BALANCING PARTICIPATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES WITH THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: ADDRESSING DOMINANCE AND PASSIVITY

Abstract. The communicative approach is widely recognized as one of the most effective methods for ESL training, enhancing both individual learner autonomy and group interaction skills through discussions, role-playing, and collaborative projects. This method encourages learners to set personal goals, make decisions, and self-regulate, promoting independent and critical thinking, thus supporting both language acquisition and personal development. Despite its advantages, the communicative approach poses challenges, particularly in managing uneven participation where dominant students overshadow their introverted peers, affecting class atmosphere and communicative competence. This study aims to investigate and address these challenges by identifying effective strategies to balance participation, creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

A comprehensive literature analysis was conducted to understand the reasons behind dominant and passive behaviours, their impact on class dynamics, and strategies to address them. Key findings suggest that confidence levels, prior educational experiences, and personality traits significantly influence student behaviour. Effective strategies identified include structured group activities with role assignments, mutual support agreements, regularly changing group compositions, and clear criteria for oral comments. These strategies aim to mitigate the dominance of active students while encouraging contributions from quieter members, fostering a collaborative learning environment.
Data were collected through systematic observations and surveys in ESP classes at the National Technical University of Ukraine. Statistical analyses assessed changes in student engagement, revealing a more balanced participation rate by the end of the study. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of the implemented strategies in enhancing educational outcomes and improving class dynamics. Despite research limitations, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective ESL training practices, offering practical solutions for educators to manage diverse classroom dynamics.

**Keywords:** ESL, students, communicative approach, passive students, dominating learners, strategies.

Корницька Юлія Анатоліївна кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри АМГС, Національний технічний університет України "Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського", просп. Берестейський, 37, м, Київ, 03056, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4781-0807

Гайденко Юлія Олексіївна кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри АМГС, Національний технічний університет України "Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського", просп. Берестейський, 37, м, Київ, 03056, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4063-525X

**БАЛАНСУВАННЯ АКТИВНОСТІ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ З ВИКОРИСТАННЯМ КОМУНІКАТИВНОГО ПІДХОДУ: ПОДОЛАННЯ ДОМІНУВАННЯ ТА ПАСИВНОСТІ**

Анотація. Комунікативний підхід широко визнаний одним із найефективніших методів навчання англійської мови як другої (ESL), оскільки він сприяє розвитку автономії учнів і навичок групової взаємодії через дискусії, рольові ігри та спільні проекти. Цей метод заохочує учнів ставити особисті цілі, приймати рішення та саморегулюватися, стимулюючи незалежне і критичне мислення, тим самим сприяючи як засвоєнню мови, так і особистісному розвитку. Незважаючи на свої переваги, комунікативний підхід ставить певні виклики для викладачів, зокрема проблему незбалансованої залученості, коли домінуючі студенти затьмарюють своїх інтровертних іншокласників, що впливає на атмосферу в класі та ефективність навчального процесу. Це дослідження має на меті вивчити та запропонувати рішення подолання цих проблем, визначивши ефективні стратегії для збалансування залученості студентів до навчальної діяльності та створення більш інклюзивного навчального середовища.

Було проведено аналіз актуальної літератури для розуміння причин домінуючої та пасивної поведінки, їхнього впливу на динаміку класу та
 стратегій їх подолання. Основні висновки свідчать, що рівень впевненості, попередній навчальний досвід і риси характеру значно впливають на поведінку студентів. Ефективні стратегії включають структуровані групові заняття з призначенням ролей, угоди про взаємну підтримку, регулярну зміну складу груп і чіткі критерії для усних відповідей. Ці стратегії спрямовані на пом'якшення домінування активних студентів, заохочуючи внески більш пасивних учасників.

