mardiah, 2025; Munawir, 2024). This functionality helps bridge gaps in classroom practice, where individualized speaking feedback is often impractical due to large class sizes.

Another innovation is the use of reflective speaking journals, where students record short oral reflections on their learning experiences or class topics. Studies such as those by Kessler et al., (2025) show that this method not only enhances oral fluency but also

encourages metacognitive awareness, prompting learners to set personal goals for spoken performance. Furthermore, collaborative learning platforms and video-based interaction tools such as Flipgrid have gained popularity for their ability to create safe and asynchronous speaking environments. These tools allow students to prepare, record, and revise their spoken contributions, fostering a greater sense of ownership over their learning process.

In summary, while the 2023 MoNE policy marks an important step toward equitable, skills-integrated language education, its success depends on addressing deep-rooted issues in teacher training, assessment practice, and classroom infrastructure. A shift toward communicative, motivation-sensitive, and formative approaches to teaching spoken skills—supported by professional development and institutional investment—is essential for achieving meaningful change in EFL classrooms. toward equitable, skills-integrated language education, its success depends on addressing deep-rooted issues in teacher training, assessment practice, and classroom infrastructure. A shift toward communicative, motivation-sensitive, and formative approaches to teaching spoken skills—supported by professional development and institutional investment—is essential for achieving meaningful change in EFL classrooms.

2.3.5 Assessing Spoken Skills

2.3.5.1 Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Assessment for learning is characterized by its developmental nature and its focus on learning. It emphasizes the significance of feedback and learner involvement in the assessment process to promote continuous improvement. Formative and summative assessments serve distinct purposes in language classrooms, with formative assessment prioritizing ongoing feedback and improvement (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Formative assessment plays a crucial role in the development of spoken language skills, offering learners a pathway to improve their fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative competence (Black & Wiliam, 2009). By emphasizing continuous feedback, collaborative evaluation, and learner-centered approaches, educators can help students build confidence and proficiency in spoken communication. As Carless (2015) emphasizes, effective formative assessment requires a shift from teacher-centered testing to student-centered feedback and reflection. As Goh and Burns (2012) argue, teaching speaking should go beyond drilling and include cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of oral language use. In the context of spoken skills, formative assessment offers more flexibility and responsiveness. It includes strategies such as teacher observation, peer feedback, self-assessment, learning journals, and real-time performance monitoring (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Sadler, 1989). These strategies not only help identify learners' individual needs but also promote reflective thinking and greater engagement (Wiliam, 2011). When implemented effectively, formative assessment strategies can reduce speaking anxiety, enhance learner agency, and contribute to the long-term oral proficiency development.

According to some researchers, self-assessment enhances students' self-regulation and confidence, particularly in language learning contexts (Panadero et al., 2017). The cyclical model of self-assessment is particularly beneficial for speaking development, where feedback, self-reflection, and adaptation play a central role in building confidence and skill. Their study also emphasizes the importance of creating structured opportunities for student voice in assessment processes, aligning closely with learner-centered pedagogies in language classrooms. Despite the recognized benefits of formative assessment, its implementation remains limited in many EFL classrooms, particularly in Türkiye. Teachers often face institutional and systemic barriers, such as limited time, large class sizes, and insufficient training in alternative assessment methods. Studies by Brookhart (2013) emphasize that well-designed rubrics serve as both instructional and assessment tools by clarifying performance expectations and supporting learner autonomy. Moreover,

the integration of formative and summative assessments should not be seen as mutually exclusive but rather complementary. Combining these approaches allows educators to monitor ongoing progress while also evaluating final performance. According to Isaacs and Trofimovich (2012), comprehensibility in L2 speaking assessments is influenced by multiple linguistic factors, including fluency, accent, and discourse organization. In summary, assessing spoken skills requires a detailed understanding of different assessment types and their pedagogical implications. While summative assessments offer necessary accountability and benchmarks, formative assessment fosters the type of ongoing, personalized feedback that is essential for spoken language development in EFL contexts. toward equal, skills-integrated language education, its success depends on addressing deep-rooted issues in teacher training, assessment practice, and classroom infrastructure. A shift toward communicative, motivation-sensitive, and formative approaches to teaching spoken skills—supported by professional development and institutional investment—is essential for achieving meaningful change in EFL classrooms. toward equal, skills-integrated language education, its success depends on addressing deep-rooted issues in teacher training, assessment practice, and classroom infrastructure. A shift toward communicative, motivation-sensitive, and formative approaches to teaching spoken skills—supported by professional development and institutional investment—is essential for achieving meaningful change in EFL classrooms.

2.3.5.2 Assessment of Learning (AoL)

Assessment of learning is traditionally used to evaluate learners' language proficiency at the end of an instructional period, often through oral exams, interviews, or presentations. In the context of EFL teaching, assessing spoken language skills summatively presents several challenges, particularly related to test validity and scoring consistency. As Fulcher and Reiter (2003) note, speaking assessments require authentic tasks and well-trained

raters to accurately reflect learners' communicative competence. However, spoken language is complex and context-sensitive, and standardized summative assessments may not always capture learners' real-world speaking ability (Luoma, 2004).

One major concern is that summative speaking tasks often prioritize performance over the process. That is, they tend to focus on what students can produce in a limited timeframe rather than how they develop fluency or manage conversation over time. This focus may inadvertently favor learners who are confident and fluent but overlook those who may improve significantly with ongoing support. Moreover, the reliability of summative speaking tests can be influenced by subjective judgments, especially when multiple raters are involved without adequate calibration (Brown, 2006). This issue becomes even more pronounced in large-scale assessments where time constraints prevent detailed qualitative feedback.

Despite these concerns, summative speaking assessments remain an essential tool in language education, particularly for formal certification or end-of-year evaluations. When designed carefully, they can provide valuable information about students' communicative development and readiness for real-life language use. In this regard, alignment with international descriptors, such as those provided by the CEFR, ensures a shared understanding of expected performance levels (Council of Europe, 2020). Rubrics that incorporate a range of performance indicators—such as fluency, accuracy, coherence, and interaction—can help standardize judgments and support fairer evaluations across student populations.

In summary, summative assessment can also contribute to learners' reflective awareness, especially when students are informed of evaluation criteria beforehand. Transparency in assessment expectations may encourage learners to set goals and self-monitor their progress. While summative assessment alone may not suffice for developing spoken fluency, it can serve as a meaningful complement to formative approaches, offering benchmarks that help learners and teachers recognize growth over time.

2.4 Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the use of assessment as a tool for promoting student learning rather than merely evaluating it (Yan, 2021). Rooted in formative assessment principles, AfL strategies focus on continuous feedback, student involvement, and learning transparency. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), AfL involves any assessment for which the priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. In the context of English as a Foreign Language education, AfL has gained prominence for its potential to improve student motivation, engagement, and spoken language proficiency.

The theoretical underpinnings of AfL also resonate with social constructivist theories of learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), for example, emphasizes the role of scaffolding in helping learners progress from what they can do independently to what they can achieve with guidance. AfL strategies such as feedback, guided practice, and collaborative learning mirror this approach, ensuring that assessment is not only diagnostic but also developmental.

The transformative shift from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning represents a critical evolution in modern educational theory and practice (Black & William, 2019). Rather than relying solely on summative evaluations that measure outcomes at the end of a learning cycle, AfL prioritizes the process of learning itself. By embedding assessment within everyday instructional practices, teachers can gather valuable insights into learners' ongoing development and adjust their strategies accordingly. This responsiveness makes AfL particularly effective in language learning environments, where the path to communicative competence is nonlinear and deeply personal.

In EFL settings, where students often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, creating opportunities for meaningful, guided language use becomes essential. AfL offers a structured yet flexible framework to address this challenge. Through peer-assessment, self-evaluation, success criteria, and formative feedback, learners are not

merely passive recipients of knowledge, they become co-constructors of their own learning journeys. This shift in role contributes to greater learner autonomy, which has been shown to correlate with increased motivation and language retention (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015).

Moreover, spoken language development requires frequent and sustained interaction (Goh & Burns, 2012), as well as space for experimentation, error-making, and reflection. AfL supports this by promoting low-stakes, high-feedback learning contexts. When learners are encouraged to engage in speaking activities without the fear of summative judgment, their willingness to take risks improves. This is particularly valuable for students who experience language anxiety—a well-documented barrier to speaking performance. In such contexts, AfL strategies help reduce the affective filter, thus allowing learners to participate more freely and confidently.

The integration of AfL also aligns closely with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction, fluency, and real-world language use. In both AfL and CLT, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Through targeted questioning, observation, and dialogic feedback, instructors can support learners in identifying their own gaps in performance and developing strategies to address them. This individualized support enhances learners' metacognitive skills, which are crucial for successful language acquisition (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Nassaji & Swain, 2000).

Additionally, the application of AfL in speaking-focused instruction enables the cultivation of a growth mindset. When students receive formative feedback that focuses on improvement rather than error detection, they are more likely to view language learning as a dynamic and continuous process (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Mangels et al., 2006). This shift in mindset nurtures resilience and perseverance—two attributes that are indispensable when learning to speak in a second or foreign language. It also enables students to set

realistic personal goals, monitor their own progress, and take ownership of their linguistic development.

Another important feature of AfL is its emphasis on success criteria and learning intentions. When these are clearly communicated, students gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes effective spoken performance. For example, instead of vague instructions like “speak fluently,” learners might be given success criteria such as “use discourse markers to connect ideas,” or “speak for at least two minutes on a familiar topic” (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989). Such specificity demystifies the expectations and empowers students to self-monitor during speaking tasks.

Technology also plays a critical role in supporting AfL practices in modern classrooms. Digital tools like voice recording applications, video conferencing platforms, and online feedback systems allow learners to engage in speaking tasks beyond the physical classroom and receive feedback asynchronously (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013; Vandergrift & Baker, 2015). Teachers can utilize these recordings to provide targeted, individualized feedback, while learners can reflect on their performance and identify areas for improvement. In this way, AfL is not limited by time or space; it becomes a continuous process that accompanies learners throughout their development.

Despite its many advantages, the implementation of AfL in EFL contexts is not without challenges. Teachers may lack sufficient training or confidence in designing and executing formative assessments. Institutional pressures, such as a focus on standardized testing or rigid curricula, may also limit the flexibility needed for AfL to be effective. Furthermore, large class sizes can hinder the individualized attention required for meaningful feedback (Heritage, 2010; Wiliam, 2011). Nevertheless, professional development programs and school-wide support systems have shown promise in helping educators overcome these barriers.

In countries like Türkiye, where recent policy changes have begun to emphasize spoken skills in national curricula, AfL offers a practical and theoretically sound approach for

aligning classroom practices with curricular goals. Since many students in the Turkish EFL context are assessed predominantly through written exams, incorporating AfL into speaking instruction presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between assessment and real-world language use (Bayyurt & Altınmakas, 2024; MoNE, 2023). When implemented strategically, AfL can create more equitable and engaging language classrooms where learners of all backgrounds feel seen, heard, and supported.

Despite the widespread recognition of the benefits of Assessment for Learning (AfL) in enhancing language acquisition, its practical implementation within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Türkiye remains relatively limited. Recent empirical studies reveal several interrelated factors that contribute to this ongoing challenge.

For instance, Çayır (2024) examined the perceptions and practices of EFL teachers at a state university in Türkiye and found a significant gap between teachers' positive attitudes towards AfL and their actual use of formative strategies. While techniques such as teacher questioning and oral feedback were frequently reported, key AfL components like clear articulation of learning goals, peer feedback, and self-assessment were underutilized. This suggests that AfL, although valued in theory, is not fully integrated into classroom routines.

Çimen (2022) reinforced these findings, documenting the limited use of authentic, continuous feedback methods in high school EFL settings in Türkiye. The study underscored that effective formative assessment is often hindered by insufficient training and resource constraints, which restrict the provision of individualized feedback critical to learner development.

Nonetheless, Tunçer and Merç (2023) identified that in-service training programs positively influence teachers' attitudes towards AfL, suggesting that sustained professional support can bridge the gap between understanding and practice. However, factors such as limited assessment literacy, time constraints, and curriculum pressures have hindered widespread adoption. As Panadero et al., (2017) suggest, embedding AfL within a cycle of

teaching, learning, and reflection requires institutional support and sustained teacher development. Teachers must be equipped not only with the theoretical understanding of AfL but also with practical tools to apply it effectively.

In conclusion, the literature collectively indicates that the limited use of AfL strategies in Türkiye's EFL classrooms stems from a complex interplay of insufficient teacher training, traditional assessment culture, and systemic educational constraints. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies including enhanced teacher education, ongoing professional development, and institutional policies that promote learner-centered assessment approaches.

At international level, recent studies (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Choi & Lee, 2017) have shown that when learners are actively engaged in the assessment process, their motivation and learning outcomes improve significantly. In speaking-focused instruction, this translates into greater confidence, willingness to communicate, and more meaningful use of the target language. Hence, integrating AfL into the EFL classroom holds the promise of transforming assessment into a catalyst for spoken language development.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) signifies a pedagogical transformation in the way assessment is conceptualized and utilized in educational environments. Traditionally, assessment has often been confined to the role of evaluating learner achievement at the end of an instructional period, primarily serving summative purposes such as grading or certification. However, AfL repositions assessment as a dynamic and ongoing process designed to actively support and enhance student learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). This approach integrates assessment into the fabric of instruction, creating continuous feedback loops that inform both teaching practices and learners' strategies for improvement. The principle underlying AfL is that assessment, when used formatively, can lead to deeper understanding, improved motivation, and ultimately, better learning outcomes. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, particularly concerning the

development of oral proficiency, AfL offers a compelling framework for facilitating communicative competence and learner autonomy.

The theoretical underpinnings of AfL are firmly rooted in formative assessment paradigms that emphasize assessment's role in shaping the learning process rather than merely measuring outcomes. Black and Wiliam (2009) characterize formative assessment as any assessment for which the priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. This definition encapsulates the intent to provide learners with actionable information that can be used to guide their ongoing learning efforts. Central to this approach is the development of metacognitive skills, where learners cultivate awareness and control over their cognitive processes related to language acquisition (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Through AfL, learners are encouraged to monitor their progress, identify gaps in understanding, and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. Social constructivist perspectives also inform AfL, emphasizing the dialogic nature of learning where peer and teacher interactions provide valuable feedback and co-construction of knowledge (Sadler, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). This collaborative element is especially pertinent in language learning, where interaction and negotiation of meaning are critical.

In practice, AfL encompasses a variety of strategies aimed at engaging learners actively in their own assessment and learning. One foundational element is the clear articulation of learning objectives and success criteria. When students understand precisely what is expected of them and what quality performance entails, they are better positioned to self-evaluate and strive toward those goals (Clarke, 2014). In the context of speaking skills, such criteria may include pronunciation accuracy, fluency, coherence, and pragmatic appropriateness.

Self-assessment represents another key strategy, inviting learners to reflect critically on their own performance and recognize areas of strength and weakness. As Yan (2022) explains, self-assessment should be viewed as an active and reflective process and used as

a learning strategy rather than merely an assessment method. This reflective practice nurtures learner autonomy and self-regulation, which are essential for lifelong language learning.

Peer-assessment complements self-assessment by enabling learners to provide feedback to one another, thus fostering collaborative learning and critical engagement (Topping, 2018). In EFL speaking tasks, peer feedback allows students to perceive their communicative efforts from different perspectives and promotes awareness of language use in authentic contexts. Teacher feedback remains central but shifts from a purely corrective function to one that supports scaffolding and encourages learner reflection (Brookhart, 2017). Effective feedback should be timely, specific, and focused on guiding future learning rather than merely pointing out errors (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). For oral skills, this feedback might address features such as intonation, lexical variety, or interactional competence.

Questioning techniques also play an important role within AfL by prompting deeper thinking and self-assessment (Farrell, 2003). Open-ended and scaffolded questions from teachers encourage learners to analyze their performance and articulate learning challenges and strategies. The integration of technology has further expanded the possibilities of AfL in EFL settings. Tools like audio and video recording, online peer review platforms, and digital portfolios provide learners with the means to record, revisit, and evaluate their spoken language outside the constraints of classroom time (Boud & Molloy, 2013). This not only increases opportunities for reflection but also supports more personalized and flexible learning experiences.

The application of Assessment for Learning (AfL) in the development of oral proficiency is particularly significant, as spoken communication is inherently interactive and spontaneous. In EFL classrooms, where learners often struggle with confidence and fluency in speaking, AfL provides formative mechanisms such as peer feedback, self-assessment, and teacher-led dialogue that foster continuous oral development. For

example, in a study conducted with Turkish university EFL teachers, Soruç et al., (2025) found that teachers viewed oral corrective feedback not merely as error correction, but as a formative dialogue that enhanced learners' interactional competence, particularly when adapted to the emotional and contextual needs of students. Similarly, Taner and Balıkcı (2022) designed an oral communication course for ELT students that embedded AfL strategies such as structured group discussions, formative rubrics, and self-evaluation checklists. Their findings highlighted that scaffolded formative speaking tasks significantly increased students' confidence, fluency, and self-awareness in oral performance. Furthermore, Aydın (2023), in an experimental study with young Turkish EFL learners, demonstrated that speech act development improved considerably when learners received sustained formative feedback and participated in reflective self-assessment. The study also reported positive gains in learners' motivation and speaking-related self-efficacy. Taken together, these findings indicate that when AfL is implemented through reflective, dialogic, and interactive practices, it enhances learners' spoken proficiency by not only developing linguistic accuracy and fluency but also by cultivating learner autonomy and confidence—key components of long-term oral development in EFL contexts.

The impact of AfL on learner motivation and achievement is well-documented in recent empirical research. Andrade and Brookhart (2020) highlight that learners' active involvement in assessment fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, which are powerful motivators for sustained engagement and progress. Specifically, in speaking-focused instruction, AfL practices have been linked to increased learner confidence, willingness to communicate, and greater use of authentic language functions. AfL supports self-efficacy by providing learners with opportunities to recognize incremental progress and to set realistic, achievable goals. Furthermore, AfL facilitates continuous practice cycles where learners receive real-time feedback, reflect on their performance, and adjust accordingly. For example, learners might record their responses to speaking prompts, engage in self-assessment against defined success criteria, and participate in peer-review

sessions that offer diverse viewpoints. Teacher feedback that emphasizes formative guidance rather than summative judgment helps reduce anxiety and motivates learners to experiment with language use, thereby supporting fluency and communicative confidence.

Despite the demonstrated benefits, the implementation of AfL in Turkish EFL classrooms is still constrained by several factors. Teacher assessment literacy remains limited, with many educators lacking formal training in AfL principles and strategies (Güngör & Güngör, 2024). One of the most pervasive challenges is the dominance of summative and exam-driven assessment, where instructional emphasis is placed on grammar and vocabulary coverage in preparation for high-stakes tests rather than on meaningful communicative development. Studies show that despite curricular reform aligning with CEFR principles, many teachers continue to administer traditional written exams, neglecting opportunities for oral feedback and formative speaking assessment (Çimen, 2022). Compounding this problem are large class sizes, which significantly limit the teacher's capacity to monitor individual learners' speaking performance and provide timely feedback. In many Turkish secondary schools, classrooms often exceed 40 students, making dialogic assessment strategies logistically difficult to sustain (Shamim & Kuchah, 2016). Moreover, time constraints arising from overloaded syllabi and standardized exam preparation further reduce the feasibility of integrating AfL into everyday speaking instruction. Teachers often report that they lack sufficient instructional time to include formative feedback or peer collaboration due to the pressure of meeting curriculum pacing requirements (Xu & Harfitt, 2019). Finally, the rigid structure of the national curriculum poses another obstacle. Although official documents promote communicative competence, teachers frequently feel restricted by prescribed coursebooks, centralized planning, and an assessment culture that prioritizes final scores over process-based learning. Together, these challenges form a systemic barrier that limits the transformative potential of AfL for fostering spoken language development in Turkish EFL contexts. Overcoming these

challenges necessitates systemic changes, including targeted professional development, institutional support, and curricular adjustments that recognize and prioritize formative assessment. In this regard, developing teachers' assessment literacy becomes critical. As Yan and Pastore (2022) emphasize, the Teacher Formative Assessment Literacy Scale assesses the conceptual, practical, and socio-emotional aspects of formative assessment literacy. This instrument is grounded in a robust theoretical model and evaluates formative assessment literacy through three interrelated dimensions: conceptual, practical, and socio emotional. The conceptual dimension pertains to a teacher's understanding of the principles, purposes, and rationale underlying formative assessment (Yan & Pastore, 2022). The practical dimension reflects the teacher's ability to apply this understanding through classroom techniques such as questioning, feedback provision, and facilitating student self-assessment. Finally, the socio-emotional dimension, which has often been underrepresented in earlier frameworks, captures teachers' awareness of how interpersonal and emotional dynamics shape the assessment process—such as the affective consequences of feedback or the relational trust required for formative assessment to function effectively (Yan & Pastore, 2022). TFALS serves not only as a diagnostic tool for research purposes, but also as a framework for guiding teacher professional development in formative assessment (Yan & Pastore, 2022). Given the growing emphasis on formative and learner-centered approaches within English language education, TFALS holds particular relevance for improving assessment literacy among EFL teachers in diverse educational settings.

Moreover, professional development plays a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' ability to implement AfL effectively. Yan (2021) stresses that professional development programmes can enhance teachers' implementation of assessment-as-learning, especially when accompanied by systematic support measures. Therefore, for AfL to achieve its intended impact, schools and educational institutions must invest in building assessment literacy and equipping teachers with tools and resources to adapt to AfL strategies in diverse classroom contexts.

Assessment for Learning represents a pedagogically rich and research-supported approach that redefines the role of assessment in EFL contexts. By embedding assessment within the learning process and engaging learners as active participants, AfL strategies have the potential to significantly enhance spoken language proficiency and learner motivation. However, to harness these benefits in Turkey's EFL classrooms, concerted efforts are needed to build teacher capacity, reform curricular demands, and foster institutional cultures that value formative practices. The integration of technology and ongoing professional development will be crucial in ensuring the sustainable and effective implementation of AfL, thereby transforming assessment from a summative endpoint into a catalyst for continuous learning and communicative competence.

2.4.1 Self-Assessment

Self-assessment invites learners to critically reflect on their own progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and take initiative in their learning process. As Boud and Falchikov (2007) note, when learners engage in self-assessment, they develop metacognitive awareness, which leads to greater autonomy. In EFL speaking classes, self-assessment allows students to monitor fluency, pronunciation, and coherence, giving them ownership of their oral skill development. Studies (Yan & Pastore, 2022) have shown that self-assessment enhances learner motivation and contributes to sustained progress over time. research conducted in the Turkish context supports these findings. Karakaya et al., (2017), in a quasi-experimental study with 46 B1-level Turkish university students, observed that while self-assessment did not yield significantly higher test scores compared to the control group, participants reported marked improvements in metacognitive awareness and speaking motivation. Students described the process as encouraging and engaging in developing their speaking abilities. A similar study in high school EFL settings found that incorporating speaking e-portfolios—where students recorded, reflected, and

assessed their own oral performances—led to statistically significant increases in speaking self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward speaking practice. These findings underscore that self-assessment not only reinforces oral skill development but also fosters learner autonomy, motivation, and confidence (Karakaya et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Peer Assessment

Peer assessment encourages collaboration and shared responsibility in the classroom. Through structured activities, learners evaluate one another's spoken performance, often using rubric or success criteria developed collaboratively with the teacher. According to Topping (2018), peer assessment not only fosters critical thinking and interpersonal communication but also provides learners with valuable feedback from multiple perspectives. Research has demonstrated that peer evaluation enhances students' speaking confidence and supports their ability to analyze communicative effectiveness (Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015). In Türkiye, emerging studies provide further corroboration. A case study with Turkish pre-service teachers revealed that participation in peer evaluation during practicum enhanced their reflective awareness, self-confidence, and ability to adopt multiple viewpoints (Gümüşok & Çopur, 2015). Similarly, research in a Turkish preparatory school context examined the effects of peer and teacher feedback on EFL learners' oral performance and speaking self-efficacy (Au & Bardakçı, 2020). Results showed that students improved their speaking performance significantly after peer feedback and that structured peer review also bolstered confidence levels—though teacher feedback produced somewhat larger gains (Au & Bardakçı, 2020). Additionally, a study exploring group work and peer reflections with 52 Turkish preparatory-class students found that those engaged in peer evaluation reported increased motivation, respectful interaction, and a sense of shared accountability during speaking activities (Harputlu &

Erarslan, 2019). These findings suggest that peer assessment can create a supportive “mini-speaking community” that enhances motivation and communicative practice.

Together, these Turkish studies echo international findings and confirm that peer assessment is a viable strategy in EFL speaking classrooms—supporting not only skill development but also learner agency and self-efficacy. However, successful implementation requires clear criteria, structured training, and teacher scaffolding to ensure feedback is constructive and reliable (Au & Bardakçı, 2019; Topping, 2018).

2.4.3 Success Criteria and Learning Objectives

Clarifying success criteria and learning goals helps learners understand what constitutes quality performance in speaking tasks. In EFL settings, success criteria might include aspects such as intonation, fluency, vocabulary use, or turn-taking strategies. Studies (Panadero et al., 2017) highlight how clarity in learning expectations improves learner confidence and leads to better outcomes in spoken communication. Panadero et al. (2017) demonstrate that when learners are provided with clear, specific success criteria, using discourse markers to link ideas, or maintaining smooth flow for at least two minutes—they report higher confidence and produce more structured and cohesive spoken output. In addition, systematic reviews in L2 assessment. By making success criteria and learning objectives explicit, teachers facilitate self-regulation, helping learners internalize what successful spoken communication looks like and enabling them to self-assess during performance. This has been shown to reduce cognitive load on the teacher and foster learner independence (Butler & Winne, 1995).

2.4.4 Teacher Feedback

Formative feedback provided by the teacher is central to the AfL framework. Rather than simply correcting errors, effective feedback guides students toward improvement by

offering specific suggestions and affirming progress. Hattie and Timperley (2007) stress the importance of feedback that is timely, goal-referenced, and focused on the task. In EFL speaking contexts, formative feedback allows learners to refine their pronunciation, improve discourse strategies, and enhance clarity

Evidence from the Turkish EFL context underscores the importance—and complexity—of teacher feedback in spoken performance. For example, Fakazlı (2018) found that university-level Turkish learners who received recasts and clarification requests from their instructors achieved a 100% correction uptake rate, especially for recurring grammar errors, indicating both awareness and immediate improvement following feedback. Similarly, Öztürk (2012) observed that recasts and explicit correction were the most frequently used corrective moves in recorded EFL classrooms, highlighting instructors' reliance on meaning-focused and form-focused feedback even in large group settings. Beyond corrective techniques, the relational and socio-emotional dimensions of feedback have been studied. Ölmezer-Öztürk (2016) noted that Turkish EFL preparatory programme instructors viewed feedback as a sociocultural tool—balancing error correction with encouragement, confidence building, and support for self-regulation in oral presentation tasks. This aligns with Reinders and Lázaro's (2011) findings that well-structured formative feedback supports learner motivation and sustained engagement in speaking activities. Moreover, teachers' beliefs play a critical role in determining feedback practices. Yüksel et al., (2021) found high consistency between Turkish university EFL teachers' beliefs about oral corrective feedback and their actual classroom behaviors, suggesting that beliefs significantly influence how feedback is delivered and received. Overall, these findings from Türkiye demonstrate that teacher feedback in speaking-focused classrooms involves a complex interplay of correction, encouragement, and scaffolding. Effective feedback not only targets linguistic accuracy but also enhances motivation, learner agency, and confidence—key elements of successful AfL implementation in oral language instruction.

2.4.5 Questioning Techniques

Effective questioning techniques are essential for eliciting thoughtful responses and encouraging reflection. Open-ended questions, scaffolded dialogue, and prompts for elaboration support deeper engagement with language use. In speaking lessons, questioning techniques create opportunities for learners to express opinions, narrate experiences, and practice negotiation of meaning. Building on this, Farrell and Mom (2015) highlight several categories of teacher questions that can enhance communicative development and reflective thinking in the EFL classroom. Display questions, which aim to elicit specific, known information—such as “What is the past tense of ‘go’?”—are useful for checking accuracy but offer limited opportunities for extended speech. In contrast, referential questions invite open-ended, authentic responses and are better suited for promoting fluency and personal expression. For example, asking “Why do you think the character acted that way?” encourages learners to engage meaningfully with content and construct original utterances. Farrell also emphasizes the value of probing questions that prompt learners to clarify or elaborate on their answers. Questions like “Can you say more about that?” or “Why do you think that is important?” push learners to produce more complex, cohesive language while reflecting on their thoughts. Additionally, reflective questions, such as “What did you do well in this task?” or “How could you improve next time?”, are especially effective after speaking performances to support metacognitive development and learner autonomy (Farrell & Mom, 2015). At more advanced proficiency levels, even Socratic questioning can be applied to challenge assumptions and foster critical language use—for instance, “What evidence supports your view?” These varied questioning strategies, when applied intentionally, transform the classroom into a space for dialogic learning and self-directed growth (Farrell & Mom, 2015). In the Turkish EFL context, where classroom talk is often teacher-dominated and heavily scripted (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2010), incorporating such techniques can create richer interaction, foster confidence, and promote learner reflection as part of formative assessment.

2.4.6 Technology-Enhanced AfL Practices

Digital tools such as voice recording apps, online peer-review platforms, and digital portfolios extend AfL practices beyond the classroom. Boud and Molloy (2013) suggest that technology-enhanced assessment allows for personalized feedback, asynchronous evaluation, and richer learner reflection. EFL learners benefit from these platforms as they can repeatedly listen to their own recordings, track progress over time, and receive targeted comments from peers and teachers alike. Overall, each AfL strategy contributes uniquely to the development of spoken language skills. When applied consistently and thoughtfully, these practices foster a culture of active learning, reduce performance anxiety, and promote learner independence. The following section will explore how these strategies, when integrated into an action research framework, can transform EFL classrooms into responsive, reflective, and engaging learning environments.

2.5 Action Research

Action research, initially rooted in scientific inquiry and later adapted into social sciences, has emerged as a transformative methodological framework in educational contexts. Its central aim is to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, particularly within classroom settings. In contrast to traditional research paradigms where subjects are observed from a distance, action research involves the researcher as an active participant. As McIntosh (2010) articulates, “It aims to close the gap between the researcher and the researched upon, therefore negating positions of power in the research process itself, but in so doing it can be perceived as being subversive as opposed to democratic” (p. 33). This participatory model not only democratizes the research process but also positions educators as both investigators and change agents (Kemmis et al., 2014).

The roots of action research date back to the mid-20th century, when Kurt Lewin—considered one of the pioneers of social psychology, introduced the concept as a practical

response to social issues. His model, which emphasized cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, was originally intended to address problems in organizational and community settings. However, its principles have since been embraced by educators seeking to examine and enhance their own pedagogical practices (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). In contemporary educational research, action research is valued not only for its continuous and reflective qualities but also for its capacity to generate contextually relevant and immediately applicable insights.