Дані були зібрані через систематичні спостереження та опитування у клахах ESP у Національному технічному університеті України. Статистичний аналіз оцінив зміни в залученості студентів, виявивши більш збалансовану участь до завершення експериментального впровадження. Результати демонструють ефективність використаних стратегій у покращенні освітніх результатів та динаміки класу. Незважаючи на певні обмеження, це дослідження робить внесок у поточну дискусію щодо ефективних практик навчання ESL, пропонуючи практичні рішення для викладачів з управління динамікою класу.

Ключові слова: ESL, студенти, комунікативний підхід, пасивні студенти, домінуючі студенти, стратегії.

**Problem Statement.** The communicative approach is widely recognized as one of the most effective methods for ESL training, primarily because it develops foreign language proficiency by shaping both individual learner autonomy and group interaction skills. This approach leverages a variety of teaching methods like discussions, role-playing, and collaborative projects, which collectively provide opportunities for students to learn from each other's insights improve their communication skills and facilitate teamwork. The autonomy encouraged by this method develops the students’ skills to set their personal learning goals, make decisions, and self-regulate, stimulating independent and critical thinking. These elements are essential since they ensure that the learning process supports not just the process of a foreign language acquisition but also personal and social development within an educational context.

However, despite all the advantages, the communicative approach presents for educators a range of challenges that require proper management. Among them is the uneven participation: where dominating students often actively engage in discussions and overshadow their more introverted or passive peers. The ability of an instructor to balance this activity within the group is crucial, as it affects not only the class atmosphere but also the overall development of communicative competence. It is noteworthy that activity levels among students, both 'strong' and 'weak,' can vary greatly, with some actively participating and others remaining detached, regardless of their actual language proficiency. This lack of correlation between language level and class dominance means that even students with limited
vocabulary and frequent grammatical errors can assert control over discussions, while their more proficient classmates might hesitate to contribute or take initiative. Therefore, selecting training methods, strategies and tools for students, who vary both in their language proficiency and in level of engagement, is a significant challenge.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** Addressing the issue of managing the dynamics of dominating and passive students within a group has always been in focus of educators since it is essential to creating a productive and supportive class environment. Having summarised the recent research findings, we are able to outline the following three main tasks for an instructor in addressing the class participation issues:

1: *to analyse the reasons behind the dominance or passivity.* Recent studies suggest that these behaviours may stem from varying levels of confidence and prior educational experiences. For instance, a range of studies indicates that dominating students often have previous positive learning experiences, which boost their confidence, whereas passive students may have faced educational setbacks that inhibit their classroom engagement [1; 11; 14].

2: *to address the problems caused by such behaviours.* Dominating students can sometimes stifle the contributions of others, leading to an imbalance in class participation. Conversely, the passivity of certain students can contribute to a lack of diverse perspectives in discussions. A 2020 paper by Fabbri, aligning with the findings of Sage in 2022 and Sayegh and Rigopoulos in 2023, highlights the effectiveness of structured group activities that assign roles to each student, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued [4; 12; 13]. These activities not only mitigate the overpowering influence of dominating students but also draw out contributions from quieter members, enriching the learning experience for the whole group.

3: *to establish an effective working environment for cultivating mutual support among students.* Research by Lin et al. (2021) demonstrates that creating small, diverse working groups within the classroom can foster a sense of community and support [14]. This approach encourages students to collaborate and support each other's learning, helping to balance the dynamics between dominating and passive students. Such an environment not only improves language skills but also enhances interpersonal relationships among students, contributing to a more cohesive and supportive learning atmosphere [3].

Together, these studies provide a foundation for educators to develop strategies that effectively manage and integrate dominating and passive students in foreign language group settings, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes for all students involved.

It is important to note that a student's activity in class can be either constructive or disruptive. For instance, a student's dominance in a group may manifest through attempts to disrupt the lesson, striving to be the centre of attention.
at any cost, or unwillingness to allow others to speak. The reasons for such dominating behaviour include:

1. *Extraversion as a personality trait*. Extroverted students typically exhibit certain characteristics such as:
   - enthusiastically completing tasks set by the teacher;
   - a desire to express their viewpoints, often interrupting others including the teacher;
   - good adaptation to any external conditions without getting distracted, for example, by conversations of other student groups during role-play preparations;
   - effective group work, often taking on leadership or coordinator roles;
   - a tendency to produce "effects," enjoying being the centre of attention or performing tasks that involve talking about themselves;
   - abstract expression;
   - initiative and creativity;
   - frequent questioning and clarification of tasks;
   - ignoring or poorly performing written tasks;
   - inability to perform repetitive tasks;
   - quick incorporation of new words and expressions into speech;
   - fearlessness in making mistakes;
   - poor grammar knowledge, speaking fluently but using grammatical structures incorrectly;
   - poor test results due to inattentiveness;
   - preference for a fast-paced lesson but often being restless [5; 6].

2. *Desire for instructor's approval*. This desire can stem from the student's psychological type. It may also be linked to the necessity to pass a course or earn extra points, which are significant under the current point-rating system. Even students with a low level of foreign language proficiency may seek to draw the instructor's attention to earn these crucial points [7].

3. *Desire to win authority and attention in the group*. The drive to attract attention can often be a primary behavioural motive. When this desire exceeds reasonable limits, it can lead to conflict behaviour, pushing educational goals to the background for the student [5; 7].

Conversely, the reasons for students' passivity may be:

1. *Introversion as a personality trait*. Introverted students are characterised by the following behaviours:
   - They are slow to complete tasks set by the teacher.
   - They wait for the teacher to notice them and initiate interaction.
   - They adapt poorly to external conditions, with surrounding noise hindering their task performance.
They are passive in group tasks and are not inclined to voice their opinions during discussions.

- Their speech is typically precise and to the point.
- They show little initiative but are meticulous in recording and completing individual and writing assignments.
- They prefer routine exercises and carefully study and analyse new vocabulary before using it in speech.
- They fear making mistakes and often write down their oral answers first.
- Generally, they have a good grasp of grammar and take its study seriously.
- They enjoy writing tests and often produce commendable results.
- Their work pace is relatively slow, but they are patient and focused [5; 6; 10].

2. **Insufficient preparation for classes.** Even if nominally "strong" students are not fully prepared for a lesson, they prefer to remain silent and try to be inconspicuous. Unfortunately, some adopt this as a systematic approach, leading to a passive stance in practical foreign language sessions [2; 8].

3. **Previous negative experiences.** Some students may have been subjected to severe criticism by teachers or peers in the past. The fear of making mistakes or appearing foolish inhibits their active participation in the learning process [2; 8; 9].

4. **Lack of motivation.** Various factors can cause a lack of motivation, including a shortage of praise from teachers (not all teachers are quick to encourage or commend, which ultimately leads to a loss of trust and the development of wariness), uninteresting lesson topics, and personal characteristics of the student [2; 7; 9].

These factors illustrate the complex interplay of personality, previous experiences, and situational factors in shaping student behaviour, highlighting the need for tailored educational approaches to engage all learners effectively.

**The aim** of the current study is to investigate and address the challenges associated with balancing participation in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that employ the communicative approach. Specifically, it seeks to identify effective strategies for managing the dynamics between dominating and passive students to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. By analysing recent research, developing adequate strategies and implementing them in practice, the authors aim to enhance both individual learner autonomy and group interaction skills, ultimately improving overall educational outcomes and fostering a productive classroom atmosphere for all students. Despite the limitations of the conducted research, this endeavour represents an earnest attempt to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the relevant training practices.
The aim of this study is to investigate and address the challenges of balancing participation in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that use the communicative approach. It seeks to identify effective strategies for managing the dynamics between dominating and passive students, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. By analysing recent research, developing appropriate strategies, and implementing them in practice, the authors aim to find solutions that enhance both individual learner autonomy and group interaction skills, thereby improving educational outcomes and fostering a productive class atmosphere for all students. Despite the limitations of the research, this endeavour represents a sincere effort to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective ESL training practices.