Unlike conventional experimental research, which often prioritizes generalizability and objectivity, action research prioritizes specificity and contextual relevance. It asks not what works universally, but what works here and now, in this classroom, with these learners. As such, it provides a powerful framework for teachers to investigate real challenges they face, whether these concern student engagement, assessment practices, curriculum implementation, or classroom management. By observing their own practice, collecting data, and reflecting critically on outcomes, teachers engage in a continuous learning process that mirrors the kind of lifelong learning they aim to instill in their students (Burns, 2009).

Central to this approach is the role of the teacher-researcher. Educators engaging in action research are not detached observers but embedded practitioners whose dual identity affords them a nuanced understanding of the learning environment. This insider perspective allows for a more holistic and responsive analysis of classroom dynamics. Moreover, it blurs the traditional boundary between theory and practice, highlighting the ways in which educational knowledge is co-constructed through ongoing inquiry and reflection. In doing so, action research empowers teachers to become agents of change within their own professional contexts, leading to improvements that are both meaningful and sustainable (Coghlan, 2014).

Another fundamental feature of action research is its cyclical nature. Typically, an action research project involves several stages: identifying a problem, planning an intervention,

implementing the intervention, collecting and analyzing data, and reflecting on the results. This cycle can be repeated multiple times, with each iteration deepening the researcher's understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of the intervention. The recursive nature of action research encourages adaptability, allowing educators to respond dynamically to emerging insights and changing conditions. Rather than seeking final answers, action researchers remain open to ongoing learning, embracing uncertainty as a space for growth (Kemmis et al., 2014).

The collaborative dimension of action research further distinguishes it from more hierarchical models of inquiry. While a single teacher can conduct action research independently, many projects are undertaken collaboratively among colleagues, departments, or even across schools. This shared inquiry fosters a culture of professional dialogue and collective responsibility, where educators learn from one another's experiences and work together to improve educational outcomes. Moreover, involving students in the process—as co-researchers or feedback providers—can further enhance the democratic ethos of action research and enrich the insights generated.

In language education in particular, action research has proven especially valuable. Language classrooms are inherently complex, shaped by the interplay of linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and emotional factors. Standardized research methods often fail to capture this complexity or to offer solutions that are relevant to the lived experiences of teachers and learners. Action research, by contrast, embraces this complexity and enables teachers to address it from within. For example, a teacher might investigate how different feedback strategies influence students' speaking fluency or how group work dynamics affect learner participation. The findings from such inquiries not only inform immediate practice but can also contribute to broader pedagogical conversations.

Furthermore, action research aligns closely with reflective teaching practices, a cornerstone of professional development in education. Reflective teachers regularly question their assumptions, evaluate the impact of their choices, and seek out new approaches to enhance

student learning. Action research formalizes this process, providing a structured framework for inquiry that goes beyond intuition or anecdotal evidence. By documenting their findings and sharing them with others—through presentations, publications, or informal discussions—teachers participating in action research contribute to the collective knowledge base of the profession.

However, despite its many strengths, action research is not without challenges (Banegas & Güngör, 2024). One common concern is the tension between subjectivity and validity. Because the researcher is deeply embedded in the context being studied, maintaining objectivity can be difficult. Yet, proponents argue that this embeddedness is not a limitation but a source of insight, as long as researchers are transparent about their positionality and use rigorous methods to ensure trustworthiness. Triangulation, member checking, and reflexive journaling are among the strategies used to enhance credibility in action research.

Time constraints are another significant barrier, particularly for full-time teachers juggling instructional responsibilities. Conducting action research requires time for planning, data collection, analysis, and reflection—all of which must be integrated into already demanding schedules. Institutional support, such as providing release time, access to resources, or opportunities for collaboration, can make a substantial difference in enabling teachers to engage in this form of inquiry.

Additionally, there may be skepticism from administrators or policymakers who favor quantifiable, large-scale research studies over localized, qualitative inquiries. Advocates for action research must therefore articulate its value not only in terms of improved practice but also in relation to broader educational goals, such as equity, inclusion, and learner-centered pedagogy. When framed in this way, action research can be seen as a vital tool for contextualizing and humanizing education policy.

In sum, action research is a powerful vehicle for educational change, especially when it is conducted by practitioners who are intimately familiar with the contexts in which they

work. By positioning educators as reflective researchers, it challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge production and reaffirms the value of experiential, context-sensitive insights. Its participatory, cyclical, and reflective nature makes it especially well-suited for addressing the dynamic and complex challenges of classroom life. Whether used to enhance student engagement, adapt instructional strategies, or explore assessment practices, action research supports a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement that ultimately benefits both teachers and learners.

In the realm of language education, action research offers a highly contextualized approach to inquiry. Whitehead and McNiff (2006) emphasize that teacher-researchers become reflective practitioners, constantly revisiting their practices through inquiry and adjustment. This reflective stance allows for meaningful pedagogical development that is grounded in the lived experiences of both teachers and students. The evolution of teachers into practitioner-researchers not only enhances their instructional competence but also contributes to their professional identity and agency.

Kurt Lewin, credited with formalizing the concept of action research, described it as a cyclical process composed of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis et al., 2014). This cyclical nature allows for continuous refinement of instructional strategies based on systematic observations and evidence gathered directly from the classroom. In EFL contexts, where teaching is often influenced by rigid curricula and external assessment pressures, this flexibility becomes especially valuable. Teachers can tailor their interventions to better meet students' immediate learning needs, particularly in skill areas like speaking, where learner confidence and engagement are pivotal.

Burns (2009) argues that action research in ELT empowers teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms, encouraging them to identify areas for improvement and systematically explore solutions. This engagement cultivates a sense of ownership over professional development, contrasting sharply with top-down policy mandates that often overlook contextual nuances. For EFL teachers in Türkiye, where standardized curricula

may not always reflect local classroom realities, action research becomes a vehicle for meaningful and relevant pedagogical innovation (Güngör, 2016).

Mertler (2017) reinforces this perspective by noting that action research fosters a sustained commitment to inquiry, rather than one-off solutions. Teachers engaging in this method continuously revisit their assumptions, strategies, and outcomes, which leads to a deeper understanding of their students and the effectiveness of their teaching. This recursive engagement promotes professional growth and encourages a reflective teaching culture, especially critical in the language classroom where learner dynamics are fluid and multifaceted.

A significant strength of action research lies in its responsiveness. Teachers can adapt their methods in real time, based on direct feedback from their learners. This adaptability is particularly essential in the teaching of spoken English, where anxiety, confidence, and willingness to communicate can vary widely among students. By observing student reactions and adjusting instructional practices accordingly, teachers can foster a more supportive and effective learning environment. In this way, action research aligns closely with formative assessment principles and learner-centered pedagogy.

Borg (2013) contends that action research bridges the traditional divide between educational research and classroom practice. Rather than treating research as the domain of external academics, action research legitimizes the knowledge generated by teachers themselves. This shift is critical in developing a research culture within schools that values practitioner expertise and supports ongoing pedagogical refinement. In the field of language education, where context-sensitive strategies are crucial, such practitioner-led inquiry offers insights that are often more actionable and relevant than those derived from large-scale studies.

Moreover, Cochran-Smith et al., (2009) introduce the idea of “knowledge democracies,” wherein teacher research becomes a tool for equity and empowerment. In this model, educators do not simply implement pre-formulated best practices; they create context-

specific knowledge that reflects the realities of their classrooms. This has particular resonance in linguistically and culturally diverse settings, where one-size-fits-all approaches may fall short. Through action research, teachers can explore how to integrate cultural identity, learner interests, and linguistic diversity into their pedagogy.

Edge (2011) complements this perspective by emphasizing the importance of reflexivity in teacher development. Action research encourages teachers to question not only what they do but why they do it, prompting critical self-examination and ethical awareness. This reflexivity can lead to deeper levels of professional authenticity and greater alignment between pedagogical values and classroom practice. For language teachers, whose work involves navigating cultural, cognitive, and communicative dimensions, such introspection is essential.

In the context of this study, action research was employed to evaluate the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies within EFL classrooms in Türkiye. By using continuous cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, the study aimed to identify how AfL practices influenced students' motivation and spoken language development. The teacher-researcher position enabled real-time adjustments to instruction, enhancing both teaching quality and learner engagement. In doing so, the research captured the dynamic interplay between assessment, teaching, and learning in a natural classroom environment.

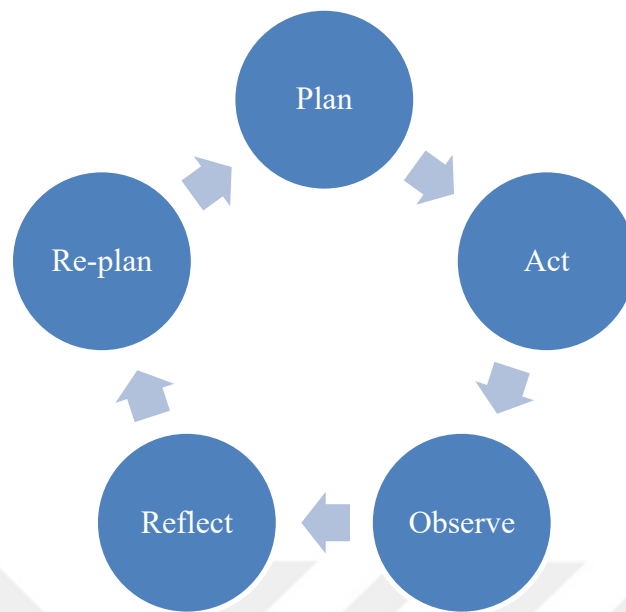


Figure 1. Action Research Cycle (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18)

2.5.1. Action Research Cycle

The action research cycle is a fundamental framework that guides teacher-researchers through a systematic process of inquiry, reflection, and improvement. Central to this model is its cyclical and continuous nature, which allows educators to revisit and refine their practices continuously. As Kemmis et al., (2014) explain, the cycle typically comprises four interconnected stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Each phase builds upon the previous one, creating a dynamic process of knowledge generation and practical intervention.

The planning stage involves identifying a specific problem or area of focus within the teaching context. Teachers define research questions, set objectives, and design interventions tailored to address the observed issues. This stage requires both critical self-assessment and contextual awareness, ensuring that the inquiry aligns with the needs of the learners and the educational setting.

Following planning, the acting phase entails implementing the intervention or strategy in the classroom. This could include new teaching techniques, assessment methods, or classroom management approaches. The emphasis here is on practical application and active engagement, as teachers become change agents rather than passive observers (Burns, 2009).

In the observing phase, data collection takes place to document the effects of the intervention. This can include qualitative methods such as field notes, interviews, and recordings, or quantitative measures like tests and surveys. The goal is to gather rich, context-specific evidence that captures the complexities of the classroom environment (Stringer & Aragon, 2014).

The final stage, reflecting, involves critical analysis of the data collected. Teachers evaluate the success of the intervention in meeting its objectives, consider unexpected outcomes, and contemplate possible improvements. Reflection is not merely a summative activity but a generative one, informing the next cycle of planning and action (Coghlan, 2014). Together, these components create a continuous spiral of inquiry, encouraging adaptability and responsiveness to changing classroom realities. This cyclical process contrasts with traditional linear research by emphasizing emergent knowledge and practitioner empowerment (Kemmis et al., 2014). Through ongoing cycles, teacher-researchers develop deeper insights into their practice, refine pedagogical strategies, and ultimately enhance student learning outcomes. In sum, the action research cycle embodies the core philosophy of action research: knowledge creation through active, reflective practice. By embracing its stages, educators can transform challenges into opportunities for professional growth and meaningful classroom change (Burns, 2009).

2.5.2 Previous Research Studies on Action Research for Spoken Skills

Since previous studies with the same topic and research design provide a pathway for this study, it is vital to mention them. Numerous empirical investigations have explored the potential of action research (AR) as a practical and reflective methodology to enhance speaking skills in EFL contexts. These studies offer critical insights into how teacher-researchers can transform classroom challenges into opportunities for pedagogical improvement.

One such study is by Savaşçı (2014), who examined the reasons for Turkish EFL learners' reluctance to use English in classroom settings. Utilizing participatory action research design, she actively participated as a practitioner-researcher to gain first-hand experience of learners' struggles. Her involvement enabled her to identify anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and insufficient real-life speaking opportunities as key barriers. The continuous and cyclical nature of action research allowed Savaşçı to introduce timely interventions, including the use of communicative activities and student-centered discussion tasks, which helped foster a more supportive speaking environment. This case reflects the core advantage of action research: it equips teachers with the agency to tailor instruction dynamically, based on real-time classroom experiences.

Expanding on this perspective, Tamayo et al., (2023) implemented exploratory action research to explore how ECRIF, (Encounter, Clarify, Remember, Internalize, and Fluent Use) strategies can influence learners' spoken proficiency. Their study revolved around the assumption that reflective practice leads to pedagogical transformation. They concluded that action research empowers teachers not only to identify gaps in their instructional practices but also to experiment with contextually appropriate strategies that promote learner autonomy. Through classroom observations, video-recorded speaking tasks, and reflective teaching journals, the researchers illustrated the value of ongoing reflection in helping students gain communicative competence and confidence. This affirms that action

research, particularly in its exploratory form, serves as a bridge between research and practice.

Another noteworthy contribution is by Alkan and Bümen (2020), who explored the efficacy of asynchronous online speaking activities during remote instruction. Their action research focused on enhancing oral communication through recorded video presentations, peer feedback forums, and self-assessment checklists. Their findings highlighted the power of asynchronous environments in lowering affective filters and encouraging practice beyond classroom walls. The teacher-researchers engaged in systematic cycles of planning, implementation, and reflection, leading to the creation of richer oral interaction tasks adapted to students' needs. These findings contribute significantly to our understanding of how action research can be applied in digitally mediated language learning environments.

The thread that runs through these studies is the adoption of action research as a teacher-driven, participatory process. By engaging in structured cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis et al., 2014), teacher-researchers are better equipped to understand the nuances of their students' spoken language development. Moreover, action research promotes a culture of inquiry and experimentation, encouraging teachers to step beyond textbook instruction and embrace innovation.

Burns (2009), a leading figure in classroom-based action research, contends that AR is especially effective in EFL contexts due to its flexibility and emphasis on contextual adaptation. According to Burns, teachers are not merely recipients of externally developed methodologies but are positioned as active agents capable of crafting practices that meet their learners' unique needs. For speaking instruction, this agency is crucial. Speaking, as a productive and interactional skill, demands real-time negotiation, confidence, and the ability to adapt language use according to context—qualities that cannot be developed through decontextualized instruction.

Edge (2011) similarly argues that AR fosters a reflexive stance among teachers, enabling them to continuously revise their instructional goals in alignment with learner responses.

Reflexivity, in this context, is not limited to technical adjustments but includes an awareness of pedagogical values, classroom relationships, and learner identities. For EFL teachers aiming to develop students' oral skills, this holistic lens is particularly useful. It ensures that instructional changes are not only methodologically sound but also ethically and affectively informed.

Mertler (2017) adds to this discourse by emphasizing that action research empowers educators to become agents of change within their own classrooms. His model of the AR process—identify the problem, review relevant literature, develop a plan, implement the plan, collect and analyze data, reflect, and revise—maps seamlessly onto speaking instruction initiatives. For example, a teacher may begin with the observation that students hesitate to participate in discussions. Through AR, they can systematically explore whether scaffolding techniques like sentence starters, discussion prompts, or peer modeling improve participation.

A salient aspect of action research that aligns with spoken skills instruction is its compatibility with formative assessment. As noted by Wiliam (2011), formative assessment depends on continuous feedback, learner self-regulation, and adaptive teaching—all hallmarks of AR. When integrated into classroom practice, formative assessment strategies such as peer feedback, self-assessment checklists, and oral rubrics become tools for both assessment and instruction. Teachers who engage in AR are better positioned to embed these tools into their practice and to revise them based on real classroom dynamics.

Additionally, the reflective dimension of AR aligns well with metacognitive skill development in speaking. When learners are encouraged to reflect on their speaking performances, review recorded tasks, and set personalized improvement goals, they become more autonomous and intentional in their language use. This shift mirrors the teacher's journey in AR, moving from reactive instruction to strategic, learner-centered facilitation.

In this sense, action research also contributes to teacher professional development (Güngör & Güngör, 2023). As teachers navigate the continuous cycles of AR, they build not only methodological competence but also confidence and insight. Edge (2011) captures this transformation through the concept of “roots and wings”—where roots symbolize pedagogical grounding and wings represent the courage to innovate. For EFL teachers aiming to foster spoken skills, this balance is vital.

The cumulative evidence from these studies and theoretical perspectives reinforces the idea that action research is uniquely suited to the development of spoken language skills in EFL settings. Its cyclical, reflective, and participatory nature aligns seamlessly with the demands of communicative instruction. Moreover, it offers a sustainable model for teacher-led innovation, fostering both learner achievement and educator growth.

Despite its many benefits, challenges to implementing AR in EFL contexts remain. Teachers may struggle with time constraints, lack of institutional support, or insufficient research training. As Burns (2009) points out, successful AR requires a supportive school culture that values teacher inquiry. Without such support, even the most motivated teachers may find it difficult to sustain AR cycles. This is particularly relevant in exam-oriented systems, where spoken skills are undervalued or inconsistently assessed. Nevertheless, as global and national language education policies continue to emphasize communicative competence, the case for integrating AR into teacher practice grows stronger (Banegas & Güngör, 2024).

In conclusion, previous research on action research for spoken skills reveals that this methodology holds considerable promise for transforming EFL instruction. By positioning teachers as reflective practitioners, AR fosters pedagogical responsiveness, learner engagement, and sustainable innovation. For the current study, these insights form a robust foundation for investigating how AfL strategies, integrated within an action research framework, can enhance both motivation and spoken language development among Turkish EFL learners.

2.6 English Language Teaching and Assessment Policies in Türkiye

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Türkiye has undergone significant transformation over the past few decades, influenced by global trends, national education reforms, and sociopolitical shifts. Historically, English was introduced into the Turkish educational system as a foreign language in the mid-20th century, initially driven by economic modernization efforts and increased international engagement. However, early approaches to teaching English primarily relied on grammar-translation methods, emphasizing rote memorization and written accuracy over oral fluency or communicative competence (Kırkgöz, 2007).

With the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Türkiye's national curriculum in the early 2000s, a more communicative and competency-based model of language teaching was promoted. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) revised the national curriculum to reflect CEFR proficiency levels, aligning language instruction with European standards (MoNE, 2006). However, it is important to contextualize this shift by examining earlier English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program in Türkiye.

The 1997 EFL curriculum marked a transition from traditional grammar-translation approaches towards more communicative methods, emphasizing functional language use and basic communicative competence. This program introduced task-based activities and sought to engage learners more actively, though implementation varied widely due to resource constraints and teacher preparedness (Kırkgöz, 2017).

In 2013, MoNE implemented another major curriculum reform aimed at strengthening the communicative approach further. The 2013 program integrated more explicit language proficiency goals, increased emphasis on learner-centered activities, and introduced continuous assessment components aligned with CEFR levels (MoNE, 2013).

A significant milestone came with the 2018 national curriculum reform, which sought to consolidate previous efforts and address existing gaps. This curriculum emphasized

competency-based education across all subjects, including foreign language teaching, and incorporated formative assessment strategies to foster learner autonomy and reflective practice (MoNE, 2018). The reform aimed to balance communicative competence with linguistic accuracy, although studies suggest that classroom realities continue to challenge this balance.

More recently, the Ministry of National Education launched the *Century of Turkish Education model*, an innovative initiative designed to modernize ELT through integrated digital resources, flexible learning pathways, and enhanced assessment frameworks (MoNE, 2023). The aforementioned program emphasizes personalized learning, the use of technology for authentic language practice, and alignment with international standards. This model is currently in the pilot phase, with ongoing evaluations to assess its impact on student outcomes and teacher practices (MoNE, 2023). Together, these successive reforms illustrate Türkiye's evolving commitment to aligning English language education with global best practices, even as practical challenges remain in translating policy into effective classroom teaching and assessment.

The integration of CEFR into Türkiye's national education system was a significant shift from traditional grammar-focused instruction to a framework emphasizing communicative competence and performance-based outcomes. CEFR's structured descriptors for language proficiency—ranging from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient user)—provided a common language and a transparent set of expectations for educators, learners, and policymakers. In theory, this transition was intended to unify assessment and instruction across schools in Türkiye and promote consistency with broader European educational trends.

Following this policy shift, the MoNE published English language curricula designed to reflect CEFR descriptors, with each grade level mapped to specific skill outcomes in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This move was expected to foster more balanced language instruction, with particular emphasis placed on integrating productive skills like speaking into the core of classroom activities. Teachers were encouraged to adopt

communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning, and student-centered pedagogy as key strategies aligned with CEFR-based outcomes.

However, despite these well-intentioned reforms, significant challenges persist in classroom implementation, especially in the teaching and assessment of spoken language (Uztosun, 2020). Many of these difficulties stem from systemic and infrastructural limitations, such as overcrowded classrooms, rigid curricula, limited access to technological tools, and insufficient teacher training in communicative methodologies. Particularly in public schools—where resources are unevenly distributed and class sizes often exceed recommended ratios, the practical application of CEFR principles becomes difficult to sustain.

One of the most critical barriers is the mismatch between curriculum goals and assessment practices. While the curriculum emphasizes communicative competence, assessment in many schools remains largely summative and written in nature. National exams, which exert strong influence over both teaching content and pacing, have historically neglected speaking and listening skills. This has contributed to a phenomenon commonly referred to as *washback*, where teaching is shaped by the content and format of high-stakes tests rather than by curricular ideals. Consequently, even though CEFR promotes equal emphasis on all four language skills, speaking remains underrepresented in actual classroom practice (Kırkgöz, 2008). For instance, studies have shown that teachers tend to prioritize grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in their instruction, as these are the components most heavily tested in high-stakes exams such as LGS and YDT. In a large-scale qualitative study, Öztürk and Gürbüz (2017) found that Turkish EFL teachers felt pressured to “teach to the test,” often skipping or superficially covering oral tasks despite knowing their pedagogical value. As a result, students rarely engage in extended speaking tasks, and their communicative competence remains underdeveloped.

Only recently, particularly after 2023—has the MoNE begun piloting formal speaking assessments at the secondary level. These initiatives represent important steps toward a

more balanced assessment system, yet their implementation has been gradual and inconsistent across regions. Teachers report limited preparation, unclear rubrics, and a lack of professional development in oral assessment strategies. Without adequate support structures, the goal of communicative competence remains aspirational rather than actualized.

Another dimension of the challenge lies in teacher preparedness and assessment literacy. Many in-service teachers were trained under traditional pedagogical models that prioritize grammar translation and accuracy-based learning. For these educators, shifting toward a model that emphasizes fluency, interaction, and student agency requires not only a conceptual change but also practical support in the form of workshops, observation cycles, and collaborative planning. Unfortunately, access to such professional development is often limited, particularly outside major urban centers.

Moreover, CEFR's emphasis on learner autonomy and self-regulation presents additional challenges in contexts where teacher-centered instruction still dominates. The CEFR encourages students to reflect on their progress, set personal goals, and engage in self-assessment—a skillset that must be actively nurtured through classroom culture and pedagogical design. In many Turkish classrooms, students remain passive recipients of knowledge, unaccustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning. This cultural gap underscores the need for a broader pedagogical shift that aligns not just content but also classroom norms with CEFR values.

Beyond pedagogy, institutional and societal expectations also shape how language is taught and assessed. English continues to be perceived as a high-stakes subject tied to university entrance and employment opportunities, reinforcing a focus on exam performance over communicative proficiency. Parents, school administrators, and even students themselves may prioritize grammar accuracy and test preparation over fluency or interactional competence. Without a shared understanding of the importance of spoken skills, attempts to implement CEFR-based assessment risk being superficial or tokenistic.

Nevertheless, recent policy changes—such as the introduction of practical speaking assessments in some grade levels and the development of oral performance rubrics by the Ministry of National Education—signal a tangible shift toward recognizing spoken language as an integral component of language proficiency. New teacher education programs have begun to incorporate communicative approaches, performance-based assessment, and CEFR-aligned materials into their syllabi. Innovative pilot programs funded by the MoNE or international partnerships, such as the English Together project by the British Council and MoNE (British Council, 2022), or in-service training modules on Teaching English to Young Learners, have provided teachers with real-world models of oral language instruction and feedback strategies rooted in formative assessment principles. In addition, digital platforms and mobile applications now offer teachers alternative ways to engage students in spoken interaction, even in large or under-resourced classrooms.

In conclusion, Türkiye's adoption of the CEFR has undoubtedly provided a useful roadmap for reforming English language teaching and assessment. However, alignment with European frameworks alone does not guarantee successful implementation. Deep-seated issues related to assessment culture, teacher training, resource inequality, and classroom tradition continue to hinder the full realization of CEFR-based goals—particularly in the realm of spoken skills. Moving forward, policymakers and educators must work collaboratively to bridge the gap between policy and practice. This includes investing in teacher development, designing context-sensitive assessment tools, and fostering a culture that values spoken language as a core component of communicative competence. Only through such sustained and systemic efforts can the promise of CEFR be fully realized in Türkiye's diverse educational landscape.

Recent policy reforms, particularly those introduced after 2023, have marked a shift toward integrating all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—into both instruction and assessment. For the first time, public schools began formally assessing

speaking and listening skills, reflecting a more balanced approach to language proficiency. However, research has revealed that classroom practices often lag behind policy intentions. For instance, Şahin (2019) emphasizes that while curricula may advocate for communicative and formative assessment practices, teacher education programs often fail to sufficiently prepare pre-service teachers in language assessment literacy. Furthermore, as a very recent step, MoNE (2023) has announced the Century of Turkish Education model. This new curriculum framework, designed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), reflects a decisive shift toward a more holistic, competency-based, and learner-centered educational paradigm. Grounded in the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the model emphasizes productive skills—particularly speaking—as central to communicative competence. Unlike traditional approaches that often prioritized written accuracy and grammatical form, the new framework seeks to integrate speaking and listening as core components of language instruction. Notably, spoken performance is no longer treated as supplementary but is embedded in the curriculum as a measurable, assessable, and developable skill.

One of the model's most significant pedagogical innovations lies in its adoption of process-based assessment practices, which represent a departure from solely summative evaluations. Drawing on formative assessment principles, the Century of Turkish Education Model (MoNE, 2023) encourages teachers to engage in diagnostic, formative, and performance-based evaluations, aligning with global AfL strategies. This alignment supports the development of spoken language skills through ongoing feedback, peer collaboration, and real-time instructional adjustment. Moreover, the model promotes clarity in learning outcomes by introducing success criteria and learning objectives across language domains, which are crucial for learner autonomy and metacognitive engagement, two factors directly influencing speaking performance.

Another important feature of the new policy landscape is the emphasis on school-based curriculum planning, granting educators more autonomy to tailor instruction to local needs.

This decentralization is particularly relevant for English language education in Türkiye, where classrooms often vary widely in terms of socio-economic background, linguistic diversity, and resource availability. Furthermore, the model embraces a multimodal literacy framework, integrating digital, cultural, and media literacy into language education. This approach enables educators to incorporate audio-visual tools, asynchronous speaking tasks, and reflective digital portfolios that reinforce speaking practice beyond the classroom (Yavuz & Zehir-Topkaya, 2013).

Despite these advancements, the implementation of the Maarif Model presents certain challenges. Teacher assessment literacy, particularly in formative practices, remains a concern. Many educators report insufficient training in how to assess speaking skills reliably and constructively. In addition, systemic barriers such as large class sizes, rigid pacing guides, and high-stakes testing culture continue to limit the practical application of spoken assessment tools. Nevertheless, the model's commitment to a learner-centered, skills-integrated, and inclusive pedagogy marks a crucial step toward modernizing English language education in Türkiye. However, the broader educational ecosystem in which the Maarif Model operates presents significant constraints that can undermine its impact. Chief among these is the dominance of centralized assessment systems, which continue to shape pedagogical choices in ways that often conflict with the model's formative, communicative ideals.

The centralization of educational policies in Türkiye also plays a significant role in shaping language instruction. National examinations like the LGS (High School Entrance Exam) and YKS (University Entrance Exam) heavily influence instructional priorities in classrooms, often leading to a washback effect where test preparation dominates language teaching. Hatipoğlu (2016) critically explores how high-stakes assessments discourage innovation in teaching methodologies and reduce teachers' autonomy in adapting formative or student-centered approaches.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Dikilitaş et al. (2018) many EFL instructors in Türkiye report feeling constrained by exam-oriented policies, stating that institutional pressure to produce measurable results overshadows the pedagogical value of interactive speaking activities and formative feedback. Moreover, Aksu-Çekiç (2024) found out in her study that EFL instructors expressed criticism toward certain institutional assessment practices, perceiving them as outdated and misaligned with contemporary pedagogical needs. Specifically, some assessment methods were viewed as overly traditional and lacking contextual relevance.

In terms of assessment policies, MoNE has made strides toward more comprehensive frameworks, yet there are inconsistencies in implementation. Palabıyık (2021) points out that although policies promote learner-centered education, teachers often default to traditional, teacher-centered instruction due to lack of training and institutional support.

Another key factor is the limited alignment between teacher education curricula and real-world teaching demands. Şahin (2019) underscores the need for targeted training in assessment literacy, noting that many teacher candidates graduate without adequate understanding of formative and alternative assessment techniques. This gap leads to superficial use of assessment tools and underutilization of student feedback (Güngör & Güngör, 2024).

The integration of CEFR descriptors into national language education policy has also had a dual impact. On the one hand, it has brought clarity and standardization to expectations for language proficiency. On the other, Coşkun (2016) notes that a lack of concrete strategies and contextualized materials aligned with CEFR has hindered its effective use in everyday teaching, especially among young learners.

Moreover, research by Kavaklı and Mirici (2018) reveals disparities between formal and non-formal ELT environments in Türkiye. While private language institutions often employ innovative assessment tools and focus on speaking fluency, public schools

continue to emphasize grammatical accuracy due to institutional inertia and exam-centric evaluation systems.

In conclusion, while Türkiye has made commendable progress in aligning its English language education policies with global standards, significant gaps remain between policy and practice. Bridging these gaps will require a multi-faceted approach: enhancing teacher education programs, reducing class sizes, investing in ongoing professional development, and designing assessments that genuinely reflect communicative competence. Only through such systemic efforts can Türkiye foster an ELT environment that is both equitable and pedagogically sound.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants and Context

This study was conducted at Adil Karagöz Anatolian High School, a state high school located in Osmaniye, Türkiye. The school is situated in a district characterized by predominantly low socio-economic status, with many students coming from families that face financial and educational disadvantages. Such a context presents both pedagogical challenges and rich opportunities for classroom-based inquiry, particularly in relation to learner motivation, confidence, and access to meaningful language learning experiences. The decision to carry out the research in this setting is justified by the belief that innovative, formative assessment practices such as AfL may have the most transformative impact when applied in under-resourced environments where traditional, test-oriented instruction dominates.

The study focused on a tenth-grade class, 10/A, consisting of 37 students, 22 females and 15 males, aged between 15 and 17. However, due to academic absenteeism and personal constraints, only 30 students regularly participated in the two-month study. This number was still considered sufficient for meaningful data collection and thematic saturation within a qualitative design. The selection of this particular class was purposeful, based on

the teacher-researcher's familiarity with the students, the feasibility of consistent implementation, and the class's regular schedule for speaking lessons.

According to the national curriculum guidelines published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE), students at this grade level are expected to achieve A2 to B1 levels in spoken English proficiency in alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, classroom observations and informal assessments prior to the study revealed that most students demonstrated lower-than-expected performance, particularly in oral fluency, pronunciation, and confidence when speaking. This discrepancy between curricular expectations and actual proficiency levels served as a strong rationale for introducing formative, student-centered strategies such as AfL, which are known to support both linguistic progress and learner autonomy in contexts where standardized instruction often fails to meet diverse learner needs.

In keeping with the principles of action research, the teacher in this study took on a dual role as both insider and outsider—facilitating instruction while critically observing and reflecting on the teaching and learning processes (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006; McIntosh, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014). This dual positioning allowed the teacher-researcher to maintain pedagogical authenticity while also engaging in systematic inquiry, thus enriching both the instructional experience and the validity of the research process.

Importantly, the researcher was not only the facilitator of instruction but also an active participant in the research itself. In action research, the teacher-researcher's reflections, decisions, and adaptations form a central part of the data and shape the trajectory of the study. As the sole English teacher in the school, the researcher's experiences of planning lessons, balancing institutional requirements, and addressing classroom realities directly informed the inquiry. The researcher's weekly reflective journals, classroom observations, and ongoing adjustments to lesson plans illustrate how participation extended beyond instruction to include the lived challenges of enacting formative assessment within a resource-constrained environment. Thus, both students and the teacher functioned as co-

participants in this action research cycle, with their interactions, responses, and reflections collectively generating the findings of the study.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Total students in 10/A	37
Participating students	30
Female participants	17
Male participants	13
Age range	15–17

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design rooted in Exploratory Action Research (EAR), reflecting a commitment to both understanding and enhancing classroom practices in real time. Exploratory action research is particularly well suited to educational settings where the aim is not only to observe and report but also to intervene and improve through reflective cycles of planning, action, observation, and evaluation (Burns, 2009). This approach aligns closely with the nature of this study, which sought to explore how the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies into speaking lessons could influence learners' emotional responses, spoken language performance, and engagement over time. Given its emphasis on continuous reflection, practitioner involvement, and context-specific change, Exploratory Action Research was deemed particularly suitable for investigating the dynamic and situated nature of classroom-based speaking instruction.

A key justification for employing exploratory action research lies in its being adjustable and flexible to emerging classroom realities. Unlike traditional experimental models,

which require strict control and separation between researcher and subject, exploratory action research allows the teacher-researcher to actively participate in the pedagogical process while simultaneously gathering and analyzing data. This dynamic was essential in this study, where the AfL-integrated lesson plans were not static instructional documents, but evolving tools shaped by weekly classroom experiences and student feedback.

The relevance of this approach is further supported by recent studies in the field of applied linguistics, such as Güngör's (2023) action research on interlanguage pragmatics in Turkish EFL contexts. Güngör's study demonstrated how continuous, classroom-embedded interventions can lead to both improved learner outcomes and context-sensitive insights for practitioners. Like Güngör, the current study engaged in reflective cycles, incorporating multiple sources of qualitative data—focus group interviews, researcher's journals, students' weekly reflections, and AFL-integrated lesson plans—to document and respond to the ongoing development of learners' skills and attitudes.

Additionally, exploratory action research supports the construction of practitioner knowledge, which is particularly valuable in under-researched areas such as the affective and identity-related dimensions of EFL speaking development. By positioning the teacher as both researcher and facilitator, this design enabled a closer examination of student voice, classroom interaction, and pedagogical responsiveness, which may otherwise be overlooked in top-down research models. Therefore, exploratory action research not only matched the study's aims but also empowered the researcher to engage ethically and meaningfully with the classroom as a space of inquiry and transformation.

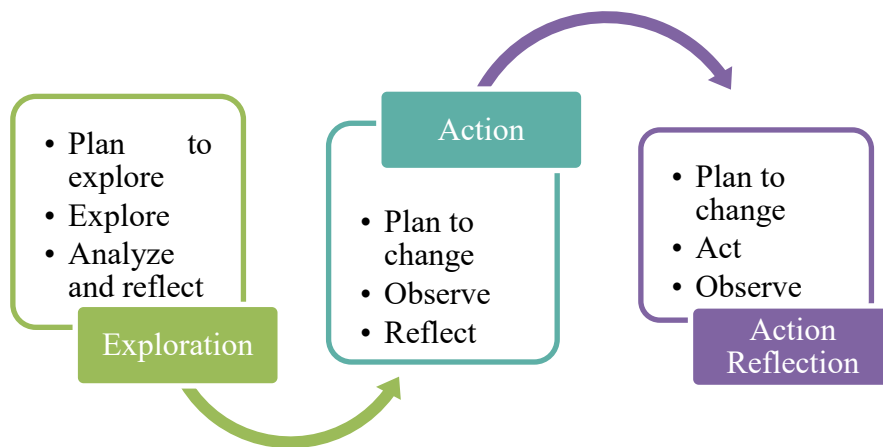


Figure 2. Exploratory Action Research Process (Tamayo & Almeida, 2023, p. 6)

3.2.1 Implementation of Exploratory Action Research (EAR)

This study was grounded in the principles of Exploratory Action Research developed by Tamayo and Almeida (2023), which conceptualizes teacher research as a cyclical and reflective inquiry into classroom practices, with the aim of understanding and improving pedagogical decisions in a localized context. Unlike traditional experimental models that seek to confirm hypotheses through controlled variables, EAR prioritizes a collaborative, responsive, and context-sensitive approach to knowledge generation. For teachers working within complex educational systems like Türkiye’s MoNE-regulated schools, EAR offers a compelling methodological alternative—one that empowers practitioners as both implementers and investigators of change (Banegas & de Castro, 2019; Burns, 2009).

In this study, the EAR model was operationalized through a four-phase cycle: observe, plan, act, and reflect. These stages were not treated as discrete or sequential tasks, but as interlocking and recursive phases that informed all aspects of the research—from identifying the instructional problem to designing interventions and interpreting findings. Each stage is detailed below with references to how it guided the processes of lesson planning, data collection, and thematic analysis.

Table 2

Implementation of EAR in Data Collection Procedure

Week	EAR Phase	Implementation / Process Description	Data Collection Tools		
Week 1	Observe	The first focus group interview was conducted. Initial observations focused on students' speaking reluctance and low motivation.	1st Interview	Focus Group	
Week 2	Plan	Based on Week 1 insights, the first AfL-integrated lesson plan was designed.	AfL-Integrated Plan,	Lesson Researcher's Journal	
Week 3	Act	The planned lesson was implemented. AfL strategies were applied, and data were gathered through journals and reflections.	Students' Reflections,	Weekly Researcher's Journal	
Week 4	Reflect → Plan	New lesson plan was designed in response to reflections and journals. Student reactions and needs were analyzed.	Students' Reflections,	Weekly Researcher's Journal	
Week 5	Act	The updated lesson was delivered. Speaking-focused AfL activities were continued.	AfL-Integrated Plan,	Lesson Researcher's Journal	
Week 6	Reflect → Plan → Act	Lessons were revised again based on feedback. Activities targeting pronunciation and peer feedback were added.	Students' Reflections,	Weekly Researcher's Journal	
Week 7	Plan → Act	Student-selected speaking topics were introduced. Self-assessment and goal-setting were embedded.	AfL-Integrated Plan, Students' Reflections,	Lesson Weekly Researcher's Journal	
Week 8	Reflect	The process ended with the second focus group interview. Student perceptions on change and growth were collected.	2nd Interview, Weekly	Focus Group Students' Reflections,	

3.2.1.1 Observe

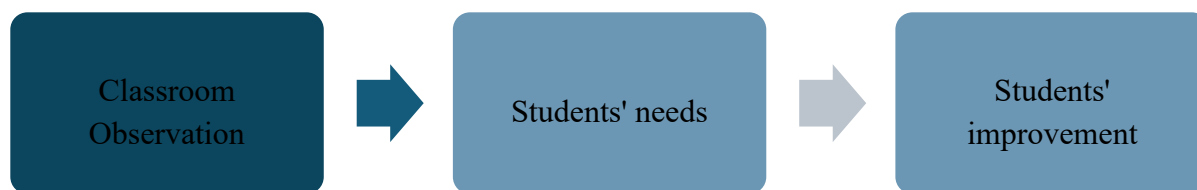


Figure 3. Observe as an action research component

The research process began with a systematic and deliberate period of classroom observation, spanning the first two weeks of instruction before the AfL-integrated lesson plans were implemented. During this exploratory phase, the teacher-researcher assumed the dual role of participant and observer, employing ethnographic techniques—such as unstructured observation, field notes, informal conversations with students, and contextual interpretation of classroom events—to develop a grounded understanding of the learners’ behaviors, attitudes, and affective reactions, particularly in relation to speaking activities.

Rather than relying on a formal diagnostic test, the researcher chose a naturalistic approach to diagnosis, allowing learner behaviors to emerge in context without interference (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Over a total of eight classroom hours (four hours per week), classroom routines, interaction patterns, and student reactions during speaking tasks were carefully recorded. The focus was on identifying not only who spoke and how often, but also how students responded to being prompted to speak, how they reacted to peer or teacher correction, and what kinds of non-verbal cues (e.g., body language, eye contact, silence, fidgeting) revealed emotional discomfort or disengagement.

One of the first noticeable patterns was that students rarely initiated speech voluntarily, even during activities designed for oral interaction. In pair work, many students reverted to Turkish unless explicitly reminded to use English, and even then, they produced short, formulaic responses. Attempts at open-ended speaking tasks (e.g., sharing weekend activities or commenting on visuals) were met with hesitation, silence, or laughter, which the researcher interpreted as manifestations of speaking anxiety and lack of confidence.

These observations were consistently recorded in a reflective field journal, with particular attention to gender dynamics, group composition, and seating arrangements, all of which subtly influenced participation levels.

The researcher also engaged in informal student dialogues during breaks and after class, posing open-ended questions such as “Do you enjoy speaking English in class?” or “What makes speaking easier or harder for you?” These low-stakes conversations revealed that many students feared making mistakes in front of their peers, and some viewed speaking as “a test” rather than “a skill.” Several students mentioned that they felt they were “bad at speaking” because they had rarely been given a chance to practice it in earlier grades. These insights highlighted the need for a learning environment where oral production would be reframed not as performance, but as a process—a key principle of formative assessment and AfL methodology.

Collectively, this initial two-week diagnostic period confirmed the existence of a learning problem: while the curriculum mandated A2–B1 level spoken interaction competencies, learners lacked the motivation, confidence, and practice opportunities to achieve those outcomes. This exploration aligned directly with the “observe” stage of the Exploratory Action Research cycle (Tamayo & Almeida, 2023), where the teacher-researcher identifies the pedagogical issue through sustained interaction with the classroom ecology, rather than through top-down measures. The observations provided a rich contextual foundation for the design of the subsequent AfL-integrated lesson plans, ensuring that the intervention would be responsive to the specific needs and realities of the students rather than imposed from abstract principles.

This exploratory stage aligns with Tamayo and Almeyda’s emphasis on “problematizing from within”—wherein the practitioner does not begin with a pre-set solution, but allows the problem to emerge organically through classroom engagement. As Burns (2009) explains, action research begins with noticing—a dissonance between current practice and intended learning outcomes. In this case, although the curriculum expected students to

reach CEFR A2-B1 levels in spoken interaction, their oral engagement was minimal, and the teacher-researcher documented a noticeable disconnect between curricular goals and classroom reality.

3.2.1.2 Plan



Figure 4. Plan as an action research component

In the plan stage of the research cycle, instructional decisions were shaped through a deliberately reflective and learner-centered process. Rather than designing all instructional materials prior to implementation, the teacher-researcher developed one AfL-integrated lesson plan at the end of each week, based directly on the insights gathered from classroom observations, researcher journals, and students' weekly reflections. These planning sessions took place after each teaching cycle, typically on Friday afternoons—when the emotional, cognitive, and interactional dynamics of the week were still fresh in memory and recorded in field notes. The structure and content of each lesson plan were adjusted in response to the challenges and opportunities that emerged during the prior week's implementation. For example, when early reflections revealed high anxiety during open-class speaking, the following plan focused on low-stakes, scaffolded pair activities supported by peer checklists. This reflective design approach mirrors the negotiated and living curriculum concept embedded in Tamayo and Almeida's (2023) exploratory action research framework, in which lesson planning is treated as a dialogic, cyclical practice rather than a static product. Each plan targeted a communicative outcome aligned with CEFR speaking descriptors (A2–B1 range), integrated at least one AfL strategy (e.g., peer

feedback, goal setting, or exit tickets), and included a built-in opportunity for reflection or formative monitoring. In the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), speaking skills are comprehensively described under two key categories: Spoken Production and Spoken Interaction. These categories are further elaborated across all CEFR proficiency levels (A1 to C2), with illustrative can-do descriptors that reflect communicative competence in real-life contexts. At the A2 level, for instance, learners are expected to use simple phrases and sentences to describe personal background, immediate environment and needs, and to communicate in routine tasks requiring a direct exchange of information. At B1 level, learners can produce connected speech on familiar topics, describe experiences and events, and briefly explain opinions and plans. In addition to outcome-based descriptors, the CEFR also offers detailed qualitative aspects of spoken language use, such as fluency, coherence, lexical and grammatical range, accuracy, and interaction strategies (e.g., turn-taking and negotiation of meaning). These descriptors enable educators to align their instructional goals with level-specific communicative outcomes and to monitor learners' progress systematically. In this study, the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies—such as peer feedback, self-assessment, and structured speaking tasks—was designed in accordance with CEFR's communicative approach, supporting learners in gradually achieving these targeted speaking outcomes. In this way, the planning process was not only instructional but also methodological—it ensured that each lesson served as both a teaching event and a unit of inquiry within the broader research cycle. This dual function of planning—as both pedagogical design and action research mechanism—allowed the teacher to remain responsive, reflective, and exploratory, in keeping with the values of practitioner-led inquiry. By maintaining an open and responsive planning stance, the study fulfilled the EAR principle of classroom responsiveness, allowing pedagogical decisions to emerge from authentic classroom inquiry rather than abstract theory (Banegas & de Castro, 2019).

3.2.1.3 Act

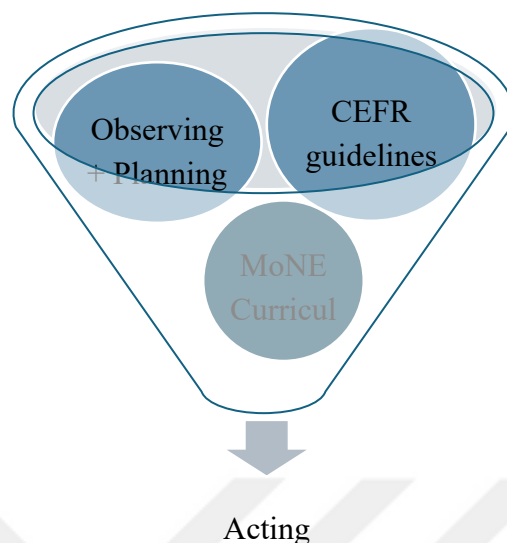


Figure 5. Act as an action research component

In Türkiye's K–12 education system, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) allocates four weekly lesson hours (4×40 minutes) to English instruction across all grade levels (MoNE, 2023). In the current study, this officially designated time frame was maintained yet strategically restructured. Two consecutive periods (approximately 80 minutes) were dedicated each week to an *Assessment for Learning* (AfL)-based speaking workshop, which prioritized dialogic interaction, low-stakes feedback, and reflective goal setting. The remaining two hours continued to follow the coursebook sequence outlined in the national curriculum. This division is in line with the flexibility stated in the MoNE curriculum, which allows for adaptations to meet learner needs and context-specific goals (MoNE, 2018). Moreover, this structure directly supports the curriculum's communicative goals, especially those emphasizing interactional competence and oral fluency, as aligned with CEFR descriptors. By reserving half of the weekly English hours for targeted speaking tasks—such as role-plays, pair interviews, small-group discussions, and reflection rounds—the study operationalized national curriculum priorities through AfL-informed practices. In response to the feedback received, it is clarified that the four-hour framework

is official, and the decision to devote two of those hours exclusively to speaking was a deliberate, research-informed design choice that remains fully aligned with the official K–12 English curriculum. Crucially, each weekly *act* phase was not only a site of pedagogical implementation but also a dynamic moment of data generation and interpretation. Researcher’s observations, students’ weekly reflections, classroom atmosphere, and emerging verbal behaviors were systematically recorded immediately after each session. As Tamayo and Almeida (2023) emphasize, the *act* phase is not merely the execution of a lesson plan, it is the observation of pedagogical practice in motion. This framing positions the teacher-researcher not simply as a facilitator of tasks but as a co-learner within the classroom ecology, constantly engaging in reflexive meaning-making (Burns, 2009). In line with Creswell’s (2013) view of qualitative inquiry as a continuous and cyclical process, data analysis in this study was not deferred to a separate post-intervention phase; instead, it unfolded concurrently and recursively with each cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This approach allowed the researcher to refine instructional decisions in real time, making the data analysis process both emergent and embedded in the lived classroom experience—characteristics that are central to action research methodology (Burns, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

3.2.1.4 Reflect and Recycle

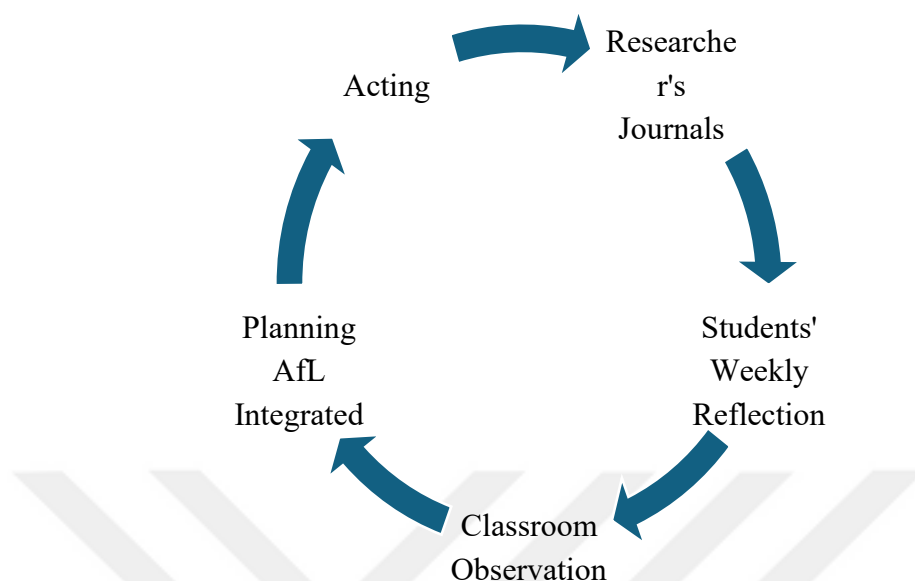


Figure 6. Reflect and recycle as an action research component

The final—but ongoing—phase was reflection, which occurred weekly and post-intervention. Reflection was multi-modal: the researcher wrote detailed journals, analyzed student reflections, and conducted two structured focus group interviews. This reflective process functioned not only as a personal meaning-making tool but as a pedagogical recalibration mechanism, directly influencing the next cycle of observe-plan-act.

In line with EAR principles, reflection was also embedded into students' roles through structured self-assessment and peer feedback. These roles went beyond passive participation; students were systematically positioned as self-assessors, peer evaluators, goal setters, and observers within the communicative tasks. For example, in pair interviews and role-plays, students alternated between being speakers and peer feedback providers, using checklists or sentence frames to offer formative comments. In small-group discussions, one student would take on the role of a discussion participant, while another documented key points and later reflected on group dynamics. These structured roles were not only aligned with AfL strategies but also cultivated learner agency, encouraging students to actively monitor and regulate their oral language development. This design

directly reflects the reflective, cyclical nature of exploratory action research, where learners are not only recipients of instruction but co-constructors of knowledge through feedback loops and goal-oriented dialogue. This distributed reflective structure allowed learners to participate not just in learning, but in shaping the learning process itself—a key outcome in participatory action research (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Moreover, during the data analysis stage, the reflective principle of EAR continued to guide the researcher's decisions. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model, the researcher continuously coded the data, frequently returning to journals and lesson plans to contextualize emerging codes. For instance, the theme "Fluency and Reflective Autonomy" in Week 8 arose not from a single data point, but from a pattern across reflections, lesson observations, and peer feedback sessions—all of which were shaped by the EAR cycle itself.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

3.3.1 Researcher's Journals

One of the primary data collection tools in this study was the researcher's journal, which served as a reflective narrative record throughout the implementation of the AfL-integrated lesson plans (see Appendix A). The study was conducted during February and March, a period comprising eight weeks of instruction. In line with the weekly division of English classes in Turkish state high schools—where students receive four hours of instruction per week, spread over two days—the practitioner-researcher wrote a journal entry after two-hour teaching session in which AfL strategies were applied for each week. This resulted in eight journals in total, each corresponding to one week of classroom observation and reflection.

The rationale for using a researcher's journal lies in its ability to capture rich, contextualized, and process-oriented insights into classroom dynamics, pedagogical decisions, and learner responses (Ortlipp, 2008). These journals documented not only the implementation of specific Assessment for Learning (AfL) techniques but also the students' affective reactions, levels of participation, and observable behavioral shifts during speaking tasks. This allowed the researcher to track emerging patterns, adjust instruction in real time, and make connections between formative assessment strategies and learner development.

More importantly, the journal functioned as a dual lens—blending the insider's pedagogical intuition with the outsider's analytical distance (McNiff, 2017). This aligns with the principles of action research, where teacher-researchers engage in systematic self-inquiry to improve practice and generate localized knowledge (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). As a reflective and recursive process, journal writing enabled the researcher to remain critically aware, documenting not only what happened but also how and why instructional choices evolved over time. It also contributed to thematic saturation during analysis, by providing longitudinal data that captured shifts in classroom discourse and student identity.

Given its recursive nature and its function as both data source and analytical scaffold, the researcher's journal was one of the most foundational and trustworthy instruments in the study. It supported triangulation across other data sets (e.g., focus group interviews and student reflections), and helped ensure credibility and transparency in the analysis process.

3.3.2 Focus-group Interviews

In order to explore students' evolving attitudes toward English speaking skills and their perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices in depth, this study employed two rounds of focus group interviews as a key qualitative data collection method (see Appendix

B). The first round took place at the beginning of February, prior to the implementation of AfL-integrated lesson plans, while the second was conducted at the end of March, following the completion of the eight-week instructional period. This pre-post structure enabled the researcher to capture both initial beliefs and later reflections, offering a comparative understanding of change over time—a strategy that aligns well with the cyclical nature of action research (Burns, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014).

The entire participant group of 30 students was divided into six focus groups, each comprising five learners. This decision was guided by both practical and pedagogical considerations. Smaller group sizes allowed all students sufficient time to express their thoughts, while also creating a psychologically safer environment for students who were typically hesitant to speak in whole-class settings. This was particularly relevant in the context of this study, where learners had previously expressed high levels of anxiety about speaking English in front of others, as noted in baseline classroom observations and informal conversations.

Focus group interviews were selected over individual interviews because of their ability to foster collaborative meaning-making among peers. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), focus groups are especially effective in educational research as they allow participants to build on each other's ideas, thereby generating richer and more nuanced data. In this study, students often responded not only to the facilitator's questions but also to their classmates' comments, leading to natural and revealing discussions about classroom dynamics, motivation, and emotional experiences.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, combining predetermined open-ended questions with the flexibility to pursue emerging themes. Topics included students' experiences with speaking English in the classroom, perceived challenges, emotional reactions to feedback, and reflections on specific AfL strategies such as peer assessment and self-monitoring. To ensure accuracy, transparency, and analytical depth, all sessions

were audio-recorded using a voice recorder. The recordings did not involve any video or visual data, in order to protect students' privacy and reduce performance-related anxiety.

The decision to use audio recordings was not merely logistical; it also served a methodological function. It allowed for detailed transcription and enabled the researcher to return to the data repeatedly during thematic analysis, as guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Moreover, recording students' actual language use during spontaneous discussions offered valuable insight into their authentic communicative competence and emotional tone, elements that would be difficult to capture through notes alone.

Finally, the two rounds of focus group interviews served a longitudinal and comparative purpose. By analysing students' responses before and after the instructional intervention, the researcher was able to identify not only what changed, but how and why those changes occurred. This approach enriched the validity and depth of the findings, and complemented the more individualised data collected from weekly reflections and classroom journals.

3.3.3 Students' Weekly Reflections

Another significant source of qualitative data in this study was the collection of weekly student reflections, written throughout the eight-week instructional period between early February and late March (see Appendix C). In accordance with the structure of English lessons in Turkish state high schools—where students receive four hours of instruction per week—the researcher implemented AfL-integrated lesson plans during two hours, while the remaining two hours were reserved for instruction aligned with national exam content. At the end of each week, students were asked to write personal reflections based specifically on the AfL-based speaking activities they experienced during the formative instruction block.

Each student completed eight reflections in total, yielding a rich, longitudinal dataset that offered insight into students' evolving attitudes, emotions, and self-perceptions regarding spoken English and formative assessment strategies. The reflections were open-ended and written in their native language (Turkish) to ensure that linguistic limitations in English would not interfere with the authenticity and depth of their responses. Prompts encouraged students to comment on how they felt during the activities, what they learned, which strategies helped or challenged them, and whether they noticed any personal improvement. This introspective dimension was essential for capturing learners' internal processes, especially shifts in confidence, motivation, and identity.

The rationale for including weekly reflections stems from their value in promoting both metacognitive awareness and emotional expression. According to Farrell and Mom, (2015), structured self-reflection enables learners to “articulate tacit thoughts, notice patterns, and take ownership of their learning process.” In the context of AfL, reflections helped reinforce a learner-centered culture by encouraging students to monitor their own progress and make sense of formative feedback. Additionally, from a research perspective, the reflections offered a continuous stream of learner-generated data, allowing the researcher to track individual and collective change over time.

These reflections were later coded and analysed inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, alongside data from focus group interviews, journals, and lesson plans. The triangulation of student reflections with other data sources enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings by ensuring that emerging themes were grounded in multiple forms of evidence. The reflective narratives were especially valuable for capturing subtle emotional shifts and learner voice—dimensions that are often overlooked in more formal assessments or structured interviews.

3.3.4 AfL Strategies Integrated Lesson Plans

At the heart of this study lays eight weekly lesson plans—each specifically designed to integrate Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies aimed at developing spoken interaction and spoken production, in accordance with CEFR guidelines (see Appendix D). Spanning February through March, each week consisted of four English lessons (four hours), with two hours dedicated to national curriculum instruction and the other two hours devoted to AfL-integrated activities. This allocation ensured consistency and allowed for incremental implementation of formative assessment. Importantly, the themes of these lesson plans were aligned with the MoNE (Ministry of National Education) curriculum objectives, ensuring that the lessons both met national standards and fulfilled the CEFR descriptors for spoken interaction and production. This parallelism between MoNE outcomes and CEFR-based strategies strengthened curricular coherence and provided a practical foundation for integrating AfL tools.

AfL-integrated lesson plans serve as a mechanism for instructional design and inquiry. Consistently cited as pivotal in bridging theory and classroom practice, they enable active continuous refinement (Black & Wiliam, 2009) and give insight into how interventions unfold in real time. In this study, lesson plans guided not just what was taught, but how and why, reflecting both the researcher's pedagogical decisions and students' changing needs. Following exploratory action research principles (Burns, 2009), each week's reflection data (exits, journals, observations) informed the next week's planning. If students struggled with vocabulary use, for example, Week 5 integrated collaborative vocabulary-building games, with associated peer feedback structures. This cycle reinforced both pedagogical responsiveness and data-informed teaching.

These AfL-integrated lesson plans were more than lesson scripts—they formed a reflective inquiry cycle, connecting international frameworks (like CEFR), classroom realities, and formative practices. By embedding tasks such as peer feedback, self-monitoring, role-play, and reflection into speaking-focused lessons, this study generated sustainable change in

learners' beliefs, skills, and identities. As the findings later show, students evolved from anxious speakers to more autonomous, fluent communicators—testament to the power of thoughtful AfL-based design.

Table 3

AfL Strategies Integrated Lesson Plans and Weekly Distribution

Week	Focus / AfL Strategy	Rationale
Week 1	Peer Feedback and Self-Assessment Checklists (see Appendix E). Rubrics adapted from CEFR A2–B1 descriptors for fluency, coherence, vocabulary, and pronunciation were introduced and modeled (see Appendix F).	Set reflective habits and clear criteria for spoken performance. Modeled self-regulated learning (Panadero et al., 2016).
Week 2	Role-Play for Pragmatic Functions. Activities like making requests, giving advice, and expressing opinions.	Fostered authentic spoken interaction, aligning with CEFR's dialogic exchanges (Bygate, 2018). Boosted vocabulary and confidence.
Week 3	Exit-Ticket Reflections (see Appendix G). Prompts: "What did I do well?" "What I want to improve."	Created formative feedback loops and guided teacher planning (Brookhart, 2013). Enhanced metacognitive awareness.
Week 4	Group Reflection and Goal Setting. Students set weekly goals like "use three new words" or "reduce hesitation."	Built metacognitive awareness and accountability (Zimmerman, 2002). Encouraged personalized learning.
Week 5	Mini-Presentations for Spoken Production. Monologue tasks with peer/self-assessment.	Practiced coherent monologic speech, aligned with CEFR's spoken production descriptors. Promoted ownership of language.
Week 6	Collaborative Vocabulary-Building Games. Targeted vocabulary expansion based on identified needs.	Addressed observed vocabulary gaps. Made learning engaging and scaffolded.
Week 7	Debates and Turn-Taking Strategies. Structured debates with real-time feedback.	Supported turn-taking and extended exchanges (Carless & Boud, 2018). Strengthened interactional competence.
Week 8	Final Reflections and Synthesis. Revisiting goals, triangulating insights with exit tickets, peer/self reflections.	Reinforced action research principles of continuous improvement (Burns, 2010). Consolidated learning and showcased progress.

Each lesson plan was carefully designed to map directly onto CEFR's descriptors for spoken interaction and production. For example, interacting in pairs was explicitly targeted through role-play dialogues in Weeks 2–4, while producing short presentations was practiced through monologue tasks in Week 5. Managing turns and clarifying points, crucial interactional skills, were a focus in debates and group discussions in Week 7. This alignment ensured that every activity was both communicatively authentic and pedagogically justified. Grounding activities in authentic tasks enhances both motivation and learning outcomes (Ellis, 2003).

Furthermore, the implementation of AfL strategies was carefully aligned with the CEFR A2–B1 descriptors for spoken English. Early weeks focused on foundational skills such as basic fluency, pronunciation, and simple interaction, reflecting A2-level expectations. As the intervention progressed, tasks were scaffolded to incorporate more complex language use, coherent expression, and extended responses, targeting B1-level descriptors. For example, co-constructed success criteria and peer feedback in Weeks 2–3 emphasized clarity and basic interaction (A2), while self-assessment, goal-setting, and transformative feedback in Weeks 5–7 encouraged learners to monitor coherence, vocabulary range, and nuanced pronunciation (B1). This systematic progression ensured that each AfL activity not only supported the development of speaking skills but also directly corresponded to the incremental proficiency levels outlined in the CEFR, enabling students to build confidence and autonomy in a structured, standards-aligned manner.

Implementing these AfL-integrated lesson plans was not without challenges. Classroom management was key, particularly when facilitating peer feedback and debates. To address potential discomfort or resistance, the teacher-researcher adopted an empathetic, scaffolded approach—gradually increasing the complexity of tasks and modeling constructive feedback practices (Shute, 2008). Another challenge was ensuring students understood the purpose of AfL strategies, rather than seeing them as extra work. Explicit discussions about the “why” behind each strategy helped mitigate this (Sadler, 1989). Moreover,

integrating student voice through reflection and goal setting proved essential in fostering ownership of learning.

The effectiveness of these plans was evident in the evolving classroom dynamics and student voices. Initial hesitancy gave way to more confident, fluent exchanges. Students reported feeling more autonomous and willing to take risks—key indicators of successful spoken interaction development (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). These findings are elaborated upon in the thesis' subsequent chapter, reinforcing the transformative potential of AfL when meaningfully embedded in speaking-focused lessons.

In conclusion, these eight AfL-integrated lesson plans were dynamic blueprints for continuous, reflective, and student-centered teaching. They operationalized CEFR's principles within a local context, balancing rigor with flexibility, and fostering an inclusive space for spoken interaction and production. As Black and Wiliam (2009) argue, effective formative assessment is a “feedback loop,” and these plans exemplified that loop—constantly evolving to meet learners' needs and aspirations. Additionally, the alignment of these lessons with MoNE's curriculum objectives ensured that national standards were met alongside the international CEFR descriptors, thereby enhancing the practicality and relevance of the study's design.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure in this exploratory action research study was carefully crafted to capture the evolving interplay between the teacher's pedagogical decisions and the students' experiences in developing their speaking skills and motivation. The process began in February with initial focus group interviews, designed to establish a foundational understanding of the students' existing perceptions about their spoken language proficiency, levels of confidence, and their previous experiences with Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices. Conducting focus group interviews at the outset aligns with the principles of exploratory action research, as outlined by Tamayo and Almeida (2023), who

emphasize that establishing an initial snapshot of the learning environment is crucial for subsequent planning and continuous refinement.

Following the initial interviews, the researcher implemented eight carefully designed AfL-integrated lesson plans over two months. Each week, the lessons were meticulously planned to incorporate varied AfL strategies—ranging from peer assessment and self-reflection prompts to collaborative role-plays and exit-ticket reflections—ensuring a dynamic and responsive learning environment. This approach reflects the cyclic nature of exploratory action research, where teaching practices are continuously adapted in response to emergent classroom dynamics and participant feedback (Tamayo & Almeida, 2023).

A core element of this data collection process involved the systematic documentation of classroom practices and reflections through the researcher's journal. After completing each two-hour English class session that focused on AfL-based speaking activities, the researcher engaged in structured journaling that encompassed three critical dimensions: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action, as conceptualized by Burns (2009). Reflection-in-action captured immediate observations during classroom activities, noting how specific AfL strategies were received by students in real time. Reflection-on-action involved post-lesson evaluation, allowing the researcher to consider what worked effectively and which areas required further adaptation. Reflection-for-action provided a proactive perspective for subsequent lesson planning, identifying potential adjustments to ensure that the strategies remained attuned to student needs.

Parallel to the teacher's ongoing reflective practice, students completed weekly written reflections at the end of each lesson. These reflections were typically brief but meaningful, asking students to articulate what they had accomplished, what challenges they had encountered, and what specific goals they had for the next session. This dual-source reflection strategy—capturing both teacher and student perspectives—is consistent with best practices in classroom-based research, as it not only triangulates data but also empowers learners to take ownership of their progress. By systematically gathering these

written reflections, the researcher could trace how students' confidence, motivation, and spoken interaction skills evolved over the intervention period.

At the conclusion of the eight-week cycle, the researcher conducted second focus group interviews to gather cumulative insights from participants about the overall effectiveness of the AfL-integrated lessons. These concluding interviews enabled students to reflect holistically on how the various AfL strategies had impacted their spoken language development, collaborative practices, and metacognitive awareness. In addition, these final interviews offered an important opportunity to validate findings from the researcher's journal and student reflections, in line with the triangulation principles outlined by Denzin (2012). Such triangulation is vital in enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research, ensuring that emerging patterns are not solely the product of one data source or the researcher's interpretations.

The decision to employ thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as the primary analytical framework was justified by its flexibility and methodological rigor. The six-phase process of thematic analysis—familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing—mirrors the continuous cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection central to exploratory action research (Altrichter et al., 2002). This parallel structure between data analysis and research implementation strengthened the methodological coherence of the study, ensuring that emergent themes were genuinely grounded in the lived experiences of both teacher and students.

Furthermore, thematic analysis was particularly well-suited for analyzing the nuanced and multi-layered data sets generated by this study: the researcher's reflective journals, the students' weekly reflections, and the two rounds of focus group interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of researcher reflexivity in thematic analysis, urging researchers to maintain a conscious awareness of their influence on data interpretation. The researcher's ongoing reflection throughout the process actively engaged

with this principle, ensuring that interpretations were situated within the collaborative and responsive ethos of exploratory action research.

By weaving together data from multiple sources and applying thematic analysis in a continuous, reflective manner, this data collection procedure achieved a robust, context-sensitive approach to classroom-based inquiry. In addition, the lesson themes and activities were carefully aligned with the MoNE curriculum goals, ensuring that the study remained both pedagogically relevant and practically viable for the national context. As the findings section will demonstrate, this integrated, cyclical, and reflective approach not only captured the dynamic nature of spoken language development but also illuminated how thoughtfully designed AfL strategies can transform students' motivation and self-perceptions as language users.

Table 4

The Timeframe of Data Collection Procedure

Timeframe	Data Method	Collection	Content and Purpose	Description
Week 1 (February)	Initial Focus Group Interviews	Group	To explore students' existing spoken language skills, motivation levels, and prior experiences with AfL	Establishing a baseline understanding and identifying key areas for intervention
Weeks 2–9 (February–March)	Implementation of Weekly Integrated Lesson Plans	AfL-Lesson	To enhance spoken interaction and production skills while fostering motivation through varied AfL strategies	Intervention phase where lesson plans are applied and continuously adapted based on ongoing data
After Each Lesson	Researcher's Reflective Journal		Documenting immediate observations, reflections on AfL strategies' effectiveness, and motivational dynamics	Reflection-in-action, on-action, and for-action to inform continuous planning

End of Each Week	Student Written Reflections	Weekly	Capturing perceptions of learning progress, challenges faced, and goals for improvement	students' progress, challenges faced, and goals for improvement	Providing learner voice and enabling triangulation with researcher's observations
Week 10 (April)	Final Focus Group Interviews	Group	To evaluate overall impact of AfL-integrated lessons on students' speaking skills and motivation	overall impact of AfL-integrated lessons on students' speaking skills and motivation	Gathering cumulative insights and validating findings through participant feedback



Figure 7. Data Collection Procedure Cycle

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed in this study as the primary method of data analysis due to its flexibility, rigor, and suitability for exploring complex qualitative data. The choice to utilize thematic analysis stems from its ability to

offer a rich, detailed, and nuanced account of data, particularly when seeking to understand participants' experiences and perceptions, such as those concerning motivation and spoken language development within an AfL framework.

Unlike other qualitative methods, thematic analysis does not require adherence to a specific theoretical framework, allowing for both inductive and deductive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, an inductive, data-driven approach was preferred to allow themes to emerge naturally from the participants' reflections, interviews, and researcher journals, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data rather than imposed by preconceived notions. This is crucial in action research, where understanding the authentic voices of participants guides both analysis and subsequent pedagogical decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burns, 2009).

The manual approach to coding and analysis was deliberately chosen to maintain close contact with the data. While qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) tools, such as NVivo or Atlas.ti, offer efficiency, their use can sometimes create a degree of separation between researcher and data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given that the research focus was on motivational shifts and subtle developments in spoken language—a domain inherently nuanced and contextually sensitive—engagement with data “by hand” ensured a deeper, more empathetic understanding. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that thematic analysis is not simply about coding data but about making sense of the entire data set through a reflexive and continuous process, which was best served by manual analysis in this context.

The analysis proceeded according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, providing a structured yet flexible roadmap for the researcher's immersion into the data:

Familiarization with the data stage involved repeated and active reading of the qualitative data. The researcher transcribed interview recordings personally, re-read students' weekly reflections and researcher journal entries multiple times, and made comprehensive notes

regarding initial impressions and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the importance of this phase, noting that it forms the foundation for all subsequent analytic work, as the researcher “becomes intimately familiar with the depth and breadth of the content” (p. 87). This process allowed the researcher to start noticing recurrent expressions related to confidence, anxiety, self-regulation, peer interaction, and feedback—key aspects within the AfL context.

To generate initial codes, an inductive approach was used. Coding was done manually using printed transcripts and highlighters, as well as digital word processors for organization. Each segment of data that seemed relevant was assigned a descriptive label that encapsulated its meaning without restricting interpretative flexibility. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe codes as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way” (p. 88). For example, student remarks such as “I felt less nervous after the peer feedback” were coded as ‘reduced speaking anxiety’ and ‘peer feedback benefits.’ These recursive codes were constantly reviewed and refined to capture nuanced distinctions, such as separating ‘motivation through peer support’ from ‘motivation through self-reflection.’

Once a comprehensive list of codes was developed, the researcher began grouping related codes into broader themes. This process involved physically cutting and grouping coded data excerpts to visualize connections and patterns. For instance, codes like ‘peer encouragement,’ ‘confidence building,’ and ‘reduced fear of mistakes’ were grouped under the emerging theme of ‘Enhancing Learner Confidence and Autonomy.’ Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this step as “collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme” (p. 89). The emergent themes were then reviewed in terms of their internal coherence and distinctness from one another.

After that, themes were checked against the data to ensure if they represented meaningful patterns. This involved two levels of review: first, reviewing coded extracts within themes

to confirm coherence; second, reviewing the entire data set to verify the themes accurately reflected the data as a whole. For example, initial themes concerning ‘Motivation’ were split into sub-themes such as ‘Intrinsic motivation’ and ‘Motivation through peer interaction’ after this review phase. This refinement stage aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) assertion that thematic analysis is continuous and reflective, requiring flexibility and willingness to reconfigure themes as understanding deepens.

Defining and naming themes: Once finalized, each theme was clearly defined and named to capture its essence succinctly and evocatively. For example, ‘Transformative Feedback’ was chosen to represent students’ experiences of receiving formative peer and teacher feedback that influenced both their confidence and skill development. These clear definitions ensured that themes functioned as analytic tools, illuminating different facets of students’ developmental trajectories within the AfL environment.

The final stage involved weaving the thematic findings into a coherent narrative supported by vivid data excerpts. This presentation was not merely descriptive but interpretive, contextualizing findings within existing literature on formative assessment, motivation, and spoken language development (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 2009; Dörnyei, 2009). Direct quotations were used to ensure participants’ voices were central to the analytic narrative, enhancing credibility and authenticity.

A key justification for this methodological choice lies in the alignment between thematic analysis and the epistemological stance of exploratory action research. Both methodologies emphasize cyclical reflection, contextual sensitivity, and participant-centered inquiry (Burns, 2009; Tamayo & Almeida, 2023). Manual, inductive thematic analysis allowed the researcher to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the data, reflecting on emerging insights and adapting research focus in accordance with participants’ experiences. This continuous reflexivity is crucial in action research, where data analysis and intervention inform and shape each other.

The decision to avoid over-reliance on coding software further supports the study's credibility by foregrounding researcher subjectivity as a resource rather than a threat. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that reflexive thematic analysis embraces researcher positionality, acknowledging that themes do not passively 'emerge' but are actively constructed. By immersing themselves deeply in the data, the researcher could more fully understand the nuances of language use, metaphor, and affect—elements often flattened by software-driven coding. This depth of engagement was vital for exploring subtle shifts in motivation and spoken skill development, areas where meaning is often implicit and context dependent.

Moreover, this approach allowed for a richer triangulation of data sources. By cross-examining researcher journal entries, student reflections, and interview transcripts, the researcher could verify the consistency and robustness of emerging themes, minimizing bias and increasing the analytic trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The thematic framework provided a clear structure to synthesize diverse qualitative inputs, thereby supporting a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

In addition, steps were taken to strengthen inter-rater reliability. To ensure that the coding process was not solely dependent on the perspective of a single researcher, a subset of the data (two student reflections and one focus group transcript) was independently coded by the researcher's academic supervisor. The coding outcomes were then compared, and areas of divergence were discussed until consensus was reached. This collaborative process enhanced the consistency of the coding framework and provided an additional layer of methodological rigor. Moreover, the researcher maintained an audit trail of coding decisions, thematic refinements, and reflexive notes, which contributed to transparency and allowed analytic procedures to be revisited when necessary. While reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the active role of the researcher in theme construction, the involvement of the supervisor as a secondary coder, alongside systematic documentation, provided further assurance of reliability and credibility.

To illustrate the process, consider the theme ‘Learner Agency in Speaking Tasks.’ Initially, various codes such as ‘student-led topic choice,’ ‘self-assessment of speaking,’ and ‘goal setting’ were generated. Through continuous thematic refinement, these codes converged into a coherent theme highlighting how students’ growing autonomy in managing speaking tasks contributed to increased motivation and improved spoken production. Participant quotes such as “When I choose what to talk about, I feel more confident” exemplify this theme’s salience. The thematic analysis thus transcended mere categorization, providing a conceptual lens through which to understand the complex interplay of affect, cognition, and behavior in language learning.

Finally, visual tools such as thematic maps were employed to depict relationships between main themes and sub-themes, making the analytic structure transparent and accessible. For example, the map illustrated how ‘Enhancing Learner Confidence’ interrelated with ‘Transformative Feedback’ and ‘Learner Agency,’ highlighting the dynamic, interconnected nature of the learning process fostered by AfL strategies.

In conclusion, the use of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework, conducted manually and inductively, was a deliberate methodological choice that enhanced the depth, authenticity, and credibility of this exploratory action research. It allowed for a rich, contextually grounded interpretation of complex qualitative data, directly informing pedagogical practice and contributing valuable insights into how AfL strategies impact student motivation and spoken language development.



Figure 8. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.1 Findings from the 1st Focus Group Interview

The first focus group interview was conducted with a total of 30 tenth grade EFL students attending a public high school in Türkiye. Thematic analysis of the data revealed five main themes, each representing a recurring pattern across participants' responses. These themes were constructed inductively, based on the most frequently coded ideas, concerns, and experiences voiced by the students. The findings presented below are interpreted within the broader context of EFL learning in Turkey, where speaking hours are limited, and speaking activities often fail to create authentic, communicative environments that support oral fluency and confidence. Each theme is illustrated with student quotations, along with the

number of participants whose responses reflected the theme. The table below illustrates the codes and the themes that emerged.

Table 5
Thematic Analysis of the 1st Focus Group Interview

<i>Question</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<i>1. How do you feel about speaking English at the moment?</i>	Nervous, Afraid, Anxious, Insecure, Ashamed	Emotional Barriers to Speaking
<i>2. What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to speak English in class?</i>	Pronunciation issues, Lack of courage, Peer pressure, Fear of making mistakes, Insecurity, Fear of speaking in front of others	Challenges in Speaking
<i>3. What motivates or demotivates you when it comes to improving your speaking skills?</i>	Motivating factors: Popular English TV shows, English songs, Online games, Communicating with people from different cultures, English as a lingua franca, Career advantages of English. Demotivating factors: Incorrect pronunciation, Structural features of English, Lack of confidence.	Motivating and Demotivating Factors
<i>4. Have you ever received any feedback or used specific strategies to improve your speaking skills? If yes, what was your experience?</i>	Fluency-based feedback (Role play activity)	Feedback and Strategy Use
<i>5. Do you prefer participating in group discussions, receiving peer feedback, or engaging in self-assessment?</i>	15 students had no experience with these activities. The remaining students preferred group discussions and peer feedback.	Preferred Learning Activities

4.1.1 Emotional Barriers to Speaking

The affective dimension of speaking in a foreign language emerged as a powerful theme in this study. For most students, speaking English in front of their peers was not just an academic task but an emotionally charged experience. Among the 30 participants, 24 expressed feelings of anxiety, insecurity, or shame during speaking activities, feelings that directly interfered with their willingness to participate. These emotional responses were not incidental; they were rooted in deep-seated fears of making mistakes, being judged, or losing face.

Student 8 articulated this experience vividly: “When the teacher asks me to speak, my heart beats fast. I feel very nervous, and I think I will say something wrong.” Even students who reported understanding the material hesitated to speak, as Student 14 revealed: “Even if I know what to say, I feel ashamed to speak. I think others will laugh.” These fears were not isolated. They were echoed by others, like Student 22, who explained: “I get anxious when I have to talk in front of the class. I forget words and just want to sit down.” These comments illustrate how emotional discomfort can override cognitive readiness, silencing students even when they possess the linguistic means to communicate.

In the Turkish EFL context, such emotional barriers are often reinforced by instructional practices that emphasize accuracy over fluency and offer limited opportunities for genuine interaction. Speaking activities, when present, are frequently restricted to reading aloud or repeating set phrases, leaving little space for personal expression or spontaneous use of language. In classrooms where mistakes are corrected harshly or where peer judgment is perceived as a threat, students begin to internalize a sense of linguistic inadequacy. Over time, this leads to withdrawal, silence, and a deep reluctance to speak.

The findings suggest that fostering oral proficiency cannot be separated from creating emotionally supportive classroom climates. Students are unlikely to develop communicative competence unless they feel psychologically safe enough to try, to fail, and

to try again. Without addressing these emotional barriers, the most well-designed speaking activities may remain unused, their potential eclipsed by fear.

4.1.2 Challenges in Speaking

Beyond emotional discomfort, many students also face persistent challenges that are both linguistic and psychological in nature. In this study, 28 out of 30 students identified specific difficulties that hindered their ability to speak English confidently in the classroom. Issues such as pronunciation problems, fear of making mistakes, lack of courage, and peer pressure were cited repeatedly, forming a complex web of obstacles that silence learners even when they are motivated to speak.

Student 11 remarked, “My pronunciation is not good. I don’t want to speak because others may correct me or laugh.” For this student, and many others, the pressure of performing accurately in front of peers becomes a source of inhibition. Student 3 echoed this anxiety, explaining, “I want to try but I am not brave enough. I feel all eyes are on me.” Such comments reveal how the classroom can feel more like a stage than a learning space—where every spoken word is open to scrutiny. As Student 25 noted plainly, “I always think I will make a mistake, so I stay quiet.” These statements reflect an internalized fear that has less to do with competence and more to do with perceived social risk.

This theme resonates with long-standing critiques of EFL instruction in Türkiye, where accuracy and grammar continue to dominate classroom priorities. Speaking is often assessed in formal, performance-oriented tasks with limited scaffolding, and little emphasis is placed on developing fluency or building learner confidence. In such settings, students may fear ridicule not only from peers but also from teachers, particularly when correction is immediate and public. In addition, many learners reported a lack of sufficient exposure to natural spoken English, whether through media, classroom models, or teacher talk. Without access to authentic input, students are left unsure about how to formulate their

thoughts spontaneously, which further undermines their willingness to engage in speaking activities.

These findings suggest that addressing speaking challenges requires more than drilling pronunciation or correcting grammar demands a pedagogical shift. Classrooms must provide models, reduce pressure, and scaffold speaking tasks in ways that gradually build learners' confidence and competence. Otherwise, even the most motivated students may continue to hold back their voices.

4.1.3 Motivating and Demotivating Factors

This theme emerged from students' reflections on what either supports or hinders their desire to improve speaking skills. Out of the 30 participants, 20 students mentioned motivating factors such as watching English TV shows, playing online games, and communicating with people from other cultures. These activities, occurring primarily outside the classroom, seemed to create meaningful exposure to authentic English and foster a more organic desire to use the language. As Student 5 shared, "I love watching English TV shows with subtitles. It makes me want to understand and speak better." Similarly, Student 9 stated, "Playing online games with foreign people helps me talk in English more easily." These experiences helped learners engage with spoken English in a low-pressure, interest-driven environment—one where mistakes were part of interaction, not public failure. Student 19 made a clear connection between language learning and long-term goals: "I want to speak English because it is important for my future job." Such comments show that many students are aware of English as a communicative and career-relevant tool, even if their classroom experiences do not always reflect that reality.

However, in contrast, 18 students also described various demotivating factors, most of which were rooted in classroom dynamics or instructional challenges. These included difficulty with pronunciation, complex grammar, and persistent lack of confidence. As

Student 6 revealed, “I feel bad when I pronounce a word wrong. I stop trying.” Likewise, Student 20 remarked, “English grammar is difficult. I don’t feel confident.” These expressions point to a disconnection between what students find meaningful and engaging outside the classroom and what they experience inside it. Many of the practices that motivate students to speak—authentic interaction, personal relevance, and language exposure—are not consistently present in classroom environments, particularly where test preparation or rigid curriculum pacing dominate instruction.

What emerges here is a broader pedagogical tension. Students’ extrinsic motivations, such as career aspirations or global communication, often clash with the intrinsic demotivation that stems from uninspiring or overly difficult instructional experiences. This tension is particularly concerning in the Turkish EFL context, where speaking continues to receive less instructional time and is rarely assessed formally, despite its inclusion in curricular guidelines. As a result, students are implicitly taught that speaking is a peripheral luxury skill rather than a core component of language proficiency.

These patterns also intersect with the previous themes. Emotional barriers and linguistic challenges do not exist in isolation; they are reinforced or alleviated depending on how motivating—or demotivating—the learning environment becomes. For example, when feedback is punitive or lacking, students’ fear of speaking intensifies. When interaction is limited to scripted dialogues, learners lose opportunities for fluency and confidence building. Conversely, when tasks are relatable and communicative, such as peer interviews or real-world simulations, students begin to shift from passive recipients to active participants.

Taken together, the findings across all themes point to the critical role of learning context in shaping learners’ spoken language development. While students possess both the motivation and the potential to become confident English speakers, their progress depends heavily on whether the classroom environment validates and supports their efforts. Addressing these emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical dimensions simultaneously is

essential. Without such a holistic approach, the same barriers—fear, silence, and disengagement—are likely to persist, undermining learners' progress even when interest and exposure exist beyond the classroom. A learner-centered, feedback-rich, and interaction-focused pedagogy rooted in Assessment for Learning principles may offer a sustainable path forward, bridging the gap between students' aspirations and classroom realities.

4.1.4 Feedback and Strategy Use

When students reflected on the types of feedback and speaking strategies they had encountered, only a small minority reported positive experiences. Out of 30 participants, just 7 recalled receiving meaningful feedback related to their speaking performance. Among these, 5 students specifically highlighted that fluency-based tasks, such as role-plays and simulations, were the most helpful. These activities allowed them to express themselves more freely, without the constant pressure of being corrected for every grammatical misstep. Student 2 remembered, “We did a role play once, and it was fun. The teacher didn’t stop us for grammar mistakes, so I spoke more freely.” Similarly, Student 17 noted, “It was better when we acted like we were in a real situation. I didn’t feel as nervous.” These moments, though rare, seemed to offer learners a glimpse of what communicative competence could feel like when risk-taking was permitted and fluency was prioritized.

However, for the remaining 23 students, feedback was either absent or unclear. Most of them described their speaking experiences as unstructured, isolated, or limited to pronunciation correction, often delivered without context or follow-up. The majority pointed to classroom routines that emphasized writing, grammar rules, and textbook-based exercises over any systematic speaking practice. Student 10 explained, “Most of the time we only do grammar exercises. Speaking is not important in the exam, so we don’t practice

much.” This view was echoed by Student 15, who remarked, “We read dialogues sometimes, but the teacher doesn’t ask us to talk on our own. There is no time.” Student 23 added, “I don’t remember getting any feedback about speaking. Only for tests or writing homework.” These reflections illustrate a striking disconnect between policy-level emphasis on speaking and the reality of classroom practice, where feedback is largely reserved for written skills, and speaking activities, if present at all, remain unassessed and undervalued.

The scarcity of formative feedback in these accounts points to deeper structural issues. While communicative competence is promoted in curriculum documents, the lack of teacher training, large class sizes, and exam-oriented culture may limit the consistent use of strategic, feedback-driven instruction. Moreover, even when speaking occurs in class, it is often mechanical—repeating sentences or filling in blanks—rather than experiential or reflective. Without regular opportunities for guided feedback, self-monitoring, or goal setting, students are left without the tools to develop their oral skills autonomously or with confidence.

These findings may underscore the need to move beyond occasional speaking activities and toward a classroom culture where feedback is embedded into daily practice. The few positive experiences students described—such as speaking without interruption or simulating real-life scenarios—offer valuable models for designing future lessons. In contrast, the prevailing lack of strategy use and feedback in most accounts reveals a significant gap between curriculum goals and instructional reality. For AfL to be effective in developing spoken English proficiency, feedback must not be sporadic or incidental, but intentional, continuous, and integrated into the learning process.

4.1.5 Preferred Learning Activities

A clear divide emerged in students' preferences for how they would like to develop their speaking skills. Out of the 30 participants, 15 students indicated that they had no prior experience with interactive techniques such as peer feedback, group discussions, or self-assessment. This absence suggests a strong reliance on teacher-led instruction in their previous English education. However, the other 15 students who had encountered or imagined these techniques—tended to favor collaborative and less teacher-fronted methods. These students described small group work, peer conversation, and interactive tasks as more comfortable and engaging compared to whole-class speaking led by the teacher.

For example, Student 21 shared, “I like group work because I feel more relaxed with my friends,” expressing how peer collaboration lowers affective barriers. Similarly, Student 10 explained, “Talking with peers is better than speaking in front of the whole class. I feel less pressure.” These insights suggest that the psychological demands of whole-class speaking, where all attention is on one student, may inhibit participation, whereas small group formats provide a safer space for risk-taking and language experimentation. Even among those with no prior experience of interactive methods, there was openness to change. Student 27 reflected, “I haven’t done peer feedback before, but I think it would help.” This willingness indicates a readiness among learners to embrace new forms of classroom communication, provided that the environment supports such practices.

Despite this openness, the findings highlight a critical gap between students' preferences and their actual classroom experiences. In many Turkish EFL contexts, especially in state schools, speaking activities remain largely teacher-directed, with limited use of student-centered techniques such as pair work, small-group speaking, or formative peer evaluation. This reliance on whole-class formats—where the teacher dominates the speaking floor—can turn spoken English into a performance event rather than a communicative process. As

a result, learners internalize the belief that speaking in English means getting everything “correct” under pressure, rather than engaging meaningfully with peers.

Moreover, the lack of variation in instructional methods likely contributes to students’ emotional discomfort, as explored in earlier themes. When learners are only exposed to high-stakes, high-visibility speaking formats, they have little opportunity to develop fluency, receive peer support, or reflect on their progress. In contrast, interactive strategies such as group discussions, partner tasks, and peer feedback provide not only more speaking opportunities but also the psychological scaffolding learners need to take risks and grow. The students’ comments on this theme illustrate that even limited exposure to these practices can have a positive impact on motivation and willingness to speak.

Therefore, aligning classroom practices with students’ preferred modes of interaction is not simply a matter of engagement, it is a pedagogical imperative. When learners feel heard, supported, and given space to explore their voice among peers, they are more likely to build the confidence and competence necessary for sustained oral language development.

4.2 Findings from the 2nd Focus group Interview

After the implementation of AfL strategies, 30 EFL students participated in a second focus group interview. Compared to the first interview, the tone of the responses shifted from emotionally burdened and passive to more confident, reflective, and motivated. The themes that emerged reflect both affective and instructional impacts of AfL strategies. Below is a table which provides detailed, quote-driven analysis of each theme.

Table 6

Thematic Analysis of the 2nd Focus Group Interview

Question	Codes	Themes
1. Has the use of specific AfL strategies (e.g., peer feedback, self-assessment) influenced your motivation to speak in English? How?	Anxiety reduction Pronunciation improvement Motivation boost Interactivity Enjoyment & confidence Corrective feedback	- Psychological Empowerment through AfL Strategies - Increased Classroom Engagement and Motivation
2. Have your goals or attitudes toward improving your spoken English changed since using AfL strategies?	Self-confidence Anxiety relief Fear reduction Interest Enthusiasm	- AfL Strategies as a Tool for Emotional Relief - Positive Shift in Attitudes and Motivation
3. In what ways have the classroom activities helped you improve your speaking skills?	Pronunciation accuracy Vocabulary growth Fluency via feedback Interactive group work	- Concrete Contributions of AfL Activities to Speaking Skills - Interaction-Based Learning Environment Enhancing Oral Practice
4. Are there specific AfL techniques that you find particularly helpful in improving your fluency, accuracy, or pronunciation?	Holistic subskill support Peer assessment (accuracy) Formative tools (pronunciation) Group presentations (fluency)	- Strategic Use of AfL to Improve Fluency, Accuracy, and Pronunciation - Holistic Support for Speaking Development
5.. Do you feel that AfL strategies make learning spoken skills more interactive and enjoyable? Why?	Peer communication Positive classroom climate Interactive activities Inclusive teacher feedback Student-led presentations	- Enhanced Social Bonds and Interaction in the Classroom - Enjoyable and Participatory Learning Environment

4.2.1 Psychological Empowerment through AfL Strategies

One of the most compelling patterns that emerged from the data was how AfL strategies contributed to students' emotional growth and self-confidence in speaking. A total of 24 out of 30 participants stated that the formative nature of these strategies helped them manage anxiety, reduce fear of judgment, and feel more accepted within the classroom community. These reflections highlight the affective power of AfL—not only as a set of instructional tools, but also as a cultural shift that reshapes how learners see themselves as speakers.

Student 4 shared, “I used to feel afraid of making mistakes, but peer feedback made me feel that mistakes are normal.” This sentiment points to an important psychological transformation: from fearing failure to seeing it as a learning opportunity. AfL tasks such as peer feedback, exit tickets, and group reflections made space for learners to experiment with language without the looming threat of formal judgment. Student 16 echoed this emotional reassurance, stating, “When we share our ideas and get comments, I feel more comfortable. I know I am not the only one.” Here, feedback becomes more than correction—it becomes a signal of shared experience, of learning as a collective rather than solitary effort. Student 21 added, “I feel like my voice matters now. When I speak, someone listens, not just the teacher,” emphasizing the shift from passive reception to active contribution in the classroom dynamic.

This shift is particularly significant in Turkish EFL classrooms, where speaking has traditionally been treated as a high-stakes skill evaluated primarily through summative means. In many public schools, speaking activities are either limited or judged harshly, often focusing on correctness and pronunciation rather than communicative effectiveness. Such an approach inadvertently silences learners, reinforcing the idea that only “perfect” English deserves attention. AfL strategies in this study disrupted that norm by offering a safer, non-evaluative space, where mistakes were not just tolerated, they were welcomed as

natural and necessary parts of learning. This reframing allowed learners to take risks, voice their thoughts, and engage in authentic interaction.

What emerges from these accounts is a subtle but important form of psychological empowerment. When students feel safe, supported, and validated, they begin to see themselves not merely as language learners, but as communicators with something valuable to say. The feeling of being “heard,” as described by several students, reflects a fundamental shift in classroom culture—from teacher-centered transmission to learner-centered dialogue. AfL, in this sense, does not merely improve language outcomes; it transforms the emotional climate of the classroom, enabling learners to build not only fluency but also self-efficacy and ownership of their learning.

4.2.2 Increased Classroom Engagement and Motivation

Increased participation and engagement emerged as a prominent theme, with 22 out of 30 students reporting that AfL strategies significantly enhanced their interest and involvement in speaking lessons. These students repeatedly emphasized that classroom activities became more collaborative, student-driven, and enjoyable when compared to traditional grammar-oriented instruction. Instead of passively listening or repeating after the teacher, learners described being more inclined to participate when given space for reflection, peer interaction, and real communicative tasks.

Student 7 captured this change clearly: “Before, I was bored in speaking lessons. Now I enjoy them because we do group work and give feedback.” What this statement reveals is not just a preference for variety but an underlying shift in how students view their role in the classroom—from passive recipient to active participant. Similarly, Student 20 remarked, “I participate more when we know we will discuss and reflect. It’s not just the teacher talking.” This comment illustrates how feedback-based, dialogic approaches disrupt the teacher-centered model that continues to dominate many EFL classrooms in

Türkiye. Student 2 added, “When we work together and listen to each other, it feels like real communication,” highlighting that group work and peer engagement not only increase motivation but also foster authenticity in language use.

In the Turkish secondary school context, speaking lessons are often limited to scripted dialogues, controlled drills, or teacher-led Q&A, which can feel disconnected from real-world communication. Moreover, the broader curriculum tends to prioritize grammar and reading comprehension—skills that are more easily tested through summative assessments. Within this framework, speaking becomes peripheral or, worse, performative: a moment for display rather than development. Unsurprisingly, many students disengage, particularly when they feel their voices are not being heard or valued.

AfL strategies in this study appeared to challenge that norm. Through the inclusion of peer feedback, group discussions, and reflective tasks, students not only spoke more often but did so with greater purpose and ownership. Lessons became dialogic rather than monologic, shifting the classroom atmosphere toward cooperation and mutual understanding. This change was especially significant for students who had previously expressed reluctance to speak or lacked confidence. As they experienced more frequent and meaningful interaction, they became more invested in classroom communication—not because they were required to, but because the classroom became a space where they wanted to speak.

This increased motivation was not just emotional—it translated into behavioral engagement. Students contributed more, listened more actively to their peers, and began to see speaking as a tool for learning rather than a risk to be avoided. This motivational shift represents a meaningful pedagogical outcome, suggesting that AfL—when implemented consistently and with sensitivity to student needs—can reinvigorate speaking instruction and foster a more equitable, engaging, and student-centered language classroom.

4.2.3 AfL Strategies as a Tool for Emotional Relief

This theme, supported by the voices of 21 students, reveals the significant emotional transformation they experienced through the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies. Many students reported a noticeable reduction in anxiety and fear, emphasizing how AfL practices normalized their emotions and provided crucial emotional support via structured feedback and collaborative peer activities. For example, Student 12 stated, “I don’t feel as nervous as before. Now I know others also struggle and we help each other,” highlighting the sense of solidarity that helped reduce individual pressure. Similarly, Student 27 reflected, “Feedback time is good. We can share our worries or talk about what was difficult,” showing how feedback sessions created a safe space for emotional expression. Student 6 added, “When I realize my classmates are also nervous, I feel more relaxed,” illustrating how peer awareness eased feelings of isolation and anxiety. Several other students echoed these sentiments: Student 1 shared that speaking anxiety diminished because they no longer feared being “frozen” during speech due to mistakes being collectively addressed. Student 4 pointed out that knowing everyone struggles made learning feel more normal and less intimidating. Student 10 emphasized the importance of shifting from a focus on perfection to embracing the learning process, saying, “I realized I don’t have to be perfect.” Student 18 commented, “Because of AfL, I am no longer afraid to make mistakes when I speak,” demonstrating how emotional safety fostered risk-taking in speaking tasks. Student 21 mentioned, “Knowing that my peers have the same feelings gives me confidence,” while Student 22 observed, “I was afraid to speak before, but now I feel more comfortable.” These reflections collectively highlight how AfL strategies functioned not only as pedagogical tools but also as emotional buffers. They reduced the debilitating fear of failure common in high-stakes, exam-driven contexts such as Turkey’s, where perfectionism can be paralyzing. The supportive classroom environment cultivated through AfL allowed students to view mistakes as opportunities for growth rather than threats, which was key to increasing their confidence and willingness to participate. In this

way, AfL shifted the focus from solely product-oriented outcomes to valuing the learning journey itself, thereby easing emotional pressure and fostering a collaborative, empathetic learning atmosphere.

4.2.4. Positive Shift in Attitudes and Motivation

This theme captures a profound transformation in students' attitudes and motivation toward speaking English, as reported by 18 participants. Initially, many students perceived speaking activities through the lens of high-stakes assessments, which often led to avoidance, silence, or minimal engagement due to fear of failure or judgment. However, the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies fundamentally altered these perceptions, fostering a more positive and growth-oriented mindset. Student 10's reflection, "I started to care more about my speaking. I want to be better now, not just pass the exam," exemplifies this shift from extrinsic, exam-driven motivation toward intrinsic motivation focused on personal improvement and meaningful communication. Similarly, Student 23's admission, "Now I feel it is okay to make mistakes. Before, I just stayed silent," highlights how AfL helped reduce the fear of making errors, a common barrier to active participation in foreign language classrooms. This change is further echoed by Student 19, who said, "Speaking is not scary anymore. I even want to practice at home now," indicating that AfL's impact extended beyond classroom walls, encouraging autonomous learning and sustained engagement.

The significance of this positive attitudinal shift cannot be overstated in the context of traditional Turkish classroom cultures, where exam pressure and compliance-based participation frequently undermine students' motivation and willingness to take risks. In such environments, speaking activities are often viewed as low-stakes or irrelevant because they do not directly influence final grades, leading to disengagement. AfL strategies challenged this norm by creating a learning environment that valued process over product,

progress over perfection, and collaboration over competition. This environment enabled students to internalize their learning goals, transforming speaking from a dreaded test into an opportunity for self-expression and growth.

Moreover, the motivational changes reported by students indicate the development of a more resilient and self-determined learner identity, which aligns with social constructivist theories emphasizing the role of learner agency and meaningful interaction in language acquisition. By positioning speaking as a skill to be nurtured rather than judged, AfL helped students reframe their relationship with language learning, fostering enthusiasm, confidence, and a proactive attitude toward practicing and improving their speaking skills. This positive shift in attitudes and motivation not only enhances classroom participation but also has the potential to contribute to long-term language learning success, particularly in high-stakes educational systems like Turkey's where affective barriers have historically impeded learner engagement.

4.2.5 Contributions of AfL Activities to Speaking Skills

This theme is strongly supported by the reflections of 20 students who explicitly described how specific AfL activities contributed to tangible improvements in various speaking subskills, including pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and confidence. Rather than offering vague or general impressions, these students provided detailed accounts of what changed and how these changes occurred. For instance, Student 5 observed, "After getting feedback, I noticed my pronunciation became clearer," emphasizing the importance of corrective feedback in phonological development. Student 18 highlighted the role of interactive exercises by stating, "Role-plays and group activities helped me speak more naturally," demonstrating how collaborative communication practices enhanced fluency and spontaneity. Student 8 added, "New words stayed in my mind more when we used

them in activities,” reflecting how contextualized vocabulary learning supported retention and active use.

Other students shared similarly specific insights: Student 3 remarked that regular peer feedback improved her ability to self-correct, “I learned to notice my own mistakes and fix them.” Student 12 noted, “Using words in real conversations made me remember them better,” while Student 16 appreciated the variety of speaking tasks, saying, “Each activity challenged me differently, which helped me improve step by step.” Student 20 described how group discussions increased her confidence, “Speaking with friends made me less afraid to talk in front of the class.” Student 7 emphasized the development of fluency, “When we practiced dialogues repeatedly, I could speak more smoothly.” Meanwhile, Student 14 commented on the integrated nature of the learning, “I could connect grammar and vocabulary with speaking, which made everything easier to understand.”

In Turkish EFL classrooms, where vocabulary, grammar, and speaking are often taught in isolated segments, the integrated approach promoted by AfL is particularly impactful. AfL activities provided authentic communicative contexts that allowed students to simultaneously practice and refine multiple subskills, fostering a more holistic and meaningful language learning experience. The students’ reflective comments reveal a growing metacognitive awareness rarely observed in traditionally rote-based environments, signifying a shift toward learner autonomy and self-regulated learning. Through AfL, students not only enhanced their pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency but also gained the confidence and motivation to actively participate in spoken communication. This comprehensive development underscores the crucial role of AfL strategies in bridging the gap between isolated skill instruction and effective oral proficiency in English.

4.2.6 Interaction-Based Learning Environment Enhancing Oral Practice

This theme is emerged by the reflections of 25 students who expressed a clear preference for group work and peer-led discussions as essential components in enhancing their oral practice. Many students described how increased interaction within the classroom reduced their speaking anxiety and created more opportunities to communicate. For instance, Student 9 shared, “When we work in groups, I feel more relaxed and I talk more,” highlighting the emotional comfort that peer collaboration provides. Student 28 emphasized the dynamic nature of group activities by stating, “It is easier to speak when we are doing something together. Not like only the teacher asking questions,” which contrasts with the traditional teacher-centered IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) pattern common in Turkish classrooms. Student 11 further explained, “Speaking doesn’t feel forced anymore. We talk because we have something to say,” pointing to the purposeful and authentic nature of peer interactions promoted by AfL practices.

These reflections underscore a significant pedagogical shift facilitated by AfL strategies, which disrupted the conventional, teacher-controlled communication flow and encouraged student autonomy in spoken interaction. Unlike rehearsed or teacher-led exchanges, peer discussions within AfL environments were spontaneous and meaningful, allowing students to develop fluency through real-time negotiation of meaning and collaborative meaning-making. This interactive setting fostered a sense of shared responsibility for learning and created a safer emotional space, where students felt more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with language. Consequently, the interaction-based learning environment helped students move beyond rote memorization and passive response patterns toward active, communicative participation, which is crucial for oral language development. The authentic and sustained speaking opportunities afforded by AfL stand in contrast to the grammar-translation style instruction dominant in many Turkish classrooms, which rarely supports such spontaneous and learner-centered oral practice.

4.2.7 Strategic Use of AfL to Improve Fluency, Accuracy, and Pronunciation

This theme illustrates a marked increase in metacognitive awareness as learners explicitly connected specific Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies to improvements in discrete speaking subskills such as fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Students reported that tools like exit tickets, peer correction, and the “two stars and a wish” feedback model facilitated deeper reflection on their speaking performance and helped them identify areas for targeted improvement. For example, Student 2 remarked, “Exit tickets helped me see my pronunciation mistakes. I paid more attention after that,” emphasizing how formative assessments promoted phonological self-monitoring. Student 11 noted, “Peer feedback was good for accuracy. My friend corrected me kindly, and I remembered it better,” which highlights the role of supportive peer interaction in reinforcing correct language use. Additionally, Student 13 shared, “Our teacher's feedback during role-plays helped me speak with fewer pauses,” illustrating how timely teacher interventions can enhance fluency by reducing hesitation.

Within Turkey’s exam-oriented educational system, speaking skills are rarely assessed holistically or deconstructed into components such as fluency and accuracy. Consequently, students often lack a clear understanding of what constitutes effective speaking performance. AfL strategies addressed this gap by making these subskills visible and manageable, encouraging learners to take greater ownership of their oral language development. This heightened metacognitive awareness not only supports immediate skill improvement but also lays the groundwork for sustained, autonomous learning beyond the classroom. Such learner-centered, reflective practices are seldom observed in traditional grammar-translation or test-focused instruction, underscoring the transformative potential of AfL in promoting nuanced and strategic language learning.

4.2.8 Holistic Support for Speaking Development

This theme can be observed in the reflections of 19 students who perceived Assessment for Learning (AfL) not as a fragmented or isolated technique but as a comprehensive, integrated system that simultaneously nurtured multiple aspects of their speaking skills. Many students emphasized that through continuous engagement with AfL tools, they experienced concurrent improvements in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, reflecting a more balanced and holistic oral development. For example, Student 14 remarked, “It’s not just grammar now. We talk, we get feedback, and we improve everything step by step,” underscoring how AfL activities fostered incremental progress across various linguistic domains. Similarly, Student 22 shared, “I learned new words, used them in speaking, and got feedback on how I say them. It helped all parts,” illustrating how vocabulary acquisition was seamlessly integrated with pronunciation and fluency practice within AfL. Student 30 echoed this sentiment by stating, “Speaking used to feel random. Now I know what to focus on and how to improve,” indicating increased learner awareness and strategic focus on oral skills development.

In the context of public EFL classrooms in Turkey, where speaking instruction often remains decontextualized and segmented—with grammar and pronunciation taught separately—AfL practices introduced a cohesive learning environment that bridged these divides. The sustained application of AfL strategies allowed students to connect discrete language components into meaningful communicative practice, fostering synergy among subskills rather than treating them in isolation. The students’ ability to recognize and articulate this integrated progress not only reflects their heightened metacognitive awareness but also demonstrates AfL’s potential to promote comprehensive oral proficiency. Such holistic support is crucial in overcoming the limitations of traditional, compartmentalized language instruction, enabling learners to develop as effective and confident communicators.

4.2.9 Enhanced Social Bonds and Interaction in the Classroom

26 out of 30 students reported feeling a stronger sense of connection and trust toward their peers, which in turn fostered openness in giving and receiving feedback and enhanced their sense of belonging to a collaborative learning community. For instance, Student 6 expressed, “I trust my group. We help each other, so it’s easier to talk,” highlighting the role of mutual support in lowering affective barriers to speaking. Student 26 noted, “I used to feel alone in class. Now I feel like we are learning together,” which illustrates a shift from isolation to collective engagement. Similarly, Student 15 observed, “When we give feedback, we listen better. It’s like teamwork,” emphasizing the collaborative spirit nurtured through peer interaction.

In traditional Turkish classrooms, the prevalent teacher-centered model often prioritizes authoritative instruction and limits opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and dialogue. AfL strategies effectively disrupted this pattern by fostering environments where students engaged in meaningful communication, mutual reflection, and cooperative learning. This not only enhanced their linguistic competence but also nurtured a classroom culture characterized by solidarity, shared responsibility, and social cohesion. Such an environment is essential for sustained language development, as positive social bonds reduce anxiety, increase motivation, and encourage risk-taking in speaking tasks. Therefore, AfL’s contribution extends beyond cognitive and linguistic gains to include vital socio-emotional dimensions that underpin successful language learning communities.

4.2.10 Enjoyable and Participatory Learning Environment

This theme is strongly supported by the reflections of 26 students who described a notable transformation in their speaking lessons, which became more enjoyable, less intimidating, and increasingly collaborative following the implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies. For many students, speaking English in class shifted from a stressful, test-

like experience to one that felt “natural” and “fun” for the first time. For example, Student 15 expressed, “It feels more like a game or project, not a test. That makes me want to speak,” highlighting how AfL activities fostered a playful and motivating atmosphere. Student 1 shared a similar sentiment: “We show our work at the end of the lesson. It feels like a performance, but in a good way,” which reflects increased learner ownership and pride in oral output. Student 17 noted, “Now I look forward to speaking class. Before, I was just waiting for it to finish,” indicating a profound change in attitude and engagement. Enjoyment and active participation are rarely emphasized in state school curricula, where instruction is often driven by summative assessments focused on grammatical accuracy and written skills. AfL strategies, by contrast, reposition learners as active agents in their language development, creating emotionally positive spaces for expression and risk-taking. These affective conditions are crucial for developing speaking fluency but are frequently absent in rigid, exam-oriented classroom environments. The contrast between the first and second focus group interviews is particularly striking: while the initial discussions revealed fear, hesitation, and disengagement, the later sessions showcased empowered, connected, and motivated learners who were increasingly aware of their progress. This shift underscores the transformative power of AfL—not only as a set of teaching practices but also as a catalyst for positive cultural change within Turkish EFL classrooms, where oral communication has traditionally been marginalized.

Characteristic	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2
 Emotional Orientation	Negative emotions	Positive emotions
 Speaking Challenges	Unaddressed challenges	Overcoming challenges
 Motivation & Attitude	External motivation	Intrinsic motivation
 Classroom Interaction	Teacher-centered	Collaborative culture
 Speaking Subskills	General feedback	Specific improvements

Figure 9. The comparison of the 1st & 2nd focus group interviews

4.3 Findings from the Researcher's Journals

The Researcher's Journals played a crucial role throughout the study by providing a space for continuous reflection, self-evaluation, and in-depth analysis of the AfL implementation process. These journals offered valuable qualitative insights that complemented student data and interviews, enabling a comprehensive understanding of classroom dynamics during the application of Assessment for Learning strategies. Through ongoing reflections, emerging challenges, successes, and shifting interactions were documented, offering an insider's perspective essential for the cyclical nature of action research. Observations recorded in the journals highlighted significant changes in student engagement and motivation; initially, many students were hesitant and reluctant to participate in speaking activities due to fear of making mistakes and an exam-focused mindset. However, as AfL practices were introduced, enthusiasm and voluntary participation increased markedly, supported by moments of peer collaboration and constructive feedback that fostered intrinsic motivation and encouraged risk-taking in communication. The journals also captured reflections on the effectiveness of specific AfL techniques such as peer feedback, exit tickets, and group discussions, noting that these approaches contributed not only to linguistic development but also to emotional relief and strengthened social bonds among learners. Challenges such as student resistance to peer correction and inconsistent feedback quality were addressed through ongoing adjustments informed by reflective entries, enhancing the relevance and impact of the activities over time. Documented difficulties like time constraints, diverse proficiency levels, and students' uncertainty in peer assessment roles prompted the use of scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and explicit modeling to overcome obstacles and maintain active involvement. This adaptability underscored the importance of reflective practice in guiding the repetitive cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting inherent in the research process. Additionally, maintaining the Researcher's Journals facilitated personal and professional growth by deepening the researcher's understanding of formative assessment and shifting their

pedagogical approach from teacher-centered to learner-centered. This evolution fostered a more empathetic and responsive teaching practice, aligned with the study's aims to create a collaborative and effective learning environment.

Table 7

Thematic Analysis of the Researcher's Journals

Week	Codes	Theme	AfL Strategies
Week 1	Hesitancy to speak Increased participation through brainstorming Role-playing as confidence booster	Confidence Building through Interactive Activities	Brainstorming, Role-playing, Group Work, Whole-class Discussion, Teacher's Feedback, Self Correction
Week 2	Relevance through experience Speech organization Self-awareness via feedback	Personal Relevance and Cognitive Engagement	Experience Sharing, Concept Mapping, Role-playing, Peer Feedback, Reflective Feedback
Week 3	Goal clarification Dialogue practice Targeted improvement	Goal-Oriented Communication Practice	Group Discussion, Role-playing, Exit Ticket, Peer and Reflective Feedback
Week 4	Cultural sharing Self-regulation via rubrics Awareness through peer feedback	Autonomy and Cultural Awareness through Collaboration	Whole-class Discussion, Process Description, Self-assessment Rubrics, Peer Feedback, Group Reflection
Week 5	Peaceful evaluation Constructive suggestions Motivation via goal setting	Constructive Assessment and Motivation	Brainstorming, Questioning, Peer Assessment, Self-assessment, Goal Setting
Week 6	Interest in digital topics Structured feedback Motivation and self-awareness	Relevance-Driven Engagement and Self-Evaluation	Brainstorming, Peer Feedback, Group Reflection, Peer and Self-assessment, Two Stars and a Wish
Week 7	Organized speaking Metacognitive reflection Peer feedback	Scaffolded Speaking Practice and Reflection	Think-Pair-Share, Peer Feedback, Exit Ticket

Week 8	Greater fluency and confidence Self-led evaluation & motivation Perceived progress	Fluency, Confidence Reflective Autonomy	and	Whole-class Discussion, Small Group Discussion, Peer Feedback, Group and Reflective Feedback
---------------	--	--	-----	--

4.3.1 Confidence Building through Interactive Activities

The teacher-researcher's weekly reflections revealed that students initially exhibited hesitation and self-consciousness when participating in speaking activities. In the first week, several learners reportedly avoided making eye contact, hesitated before answering questions, and demonstrated a limited willingness to engage in open speaking tasks. However, after the structured integration of AfL strategies—such as brainstorming, think-pair-share, role-playing, and whole-class discussions, there were the signs of transformation in classroom dynamics. The teacher observed, “Students began to volunteer more, smiled during activities, and asked clarification questions without fear of making mistakes.” Throughout the eight-week implementation of AfL-integrated lesson plans, a noticeable shift occurred in students' classroom behavior and participation patterns. As the learning environment gradually evolved into a more supportive and student-centered space, learners began to display signs of increased comfort and confidence. For example, students who had previously remained silent or hesitant during speaking tasks started to volunteer more actively, initiating responses without being called upon. Smiling during activities and engaging with greater enthusiasm suggested that learners no longer viewed speaking as a high-stakes performance, but rather as a safe and enjoyable opportunity to practice and grow.

One of the most telling indicators of this change was students' willingness to ask clarification questions, even when unsure or at risk of making a mistake. This shift reflects the internalization of a growth-oriented learning culture, cultivated through continuous peer and teacher feedback, self-reflection, and structured opportunities to engage in low-

pressure speaking tasks. AfL strategies such as peer feedback, self-assessment, and group reflection played a crucial role in reducing the fear of failure and promoting a sense of psychological safety, which in turn empowered students to take communicative risks. This transformation illustrates not only improved engagement, but also the emergence of learner agency, as students increasingly took initiative and ownership of their learning within a collaborative, formative framework.

Role-playing emerged as a key strategy in reducing speaking anxiety. Students were given travel-related scenarios (e.g., checking into a hotel, planning a trip with friends), which allowed them to temporarily step out of their student identity and communicate through imagined roles. This strategy not only made speaking more meaningful but also helped decrease the emotional pressure associated with public performance. The teacher wrote in Week 1, “When they were pretending to be travel agents or tourists, they laughed, made eye contact, and interacted more freely than before.”

Group work and collaborative structures were also repeatedly mentioned as instrumental in lowering the affective filter. According to the teacher’s Week 2 reflection, “students were more comfortable asking their friends questions than directing them to the teacher, which encouraged spontaneous speech.” These peer dynamics enhanced learner comfort, trust, and participation.

Overall, the teacher-researcher’s journals confirm that confidence-building was not an incidental effect, but an intentional goal achieved through well-designed AfL strategies. These strategies created emotionally secure speaking environments where students could experiment with language and gradually build oral competence.

4.3.2 Motivation through Real-Life Relevance and Task-Based Design

Another theme that repeatedly emerged in the researcher's journal was the positive influence of real-world topics and task-based structures on student motivation. The teacher noted that themes such as travel, daily routines, environmental tips, and technology use resonated with students' everyday lives and interests, prompting a higher degree of oral engagement. These real-life topics served not only as conversation triggers but also as entry points for students to connect their lived experiences with classroom content.

For example, in Week 3, which focused on energy-saving habits, the teacher recorded that "students eagerly shared their ideas because they believed these tips mattered in real life." Similarly, in Week 5, when students discussed their favorite technological tools and how they use them, the class witnessed spontaneous code-switching, playful competition, and organic elaboration. The teacher commented, "I did not need to prompt them—the topic carried the lesson forward."

Task-based speaking activities, such as role-plays, interviews, and problem-solving discussions, were particularly effective in boosting learner motivation. When students had a specific goal (e.g., persuading a partner, sharing advice, comparing preferences), they demonstrated more fluent and natural speaking patterns. According to the Week 6 journal entry, "Students were trying to convince each other using phrases they had just learned. The language felt purposeful and playful at the same time."

The teacher's ongoing reflection also revealed that motivation was reinforced when tasks had tangible outcomes—such as performing a role-play in front of peers or completing a collaborative project. These performances were often supported by formative feedback, which further validated students' efforts and encouraged continued participation.

In summary, the Researcher's Journal indicates that motivation increased when language use felt meaningful, relevant, and socially situated. Task-based learning, when aligned with student interests, helped transform speaking from a classroom requirement into a personally significant and enjoyable activity.

4.3.3 Fluency and Strategy Development through Feedback and Reflection

As the action research cycle progressed, the teacher's journal entries began to emphasize a noticeable improvement in students' oral fluency and their growing use of learning strategies. Starting in Week 4, the teacher noted that students were "less hesitant, spoke with fewer pauses, and used more varied vocabulary during paired tasks." These observations coincided with the deliberate implementation of AfL tools designed to support strategic awareness—such as oral rubrics, exit slips, peer correction activities, and reflective feedback tasks.

In Week 6, students participated in a 'Two Stars and a Wish' activity following a group role-play. The teacher recorded that "many students commented on each other's use of linking words, pronunciation, and whether their ideas were clearly expressed." This kind of specific, formative feedback appeared to reinforce the metacognitive dimension of speaking: learners were not just focused on speaking more but speaking better.

Moreover, self-assessment tools gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own growth. One notable journal entry from Week 7 described how students compared their recent performance with their first recorded speech. "They noticed their own improvements in sentence structure and fluency and shared how their thoughts came out more easily," the teacher noted.

The teacher also observed an increase in strategic use of planning and rehearsal. Before speaking tasks, learners were seen using notes, underlining key phrases, or asking peers to rehearse. As noted in Week 8: "Students approached speaking with more preparation—they asked, 'Can we say this?' or 'Is this sentence correct?'—and that changed the quality of the final task." These behaviors demonstrate how feedback mechanisms can cultivate learner autonomy and build transferable communication strategies.

In essence, Theme 3 suggests that AfL techniques do more than enhance language output—they provide tools for students to regulate, refine, and expand their speaking abilities over time. The teacher's reflections show that consistent exposure to feedback and

reflective dialogue enabled learners to internalize quality criteria, take ownership of their speaking performance, and gain greater fluency through purposeful self-monitoring.

4.3.4 Clarity of Progress through Ongoing Assessment

The final theme that emerged from the Researcher's Journal entries centered on the impact of ongoing formative assessment in helping students recognize their own development over time. The teacher frequently reflected on how students responded to AfL strategies that tracked their performance across lessons—particularly self-assessment rubrics, exit slips, and reflective summaries. These tools appeared to heighten learners' metacognitive awareness and helped them visualize their progress.

In Week 7, the teacher wrote, "When students completed their exit tickets, many wrote about how they used new vocabulary correctly or were able to speak longer than before." This kind of post-task reflection allowed students to consolidate what they had learned and to link improvements with specific strategies or classroom moments. Moreover, the exit tickets prompted forward-thinking behavior. In Week 8, one student reportedly wrote, "Next time, I want to improve my linking words." Such goal-setting statements suggest that learners had internalized the continuous nature of improvement.

This growing clarity about individual progress supported a deeper investment in classroom activities. The teacher observed that students were not just more motivated to speak, but more attentive to feedback and more self-directed during pair work. "Students began reviewing the checklist before speaking," she wrote, "as if they were preparing themselves to meet their own goals."

In summary, the Researcher's Journals captured how sustained, strategic AfL implementation helped students develop a clearer understanding of their own growth. Through repeated cycles of reflection, assessment, and feedback, learners began to see themselves not just as participants in tasks, but as active agents in their learning journeys.

4.3.5 Researcher's Reflection

Throughout the action research process, my dual role as both a teacher and a researcher positioned me at the heart of an evolving pedagogical experience. Initially, I approached the implementation of AfL strategies with a sense of cautious optimism. While I believed in the potential of formative practices, I also held lingering concerns about students' readiness and the practicality of sustaining such reflective practices in a performance-oriented classroom culture.

Emotionally, the process was marked by fluctuations. During the early weeks, I experienced a sense of vulnerability as I introduced new strategies such as peer feedback and self-assessment rubrics—tools that required relinquishing a degree of control and trusting learners to take more responsibility. There were moments of doubt when students appeared disengaged or resistant, which led to self-questioning about the effectiveness of the approach.

However, as the weeks progressed, witnessing tangible changes in students' engagement, confidence, and metacognitive awareness gradually reshaped my beliefs. I observed that AfL was not only feasible but transformative when embedded consistently and supportively. These moments of growth—both in students and myself—brought about a shift from teacher-centered delivery to a more dialogic and learner-centered stance.

Practically, the most challenging aspect was integrating time for reflection and feedback within limited lesson durations. Yet, these were also the most rewarding components. The act of journaling weekly allowed me to trace both pedagogical patterns and personal tensions. Over time, these reflections revealed a growing alignment between my professional values and my daily teaching practices.

At the same time, I also faced significant challenges in designing lesson plans that aligned with the Ministry of National Education's curriculum requirements while incorporating AfL strategies in a meaningful way. As the only English teacher in my school, sustaining these plans over an extended period was often exhausting. Although my students expressed

their willingness to continue with such practices, the process demanded considerable time and energy. Balancing institutional expectations, curriculum mandates, and innovative assessment practices made this journey particularly demanding, highlighting the realities of implementing action research within a resource-limited school context.

Ultimately, the action research journey strengthened my belief in responsive, evidence-informed pedagogy. It showed me that AfL is not simply a toolkit but a mindset—one that values learners' voices, empowers their agency, and challenges the teacher to grow alongside them.

4.4 Findings from the Students' Weekly Reflections

This section presents the thematic analysis of the students' weekly reflections collected throughout the eight-week action research cycle. Drawing upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis, the qualitative data in this study were systematically analyzed to identify meaningful patterns related to students' spoken English development and their responses to Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies. The first step, *familiarisation with the data*, involved reading and re-reading the focus group transcripts, weekly reflections, and lesson plans to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. During this stage, initial impressions and recurring ideas were noted. The second step, *generating initial codes*, consisted of systematically highlighting significant features of the data, such as emotional reactions, learning behaviors, and classroom experiences, and assigning concise labels (codes) to them. In the third step, *searching for themes*, related codes were grouped together under broader conceptual categories that captured repeated patterns of meaning across participants. This led to the fourth step, *reviewing themes*, where the coherence of each theme was checked both within and across the data sources, ensuring that they accurately represented the coded extracts and the overall dataset. The fifth step, *defining and naming themes*, required refining the scope and focus of each theme and articulating what made each theme distinct, including how it related to

the research questions. Finally, in the sixth step, *producing the report*, the themes were woven into a coherent narrative, supported by vivid and representative student quotations. This rigorous and recursive approach allowed for a deep exploration of learners' voices and enabled the findings to be grounded in the lived experiences of participants; reflections were analyzed to identify recurring patterns of meaning from the learners' perspectives. The themes emerging from the students' voices not only complement the teacher-researcher's observations but also illuminate how the implementation of AfL strategies affected learners' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in oral English tasks.

Table 8
Thematic Analysis of the Students' Weekly Reflections

Weeks	Codes	Main Themes
1	Anxiety reduction	Emotional Safety and Motivation
2	Collaborative learning	Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback
3	Reflection and retention	Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve
4	Learner responsibility	Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity
5	Constructive feedback	Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback
6	Noticing progress	Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve
7	Self-awareness	Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve
8	Personal growth	Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity

4.4.1 Emotional Safety and Motivation

In the initial stages of the study, many students described intense feelings of anxiety when speaking English, particularly in front of the whole class. Student 1 explained, "My hands would shake when the teacher asked me to speak. I just hoped someone else would answer." Student 2 shared, "Even if I knew the answer, I didn't speak because I thought I'd

pronounce it wrong and others would laugh.” For several learners, the act of speaking was not just academically challenging, but emotionally overwhelming. Student 3 wrote, “I used to read quietly so I wouldn’t be chosen to speak. I always sat at the back.”

However, as the AfL-integrated speaking lessons progressed, students began to report a gradual but meaningful shift in how they felt about participating. Student 4 reflected, “In group work, I don’t feel ashamed. I know we are all learning.” Student 5 noted, “Now I speak more because my friends also make mistakes. It’s normal.” Some students shared that peer feedback gave them confidence, with Student 6 saying, “My partner said I explained well, and that made me want to talk more next time.” Others described the positive emotional effect of teacher feedback, such as Student 7: “The teacher didn’t stop me when I made a mistake. She let me finish. That helped me speak freely.”

As confidence grew, so did participation. Student 8, who previously stayed silent, explained, “Now I raise my hand. I still get nervous, but I want to try.” Student 9 added, “I asked a question in English for the first time. I wasn’t scared.” Smiling during tasks, volunteering without prompting, and initiating questions became common indicators of students’ increased emotional comfort. Student 10 wrote, “Speaking is fun now. It’s not like before, when it felt like a test every time.”

These reflections demonstrate that emotional transformation did not happen suddenly, but through repeated experiences of being listened to, not judged, and receiving support from both peers and the teacher. As Student 11 summarized: “This is the first time I feel like I can speak English without fear.”

4.4.2 Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback

As learners gradually developed emotional confidence through supportive and low-pressure speaking environments, they also began to report measurable improvements in specific areas of their spoken English—particularly in pronunciation, vocabulary use,

fluency, and grammatical accuracy. These improvements were closely tied to repeated engagement in formative feedback activities such as peer reviews, group reflections, and targeted teacher input. For example, Student 1 shared in Week 4, “When my classmate told me I said a word wrong, I didn’t feel bad. I just tried again and said it better.” Student 2 noted in Week 6, “The feedback from my group helps me correct my grammar without feeling embarrassed.”

Students often emphasized that the act of receiving and applying feedback—rather than simply being corrected—contributed to deeper learning. Student 3 explained, “The teacher told me I used the wrong tense, but she let me finish first and then explained. That helped me remember it better.” Similarly, Student 4 shared, “When my friend corrected my sentence, it stayed in my mind more than when I read it in a book.”

The influence of group-based practice was also apparent. Student 5 wrote, “We repeated the same phrases in our group activity, so now I say them more fluently.” Student 6 commented, “Role plays helped me speak faster and use more words without stopping.” A few students highlighted vocabulary gains, such as Student 7, who said, “I used new words we learned because I heard my group using them, too.”

Importantly, the feedback students received was not perceived as punitive or evaluative, but as constructive and encouraging, which made them more receptive to correction. This shift from fear of error to engagement with improvement reflects a core function of AfL strategies—creating a space where learning is a visible, collaborative process. Student 8 summarized this change by stating, “Before, I just guessed in speaking. Now, I try to speak correctly because I know how to improve.”

By Week 8, many students had begun to express greater control and intentionality in their speaking. Rather than speaking passively or reluctantly, they described making deliberate choices about how to express themselves. Student 9 put it simply, “Now I think about how I say things, not just what I say.”

4.4.3 Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve

By the middle of the research cycle, students' written reflections revealed clear evidence of metacognitive engagement, including self-monitoring and goal-setting behaviors. These developments indicated not only a growing awareness of their speaking performance but also a shift toward independent regulation of language use. For example, Student 1 wrote in Week 8, "Now I check myself when I speak. I ask, did I say that right? Can I say it better?" Similarly, Student 2 shared, "Feedback helps me to set goals. I try to fix one thing each time I speak."

Several students described how they began consciously tracking their own improvement over time. Student 3 reflected, "At first, I only thought about finishing the sentence. Now I think about how I sound and what I can change." This awareness was also evident in Student 4's note: "If I get the same feedback twice, I write it down and try to focus on that next time." These responses demonstrate that learners were not simply receiving feedback but actively using it to guide their future performance, an essential feature of Assessment for Learning.

Some students even created personal speaking goals, either informally or with teacher support. Student 5 wrote, "This week I tried to use more transition words. Next week, I want to work on my pronunciation." Student 6 added, "When I get a suggestion, I don't forget it. I try to do better in the next speaking activity."

This emerging self-regulatory behavior shows that AfL strategies such as peer feedback, self-assessment checklists, and individual goal-setting templates not only supported speaking skill development but also fostered autonomous learning habits. Students moved from passive recipients of feedback to active agents in their own growth. As Student 7 explained, "Before, I waited for the teacher to tell me how I did. Now, I already know what I need to improve."

4.4.4 Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity

In the final weeks of the study, a meaningful transformation was observed in the way students described their relationship with spoken English. Reflections increasingly included affirming, ability-based statements—often using “can”—indicating a growing sense of self-efficacy and ownership. Students began to view themselves not just as learners of English, but as capable speakers. For example, Student 1 wrote in Week 8, “I never thought I could speak like this. Now I feel like someone who can really use English.” Similarly, Student 2 shared, “Before, speaking was for the teacher. Now it is for me, to express my thoughts.”

This shift in self-perception was echoed by others. Student 3 reflected, “I used to say ‘I don’t know English.’ Now I say ‘I can speak a little and I’m learning more.’” Student 4 stated, “I can give my opinion now. It may not be perfect, but I can do it.” For many, this turning point was not only increased participation but a change in mindset—from performance anxiety to communicative intent.

These reflections demonstrate how student-centered feedback practices, including peer comments, self-assessment, and open classroom dialogue, promoted positive identity formation. Rather than defining their ability based on grammatical correctness or test performance, students began to identify with the communicative purpose of language learning. Student 5 wrote, “When we do speaking activities, I feel like someone who actually uses English—not just someone learning it.” This highlights how formative assessment, when consistently and meaningfully implemented, can lead to not only linguistic development but also psychological empowerment.

By the end of the research cycle, the language students used to describe themselves had evolved significantly. Early reflections focused on fear, silence, and avoidance, while later entries conveyed confidence, agency, and a sense of belonging in the language-learning process. As Student 6 succinctly put it, “Now I can say: I am someone who speaks English.”

The weekly reflections provided critical insights into the lived experiences of EFL learners navigating an AfL-integrated classroom. These personal narratives illuminated how formative assessment strategies influenced not only what students learned, but also how they felt, behaved, and positioned themselves within the learning process. From initial anxiety and self-doubt to later confidence, goal setting, and a sense of capability, the reflections charted a developmental journey shaped by sustained exposure to supportive and interactive practices. The themes that emerged—ranging from emotional reassurance and peer solidarity to linguistic growth and metacognitive awareness—demonstrate that AfL created a classroom climate where learners could thrive both affectively and academically.

Importantly, these reflections revealed that formative assessment strategies did not merely enhance short-term classroom performance or task completion. Rather, they contributed to a deeper transformation in how students understood and related to language learning. Learners began to internalize a growth mindset, take ownership of their development, and engage more willingly in meaningful communication. Most notably, they started to see themselves not as passive recipients of instruction, but as competent and evolving English speakers. This shift in learner identity—from hesitant participant to active communicator—highlights the transformative potential of AfL when implemented with intentionality and care. The reflections thus provide powerful evidence that formative assessment, grounded in empathy and structure, can reorient learners' trajectories, not only by improving what they can do, but by reshaping who they believe they are becoming in the language classroom.

4.5 Findings from the AfL Integrated Lesson Plans

The eight-week lesson plans developed for this study served not only as pedagogical frameworks but also as dynamic platforms for the integration of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Implemented in a

public Anatolian high school where students receive four hours of English instruction per week, these plans were systematically applied during two of the four weekly hours over the course of eight consecutive weeks. Each lesson was designed in alignment with the official curriculum and learning outcomes determined by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE), ensuring pedagogical and institutional coherence while embedding formative assessment practices.

Rather than treating the eight-week period as a single instructional unit, the lesson plans were designed and analyzed on a weekly basis, with each week incorporating distinct AfL strategies—such as peer feedback, self-assessment, exit tickets, group reflection, and role-play activities. These strategies were purposefully selected and adapted to the weekly communicative objectives, allowing for varied and responsive instructional delivery. The evolving nature of the plans enabled the teacher to refine techniques in real time, responding to learners' emerging needs and engagement patterns.

A thematic analysis was conducted on these lesson plans, treating each week as an individual data point. Through systematic coding of instructional goals, planned activities, teacher reflections, and embedded AfL components, a range of themes was identified that pointed to recurring instructional intentions and patterns of classroom interaction. This approach allowed for a granular examination of how different AfL strategies functioned in practice and contributed to both spoken language development and student motivation over time.

The analysis revealed that carefully scaffolded and consistently applied AfL strategies transformed the classroom from a traditionally exam-focused, teacher-centered environment into a more interactive and learner-responsive space. Importantly, the integration of AfL was not treated as an add-on or isolated set of techniques but as an organic part of instruction, woven seamlessly into the design and execution of each lesson. This structured yet flexible planning process provided students with repeated opportunities

for reflection, self-regulation, and collaborative engagement, which are often absent in typical EFL classrooms in the Turkish context.

Table 9

Thematic Analysis of the AfL Integrated Lesson Plans

Weeks	Codes	Main Themes
1	Activating prior knowledge & building confidence	Emotional Safety and Motivation
2	Speaking practice in context	Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback
3	Mini production and reflection	Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve
4	Dual reflection	Metacognitive Awareness and Motivation to Improve
5	Process talk and individual evaluation	Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity
6	Targeted peer evaluation	Skill Development through Peer Learning and Feedback
7	Partner-based feedback	Emotional Safety and Motivation
8	Public sharing and private reflection	Ownership of Learning and Speaker Identity

4.5.1 Learner Engagement and Motivation

A consistent theme observed across the eight-week instructional cycle was a marked increase in student engagement and intrinsic motivation. The AfL-integrated lesson plans intentionally included elements that encouraged active participation through collaborative and meaningful interaction. For instance, Week 1 introduced brainstorming and think-pair-share activities under the theme of “Travel,” which invited students to recall and share their own experiences in a safe, peer-supported context. This approach activated students' affective schemas and lowered performance anxiety by establishing a familiar and relevant

communicative context. This weekly alignment of content, strategy, and student interest helped build a momentum of emotional connection to language tasks.

AfL strategies that allowed for personal voice—such as exit reflections and peer-to-peer sharing—resonated with students' desire to be seen and heard in the classroom space. students' engagement is strongly shaped by their understanding of the tasks applied and opportunities for collaborative construction of meaning. The lesson plans incorporated these principles through the deliberate integration of diverse Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies into classroom activities that aligned with both the weekly communicative goals and EFL learning outcomes. For instance, peer feedback was implemented through structured pair work and small group speaking tasks, where students provided each other with constructive comments using simple feedback frames such as “I liked...” and “Next time, try...”. These frames were introduced and modeled by the teacher to ensure clarity and reduce anxiety, thereby creating a supportive peer assessment environment.

Self-assessment was another key component, often embedded at the end of tasks through reflective checklists and simple rating scales. Students evaluated their own speaking performance based on criteria such as fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. These tools encouraged learners to take ownership of their progress and to identify areas for improvement, reinforcing metacognitive awareness.

Exit tickets were used regularly as a means of gathering student reflections on the day's speaking activities. These were short written responses to prompts like “What did I learn today?” or “What was difficult for me in speaking today?”. This strategy provided immediate formative data for the teacher while promoting learner reflection and goal setting.

Group reflection sessions were conducted weekly, usually at the end of the second lesson hour. During these sessions, students discussed in small groups what they had learned, what helped them, and what they still found challenging. These discussions were

sometimes guided by prompts or sentence starters to facilitate meaningful dialogue and shared understanding.

Finally, role-play activities were frequently utilized to simulate real-life communicative situations, such as ordering food, expressing opinions, or making suggestions. These tasks not only allowed students to apply language in context but also provided opportunities for teacher feedback during and after the activity, with an emphasis on fluency and clarity over grammatical perfection.

By embedding these AfL strategies into a variety of speaking-focused activities, the lesson plans operationalized formative assessment in a way that was both pedagogically coherent and responsive to students' linguistic and emotional needs. This practical integration ensured that AfL principles were not abstract concepts, but lived experiences that shaped classroom interactions and supported spoken language development.

ns that incorporated these principles created a socially and emotionally responsive environment that enhanced motivation and willingness to communicate.

The lesson plans also scaffolded engagement by escalating task complexity gradually. Earlier weeks introduced simpler forms of peer collaboration and oral interaction, while later weeks embedded more sophisticated tasks, such as group presentations and argumentative speaking. This progressive structure fostered a sustained sense of purpose and emotional ownership over one's learning.

4.5.2 Functional Speaking and Real-World Application

Another prominent theme evident in the lesson plans was the focus on purposeful language use and the simulation of real-life communication. Each week included role-playing tasks rooted in everyday scenarios—making hotel reservations, giving sustainability advice, participating in interviews, or discussing technology preferences. These carefully designed activities encouraged students to take an active role in meaningful, real-life communication

scenarios. Through these context-based speaking tasks, students were able to develop their ability to use language appropriately in different situations—also known as pragmatic fluency—while benefiting from step-by-step guidance and feedback provided by both their classmates and the teacher. This theme emerged as the lesson plans repeatedly used AfL strategies—such as peer rubrics and feedback checklists—that required students to reflect on language use in action.

Moreover, these purposeful speaking opportunities were linked to observable increases in learner confidence, as students began to view English not just as a subject, but as a tool for expressing ideas and engaging with others. When learners are given meaningful and structured speaking goals, they are more likely to internalize both linguistic forms and communicative strategies.

The functional aspect of these speaking tasks refers to their emphasis on real-world language use, where students are not merely producing grammatically correct sentences but are engaging in purposeful communication. Each task was designed to reflect a communicative function—such as making requests, giving opinions, expressing agreement or disagreement, or asking for clarification—allowing students to practice how English is used in everyday social interactions. Rather than focusing solely on form or isolated vocabulary, these tasks required learners to convey meaning, respond appropriately to others, and achieve communicative goals within a given context. This focus on function helped students develop not only fluency but also a deeper understanding of how language operates in authentic situations. It also encouraged students to draw on other skills—negotiation, turn-taking, clarification requests—thus contributing to their overall communicative competence. Over the course of eight weeks, this resulted in more fluid exchanges, increased lexical variety, and improved turn management.

4.5.3 Metacognitive Closure and Reflective Thinking

The most nuanced theme observed in the lesson plan design was the emphasis on metacognition—supporting students in thinking about their own learning. Week after week, the plans included reflective components: exit tickets that prompted students to articulate what they had learned, self-assessment rubrics to evaluate spoken output, and collaborative goal setting to plan for the next lesson. These strategies did not occur in isolation; rather, they formed a pattern of closure that helped consolidate learning while encouraging self-regulation.

By Week 8, students were not only using language in meaningful ways, but also describing their own strengths and areas for growth. Lesson plans supported this development by gradually building more sophisticated tools for learner reflection. These activities contributed to closing the Assessment for Learning (AfL) loop not merely by assessing whether students had understood the lesson content, but by going a step further to promote a mindset focused on continuous improvement. Through the use of self-assessment tools, peer feedback sessions, and reflective group discussions, students were encouraged to view learning as an ongoing process rather than a final product. This approach helped foster a growth mindset, where mistakes were seen as learning opportunities, and success was defined in terms of effort and progress. At the same time, learners began to develop a sense of ownership over their development, as they actively participated in setting goals, monitoring their performance, and identifying areas for improvement. In this way, AfL strategies shifted the role of assessment from external judgment to internal empowerment, making students more engaged and responsible for their own learning journey. Moreover, the lesson plans emphasized that metacognitive closure should be student-led rather than teacher-directed. Rather than asking, "What did you learn today?", students were prompted to answer more open-ended reflection questions such as, "What surprised you about your speaking today?" or "What would you do differently next time?" These reflective prompts

fostered deeper cognitive processing and enhanced the internalization of speaking strategies.

4.5.4 Formative Assessment as Instructional Design

A final overarching theme derived from the lesson plan analysis was the strategic placement of AfL tools as an integral part of the instructional sequence—not as add-ons, but as central, guiding components. Rather than assessing speaking after it occurred, the lesson plans embedded assessment as a process: peer observation during speaking, real-time feedback during group work, and structured revision activities following role-play.

As seen in the Week 4 and Week 6 lesson plans, formative feedback moments were interwoven with speaking activities, enabling immediate scaffolding and adjustment. According to Brookhart (2017), assessment embedded in real-time learning fosters deeper understanding and encourages students to see feedback as an opportunity rather than a judgment.

Importantly, the plans anticipated learner responses by building in opportunities for adaptation. Teacher reflection notes included in the planning documents revealed areas where tasks were adjusted based on observed difficulties. This observation-based manner adopted reflects the flexibility required in both AfL and action research contexts.

Lesson plans also treated formative assessment as a dialogue rather than a verdict. The use of comment-based rubrics, peer scoring with justifications, and verbal feedback exchanges encouraged learners to co-construct meaning and take part in evaluating their progress. This design principle aligns with the social-constructivist foundations of AfL, where assessment is viewed as an interactive and participatory process.

The thematic analysis of the lesson plans demonstrates that when formative assessment is woven into the structure of language instruction—rather than appended to the end—it serves as a catalyst for meaningful learning. Through motivating tasks, contextualized

speaking goals, structured reflection, and embedded feedback, the lesson plans operationalized the core tenets of Assessment for Learning in a way that directly supported students' spoken English development. Additionally, this analysis reaffirms that lesson planning is not simply a procedural act, but a pedagogical strategy capable of shaping learner experiences, outcomes, and identities in the EFL classroom.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the study's findings, structured around the central research questions that guided the investigation. Drawing extensively on the qualitative data collected through student reflections, focus group interviews, and researcher's journals, the discussion critically connects empirical results with existing literature on Assessment for Learning (AfL) and spoken language development in EFL contexts. The aim is to elucidate how AfL strategies influence learners' emotional experiences, motivation, metacognitive awareness, and oral proficiency, particularly within the specific cultural and educational setting of Turkish high schools. Each section systematically interprets findings considering relevant theoretical frameworks and prior research, highlighting consistencies, contradictions, and unique contextual factors. By situating the data within a broader academic discourse, this discussion not only validates the study's contributions but also identifies implications for practice and future research.

5.1 RQ.1: Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies increase EFL learners' motivation to speak?

The findings from all four data sources—focus group interviews, researcher's journals, student reflections, and lesson plans—indicate a clear and consistent increase in students' motivation to speak English throughout the eight-week intervention. Thematic analysis revealed that motivation did not arise as a one-time reaction to a novel instructional method, but evolved progressively as learners experienced the emotional and pedagogical benefits of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies. These findings are congruent with the claim that AfL promotes motivation by increasing learners' sense of purpose, ownership, and safety in the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Carless, 2007).

In Week 1, the theme “Confidence Building through Interactive Activities” emerged strongly in both journals and student reflections. Students expressed that interactive, low-stakes tasks such as brainstorming, icebreakers, and guided role-plays encouraged them to participate verbally in ways that traditional drills did not. Student 1 reflected, “Peer collaboration encouraged me to speak English. I was not afraid because we were all trying.” Similarly, in the first focus group interview, Student 6 shared, “Speaking is easier when we do it in a group; I don't feel judged.” These remarks echo the findings of Atay and Kurt (2006), who emphasized that peer-based collaborative activities lower speaking anxiety and create a socially supportive learning environment—key factors for promoting communicative engagement. Furthermore, this supports Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of social interaction in the development of higher-order functions such as language. The group-based interaction embedded within AfL not only provided scaffolding but also positioned learners as co-constructors of knowledge, which in turn increased their confidence to speak.

By Week 2, motivation was not only sustained but appeared to deepen as learners encountered tasks with personal and cultural relevance. The theme “Personal Relevance and Cognitive Engagement” highlighted how speaking tasks that drew upon students' own

lives—such as experience sharing and concept mapping—stimulated intrinsic motivation. Student 3 wrote, “Talking about my own experiences made me want to participate more. It felt like my voice mattered.” Research by Khan et al. (2021) supports this link, arguing that content that is personally and culturally resonant increases willingness to communicate by connecting the language to the learner’s lived reality. These reflections suggest that AfL can function not only as a mechanism for skill improvement but also as a tool for affective engagement. From a motivational standpoint, this corresponds with the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation. Tasks that center student voice and personal experience align with these psychological needs, thus enhancing engagement from within rather than relying on external incentives.

As the intervention progressed, Week 4’s theme—“Autonomy and Cultural Awareness through Collaboration”—marked a further shift in the learners’ motivational orientation. Students described enjoying activities where they shared cultural traditions, engaged in peer feedback, and participated in self-assessment using simplified CEFR-aligned rubrics. For example, Student 10 stated, “I liked how we shared about festivals from our countries; it made me feel more connected and motivated to speak.” This supports the view of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2017), who emphasize that motivation is sustained when learners experience agency, personal relevance, and peer recognition. In the researcher’s journal for that week, it was noted: “Students seemed proud when talking about cultural practices. The classroom became a space of sharing, not just performance.” This transformation signals a move from extrinsic, compliance-based participation—often characteristic of exam-driven contexts such as Türkiye’s national education system—toward a more intrinsically driven, socially grounded motivation to communicate. The cultural dimension of these tasks also appears to have supported the emergence of language learner identity, an often neglected but crucial factor in sustained oral engagement (Norton, 2013).

The second focus group interview further reinforced these findings, particularly the role of teacher and peer feedback in creating motivation. Student 5 explained, “Teacher feedback helped me see my progress, which made me want to try harder.” Similarly, Student 12 shared, “When my friend said I improved, I felt excited to talk again.” These reflections align with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick’s (2006) model of formative feedback, where feedback that is timely, non-evaluative, and growth-oriented contributes directly to increased learner engagement and motivation. In AfL, feedback is not merely corrective but developmental, helping learners track their progress and set realistic, personal learning goals. Feedback becomes dialogic—supporting what Sadler (1989) terms “closing the gap” between current and desired performance. Moreover, such feedback encourages a future-oriented mindset, which helps students build a positive, sustained relationship with learning rather than viewing language tasks as isolated or punitive events.

Weekly reflections also captured the emotional and motivational momentum built across the cycle. By Week 6, several students had begun to voluntarily speak in classroom activities without prompting. Student 14 noted, “Now I want to speak first. I feel like I can say something useful.” The teacher journal for the same week recorded: “Students are visibly more eager to participate, and some ask to redo parts to improve. This self-driven engagement was rare before the intervention.” These behavioral shifts represent a move from compliance-driven participation to ownership-based engagement, which is one of the most powerful indicators of motivational transformation in EFL contexts (Lamb, 2017). This autonomy-oriented engagement was also observable in students’ proactive responses to feedback, willingness to self-correct, and increased classroom presence—behaviors that signal not only enhanced motivation but also emerging metacognitive awareness.

Taken together, these findings suggest that AfL strategies were instrumental in reducing learners’ fear of judgment, increasing their sense of competence, and connecting classroom tasks with personal meaning. The motivational change was cumulative and self-reinforcing, enhanced by repeated positive experiences of peer interaction, supportive

feedback, and task relevance. Furthermore, these results are not only consistent with recent research in second language motivation (Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009), but also reinforce the idea that formative assessment, when integrated thoughtfully and systematically, creates the emotional and pedagogical conditions necessary for sustained oral engagement. Importantly, in the context of Turkish secondary education—where language instruction is often constrained by rigid curricula and summative assessment pressures—these findings demonstrate that AfL can offer a practical, research-informed pathway toward rehumanizing the language classroom. Through careful design and empathetic delivery, AfL practices transformed not only what students did, but how they felt, thought, and positioned themselves within the learning process.

5.2 RQ.2: If Yes, How Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners' Motivation to Speak?

The findings across data sources indicate that AfL strategies influenced EFL learners' motivation to speak through four interrelated pathways: emotional safety, cognitive relevance, goal orientation, and peer-supported progress. These mechanisms emerged gradually over the eight-week intervention, producing a sustained and multi-dimensional motivational effect. As motivation in language learning is shaped by emotional, cognitive, and social dynamics (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2017), AfL's flexible, student-centered structure allowed learners to internalize ownership and agency within classroom speaking tasks.

The foundation of motivation in this study was laid through the creation of an emotionally safe classroom environment. In Week 1, the theme “Confidence Building through Interactive Activities” consistently highlighted how AfL strategies—especially pair work, group speaking games, and peer-led role plays—reduced performance anxiety. In reflections and focus group responses, learners described a marked shift in their comfort levels. Student 2 noted, “AfL strategies reduced my speaking anxiety in public.” Similarly, Student 7 shared, “When we do speaking in groups, I feel more relaxed. I know my friends

will not laugh.” This shift underscores the role of affective variables in second language acquisition and affirms that psychological readiness precedes cognitive engagement. In the Turkish EFL context—where summative exams and teacher-fronted recitation dominate classroom discourse—such safe, dialogic spaces are rare, and therefore their motivational impact is magnified.

Emotional safety is also a precondition for willingness to communicate, as learners are more likely to initiate speech when they perceive the environment as non-threatening (MacIntyre et al., 1998). AfL strategies allowed learners to “try out” their language with scaffolding, rather than fearing immediate correction or evaluation. This redefinition of classroom participation—from performance for evaluation to contribution in community—enabled students to speak more authentically, with less concern for failure. Notably, it also opened a space where students’ silence was no longer interpreted as resistance or lack of ability, but as an affective state responsive to context—one that AfL actively addressed.

By Week 2, students’ motivational narratives began to shift from emotional to cognitive engagement, particularly when speaking tasks were tied to their personal experiences. The theme “Personal Relevance and Cognitive Engagement” emerged in both journal entries and student reflections. Student 3 stated, “When we talked about our families and culture, I wanted to speak more because it was personal.” Student 9 similarly expressed, “I enjoy it more when the topics are about things in my life.” These examples reveal how learners’ sense of voice and identity became integrated with speaking performance.

These reflections reflect the impact of contextualized learning, where cognitive relevance fosters sustained engagement (Ushioda, 2011; Khan et al., 2021). When tasks connect to learners’ identities and lived realities, they shift from being passive participants to active agents. AfL, by allowing room for student voice and task personalization, provided the cognitive “hook” that anchored language use in meaning rather than mechanical accuracy. This is particularly relevant in the Turkish context, where many state curricula treat speaking as a skill to be “practiced if time allows,” often disconnected from real-world

application. The alignment of tasks with learners' experiences contributed to a stronger investment in the learning process—a motivational construct emphasized in Norton's (2013) work on identity and language learning.

From Week 3 onward, students demonstrated an increasing awareness of their learning trajectories, supported by the regular use of exit tickets, self-assessment rubrics, and weekly reflections. The Week 3 theme "Goal-Oriented Communication Practice" captured this motivational shift. Student 4 reflected, "Exit tickets helped me see what to improve and made me want to try harder." Similarly, Student 11 stated, "Each week, I try to do one thing better. Last week I focused on fluency, this week on new vocabulary."

This evidence supports Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning model, in which learners set goals, monitor performance, and reflect on their progress. These are not passive outcomes but signs of *agency in learning*, which is rarely cultivated in exam-centric systems. By embedding AfL tools that foregrounded formative, low-stakes evaluation, the classroom became a site of learner-directed improvement rather than teacher-driven correction. Furthermore, these tools addressed a common weakness in traditional EFL settings—the absence of a structured feedback loop that helps students understand and act upon their linguistic gaps (Carless, 2007; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). The fact that students began to differentiate their goals (fluency, vocabulary, accuracy) demonstrates the potential of AfL to scaffold not only output but also the *thinking behind the speaking*.

Finally, the impact of peer-supported progress became evident by Week 5, with the theme "Constructive Peer Assessment and Motivation." Learners described peer feedback not as evaluative or judgmental, but as a source of reassurance, collaboration, and growth. Student 5 explained, "Peaceful peer evaluation helped me feel more comfortable speaking." Student 13 added, "When my friend said I improved, I was more excited to talk next time." This sense of peer validation is especially valuable in Turkish secondary schools, where speaking is rarely practiced collaboratively and feedback is traditionally

one-directional—from teacher to student. AfL, by legitimizing peer-to-peer support, introduced a new dynamic into the classroom culture: that of horizontal learning.

Such findings echo Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) assertion that peer feedback supports both cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning. In AfL contexts, peers are not merely observers but co-constructors of learning, reinforcing motivation through shared accountability and encouragement. This collaborative atmosphere fostered a positive motivational climate, one in which learners began to take communicative risks without fear of social sanction. It also fulfilled the "relatedness" component of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), emphasizing that motivation flourishes in contexts where learners feel socially connected and emotionally supported.

What sets these mechanisms apart is their interconnected nature: emotional safety made cognitive engagement possible; relevance supported goal setting; and peer feedback reinforced both task value and learner confidence. The motivational change observed in this study was not based on novelty or external rewards, but on the internalization of progress through structured feedback, personalized tasks, and collaborative dialogue. By the end of the eight-week cycle, learners were not simply more willing to speak—they were actively seeking opportunities to speak, a fundamental indicator of sustained motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2017). In other words, AfL practices did not merely increase classroom participation, they transformed the very *reasons* why learners wanted to participate.

AfL's effectiveness, then, lies in its ability to humanize assessment, repositioning it as a motivational tool rather than a judgmental force. This finding is especially significant in the Turkish EFL context, where standardized testing and teacher-centered instruction often dominate (Kırkgöz, 2009). Within such a system, AfL offers a counter-narrative grounded in learner voice, feedback, and progressive improvement, aligning closely with the motivational dimensions highlighted in this study. These results suggest that when implemented with fidelity, AfL can challenge the culture of silence and passivity in

speaking classrooms, allowing learners to reframe their identity—not as “test-takers” but as capable communicators. In this sense, AfL serves not just as a strategy, but as a pedagogy of motivation, designed to unlock participation from the inside out.

5.3 RQ.3: Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners’ Spoken Skills?

The thematic analysis across multiple data sources confirms that Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies not only contributed to enhanced motivation but also directly supported the development of EFL learners’ spoken skills—particularly in areas such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, and interactional competence. This development was not immediate or superficial; rather, it evolved through sustained and recursive engagement with formative practices that were explicitly designed to elicit student speech in meaningful, supportive, and feedback-rich contexts. Through repeated exposure to speaking-focused AfL tools, learners began to reposition themselves as more autonomous communicators capable of evaluating, monitoring, and adjusting their language use. The progression was particularly visible in students’ metacognitive awareness and self-reflections, which gradually shifted from affective reactions to linguistic precision and communicative intent.

In Week 1, the theme “Confidence Building through Interactive Activities” laid the groundwork for both emotional readiness and foundational spoken output. Though learners initially exhibited high levels of anxiety, low-stakes interactive tasks such as brainstorming, peer-led discussions, and structured dialogues enabled them to engage with the speaking process without the fear of failure. These tasks promoted exploratory talk, which Mercer (2000) identifies as a critical precursor to language development in collaborative settings. While the primary gains during this phase were affective, such affective readiness is not incidental—it is a fundamental condition for language emergence, particularly in contexts like Türkiye’s test-driven system where fear of error

often silences learners. Student 2's account illustrates how linguistic risk-taking emerged not through direct instruction, but through a psychologically safe communicative environment. The correlation between affective safety and linguistic experimentation aligns with Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, both of which emphasize the mediating role of social interaction in language acquisition.

By Week 5, the theme "Constructive Peer Assessment and Motivation" revealed how AfL strategies matured into more targeted mechanisms for spoken development. The shift from general participation to structured feedback signals a pedagogical transition from exposure to deliberate practice. Students were not only speaking more but also speaking with a purpose: to receive feedback, reflect, and try again. This process—embedded in tools like sentence frames and peer-assessment checklists—enhanced learners' noticing skills (Schmidt, 1990), a crucial factor in improving pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. Importantly, the peer feedback did not replicate teacher correction but offered an alternative social route for linguistic reflection. Student 6 and Student 9's reflections suggest that feedback in this context was both affectively supportive and cognitively useful, reinforcing the importance of interpersonal scaffolding in spoken language development. The ability to correct errors collaboratively without embarrassment is particularly significant in collectivist cultures, where public correction can threaten face and inhibit participation.

In Week 6, the theme "Relevance-Driven Engagement and Self-Evaluation" further deepened the learners' engagement with the structural elements of their speech. The use of strategies like "Two Stars and a Wish" supported both giver and receiver in articulating specific feedback related to pronunciation, coherence, and vocabulary. These tools operationalized abstract concepts like clarity and cohesion into observable, actionable components. Student 8's comment shows that peer feedback evolved from vague praise to precise observations, a shift that signals not only cognitive development but also a growing

sense of linguistic agency. These findings echo Andrade and Brookhart's (2020) assertion that student-friendly assessment structures can simultaneously promote linguistic competence and build assessment literacy, a rarely cultivated dimension in secondary EFL settings. The continuous nature of AfL tools allowed students to engage in self-regulated learning cycles where feedback was not terminal but developmental.

In Week 7, this process became increasingly student led. Learners began actively seeking feedback, requesting additional speaking time, and self-correcting based on prior input. The researcher's journal notes provide key observational data that confirm a pedagogical turning point: speaking became a site for performance *and* reflection. This aligns with Ellis's (2003) framework of task-based language teaching, where speaking fluency is enhanced through cycles of planning, execution, and retrospective adjustment. These recursive cycles promoted not only improved fluency and lexical retrieval but also greater control over output. The emergence of self-initiated correction and voluntary re-performance suggests that learners had internalized the principles of formative improvement and began viewing themselves as legitimate participants in the speaking process—not just as language learners performing for assessment, but as interlocutors capable of managing their own linguistic growth.

By Week 8, the final theme— “Fluency, Confidence, and Reflective Autonomy”— provided evidence of how repeated AfL-based speaking opportunities culminated in a more strategic and self-aware speaker identity. Student 10 and Student 12's remarks indicate that learners were no longer merely reacting to tasks but approaching them with intentional strategies. The ability to “speak for longer without stopping” reflects not only lexical and syntactic control but also increased discourse management, an advanced skill in the CEFR's spoken production and interaction descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020). The depth and specificity of students' reflections at this stage suggest that AfL had moved beyond surface-level gains to influence deeper layers of oral competence, including turn-taking, coherence, and pragmatic awareness. Such progression is particularly noteworthy

in contexts where speaking is traditionally neglected or treated as peripheral to language assessment.

A critical feature of AfL's success in this study lies in its cyclical and responsive design. Unlike summative assessments, which provide delayed and static evaluations, AfL tools allowed for immediate, task-embedded feedback loops that made learning visible and actionable. Lesson plans intentionally scaffolded tasks from controlled to freer production, creating a trajectory of increasing linguistic independence. These pedagogical decisions were not only aligned with best practices in communicative language teaching but were also tailored to maximize the utility of formative data. This ongoing responsiveness enabled learners to engage with speaking as a developmental process rather than a fixed ability, cultivating what Reinders (2010) refers to as "autonomous communicative competence."

The significance of these findings extends beyond linguistic outcomes. As students discussed their own speaking in increasingly metacognitive terms—evaluating not just what they said, but how and why they said it—they demonstrated an emergent form of *language learner identity*. In contexts like Turkish EFL classrooms, where speaking is often overshadowed by grammar instruction and written assessment, such identity shifts are particularly meaningful. Learners began to define success not as correctness alone, but as fluency, effort, clarity, and participation. This reframing of communicative competence reflects a transformation in classroom culture as much as in individual ability.

In summary, the data clearly support that AfL strategies positively affected learners' spoken English by promoting confidence, precision, fluency, and self-awareness. These developments were neither incidental nor anecdotal; they were the result of a deliberate, continuous, and student-centered pedagogical design that valued speaking as a developmental process. Through structured feedback, scaffolded tasks, and reflective tools, AfL enabled learners to reimagine themselves not just as students of English, but as users

of English. In doing so, it fulfilled its dual function as both a tool for instruction and a catalyst for transformation.

5.4 RQ.4: If Yes, How Do Assessment for Learning (AfL) Strategies Affect EFL Learners' Spoken Skills?

In parallel with the current study's findings, recent empirical research has emphasized the central role of formative assessment in cultivating spoken language proficiency, particularly in EFL and CLIL contexts. For example, Khallaf et al. (2025) reported that the reformed formative assessment techniques implemented at Dhofar University enabled EFL learners to engage in speaking activities with reduced anxiety, clearer expectations, and a stronger sense of progression. Their study demonstrated that when assessment shifted from product-focused testing to process-oriented observation and feedback, students' spoken output became more confident and goal-driven. This aligns with the present findings, which showed that learners improved fluency and interactional competence when they received structured, low-stakes opportunities to speak and revise through peer and self-assessment cycles. Importantly, the observation-record format used in Khallaf et al.'s (2025) intervention closely resembles the reflective tools used in the current study—such as peer rubrics and exit tickets—further confirming the value of formative systems that promote self-regulation and autonomy in oral performance.

Additionally, the study revealed a notable positive washback effect of AfL strategies on students' spoken skills. The structured cycles of goal-setting, performance, feedback, and self-reflection not only enhanced linguistic competence but also fostered intrinsic motivation, active engagement, and a willingness to take communicative risks. Students reported feeling more confident to participate, experiment with new language forms, and collaborate with peers, demonstrating that formative assessment practices themselves can shape learning behaviors and classroom culture. This effect extended beyond individual development, creating a supportive environment where learners encouraged one another

and internalized assessment criteria, ultimately reinforcing ongoing improvement in fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Taken together, these studies reinforce the current finding that AfL strategies are most effective when they are holistic, ongoing, and anchored in meaningful communicative tasks. As demonstrated across the eight-week action research cycle, students progressed not simply through repeated speaking practice, but through an orchestrated sequence of goal-setting, performance, feedback, and revision. This developmental loop, enriched by tools such as “Two Stars and a Wish” and student-led reflection routines, aligns with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick’s (2006) model of feedback that builds self-regulation. Moreover, as learners began to internalize the assessment language—articulating concepts like “fluency” and “clear pronunciation”—they moved from passive recipients of correction to active agents of spoken improvement. Such findings underscore what Carless and Boud (2018) refer to as the “learning-focused feedback culture,” in which assessment becomes a shared, dialogic process aimed at long-term competence.

5.5 RQ.5: What Are the EFL Students’ Reflections on the Use of Action Research in This Study?

The final thematic analysis tables clearly reveal that EFL students experienced the action research process as highly collaborative, empowering, and participatory. Throughout the eight weeks of the study, students’ reflections evolved toward a greater sense of agency and reflective autonomy, underscoring their deep engagement not only as learners but as co-researchers. This finding aligns closely with Burns’s (2009) conceptualization of action research in language education as a student-centered, democratic process, where learners’ voices are not only heard but actively shape pedagogical decisions. The implementation of this participatory framework enabled students to transcend their traditionally passive roles, thereby situating them within a more emancipatory learning paradigm where their

identities, preferences, and insights had tangible influence on instructional design and delivery.

In Week 8, the emergent theme of “Fluency, Confidence and Reflective Autonomy” encapsulated students’ appreciation for the role they played in co-constructing the learning environment. One student (Student 11) poignantly expressed, “It felt like we were part of the research, not just students,” highlighting the shift from passive recipient to active collaborator. This mirrors the principles articulated by Nunan (1992) and McNiff (2013), who argue that authentic action research must empower participants by involving them in problem-identification and solution-implementation, thus transforming the classroom into a community of inquiry and practice. In this sense, the study did not merely seek to generate knowledge about teaching and learning but positioned learners as co-creators of that knowledge, thus fostering a more democratic epistemological orientation to classroom research.

Student 12’s reflection, “The teacher always asked us what we thought, so we felt like we were partners,” further emphasizes the dialogic nature of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Rather than perceiving feedback as a unidirectional flow from teacher to student, the classroom environment increasingly supported multidirectional feedback loops where learners’ perceptions, emotions, and strategies shaped instructional modifications. The sense of partnership and mutual respect is fundamental to sustaining motivation and ownership, as supported by Tamayo and Almeida (2023), who found that real-time responsiveness to student input fosters a sense of belonging and investment in learning processes. Such experiences are particularly important in EFL contexts, where learner disengagement and performance anxiety are often reinforced by hierarchical teacher-student dynamics. This approach contrasts sharply with traditional top-down instructional models where students often feel disenfranchised and silenced in curriculum design and delivery. Instead, students in this study appeared to embrace their newfound roles as contributors to an evolving, adaptive learning ecosystem.

Moreover, the triangulation of students' weekly reflections with focus group interviews strengthens the credibility of these findings and highlights the transformative potential of action research combined with Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies. The integration of AfL as a methodological and pedagogical complement to action research added layers of formative interaction that made student voices not only audible but actionable. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), AfL practices that actively involve learners in self-assessment and peer feedback cultivate meta-cognitive awareness and self-regulation, which were evident in students' comments about their growing fluency and confidence. These pedagogical tools not only helped learners measure their own linguistic progress but also facilitated the internalization of reflective strategies that are essential for developing strategic competence in speaking. This reinforces the notion that when students participate in shaping their own learning paths, they develop not only linguistic skills but also critical reflective capacities essential for lifelong learning (Carless et al., 2011; Earl, 2012). In this regard, the research approach aligned closely with constructivist principles, wherein learners' lived experiences and ongoing interpretations of those experiences became central to the learning process.

Importantly, the methodological choice of manual, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ensured that the richness and subtlety of student voices were preserved without the distortion that can sometimes accompany automated analytic tools. The application of a reflexive, continuous approach to coding enabled a nuanced exploration of students' inner landscapes—their anxieties, motivations, discoveries, and aspirations—as expressed in their own words. This careful engagement with qualitative data allowed the researcher to foreground the students' authentic experiences and insights, thus maintaining a transparent and ethical research stance (Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, the commitment to reflexivity enabled ongoing adjustments based on student feedback, embodying the continuous spirit of action research where the cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting is dynamic, fluid, and learner-responsive (Kemmis et al., 2014). The method

therefore not only documented student experience but also became an extension of the pedagogical philosophy underpinning the intervention: one rooted in empathy, responsiveness, and shared inquiry.

In sum, students' reflections collectively affirm that the integration of action research into the EFL context was not only a method of inquiry but a pedagogical intervention that democratized the classroom. It nurtured a learning culture where fluency was intertwined with confidence and reflective autonomy, thus preparing students not only to use English more effectively but also to become self-directed learners capable of critical reflection and collaborative engagement. These outcomes resonate with international calls to reposition students as active agents in educational research and practice (Mertler, 2017; Edge, 2011). More broadly, they suggest that action research—when executed with intentionality, ethical transparency, and dialogic engagement—holds significant potential not just to improve instructional practice, but to reimagine the learner's role in classroom life. In this study, students were not simply the subjects of research—they were agents of change in a dynamic pedagogical process, offering a compelling example of what is possible when inquiry and instruction are united in the service of learner empowerment.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter synthesizes the key insights derived from the literature review, thematic findings, and discussion sections to provide a holistic understanding of how Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies influenced EFL learners' spoken skills development within the framework of an action research cycle. Building upon the theoretical foundations explored in the literature—such as learner autonomy, formative feedback, and the social constructivist approach to language learning—the study's findings demonstrate how AfL practices supported students' affective, cognitive, and linguistic growth in a Turkish high school context. The discussion further contextualized these findings by aligning them with established research, while also revealing their unique implications for the Century of Turkish Education model and MoNE's communicative competence goals. This final chapter reflects on the interconnectedness of theory, practice, and learner experience throughout the research process, offering concluding thoughts, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Pedagogical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry substantial pedagogical implications for the field of English language teaching in Türkiye, particularly in relation to the implementation of the

national MoNE curriculum in public secondary schools. One of the most prominent contributions of the study lies in the demonstrated compatibility between Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies and the CEFR-aligned speaking outcomes designated for high school learners at the A2–B1 levels. Throughout the eight-week intervention, students consistently showed progress in both spoken interaction and spoken production, as outlined in the CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020). This development was not incidental, but rather the result of sustained formative practices—such as peer dialogue, self-assessment, and scaffolded tasks—that helped learners internalize communicative competence not merely as a goal, but as an ongoing, reflective process. These findings underscore the potential of AfL to operationalize CEFR goals within real classroom settings, a concern often raised by language policymakers in Türkiye who struggle with the practical enactment of abstract curriculum standards (MoNE, 2018).

The AfL strategies used in this study—such as peer feedback checklists, “Two Stars and a Wish,” exit tickets, and CEFR-aligned speaking rubrics—were intentionally low-preparation yet pedagogically impactful. Their effectiveness illustrates that meaningful change in classroom interaction patterns does not require extensive reform, but rather a strategic shift in assessment practices. By integrating AfL into weekly lesson plans, the teacher was able to create a rhythm of reflective, student-centered learning that aligned with both the curriculum and the institutional realities of a test-driven system. This suggests that even within the constraints of the current Turkish educational structure, there is space to implement learner-centered, formative approaches that promote spoken fluency and learner autonomy (Reinders & Balçıkanlı, 2011).

However, it is equally important to recognize that these outcomes were not only the result of AfL strategies in isolation, but also of the continuous framework of action research (AR) that guided their implementation. The teacher-researcher did not merely adopt predetermined techniques, but engaged in continuous cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—a hallmark of AR methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this reason,

one of the key implications for practitioners is the necessity of approaching pedagogical change not as a static prescription, but as a dynamic inquiry process. Teachers are encouraged to embrace their classroom as a site of ongoing experimentation and reflection, where they can generate context-specific solutions to local challenges.

For EFL teachers in Türkiye and beyond, engaging with action research offers several concrete advantages. First, it empowers teachers to systematically document student needs, observe the effectiveness of new strategies in real time, and adjust their instruction accordingly. Second, AR fosters professional agency, positioning teachers not merely as implementers of top-down policies, but as informed decision-makers capable of shaping pedagogical discourse. Third, action research allows for collaborative knowledge-building, enabling educators to share findings with colleagues, participate in school-based inquiry communities, and contribute to grassroots innovation within their institutions.

Moreover, given the institutional constraints often encountered in public schools—such as large class sizes, limited materials, and time-bound curricula—AR offers a flexible and context-sensitive model for professional learning. Rather than waiting for externally driven reform, teachers can take incremental steps to improve speaking instruction through small-scale interventions, classroom-based data collection (e.g., journals, student reflections), and iterative redesign. As demonstrated in this study, even modest changes—when guided by systematic reflection—can lead to meaningful improvements in learner confidence, motivation, and communicative competence.

Furthermore, the findings speak to the persistent challenge of teacher-centered pedagogy in Türkiye, where speaking remains the most underdeveloped and undervalued skill in many public schools (Gürsoy, et al., 2013; Hismanoğlu, 2011). The action research process demonstrated that shifting the focus from teacher talk to student voice—through dialogic activities, reflective prompts, and performance-based tasks—can effectively transform classroom dynamics. Learners were no longer passive recipients of knowledge or grammar rules but active meaning-makers engaged in purposeful, real-life communication. This shift

reflects the principles of social constructivism, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on mediated learning and the role of social interaction in cognitive development. The co-construction of knowledge and peer-supported scaffolding observed in this study highlight the potential for Turkish classrooms to move beyond transmission models of language teaching toward communicative ecosystems where learners take increasing responsibility for their output and development.

Furthermore, this study responds to national and international calls to decolonize English language teaching by rooting classroom practices in students' experiences and linguistic needs rather than in decontextualized, textbook-driven approaches. Through culturally relevant speaking tasks—such as describing festivals, comparing traditions, and sharing personal stories—students were able to see English not only as an academic subject but also as a tool for self-expression and intercultural dialogue. This is particularly crucial in a multilingual, multicultural country like Türkiye, where the affective dimension of language learning often remains neglected. As such, AfL's emphasis on learner voice, formative dialogue, and goal-driven communication offers a culturally responsive pedagogical model that aligns well with the Century of Turkish Education model's emphasis on values education, learner agency, and holistic development (MoNE, 2023).

In sum, the pedagogical implications of this study extend far beyond the individual classroom. They suggest that when formative assessment is implemented intentionally and reflectively, it has the potential to reinvigorate speaking instruction in Türkiye's public schools, support CEFR-based proficiency goals, and promote learner autonomy in even the most constrained teaching contexts. Importantly, when these strategies are embedded within an action research framework, they become not only more adaptable but also more sustainable, as teachers develop the capacity to monitor, evaluate, and refine their practice continuously. For teacher educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, these findings advocate for a systemic reconceptualization of speaking instruction—one that values formative assessment not as an add-on, but as a central pillar of communicative

language teaching. This paradigm shift could play a pivotal role in addressing Türkiye's long-standing concerns regarding oral proficiency in English, helping to cultivate a new generation of learners who are not only linguistically competent but also confident, reflective, and empowered communicators.

6.2 Future Research Implications

Given the growing interest in Assessment for Learning (AfL) and action research in Türkiye's educational policy discourse (MoNE, 2023), this study opens several avenues for further inquiry. First, longitudinal studies that trace the impact of AfL on speaking proficiency across multiple grade levels or school years could determine the sustainability of observed gains. Given that the current study focused on A2–B1 proficiency bands, future work might also investigate how AfL supports transitioning from B1 to B2, especially in preparatory or exam-focused classes.

Secondly, future research could explore teacher professional development in AfL, particularly how Turkish teachers interpret, adapt, and implement AfL in diverse school contexts. Previous studies (Ölmezer-Öztürk et al., 2021; Şahin & Yıldırım, 2016) show that teachers often lack practical training on formative assessment, despite its emphasis in CEFR and recent MoNE curricular updates. In this regard, both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should be revisited to ensure that AfL principles are explicitly addressed within language assessment courses (Güngör & Güngör, 2024). Future studies are encouraged to explore the effectiveness of embedding AfL pedagogy into these modules, investigating how such integration influences assessment literacy, classroom assessment practices, and attitudes toward spoken language evaluation among teacher candidates.

Building on the practical experiences of this study, teacher-focused recommendations can also be made. Implementing AfL strategies in speaking lessons proved to be time-intensive, particularly when lesson plans, materials, and individualized feedback needed to

be prepared by a single teacher. For this reason, future practitioners may benefit from strategies such as collaborative lesson planning, dividing roles among co-teachers, or utilizing standardized templates for self- and peer-assessment. Schools could also establish dedicated assessment and instructional support units, responsible for preparing materials, rubrics, and monitoring student progress, allowing teachers to focus on interaction and facilitation rather than administrative workload.

Additionally, there is room to investigate student identity development through AfL in relation to spoken skills, building on social constructivist theories that frame language learning as identity construction (Norton, 2013; Mercer, 2000). Qualitative work focusing on gender, regional background, or learner beliefs may reveal how AfL affects different student groups in nuanced ways.

Finally, further studies are encouraged to examine how AfL strategies intersect with the assessment culture in Türkiye. Given that national high-stakes tests remain largely grammar-focused (Güngör & Güngör, 2021), future research could examine how classroom-based spoken assessment practices can be reconciled with exam-oriented systems—offering policy-level recommendations for integrating speaking into nationwide evaluation structures. At the policy level, MoNE could consider models observed in foreign institutions, such as co-teaching for speaking classes, or centralizing material and assessment preparation within schools, so that teachers can focus solely on delivering instruction and providing formative feedback. Such structural support could alleviate teacher workload, enhance the consistency of AfL implementation, and ultimately improve learners' spoken proficiency across different contexts.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This study, while methodologically rigorous, has certain limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single classroom with a specific group of tenth-grade students in a public high school. Although the participant number (n=30) allowed for thematic saturation, the

findings may not be generalizable to schools with significantly different socio-economic or geographic contexts. As MoNE classrooms across Türkiye vary in teacher experience, school resources, and learner profiles, the context-specific nature of this action research must be acknowledged.

Secondly, although the teacher-researcher role allowed for authentic implementation and ongoing adjustment, it may have introduced researcher bias. While triangulation was employed (via journals, reflections, and focus groups), classroom interactions were not audio-recorded, and thus the linguistic data regarding spoken performance was inferred rather than quantitatively measured.

Another limitation relates to the potential conflict of interest and social desirability bias inherent in the study design. Since the researcher was also the students' English teacher, participants may have been inclined to present themselves more favorably, either through active engagement in classroom activities or in their written reflections. This tendency to "please the teacher" could have influenced the authenticity of some responses, particularly in contexts where hierarchical relationships between teachers and students are culturally reinforced. Despite efforts to mitigate this through assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation, it remains possible that some of the data reflects students' desire to align with the researcher's expectations rather than their genuine attitudes or behaviors.

Finally, while students were highly reflective and candid in their feedback, language barriers in expressing deeper metacognitive or emotional insights in Turkish may have affected the depth of some weekly reflections. Future studies could integrate mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative data for a more comprehensive picture.

6.4 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies are not only pedagogically effective, but also highly adaptable to the realities of the Turkish EFL classroom, where time constraints, exam pressures, and teacher-centered practices often marginalize speaking instruction. By embedding AfL techniques within weekly speaking-focused lesson plans over the course of eight weeks through EAR, this study provided evidence that learners can grow—not just linguistically, but cognitively, emotionally, and socially—when given the tools to monitor, reflect on, and take ownership of their learning. Rather than relying on test-driven, grammar-heavy routines—still prevalent in many MoNE-regulated schools—this study created an environment where speaking was framed as a meaningful, interactive, and low-risk activity. Gains in motivation, confidence, and spoken proficiency were not achieved through memorization or passive exposure, but through collaborative dialogues, personalized feedback, and scaffolded self-reflection. These findings support the notion that AfL is not merely an assessment practice, but a pedagogical stance, one that repositions both the teacher and the learner in more empowered roles. It aligns directly with CEFR's descriptors for spoken interaction and production, as well as with Türkiye's revised communicative curriculum goals, which emphasize functional language use and learner autonomy (MoNE, 2018; Council of Europe, 2020).

Beyond the empirical outcomes, this EAR study illuminated the transformative potential of action research as a reflective and empowering process for both teachers and learners. The teacher-researcher did not function as a detached evaluator but engaged in an ongoing cycle of planning, implementation, observation, and recalibration. This recursive process not only enhanced the relevance and responsiveness of instruction but also modeled professional agency, showcasing how teachers can become knowledge-generators within their own classrooms (Banegas & de Castro, 2019; Burns, 2009). From the learners' side, this shift in instructional paradigm enabled them to move from being passive recipients of

language input to active constructors of meaning, slowly internalizing the confidence to speak with intention, fluency, and purpose.

In the broader context of Türkiye—where standardized exams dominate school culture, speaking is rarely assessed, and oral fluency often takes a back seat to grammar translation—this study presents a pedagogical counter-narrative. It argues for a classroom that values process over product, progress over perfection, and dialogue over compliance. This approach does not contradict national standards but operationalizes them through formative, student-centered means. It illustrates that even within the limitations of a centralized system, there is ample room for creativity, reflection, and transformation—if teachers are given the support and autonomy to experiment, and if learners are trusted as capable agents of their own development.

Ultimately, this study offers more than a set of strategies; it offers a vision of possibility. If embedded and scaled through sustained professional development, policy alignment, and curricular flexibility, AfL has the potential to transform English education across Türkiye—not only for the thirty students in this study, but for the millions of learners who are still waiting to discover the power of their own voices.

REFERENCES

- Abeywickrama, P., & Brown, H. D. (2010). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. NY: Pearson Longman.
- Akkuş, Ş. (2021). Research perspectives on foreign language speaking anxiety in Turkish EFL context: A systematic review. *Language Teaching and Educational Research*, 4(1), 30-44.
- Aksu Çekiç, İ. (2024). *English language instructors' perceptions of assessment and its implementation*. (Master's thesis, Gazi University, Türkiye).
<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp>.
- Alexander, R. J. (2008). Culture, dialogue and learning: Notes on an emerging pedagogy. In N. Mercer & S. Hodgkinson (Eds.), *Exploring Talk in School: Inspired by the Work of Douglas Barnes* (pp. 91–114). Sage.
- Alkan, H., & Bümen, N. T. (2020). An action research on developing English speaking skills through asynchronous online learning. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 12(2), 127-148.
- Altrichter, H., Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2002). The concept of action research. *The learning organization*, 9(3), 125-131.

- Amoah, S., & Yeboah, J. (2021). The speaking difficulties of Chinese EFL learners and their motivation towards speaking the English language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(1), 56-69.
- Andrade, H. L. (2019). A critical review of research on student self-assessment. In *Frontiers in education* (Vol. 4, p. 87). Frontiers Media SA.
- Andrade, H. L., & Brookhart, S. M. (2020). Classroom assessment as the co-regulation of learning. *Assessment in education: principles, policy & practice*, 27(4), 350-372.
- Andrade, H., & Cizek, G. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of formative assessment*. Routledge.
- Ashraf, H., & Mahdinezhad, M. (2015). The role of peer-assessment versus self-assessment in promoting autonomy in language use: A case of EFL learners. *International Journal of Language Testing*, 5(2), 110-120.
- Atay, D., & Kurt, G. (2006). Prospective teachers and L2 writing anxiety. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8, 110-118.
- Au, H. Y. C., & Bardakçı, M. (2020). An Analysis of the Effect of Peer and Teacher Feedback on EFL Learners' Oral Performances and Speaking Self-Efficacy Levels. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 7(4), 1453-1468.
- Aydın, D. A. (2023). A rapid switch from conventional classroom teaching to ERT: a study on university-level EFL students' self-efficacy and motivational levels in Türkiye amidst devastating earthquakes. *ELT Research Journal*, 12(1), 95-120.
- Aydın, S. (2012). Factors causing demotivation in EFL teaching process: A case study. *Qualitative Report*, 17, 101.
- Bailey, A., & Corrales, K. A. (2020). Insight into Novice Research: A Critical Review of ELT Master's Theses. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 44(4), n4.

- Ballıdağ, S., & Karagül, B. I. (2021). Exploring the language assessment literacy of Turkish in-service EFL teachers. *Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 24(45), 73-92.
- Banegas, D. L., & de Castro, L. S. V. (2019). Action research. In S. Walsh & S. Mann (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English language teacher education* (pp. 570–582). Routledge.
- Banegas, D. L., & Güngör, M. N. (2025). Action research. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal20086>
- Bayyurt, Y., & Altınmakas, D. (2012). A WE-based English communication skills course at a Turkish university. In A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Principles and practices of teaching English as an international language* (pp. 169–182). Multilingual Matters.
- Bayyurt, Y., & Altınmakas, D. (2024). Insights into academic writing in English as lingua franca contexts. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*, 14(1), 81-96.
- Bayyurt, Y., & Sifakis, N. (2017). Foundations of an EIL-aware teacher education. In A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Preparing teachers to teach English as an international language* (pp. 53–69). Multilingual Matters.
- Bekleyen, N., & Selimoğlu, F. (2016). Learner behaviors and perceptions of autonomous language learning. *TESL-EJ*, 20(3), n3. <http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume20/ej79/ej79a3/>.
- Bennett, R. E. (2011). Formative assessment: A critical review. *Assessment in education: principles, policy & practice*, 18(1), 5-25.
- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing*. Routledge.

- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: principles, policy & practice*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability (formerly: Journal of personnel evaluation in education)*, 21, 5-31.
- Borg, S. (2013). *Teacher research in language teaching: A critical analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2007). Developing assessment for informing judgement. In D. Boud & N. Falchikov (Eds.), *Rethinking assessment in higher education: Learning for the longer term* (pp. 191–207). Routledge.
- Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2013). Rethinking models of feedback for learning: the challenge of design. *Assessment & Evaluation in higher education*, 38(6), 698-712.
- Boudreau, C., MacIntyre, P., & Dewaele, J. M. (2018). Enjoyment and anxiety in second language communication: An idiodynamic approach. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(1), 149-170.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- British Council. (2022). *English Together: Enhancing the quality of English language teaching in Turkey*. British Council Türkiye. <https://www.britishcouncil.org.tr/en/english-together>
- Brookhart, S. M. (2013). *How to create and use rubrics for formative assessment and grading*. Ascd.
- Brookhart, S. M. (2017). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Ascd.
- Brookhart, S. M., & McMillan, J. H. (2020). *Classroom assessment and educational measurement* (p. 296). Taylor & Francis.

- Brown, K. (2006). Models, methods, and curriculum for ELT preparation. In B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru, & C. L. Nelson (Eds.), *The handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 680–693). Blackwell.
- Burner, T. (2015). Processes of change when using portfolios to enhance formative assessment of writing. *Assessment Matters*, 9(2), 53-79.
- Burns, A. (2009). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.
- Butler, D. L., & Winne, P. H. (1995). Feedback and self-regulated learning: A theoretical synthesis. *Review of educational research*, 65(3), 245-281.
- Bygate, M. (2009). Teaching and testing speaking. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 412–440). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bygate, M. (2018). Creating and using the space for speaking within the foreign language classroom: What, why and how?. In J. de Saint Léger & M. Bygate (Eds.), *Speaking in a second language* (pp. 153–174). John Benjamins.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Carless, D. (2007). Conceptualizing pre-emptive formative assessment. *Assessment in Education*, 14(2), 171-184.
- Carless, D. (2012). *From testing to productive student learning: Implementing formative assessment in Confucian-heritage settings*. Routledge.
- Carless, D. (2015). Exploring learning-oriented assessment processes. *Higher Education*, 69, 963-976.
- Carless, D., & Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: enabling uptake of feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43(8), 1315-1325.

- Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., & Lam, J. (2011). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in higher education*, 36(4), 395-407.
- Çayır, S. (2024). *The use and value of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies as perceived by EFL instructors at a public university in Türkiye* (Master's thesis, Bilkent University, Türkiye).
<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp>.
- Chan, D. Y. C., & Wu, G. C. (2004). A study of foreign language anxiety of EFL elementary school students in Taipei County. *Journal of National Taipei Teachers College*, 17(2), 287-320.
- Choi, E., & Lee, J. (2018). EFL teachers' self-efficacy and teaching practices. *Elt Journal*, 72(2), 175-186.
- Çimen, B. A., & Yeşilyurt, S. (2024). EFL teachers' use of the seven principles for good practice in education and its relation to their job satisfaction. *Focus on ELT Journal*, 6(4), 53-70.
- Çimen, S. S. (2022). Exploring EFL Assessment in Turkey: Curriculum and Teacher Practices. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 9(1), 531-550.
- Clarke, Shirley. *Outstanding formative assessment: Culture and practice*. Hachette UK, 2014.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Barnatt, J., Friedman, A., & Pine, G. (2009). Inquiry on inquiry: Practitioner research and student learning. *Action in Teacher Education*, 31(2), 17-32.
- Coghlan, D. (2019). *Doing action research in your own organization* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 113-143.

- Correia, R. C. (2024). Can Portuguese language policy keep up? Balancing the sociolinguistic tightrope and the rise of ELF. *Focus on ELT Journal*, 6(3), 50-75.
- Coşkun, A. (2013). Stress in English language teaching practicum: the views of all stakeholders. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 28(28-3), 97-110.
- Coşkun, A. (2016). Exploring the microteaching component of an EFL teacher education program. *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16(3), 810-829.
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). *Discourse in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classrooms*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.20>
- Darıyemez, T. (2023). Teaching Speaking Skills through Flipped Classroom Model: EFL Students' Autonomy, Willingness to Communicate, and Anxiety. *i-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, 13(2), 35.
- Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 6(2), 80-88.
- Dikilitaş, K., Dollar, Y. K., & Mede, E. (2018). English language teachers' perceptions of involvement in high-stakes testing in Turkey. *Teacher Involvement in High-Stakes Language Testing*, 233-244.
- Donato, R. (2004). 13. Aspects of collaboration in pedagogical discourse. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 24, 284-302.

- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). New themes and approaches in second language motivation research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 43–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000034>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self system. *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*, 36(3), 9-11.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553>.
- Earl, L. M. (2012). *Assessment as learning: Using classroom assessment to maximize student learning*. Corwin press.
- Edge, J. (2011). *The reflexive teacher educator in TESOL: Roots and wings*. Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2003). Designing a task-based syllabus. *RELC Journal*, 34(1), 64-81.
- Fakazlı, Ö. (2018). Exploring the use of oral corrective feedback in Turkish EFL classrooms: A case study at a state university. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 26(6), 2177-2187.
- Falchikov, N. (2007). The place of peers in learning and assessment. In D. Boud & N. Falchikov (Eds.), *Rethinking assessment in higher education: Learning for the longer term* (pp. 138–153). Routledge.
- Farrell, T. S. (2003). *Reflective practice in action: 80 reflection breaks for busy teachers*. Corwin Press.
- Farrell, T. S., & Mom, V. (2015). Exploring teacher questions through reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 16(6), 849-866.
- Freestone, R., Williams, P., Thompson, S., & Trembath a, K. (2007). A quantitative approach to assessment of work-based learning outcomes: An urban planning application. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 26(4), 347-361.

- Fulcher, G. (2015). *Re-examining language testing: A philosophical and social inquiry*. Routledge.
- Fulcher, G., & Reiter, R. M. (2003). Task difficulty in speaking tests. *Language testing*, 20(3), 321-344.
- Gardner, R. C. (2010). *Motivation and second language acquisition: The socio-educational model* (Vol. 10). Peter Lang.
- Genç, Z. S., & Aydın, F. (2017). An Analysis of Learners' Motivation and Attitudes toward Learning English Language at Tertiary Level in Turkish EFL Context. *English Language Teaching*, 10(4), 35-44.
- Goh, C. C., & Burns, A. (2012). *Teaching speaking: A holistic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Green, A. (2018). Assessment for Learning in Language Education. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 6(3), 9-18.
- Güleçoğlu, G. Y., & Öztürk, G. (2021). Research perspectives on English as a foreign language (EFL) learning motivation in Turkish context: A systematic review of studies between 2010 and 2021. *Language Teaching And Educational Research*, 4(2), 161-180.
- Gümüşok, F. (2015). *Engaging preservice EFL teachers in self-evaluation and peer evaluation for reflection* (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University). METU Open Access. <https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/84296>
- Güngör, M. N. (2016). Turkish pre-service teachers' reflective practices in teaching English to young learners. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 41(2), 137-151.

- Güngör, M. A. (2023). Action research in interlanguage pragmatics. In M. N. Güngör (Ed), *Action research in language teaching and teacher education: Voices from diverse contexts* (pp. 101–115). Blackswan.
- Güngör, M. N., & Güngör, M. A. (2019). Pre-service English language teachers' collaborative development: The emergence of research, rehearsal and reflection (3R) model from an activity theory perspective. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(1), 98-115.
- Güngör, M. N., & Güngör, M. A. (2021). Reconceptualizing testing in times of COVID-19 from an activity theory lens: A narrative inquiry of a test-designer's experiences. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 30(6), 531-539.
- Güngör, M. A., & Güngör, M. N. (2023). Developing pre-service Teachers' Assessment Literacy in the Practicum: An action research study. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 48(7), 73-88.
- Güngör, M. A., & Güngör, M. N. (2024). Relocating assessment in pre-service teacher education: an emerging model from activity theory lens. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(2), 348-368.
- Gürsoy, E., Korkmaz, S. Ç., & Damar, A. E. (2013). Foreign language teaching within 4+ 4+ 4 education system in Turkey: Language teachers' voice. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 53(1), 59-74.
- Harding, L., Alderson, J. C., & Brunfaut, T. (2015). Diagnostic assessment of reading and listening in a second or foreign language: Elaborating on diagnostic principles. *Language Testing*, 32(3), 317-336.
- Harputlu, L., & Erarslan, A. (2019). Turkish EFL Learners' Appraisal of Group Work in Speaking: Self and Peer Reflections. *The Literacy Trek*, 5(1), 1-22.

- Hatipoğlu, Ç. (2016). The impact of the university entrance exam on EFL education in Turkey: Pre-service English language teachers' perspective. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232(1), 136-144.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112.
- Heritage, M. (2010). Formative Assessment and Next-Generation Assessment Systems: Are We Losing an Opportunity? *Council of Chief State School Officers*.
- Hişmanoğlu, M. (2011). The integration of information and communication technology into current ELT coursebooks: a critical analysis. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 37-45.
- Höl, D. (2023). Standardized testing in Turkey: EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences on Cambridge YLE exams: Standardized testing in Turkey. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 15(2), 984-1007.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of a foreign language anxiety scale. *Tesol Quarterly*, 20(3), 559-562.
- Isaacs, T., & Trofimovich, P. (2012). Deconstructing comprehensibility: Identifying the linguistic influences on listeners' L2 comprehensibility ratings. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 34(3), 475-505.
- Kara, E., Ayaz, A. D., & Dündar, T. (2017). Challenges in EFL speaking classes in Turkish context. *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 3(2), 66-74.
- Karakaya, B., Mede, E., & Selçuk, M. (2017). Students' accuracy and perceptions about self-assessment in English speaking classrooms. *The Journal of International Education Science*, 4(12), 265-280.

- Kavaklı, N., & Mirici, İ. H. (2018). The utilization of the European standards for defining educational assessment: teacher-tester attributes and directors' control. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (40), 171-190.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). Introducing critical participatory action research. In S. Kemmis, R. McTaggart, & R. Nixon (Eds.), *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research* (pp. 1–31). Springer.
- Kessler, M., Marino, F., & Farrell, S. (2025). Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching: Emerging trends, challenges, and solutions in ELT. In N. A. Nazari & A. M. Riazi (Eds), *Adaptable English Language Teaching*, (pp. 228-244). Routledge.
- Khallaf, N. M., Veetil, M. N., & Mertens, L. (2025). Reforming formative assessment techniques: How successful are they from EFL teachers' perspectives? *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, 7(2), 12–51. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2025.7.2.2>
- Khan, I. U., Ullah, M., Iqbal, K., Alam, M., & Ahmad, I. (2021). Perceptions Of Efl Learners Regarding Effectiveness Of Twitter In English Language Learning Proficiency At University Level. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 9(3), 1355-1365.
- Kılıçkaya, F., & Krajka, J. (2010). Teachers' Technology Use in Vocabulary Teaching. *Online Submission*.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2007). English language teaching in Turkey: Policy changes and their implementations. *RELC Journal*, 38(2), 216-228.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2009). Globalization and English language policy in Turkey. *Educational Policy*, 23(5), 663-684.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2017). English education policy in Turkey. *English language education policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, 235-256.

- Kormos, J. (2014). *Speech production and second language acquisition*. Routledge.
- Köroğlu, Z. Ç. (2021). Using digital formative assessment to evaluate EFL learners' English speaking skills. *GIST–Education and Learning Research Journal*, (22), 103-123.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). Focus group interviewing. In K. E. Newcomer, H. P. Hatry, & J. S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 506–534). Jossey-Bass.
- Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 50(3), 301-346.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2011). A complexity theory approach to second language development/acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 48–72). Routledge.
- Lee, I., & Coniam, D. (2013). Introducing assessment for learning for EFL writing in an assessment of learning examination-driven system in Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(1), 34-50.
- Li, Z., & Hegelheimer, V. (2013). Mobile-assisted grammar exercises: Effects on self-editing in L2 writing.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1988). *Criteria for Assessing Naturalistic Inquiries as Reports*.
- Littlewood, W. (2014). Communication-oriented language teaching: Where are we now? Where do we go from here?. *Language Teaching*, 47(3), 349-362.
- Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *The modern language journal*, 92(1), 71-86.

- Long, M. H. (1996). Authenticity and learning potential in L2 classroom discourse. *Linguistics and Education*, 8(4), 323–349. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0898-5898\(96\)90015-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0898-5898(96)90015-9).
- Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mabrouk, F. (2023). Tunisian EFL Learners' Perceptions of the Use of Oral Presentations in Assessing Speaking Skills: An Exploratory Practice Study. *Studies in Applied Linguistics & TESOL*, 23(2), 18-40.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.
- MacIntyre, P., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(2), 193-213.
- Mahmudah, S., & Anggunsari, P. (2023). Oral corrective feedback as a formative assessment in teaching speaking skill. *Journal of Research on English and Language Learning (J-REaLL)*, 4(1), 18-25.
- Mai, C. (2016). *Pre-service teachers' perceptions about teaching speaking at high school in Vietnam* (Doctoral dissertation, UNSW Sydney).
- Mangels, J. A., Butterfield, B., Lamb, J., Good, C., & Dweck, C. S. (2006). Why do beliefs about intelligence influence learning success? A social cognitive neuroscience model. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 1(2), 75-86.
- Mardiah, A. Q. (2025). Maximizing ELSA Speak for Developing English Fluency and Reducing Speaking Barriers in Language Learners. *IALLTEACH (Issues In Applied Linguistics & Language Teaching)*, 7(1), 262-271.

- McIntosh, P. (2010). *Action research and reflective practice: Creative and visual methods to facilitate reflection and learning*. Routledge.
- McNiff, J. (2013). *Action research: Principles and practice*. Routledge.
- McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. SAGE Publications.
- Mercer, L. S. (2000). Measuring the use and value of electronic journals and books. *Issues in science and technology librarianship*, 25(Winter).
- Mertler, C. A. (2017). *Action research communities: Professional learning, empowerment, and improvement through collaborative action research*. Routledge.
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2006). *English language curriculum for secondary education (Grades 5-12)*. <https://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/>
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2013). *English language curriculum for primary and secondary education (Grades 2-12)*. Ankara, Turkey: MoNE Publications.
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2018). *English language curriculum for secondary schools (Grades 5–12)*. Ankara: Board of Education and Discipline. Retrieved from <https://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/Dosyalar/201812413494269>
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2023). *Guidelines for the assessment and evaluation of English language speaking skills in secondary education*. Ankara: Directorate General for Measurement, Assessment and Examination Services.
- Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. (2023). *Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli: Curriculum Framework Document*. Ankara: Ministry of National Education. Retrieved from <https://maarifmodeli.meb.gov.tr>
- Munawir, A. (2024). Does Using Word Wall Website Improve Students' Vocabulary Retrieving?. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 12(2), 2841-2858.

- Mutlu, M. (2025). *Investigating pre-service English language teachers' identity construction: A narrative inquiry in the Turkish context* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). [Middle East Technical University], [Ankara], Türkiye.
- Nassaji, H., & Swain, M. (2000). A Vygotskian perspective on corrective feedback in L2: The effect of random versus negotiated help on the learning of English articles. *Language Awareness*, 9(1), 34-51.
- Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 199-218.
- Nikolov, M., & Timpe-Laughlin, V. (2021). Assessing young learners' foreign language abilities. *Language Teaching*, 54(1), 1-37.
- Norton, B. (2013). Identity, literacy, and the multilingual classroom. In S. May (Ed.), *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education* (pp. 103–122). Routledge.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge university press.
- Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), 695-705.
- Ölmezer-Öztürk, E., & Öztürk, G. (2016). Types and Timing of Oral Corrective Feedback in EFL Classrooms: Voices from Students. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 10(2), 113-133.
- Ölmezer-Öztürk, E., & Aydın, B. (2019). Investigating language assessment knowledge of EFL teachers. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 34(3), 602-620.
- Ölmezer-Öztürk, E., Öztürk, G., & Aydın, B. (2021). A critical evaluation of the language assessment literacy of Turkish EFL teachers: Suggestions for policy

directions. *Challenges in language testing around the world: Insights for language test users*, 411-419.

Öztürk, M. S. (2012). *An analysis of the impact of metaphorical feedback on English language teaching classroom discourse* (Doctoral dissertation, Gazi University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Foreign Language Teaching). Gazi University Repository.

Öztürk, G., & Gürbüz, N. (2017). Re-defining language teacher cognition through a data-driven model: The case of three EFL teachers. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1290333.

Palabıyık, P. Y. (2021). *Foreign language education policy in practice: English as a foreign language instruction at a public high school in Turkey* (Doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University (Turkey)).

Panadero, E., Jonsson, A., & Botella, J. (2017). Effects of self-assessment on self-regulated learning and self-efficacy: Four meta-analyses. *Educational Research Review*, 22, 74-98.

Pastore, S., Azzolini, D., Marzadro, S., & Ottaviani, F. (2025). Preparing assessment literate teachers: A cross-national trend analysis. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 86, 101485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101485>

Permatasari, S. (2024). Enhancing pronunciation skills in EFL students through the ELSA Speak application. *Indonesian EFL Journal* 10(1), 45–54.

Yang, H. C., & Plakans, L. (2012). Second language writers' strategy use and performance on an integrated reading-listening-writing task. *Tesol Quarterly*, 46(1), 80-103.

Rea-Dickins, P. (2004). Understanding teachers as agents of assessment. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 249-258.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. SAGE publications.

- Reinders, H. (2010). Towards a classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 35(5), 40-55.
- Reinders, H., & Balçıkanlı, C. (2011). Learning to Foster Autonomy: The Role of Teacher Education Materials. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 2(1).
- Reinders, H., & Lazarro, N. (2011). Beliefs, identity and motivation in implementing autonomy: The teacher's perspective. In D. Gardner (Ed.), *Fostering learner autonomy: Learners, teachers and researchers* (pp. 125–134). Authentik.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, 18(2), 119-144.
- Sadler, D. R. (2010). Fidelity as a precondition for integrity in grading academic achievement. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(6), 727-743.
- Şahin, I., & Yildirim, A. (2016). Transforming professional learning into practice. *Elt Journal*, 70(3), 241-252.
- Şahin, S. (2019). *An analysis of English language testing and evaluation course in English language teacher education programs in Turkey: Developing language assessment literacy of pre-service EFL teachers* (Doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University (Turkey)).
- Savaşçı, M. (2014). Why are some students reluctant to use L2 in EFL speaking classes? An action research at tertiary level. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 2682-2686.

- Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning¹. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
- Selvi, A. F., Yazan, B., & Mahboob, A. (2024). Research on “native” and “non-native” English-speaking teachers: Past developments, current status, and future directions. *Language Teaching*, 57(1), 1-41.
- Shamim, F., & Kuchah, K. (2016). Teaching large classes in difficult circumstances. In G. Hall (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 527–541). Routledge.
- Shute, V. J. (2008). Focus on formative feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(1), 153-189.
- Solak, E., & Bayar, A. (2015). Current challenges in English language learning in Turkish EFL context. *Participatory Educational Research*, 2(1), 106-115.
- Solmaz, O. (2019). Pre-service language teachers’ use of social networking sites for language learning: A quantitative investigation. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 423-439.
- Soruç, A., Yuksel, D., McKinley, J., & Grimshaw, T. (2025). Factors influencing EFL teachers’ provision of oral corrective feedback: the role of teaching experience. *The Language Learning Journal*, 53(1), 98-113.
- Stringer, E. T., & Aragón, A. O. (2020). *Action research*. Sage publications.
- Tamayo, M. R., Almeida, E., & Pillajo, M. (2023, November). ECRIF as a Strategy to Boost EFL Students’ Speaking Skills: An Exploratory Action Research Approach. In *XVIII Multidisciplinary International Congress on Science and Technology* (pp. 217-232). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Taner, G., & Balıkçı, G. (2022). EFL Teachers’ opinions on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms: Role of experience and context. *Focus on ELT Journal*, 4(1), 74-90.

- Tezer, B. (2024). *The Integration of SDGs into CLIL Lesson Plans in Turkish EFL Context: A Sample Design*. (Master's thesis, Gazi University, Türkiye).
- Thornbury, S. (2017). *Scott Thornbury's 30 language teaching methods Google EBook: Cambridge handbooks for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thornbury, S., & Harmer, J. (2005). *How to teach speaking, 156*, Harlow: Longman.
- Topping, K. (2018). *Using peer assessment to inspire reflection and learning*. Routledge.
- Tosun, F. Ü., & Glover, P. (2020). How Do School Teachers in Turkey Perceive and Use the CEFR? *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 7(4), 1731-1739.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Tsagari, D., & Vogt, K. (2017). Assessment literacy of foreign language teachers around Europe: Research, challenges and future prospects. *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment*, 6(1), 41-63.
- Tunçer, M., & Merç, A. (2023). Turkish high school EFL teachers' AfL practices: Reported vs. actual classroom practices. *Journal of Innovative Research in Teacher Education*, 4(2).
- Ushioda, E. (2011). Context matters: A brief commentary on the papers by Housen et al. and Muñoz. *Language Learning*, 61(Supplement 1), 303–307.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00649.x>
- Ushioda, E. (2013). Motivation and ELT: Global issues and local concerns. In E. Ushioda (Ed.), *International perspectives on motivation: Language learning and professional challenges* (pp. 1–17). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Ushioda, E., & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Beyond global English: Motivation to learn languages in a multicultural world: Introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(3), 451-454.
- Ushioda, E., & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Beyond global English: Motivation to learn languages in a multicultural world: Introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(3), 451-454.
- van Lier, L. (Ed.). (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Vandergrift, L., & Baker, S. (2015). Learner variables in second language listening comprehension: An exploratory path analysis. *Language learning*, 65(2), 390-416.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press.
- Whitehead, A. J., & McNiff, J. (2006). *Action research: Living theory*. SAGE Publications.
- Wiliam, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning?. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37(1), 3-14.
- Winstone, N., Boud, D., Dawson, P., & Heron, M. (2022). From feedback-as-information to feedback-as-process: a linguistic analysis of the feedback literature. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 47(2), 213-230.
- Xin, J. J., & Lo, Y. Y. (2025). Developing the CLIL teacher assessment literacy inventory. *System*, 133, 103776. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103776>
- Xu, Y., & Harfitt, G. (2019). Is assessment for learning feasible in large classes? Challenges and coping strategies from three case studies. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(5), 472-486.

- Yan, Z. (2021). Assessment-as-learning in classrooms: the challenges and professional development. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 47(2), 293-295.
- Yan, Z. (2022). *Student self-assessment as a process for learning*. Routledge.
- Yan, Z., & Pastore, S. (2022). Are teachers literate in formative assessment? The development and validation of the Teacher Formative Assessment Literacy Scale. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 74, 101183.
- Yavuz, A., & Topkaya, E. Z. (2013). Teacher educators' evaluation of the English language teaching program: A Turkish case. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 7(1), 64–83
- Yüksel, D., Soruç, A., & McKinley, J. (2021). Teachers' beliefs and practices about oral corrective feedback in university EFL classes. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 31(3), 362-382.
- Zambak, A. (2024). Factors determining foreign language speaking anxiety: A study on high school students. *Okul Yönetimi*, 4(1), 35-46.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into practice*, 41(2), 64-70.

APPENDICES



Appendix A. A sample of The Researcher's Journal

Date February 10, 2025

Course English Speaking Skills

Class 10/A

Instructor Huzeyfe Ahmet DEMİR

Category Details

Lesson Theme This week, I implemented a lesson plan based on the theme “Travel.”

Warm-up Activity To activate students' prior knowledge and raise interest, I began the lesson with a brainstorming activity. Students were asked to share any words, memories, or associations they had related to travel. While some students eagerly contributed, others were more hesitant. However, with teacher guidance, all students eventually participated in the activity.

Role-Playing Task During the role-playing task, students were divided into groups and took on various roles such as travel agent–customer and airport staff–passenger. This activity had a noticeable impact on their speaking skills. Especially for the shy students, the supportive environment of the group enabled them to feel more comfortable and willing to speak. I observed that the students began to speak more spontaneously and confidently as the activity progressed.

Group Work Dynamics The group work component further enhanced students' social interaction skills and created a shared sense of purpose. In some groups, leadership roles emerged, while in others, students took on supportive roles, creating space for their peers to express themselves. This cooperative spirit significantly contributed to a peaceful and engaging classroom atmosphere.

Whole-Class Discussion In the whole-class discussion phase, students compared different destinations and modes of transport. Some students personalized the topic by giving real-life examples from their own travel experiences, which helped make their speech more fluent and authentic. During this stage, I

Date

February 10, 2025

provided constructive feedback, highlighting their strengths and pointing out areas for improvement. I also asked students to self-correct when appropriate, and it was gratifying to see them recognizing and correcting their own mistakes.

Overall, I observed a clear increase in both student motivation and spoken performance. The students felt a stronger need to communicate and expressed themselves more freely. This week's experience demonstrated the effectiveness of harmonizing MoNE's spoken skill objectives with AfL strategies in a student-centered classroom. Future Actions

Overall

Observation

In future weeks, I plan to use a wider variety of role-playing and task-based speaking activities aligned with different themes.

I also aim to incorporate short self-assessment rubrics to help students become more aware of their learning processes. Continuing to create supportive environments will be key to encouraging all learners to take speaking risks.

Appendix B. A Sample of the 1st and 2nd Focus Group Interviews

1st Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How do you currently feel about speaking in English?
2. What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to speak English in class?
3. While improving your spoken English skills, what motivates or demotivates you?
4. Have you received any feedback or used specific strategies to improve your speaking skills before? If yes, what was your experience?
5. Do you prefer engaging in group discussions, receiving peer evaluations, or conducting self-assessments?

2nd Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Has the use of specific AfL strategies (e.g., peer feedback, self-assessment) influenced your motivation to speak in English? How?
2. Have your goals or attitudes toward improving your spoken English changed since using AfL strategies?
3. In what ways have the classroom activities helped you improve your speaking skills?
4. Are there specific AfL techniques that you find particularly helpful in improving your fluency, accuracy, or pronunciation?
5. Do you feel that AfL strategies make learning spoken skills more interactive and enjoyable? Why?

Appendix C. Samples of Students' Weekly Reflections

Student 7

İngilizce dersindeki verimlilik hoşuma gidiyor gerçekten. Çoğunluk ile
tez çalışmalarında yaptığımız gerek partnerler ve grup çalışmaları daha
verimli oluyor. Her yeni çalışmada bilmediğim kelimeleri öğrenmek
kelime daireme katkı sağlıyor. Kurduğumuz cümleleri toplum karşısınd-
a sesli bir şekilde okumak, herhangi bir birey ile daha net ve
verimli bir şekilde konuşma fırsatı oluyor, bu da daha akıcı konu-
şmamı sağlıyor. Yani iyi ✓

Student 12

Bu yaptığımız çalışmadan gayet memnun kaldım.
Benim İngilizceye olan sevgimi, İngilizceyi daha çok
severek yapma isteğimi pekiştirdi. Yani daha verimli
hale geldi benim için. En çokta yaptığımız grup
çalışmaları olsun ve partnerimle yaptığımız çalışma-
lar beni İngilizceye karşı daha çok yönlendirdi. Ve
dönütlerde aynı şekilde İngilizceye merakım ve alakam
arttı İngilizce telaffuzum gelişti ve en çokta kendimi
dışlandırdım. Herşey bu çalışma sayesinde oldu ve bende
çalışmada olduğum için kendimle gurur duyuyorum
tesekkür ediyorum.

Student 27

Çalışma boyunca hem grup çalışması ayrıca ikili çalışma yapmaktan da ayrıca keyif aldım. Bunun yanında yeni kelimeler öğrenmenin, yeni cümle kalıpları öğrenmenin, öğrendiğim kelimelerin telaffuzlarının ne kadar motive edici olduğunu gördüm. Bu çalışmaya başlamadan önce okuduğum kelimeyi ya da cümleyi tam olarak İngilizceye çeviremezken şimdi daha kolay bir şekilde çevirebiliyorum. Yani bu çalışma baştan sona kadar keyif vericiydi. Çalışma sayesinde artık uzun cümleler kurabiliyor yeni ya da ilk kez görmüş olduğum bir kelimeyi doğru telaffuz edebiliyorum.

Appendix D. A Sample of AfL Integrated Lesson Plans

Week 3 Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan: Helpful Tips for Living Responsibly

Level: A1 English

Lesson Duration: 80 minutes

Number of Students: 30

Focus: Spoken Skills

Theme: Helpful Tips for Living Responsibly

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to talk about the consequences of wasting energy sources.

Students will be able to talk about household chores they are responsible for.

Lesson Plan Component	Description	Time	Pedagogical Justification
Warm-Up: Household Chores Discussion	Students form pairs and discuss the chores they are responsible for at home. Teacher elicits answers and writes key vocabulary on the board.	10 minutes	Activates prior knowledge, promotes engagement, and introduces key vocabulary for the lesson.
Vocabulary and Useful Phrases Introduction	Introduce energy-related vocabulary (e.g., energy	10 minutes	Provides linguistic tools for discussion and builds

	conservation, appliances) and household chore phrases (e.g., sweeping, doing the laundry). Engage students in examples and context-driven questioning.		familiarity through meaningful contextualization.
Activity 1: Group Discussion on Energy Conservation	In groups of 4, students discuss the consequences of wasting energy. Teacher uses questioning strategies to guide the conversation (e.g., What happens if we leave lights on all day?). Groups summarize their ideas.	20 minutes	Encourages critical thinking, collaborative dialogue, and meaningful communication. Questioning strategies guide deeper thinking and verbal practice.
Activity 2: Chore Responsibility Role Play	In pairs, students role-play conversations where they explain the household chores they are responsible for and why they are important. Teacher	20 minutes	Develops functional language skills, fosters confidence in speaking, and simulates real-life conversations.

	circulates to observe and provide real-time feedback.		
Exit Ticket Reflection	Students write and share one helpful tip for conserving energy at home or managing household chores effectively. Teacher collects and reviews responses.	10 minutes	Reinforces learning, allows students to articulate their understanding, and provides immediate feedback for the teacher on student progress.
Questioning Wrap-Up	Whole-class discussion with reflective questions (e.g., Why is it important to conserve energy? How can you manage chores efficiently?). Teacher provides corrective feedback and highlights successful student contributions.	10 minutes	Promotes metacognitive awareness, helps students reflect on their learning, and provides closure to the lesson.

Appendix E. The Samples of Peer Feedback and Self-assessment Checklists

A Peer Feedback Checklist

Criteria	My Partner Did This Well	Needs Improvement
Spoke fluently	☐	☐
Used correct pronunciation	☐	☐
Gave complete answers	☐	☐
Asked follow-up questions	☐	☐

A Self-assessment Checklist

Today, I...

- ☐ Spoke in English most of the time.
- ☐ Used new words I learned.
- ☐ Understood my partner's questions.
- ☐ Reached my speaking goal for this week.

Appendix F. A Sample of CEFR A2-B1 Descriptors

Criteria	3 – Good (B1)	2 – Satisfactory (A2+)	1 – Needs Improvement (A2)
Fluency	Speaks with few pauses; can keep going and link ideas.	Speaks with some pauses; can give short connected sentences.	Hesitates often; speech is fragmented and slow.
Coherence	Ideas are organized; uses connectors (e.g., <i>and</i> , <i>because</i> , <i>but</i>).	Some organization; limited use of connectors.	Ideas are disconnected; relies mostly on single words.
Vocabulary	Uses a range of everyday words and some topic-specific expressions.	Uses basic everyday words; sometimes repeats same words.	Very limited vocabulary; struggles to find words.
Pronunciation	Clear and mostly accurate; occasional errors do not hinder understanding.	Generally understandable; errors sometimes cause misunderstanding.	Frequent errors make understanding difficult.

Appendix G. A Sample of The Exit Ticket Reflections

Name:

Date:

Lesson Topic:

1. One thing I
learned today:

2. One thing I
found difficult:

3. One question I
still have:





GAZİLİ OLMAK AYRICALIKTIR...