Methods. A comprehensive review of recent research and publications was conducted to identify effective strategies for managing classroom dynamics and promoting equitable participation. Key findings from the literature and authors’ practical experience were used to develop the strategies and principles. Data on student participation were collected through systematic observations conducted during each class session. Observers recorded the frequency and nature of interactions, noting instances of dominance and passivity. In addition to observational data, student feedback was collected through surveys to gauge changes in their perceptions of class dynamics. Statistical analyses were performed to assess the significance of changes in engagement levels and to evaluate the impact of the implemented strategies. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary involvement in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute."

Findings. As we have already outlined, the varying levels of student activity present certain challenges in organising practical foreign language classes, which require instructor’s timely intervention. It should be noted that the communicative methods emphasis working in pairs and small groups. In this setup, an instructor does not control every step but rather guides the activity and assists in case of difficulties. Nevertheless, an instructor retains the role of a leader, as he or she sets the goals of the lesson, selects tasks to achieve these goals, and monitors performance.

One of the instructor’s tasks in monitoring is to identify problems related to the levels of student activity. Let us outline the typical difficulties:

A dominating student may monopolise the group discussion. This situation can be comfortable for those who, for various reasons, are reluctant to express their opinion or tend to limit themselves to brief, formal comments.

An active participant in the discussion may attempt to go beyond the assigned task, which often leads to not fully achieving the initially set goals of the lesson or failing to achieve them altogether.
Dominating students tend to correct their peers' mistakes directly during their speech, which can demotivate learners that are more passive.

Overall, dominating behaviour can foster a destructive atmosphere in the classroom. However, successful completion of communicative tasks is possible only if all parties cooperate, value each participant's contribution to the discussion, and learn from each other. Thus, the educator's task in these settings is to convey to the students the importance of mutual support and establish an atmosphere of constructive collaboration.

Although creating ideal conditions for every student is impossible, it is essential to find solutions to level the playing field. Based on the analysis of recent research and our practical experience, the following methods can be implemented:

1. **Mutual support agreement.** Dominating students may not realize the destructive nature of their behaviour. It is essential to explain the problems associated with their actions and provide algorithms for mutually beneficial cooperation in the class (such as the inappropriateness of interrupting to correct peers' errors, the need to encourage other students to dialogue, etc.). This agreement can be formalised in writing and taken into account when assessing students' performance in practical classes.

2. **Regularly changing group cast.** People tend to follow habitual behaviour patterns, which are difficult to change when interacting with the same individuals. Only new experiences and stepping out of the comfort zone can correct established behaviour. This experience will be beneficial for both passive and dominating students. When forming pairs of active and passive students, it is essential to provide them with tools for developing the conversation in advance, such as clarifying questions: 'Why do you think that? Can you give me an example?' Pairing and grouping dominating students with established discussion regulations, including time for individual responses and listening to all viewpoints, can be effective.

3. **Assigning various roles within the group.** This allows each participant the opportunity to express themselves in different areas. Roles might include the discussion leader, the person responsible for adhering to the regulations, or a student who notes down grammatical and lexical errors, etc. This method implies mutual learning among students. Initially, the role of the discussion leader could be assigned to a dominating student, with the task of gathering opinions from all participants.

4. **Evaluating oral comments based on clear criteria.** To help students recognize the importance of structuring their speech and adhering to discussion regulations, clear requirements for oral responses should be provided. The key criteria might include the relevance of comments to the stated topic; providing opportunities for others to speak, actively attempting to engage other students in the discussion; politeness and respect for other participants.

5. **Support for inhibited and passive students.** The instructor can precede a statement from a passive student with an encouraging remark, for example: "Since
(name) has practical experience here, could you describe what worked well for you?”, “I know that (name) is interested in this topic. Could you share your ideas with us?”. Certainly, these statements should be based on actual facts. It is better to ask inhibited students to speak second or third, relieving them from the stress of opening the discussion while giving them a chance to offer an original idea. Additionally, making a student feel the importance of their contribution to the discussion can be achieved by referring back to a statement they made earlier, adding a comment such as: “It supports the opinion that name expressed before”.

When working with extroversion and introversion students, also the different strategies are effective.

**While dealing with extroverts an instructor should:**
- Allow them to speak first. Show emotional interest in their contributions.
- Encourage the use of facial expressions, gestures and other appropriate displays of emotionality in role-plays, avoid static scenes. Allow to move around.
- Offer a wide range of topics and diverse roles in pair work. Encourage improvisation.
- Stimulate activities related to public speaking.
- Encourage discussion, group problem-solving, and facilitate interaction
- Avoid repetitive exercises, monotonous lectures, and individual tasks that limit interaction with other group members.
- Assign homework that involves group work such as preparing joint projects or presentations.
- Create situations where extroverts are not only interested in expressing their own views but also in developing the dialogue.
- Reward them for their ability to engage and draw out their conversation partners.

**For introverts, an instructor should consider these strategies:**
- Allow the use of fictional facts or an abstract character when discussing topics about “oneself”.
- Avoid requiring non-verbal language in role-plays and emphasizing emotionality.
- Clearly define tasks and specific roles, and provide templates, ready-made phrases, or sentences for use in pair work.
- Avoid assignments that require public speaking or impromptu tasks; instead, offer work in pairs or small groups.
- Do not demand overly active participation. Allow students to first assess the situation in discussions.
- Alternate group work with individual tasks, giving students a chance to rest from social interaction.
Encourage independent language learning by assigning individual tasks such as reading, watching/listening, writing followed by exercises and summarisation (using LMSs or learning platforms with automated feedback, if possible).

Avoid criticism and create a “situation of success” where students can feel accomplished without the stress of negative feedback.

To maximize the benefits from the solutions presented above, it is essential to implement them consistently in every lesson rather than sporadically. Regular application of these strategies enables students to adapt and internalize the guidelines and methods provided by the instructor, fostering a more structured and supportive learning environment. This concept of consistency is supported by the results of our 18-week experiment conducted over the autumn semester, which aimed at balancing the engagement between dominating and passive students. To collect data, we employed an observational approach targeting 84 students across four academic groups studying ESP in the Management and Marketing Faculty of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute."

Initially, our observations indicated that dominating students accounted for 36% of interactions, often overshadowing their more passive peers, who participated minimally. However, through the consistent implementation of the aforementioned strategies, a shift in engagement patterns was noted. By the end of the observation period, the participation rate of dominant students decreased, allowing for more balanced involvement. Simultaneously, passive students' engagement increased, with their contribution to a more equitable 41% of class interactions.

Fig. 1 The participation dynamics.
This redistribution of participation proves the effectiveness of the strategies in creating a more inclusive and balanced learning environment. This outcome was not only reflected in the observed behaviours but also corroborated by student feedback, which reported improved satisfaction with class dynamics.

Conclusions. The communicative approach to ESL training presents significant challenges in balancing class participation. Dominating students often overshadow their quieter peers, disrupting class dynamics and hindering equitable language development. These imbalances arise from various factors, including previous educational experiences and individual personality traits. Understanding the root causes of dominant or passive behaviour is crucial for developing effective strategies. Confidence levels, past experiences, and motivation significantly influence student participation. By creating a classroom environment, that encourages mutual support and structured interactions, instructors can mitigate the negative effects of dominance and passivity. Selecting adequate strategies fosters a more balanced and inclusive atmosphere. Moreover, effective management of student performance in groups with varying levels of engagement can be achieved by adhering to principles such as individual support, flexibility, and situational awareness. These principles are essential for creating a balanced, inclusive, and supportive learning environment that maximizes the benefits of the communicative approach for all students. Ultimately, a well-managed class, combined with appropriate strategies, ensures that every student has the opportunity to thrive and develop their language skills effectively.

References:


Література:


