

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**DESIGNING AND PILOTING SPEAKING TASKS
TO FOSTER WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE
IN A YEAR 8 EFL CLASS**

MA thesis

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**TARTU
2026**

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the design and piloting of speaking tasks intended to foster willingness to communicate among Year 8 EFL learners (n=3). The study applied a Task-Supported Language Teaching approach and implemented six speaking tasks during regular English lessons over a two-week period in April 2026. Data were collected through classroom observations using a structured observation checklist and learners' feedback form. The findings suggest that speaking tasks may gradually encourage learners' oral participation despite challenges related to hesitation, confidence, and limited experience with peer interaction. The study also highlights the importance of scaffolding and task structure in supporting learners' participation.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate; speaking tasks; Task-Supported Language Teaching; Action Research; materials development

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

EFL – English as a foreign language

FLA – Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCA – Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

L1 – first language

L2 – second language

SLA – Second Language Acquisition

TBLT – Task-Based Language Teaching

TSLT – Task-Supported Language Teaching

WTC – Willingness to Communicate

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, English is widely used for international communication. It plays an important role across various domains, including technology, culture, and the global economy. This high demand also impacts education. According to Eurostat (2023), around 82% of students in primary education in the EU learn English as a foreign language, whereas, for example, around only 4% study French and 4% study German. A similar disproportion can be seen in Estonia as well (EHIS 2026). However, the popularity of English among learners does not necessarily translate into their speaking it when they have the opportunity.

The Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools (Riigi Teataja 2023a) sets the development of communicative competence as an educational goal, including an outcome that students are expected to achieve a B1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2020) or CEFR by the completion of Year 9. It means that at this level, learners are expected to be able to deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling, to produce simple connected speech on familiar topics, and to describe experiences, events, and opinions in a reasonably coherent manner (*ibid*: 175). These descriptors clearly emphasize not linguistic knowledge but the ability to use the language actively in different situations as an independent language user. Also, the above-mentioned National Curriculum recommends that students and teachers actively use a target foreign language in the classroom and beyond, suggesting that students do so (Riigi Teataja 2023b: 5).

Nevertheless, some students may demonstrate strong grammatical knowledge and good written performance while avoiding oral participation for some reason. For instance, Muroya (2022) interprets this unwillingness among Japanese learners of English not only in terms of self-perceptions of foreign language abilities but also in terms of anxiety and the nature of the

interlocutor. In addition, Asassfeh et al (2011) find that Jordanian learners of English themselves consider speaking as the most difficult skill to acquire. These findings suggest that the challenges associated with oral interaction may arise across different cultural and educational contexts, as learners' attitudes towards speaking are shaped by context-specific factors. Since speaking is frequently perceived as the most challenging language skill, it becomes essential to investigate the factors that influence learners' willingness to communicate in a second language.

In the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Willingness to Communicate (WTC) refers to a person's readiness to engage in conversation at a specific time with individuals in a foreign language (MacIntyre et al 1998: 547). This readiness is influenced by many factors, including confidence, familiarity with the topic, and the classroom environment. MacIntyre et al (ibid) present a heuristic model of variables influencing WTC, conceptualizing WTC as the final step that leads to speaking in a foreign language. However, it must be noted that the WTC may be analyzed as a dynamic situational variable, subject to rapid fluctuations (Nematizadeh and Cao 2023). It suggests that classroom practices and a selection of learning activities may play a crucial role in fostering learners' WTC (ibid: 1610).

To foster learners' WTC in classroom settings, appropriate classroom tools need to be carefully considered. One possible tool is the use of tasks, which have been widely discussed in SLA, particularly within the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. In this context, tasks are usually understood as meaning-focused activities that require learners to use the foreign language to achieve a communicative outcome (Qi 2023; Nunan 2004; Shehadeh 2005).

Willis and Willis (2007: 11) point out that tasks create opportunities for meaningful interaction, increase learner engagement, and support students' interaction in a foreign language classroom. Moreover, Willis and Willis (ibid: 8-9) underline the importance of spontaneous

exchange of meanings, while the application of tasks aims to formalize this exchange. Studies conducted in the Estonian educational context, including previous MA theses in the Department of English Studies of the University of Tartu, have also shown that the use of tasks positively influenced learners' willingness to communicate (Ong 2024: 50; Kõiv 2024: 39).

However, Ong (2024) and Kõiv (2024) have focused on upper secondary or more advanced learners, while relatively little attention has been paid to the use of tasks with lower secondary school students. This indicates a research gap, particularly in the design and piloting of tasks to foster WTC among lower secondary learners.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) approach. Unlike TBLT, where tasks form the core of the syllabus, TSLT allows tasks to be integrated as classroom tools within an existing curriculum (Ellis 2024: 7, Qi 2023: 57). In this framework, tasks serve multiple purposes, such as promoting fluency, drawing attention to language features, and activating prior knowledge (Castellví and Markina 2024: 49). This flexibility makes TSLT particularly suitable for the current study, which involves a small group of Year 8 English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (n=3) with differing educational needs. Therefore, the design and piloting of speaking tasks within a TSLT framework is proposed as a potential way to support the development of learners' willingness to communicate in EFL.

Based on the above considerations, this thesis proposes the design and piloting of speaking tasks intended to encourage Year 8 students' WTC in English. The thesis is guided by the following research questions:

- How can speaking tasks be designed and piloted to foster Year 8 students' WTC in EFL?
- What possible challenges may arise for both students and a teacher when piloting speaking tasks in the EFL classroom?

To answer these research questions, the study employs an action research methodology. Efron and Ravid (2013: 238) describe action research as a cyclical process involving repeated stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, in which the end of the first cycle leads into the second, with additional research questions to pursue. However, the present study has only a first cycle. This cycle included the design and piloting of a series of carefully developed speaking tasks within the regular classroom setting.

The implementation of these tasks was examined through classroom observations using a lesson observation checklist. This data collection tool was used to document learners' participation in oral interaction, including their communicative initiative, engagement, and ability to sustain speaking during tasks, and to identify patterns across different lessons. In addition, learners' feedback was collected twice, once for tasks 3 and once for task 6, to gain insight into students' perceptions of these tasks and their experiences during task performance. Furthermore, the current thesis aims to offer practical suggestions for integrating speaking tasks into the TSLT approach within existing classroom practice.

The current thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter provides a literature review of WTC, examining its origins, theoretical development, and the factors influencing its emergence, including situational, individual, and affective dimensions. It also discusses the concept of tasks in SLA, their theoretical foundations, sequencing, and their role in fostering learners' willingness to communicate, along with considerations for designing tasks in EFL classrooms. The second chapter presents the empirical part of the study as action research. It outlines the objectives and the study's structure, describes the participants, and explains the design and piloting of speaking tasks. Furthermore, the chapter introduces the data collection instruments, including a structured observation checklist and learner feedback, and

provides an analysis of learners' participation in oral interaction during piloting, followed by a discussion of the findings and their implications for classroom practice.

CHAPTER 1. WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND TASKS IN THE EFL CONTEXT

1.1. Willingness To Communicate

This section examines the concept of WTC in SLA. It begins by discussing the origins and theoretical development of WTC, followed by an overview of the heuristic model proposed by MacIntyre et al (1998). The section then explores the situational perspective on WTC and considers the individual and affective factors that may influence learners' readiness to communicate in the EFL classroom.

1.1.1. Origins of Willingness to Communicate

The WTC concept has not originated in second language studies. It has a background in the study of first language (L1) communication, where it was regarded as a personality variable that impacts the initiation or avoidance of a conversation (McCroskey et al 1985: 3), and it emerged from Burgoon's (1976) concept of unwillingness to communicate. Nevertheless, at this point, WTC was seen more as a personality variable; it was considered a stable, trait-like tendency. It was not yet clear whether classroom practices or task design might change a person's willingness to talk.

The concept of WTC acquired an additional meaning when MacIntyre and Charos (1996) applied it to the second language (L2) classroom. They demonstrated, in their research, that L2 WTC is not like its L1 counterpart. One person may be fluent in one's native language but may be incapable of talking in a foreign language. The fear of making a mistake, lack of vocabulary, and difficulty with socializing all stand in the way of the desire to participate. Years later, the following WTC research showed that perceived communicative competence had the largest effect size among variables influencing WTC, which is closely linked to L2

communication frequency (Shirvan et al 2019; Muroya 2022; Toyoda et al 2021). It means that the belief that a person can communicate effectively in L2 was a stronger indicator of willingness to speak than actual L2 proficiency. All this suggests that a student's level of confidence is comparably more important than the amount of real knowledge they possess in L2 in the context of WTC.

This revelation preconditioned the definition that would underlie L2 WTC studies for decades. According to MacIntyre et al (1998: 547), WTC in L2 can be described as a willingness to engage in discourse with a given person or people at a given time using L2. Here, it has been clarified that L2 WTC may not be seen only as a trait-like variable but also as a situational state-like variable. It will go up and down depending on factors such as the perceived situational task competence and situational task engagement (Toyoda et al 2021: 205). This positioning changed the notion of WTC into a dynamic state influenced by many factors, including teachers.

This conceptual shift had considerable implications for teaching practice. In this case, classroom or lesson design, group formation, and error management are explicit instruments for altering students' choices about speaking. The connection between WTC and instructional practice renders the model proposed by MacIntyre et al (1998: 547) applicable not only in theory but also directly to the classroom setting in EFL teaching.

1.1.2. The Heuristic Model of WTC

To describe the potential influences that can push or pull a learner toward or away from speaking, MacIntyre et al (1998: 547) developed a pyramid-shaped, layered model (see Figure 1).

There are six levels placed above each other, starting with the broadest social forces, then narrower social influences, and finally the actual communication behavior. The low level

includes slow-moving personality traits, intergroup attitudes, and social confidence. There is a gradual increase in the specificity of the layers from the bottom up: motivation and attitudes toward the L2 community, communicative competence and experience, self-confidence in using L2, and WTC with a specific individual. As can be seen, the decision to speak or not is almost at the very top.

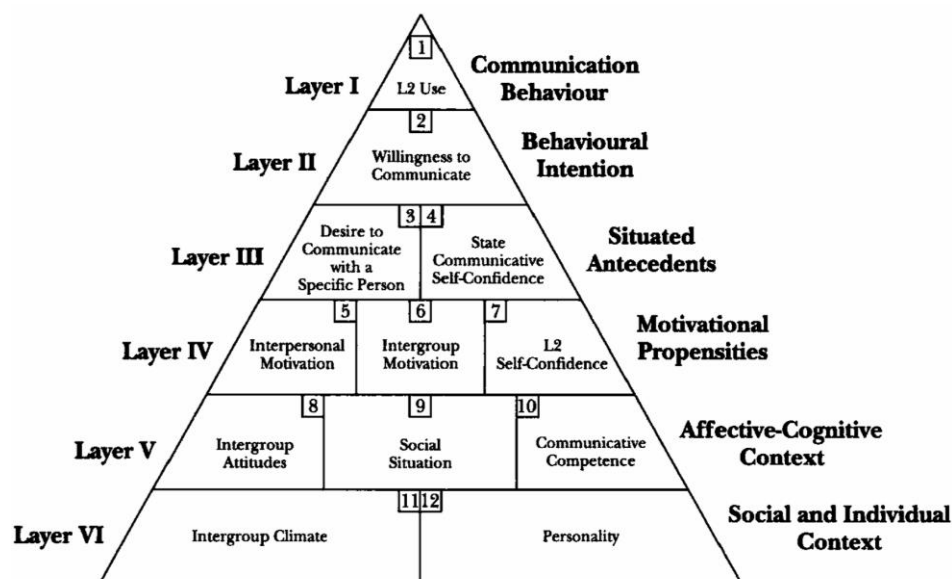


Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre et al 1998: 547).

The pyramid organization is not merely a visual one. It gives a real relationship between the layers. Deep factors, e.g., the student's attitude towards the language community or towards the student as a learner, may change gradually over months and years of practice. According to MacIntyre et al (ibid: 549) and MacIntyre (2007: 568), the upper layers (layers III, II, and I) respond to both short-term situational conditions and rapid changes. A L2 student who is comfortable with a task partner can be reported to have high WTC despite having a history of anxiety regarding L2 use. This implies that the two lower layers, though vital, do not entirely dictate what occurs at the top. Real weight is on situational factors (see Figure 2). According to

MacIntyre (2007: 573), the pyramid model suggests that L2 WTC may be conceptualized not at the trait level, but rather as a state of readiness occurring at the moment of L2 use.

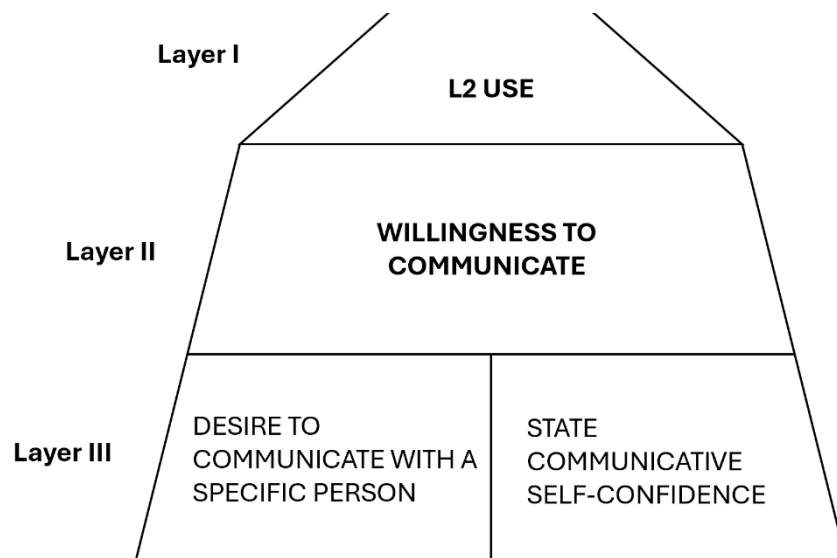


Figure 2. Layer I, Layer II, and Layer III of the Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (adapted from MacIntyre et al 1998: 547).

Moreover, the following research on L2 WTC highlighted the need to reconsider and further develop the model. MacIntyre (2020: 127) notes that the emergence of the idiodynamic method and the dynamic turn in WTC research revealed areas requiring further refinement, particularly regarding the interaction of multiple influences on WTC across different timescales. The idiodynamic method focuses on capturing moment-to-moment fluctuations in learners' affective states during communication by combining real-time self-ratings with qualitative reflection, for instance, emphasizing that WTC can change rapidly within a single communicative event (MacIntyre and Ducker 2022: 9).

However, the social aspect or “desire to communicate with the specific person” needs to be considered by teachers. Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2016: 673) underlines the importance of organization modes and group composition for teachers. Her study (ibid: 674) suggests that the

willingness to engage in communicative activities increases if there are individuals whom L2 learners like and trust.

1.1.3. Situational Perspective on WTC

As described earlier, the Heuristic Model of WTC (MacIntyre et al 1998: 547) explains the layered structure of WTC and the temporal differences between its components. This model has led to an important distinction in subsequent research between trait-like and state-like (situational) manifestations of WTC. According to Kang (2005: 279-280), trait-like WTC reflects a learner's general tendency to communicate across situations, whereas state-like WTC refers to their willingness to speak at a particular moment, shaped by immediate contextual factors. Although both dimensions coexist within the same learner, they are influenced by different variables. Importantly, the situational dimension has received considerable attention in classroom research due to its responsiveness to pedagogical intervention.

Several studies have explored how WTC emerges dynamically in classroom settings. For instance, Cao (2011) adopted an ecological perspective to examine how learners' WTC develops over time during classroom interaction. From this perspective, WTC emerges from the interdependent relationships among learners, teachers, and their classroom environment rather than from a single isolated factor (ibid: 469). The findings indicate that small-group work tends to elicit higher levels of participation than whole-class activities (ibid: 472), and this pattern is also observed by Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2016: 674). These findings suggest that the structure of interaction plays a crucial role in shaping learners' WTC. In addition, task characteristics, particularly topic familiarity, appear to significantly influence learners' engagement. Tasks related to students' personal experiences tend to elicit more communication than abstract or

unfamiliar topics (Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2016: 672; Kang 2005: 290), highlighting the importance of aligning task content with learners' backgrounds.

Recent developments in WTC research further emphasize its dynamic nature. As MacIntyre (2020) argues, idiodynamic studies demonstrate that WTC can fluctuate on a moment-to-moment basis during real-time communication. This perspective underscores the importance of considering not only stable learner traits but also the immediate classroom environment. Such considerations are particularly relevant in lower secondary contexts, where adolescents may be especially sensitive to social evaluation (Somerville 2013). For many learners, speaking in front of the whole class may provoke anxiety, whereas smaller, less public interactional settings can facilitate participation (Kang 2005: 290). Therefore, careful task design and classroom organization become essential tools for creating conditions that support learners' WTC.

1.1.4. Individual and Affective Factors Influencing WTC: A Pedagogical Perspective

Various individual factors influencing learners' WTC in L2 have been researched. Unlike situational influences discussed previously, these factors relate to learners' internal states, self-perceptions, and emotional experiences, which shape their readiness to engage in communication. For instance, Zarrinabadi and Haidary (2014) investigate the relationship between WTC and identity styles of Iranian EFL learners, while Amiryousefi (2016) examines how learners' interest, motives for communicating with the teacher, age, and gender relate to their willingness to communicate and L2 speaking. Since many of these individual and affective variables may be influenced, at least to some extent, by classroom practices and teacher behavior, it is important for teachers to be aware of their potential impact on learners'

participation. Understanding these factors can help educators design pedagogical practices that support, rather than hinder, learners' willingness to communicate.

One of the most extensively researched factors is foreign language anxiety (FLA), also referred to as foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). According to Horwitz et al (1986), language anxiety is a specific form of nervousness associated with using a foreign language in public settings. It differs from general anxiety or shyness, as it encompasses distinct components such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, and has been shown to predict language learning outcomes independently of broader personality traits (ibid: 128-129). Learners who feel confident in their first language may nevertheless experience significant anxiety when required to communicate in a foreign language, particularly in classroom environments, where the pressure of evaluation is more salient (Lee and Lee 2019).

This anxiety can shift learners' focus away from meaning and toward self-monitoring, leading to reduced fluency and increased hesitation (Horwitz et al 1986). As a result, learners may limit their participation in oral activities or avoid them altogether. In response to this, Dewaele and Dewaele (2018: 35) emphasize the importance of fostering a positive emotional classroom environment in which learners feel valued and supported, and where the target language is used in a meaningful and engaging way.

Motivation is another key factor that interacts closely with anxiety and can, in some cases, mitigate its negative effects. As Dörnyei (2001: 2) suggests, motivated learners are more likely to embrace the challenges of L2 learning. There are different basic conditions that form motivation, such as appropriate teacher behavior and good relationships with students, a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, and a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms (Dörnyei 2001: 31). Similarly, Peng and Woodrow (2010: 843-844) propose and test a model of L2 WTC in the Chinese EFL classroom in which classroom environment plays

a central role (see Figure 3). Their model demonstrates that factors such as teacher support, student cohesiveness, and task orientation influence learners' motivation, communication confidence, and beliefs about classroom communication, which, in turn, contribute to learners' WTC in English (ibid: 855-857). In particular, motivation was found to influence WTC indirectly through communication confidence, while classroom environment affected WTC both directly and indirectly (ibid: 854-856). These findings highlight that learners' WTC is not shaped by a single factor but rather emerges from the interaction of individual and classroom-related variables (ibid.: 835–836).

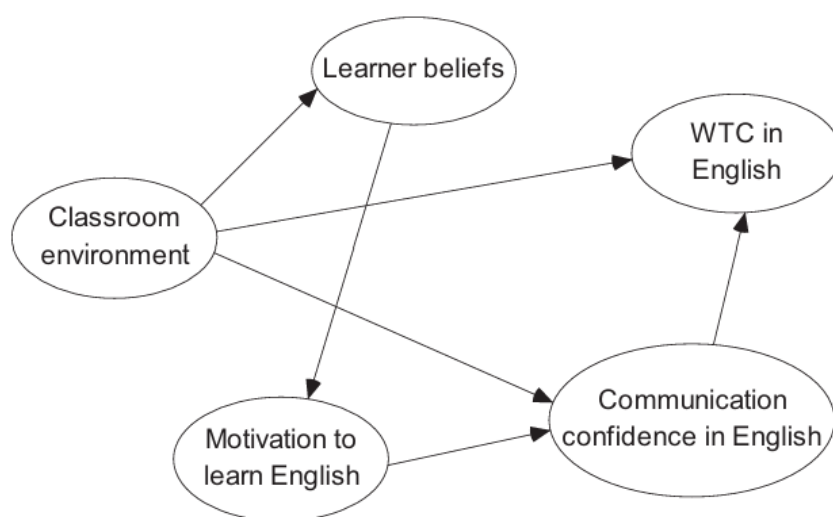


Figure 3. Tested L2 WTC model in a Chinese EFL classroom (Peng and Woodrow 2010: 844).

Perceived communicative competence is also a strong predictor of WTC. MacIntyre and Charos (1996: 549) demonstrated that learners' self-perceived ability to communicate may differ from their actual proficiency and can directly affect their willingness to speak. For instance, a learner with relatively strong linguistic knowledge but low confidence may participate less than a learner with more limited proficiency but higher confidence. This suggests that even a small experience of communicative successes supported by a teacher can create a disproportionately positive effect on learners' confidence in L2 (Darasawang and Reinders 2021: 9). This correlates with Lake (2013: 237), who highlights the role of positive

psychological practices in strengthening motivation and self-efficacy, thereby encouraging learners to engage more actively in L2 communication.

Although these factors are internal to the learner, they do not operate in isolation. Rather, they interact with the learning environment and with each other, which can either support or inhibit learners' WTC (Cao 2011: 477). Therefore, understanding these individual and affective variables, particularly those that can be shaped through classroom practice, is essential for designing pedagogical interventions that effectively foster learners' L2 WTC.

1.2. Tasks in the EFL Classroom

This section discusses the concept of tasks and their role in EFL teaching. It first discusses different definitions of tasks, and the theoretical foundations of task use in language learning. The section then reviews the sequencing of tasks, the relationship between tasks and willingness to communicate, and the principles of designing speaking tasks as pedagogical materials for the EFL classroom.

1.2.1. Defining the Task

At the outset, it should be noted that tasks have been defined in different ways by SLA researchers, which may create confusion among teachers who wish to implement them in classroom practice. In addition, although tasks are widely used in L2 teaching, they are not always designed or implemented in accordance with task-based principles, which may result in the loss of their defining characteristics, or “taskness” (Shehadeh 2024; Ellis 2024). Therefore, it is important to clarify how the concept of task is understood within the context of SLA research.

As was mentioned, the term 'task' is loosely used in education; therefore, SLA scholars have endeavored to provide a clear definition. In this context, Nunan (2004: 2) argues that the

first attempts to formulate a proper definition led to non-linguistic definitions. However, there were various attempts to define key characteristics that differentiate tasks from other classroom activities. For instance, Ellis (2003: 9-10) formulates six “criterial features of a task”: a task is a workplan, focuses on meaning, involves real-world processes of language use, involves any of four language skills, engages cognitive processes, and has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

To better understand these features, an example task may be used (see Figure 4). Ellis (2020) illustrates these features through an information-gap activity titled “What Can You Buy?” in which one learner plays the role of a customer and the other a shop owner. Since each learner has different information, they must interact to determine which products are available in the shop. The activity reflects a real-world communicative situation and requires learners to negotiate meaning through questioning. Furthermore, the task has a clearly defined outcome: identifying which items on the shopping list can be purchased. In this way, the learners’ primary attention is directed toward successful communication and task completion rather than toward the isolated practice of grammatical forms.

What Can You Buy?

Student A:

You are going shopping at Student B’s store. Here is your shopping list. Put ticks next to the items on your list you can buy.

Mary's Shopping List	
1.	oranges
2.	eggs
3.	flour
4.	powdered milk
5.	biscuits
6.	jam

Student B:

You own a store. Here is a list of items for sale in your store. Find the items that Student A asks for that you do not stock.

Abdullah's Store	
1.	bread
2.	salt
3.	apples
4.	tins of fish
5.	coca cola
6.	flour
7.	rice
8.	sugar
9.	curry powder
10.	biscuits
11.	powdered milk
12.	dried beans

Figure 4. Task “What Can You Buy?” (Ellis 2020)

SLA researchers often distinguish between real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks. While real-world tasks reflect communicative activities that learners may encounter outside the classroom, pedagogical tasks are specifically designed for language learning purposes within educational settings (Nunan 2004: 1). On the basis of previous considerations, Nunan (ibid: 4) formulates his own definition of a pedagogical task as “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form”. In addition, Nunan (ibid: 4) underlines that the task should have a sense of completeness and be able to stand alone as a communicative act. This definition is largely consistent with those proposed by other scholars. Similarly, Shehadeh (2005: 18-19) defines an L2 pedagogical task as “an activity that has a nonlinguistic purpose or goal with a clear outcome and that uses any or all of the four language skills in its accomplishment by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use.”

Moving closer to the present day, Qi (2023) concludes that most researchers agree upon three central features of a task: the use of the target language, meaning primacy, and goal orientation. Together, these characteristics distinguish tasks from other types of language learning activities. For her research, Qi (2023) adopts the definition proposed by Bygate et al (2001: 11): “A task is a well-defined learning activity, relatable to learner choice or to learning processes, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain a communicative objective”. The present thesis also adopts this definition as the primary understanding of the task used throughout the study.

However, Ellis (2024: 7) highlights a new issue in defining tasks, noting that although both TBLT and TSLT use tasks, they differ in their curriculum design and implementation.

While TBLT typically requires a task-based syllabus or a workplan (Ellis 2003: 9, Ellis 2024: 7), TSLT incorporates tasks with the existing curriculum or may be used as a part of a modular curriculum (Ellis 2024: 10). This flexibility of TSLT allows us to use tasks as an additional pedagogical device in the classroom, which is used in the current thesis.

1.2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on the Use of Tasks in L2 Teaching

Tasks became an important component of communicative approaches to L2 teaching as researchers increasingly emphasized the importance of meaningful language use in L2 learning. In particular, the grammar-translation method, as a traditional teaching style, has often been and remains criticized for developing learners' knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and occasionally pronunciation without sufficiently supporting their ability to develop their L2 through listening comprehension or communicative functions (Cook 2008: 240-241). In response, language teaching gradually shifted from "training for communication" to "teaching through communication" (Prabhu 1978, as cited in Cook 2008: 259). Within this shift, tasks began to be viewed as a way of creating communicative conditions in which language could be learned through use.

The growing interest in tasks was strongly influenced by developments in SLA research, particularly theories related to input, interaction, and output. One influential contribution was Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, which proposed that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level of proficiency ($i + 1$). Although this theory highlighted the importance of meaningful exposure to language, later researchers argued that input alone could not fully explain L2 development.

In this respect, Long's (1981, 1996) interaction hypothesis emphasized the importance of negotiation of meaning during communicative interaction. According to Long (1996: 413),

language development occurs when learners attempt to resolve communication difficulties by asking for clarification, reformulating utterances, or responding to feedback. Through this process, learners' attention may be drawn to linguistic form within a meaning-focused context, making interaction an important component of task-based learning.

Similarly, Swain's (1985) output hypothesis argued that learners also need opportunities to produce language. Producing output encourages learners to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge and process language more deeply. As Pannell et al (2017: 128) suggest, this process may involve a shift from semantic processing during comprehension to more syntactic processing during production. Together, these perspectives support the idea that tasks can create conditions for meaningful input, interaction, and output in the classroom.

Within the context of the present study, it is also important to note that TSLT is associated with skill-learning theory (DeKeyser 1998, as cited in Ellis 2018: 3). From this perspective, language learning involves the gradual development and automatization of linguistic knowledge through practice (Ellis 2018: 3-4). Unlike TBLT, where tasks function as the primary unit of instruction, TSLT integrates tasks into a broader instructional sequence that may also include explicit attention to language form. This flexibility makes TSLT particularly suitable for contexts in which speaking tasks are incorporated into an existing curriculum.

1.2.3. The Sequence of Tasks

In the application of tasks, the organization of classroom activities follows a structured sequence that balances meaning-focused communication with attention to form. A widely recognized framework is the three-stage model consisting of a pre-task phase, a during-task phase, and a post-task phase (Willis 1996, as cited in Cook 2008: 260). Building on this model, Ellis (2002: 80) proposes a more detailed framework for designing task-based lessons (see Table

1), emphasizing that the during-task phase itself remains the core and indispensable component of using tasks in EFL instruction.

Table 1. A framework for designing task-based lessons (Ellis 2002: 80)

Phase	Examples of options
A. Pre-task	* Framing the activity (e. g. establishing the outcome of the task) * Planning time * Doing a similar task
B. During task	* Time pressure
C. Post-task	* Number of participants * Learner report * Consciousness-raising * Repeat task

The sequence begins with the pre-task stage, during which the teacher introduces the topic, activates relevant vocabulary, and provides learners with the conceptual support needed to engage with the task (Willis and Willis 2007: 21–22). This stage can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety, particularly when learners are confronted with open-ended communicative tasks (Aubrey 2022: 13-14). At the same time, it is important that pre-task preparation does not involve extensive pre-teaching of language forms, as this may undermine the task's communicative purpose (Ellis 2024: 6).

The during-task phase is the central part of the lesson, during which learners engage in the task itself, typically working in pairs or small groups. During this stage, the teacher adopts a facilitative role, managing interaction and supporting communication rather than directly transmitting knowledge. As Willis and Willis (2007: 148–150) suggest, the teacher acts as a guide, creating conditions for learners to negotiate meaning and develop their communicative competence through interaction.

In the post-task stage, learners are usually asked to report their outcomes to the class and reflect on the language they have used. This phase provides an opportunity to focus on form, as

the teacher can highlight patterns, compare different expressions, and address mismatches between intended and actual meaning (ibid: 151). In this way, attention to language emerges from communicative use rather than preceding it.

While this sequence is characteristic of TBLT, TSLT organizes task phases somewhat differently (see Table 2). In TSLT, tasks are typically integrated into a broader instructional sequence that may include explicit language instruction and controlled practice before communicative task performance (Ellis 2024: 7; Qi 2023: 57). As a result, instruction often follows a more traditional sequence, such as the Present–Practice–Produce (PPP) model, in which explicit instruction precedes task performance (Ellis 2024: 8). In this context, tasks are often designed as focused activities that reinforce specific grammatical or lexical features. While this may limit opportunities for spontaneous, meaning-driven communication, it can provide learners with a greater sense of security and control, particularly when dealing with complex language forms.

Table 2. Summary of characteristics of TBLT and TSLT in procedure (adapted from Qi 2023: 59)

Phase	TBLT	TSLT
Pre-task	Task instruction.	Explicit grammar explanation.
During-task	Focus on form is reactive, interactive, and student-initiated.	Focus on form can occur preemptively and reactively, can be initiated by anyone, and does not have to be interactive
Post-task	Teacher commenting on task completion.	Teacher focusing on language use.

Moreover, TSLT may be particularly effective in contexts where learners experience difficulties with specific language structures or demonstrate recurring errors, as it allows for

targeted support within a communicative framework (Ellis 2024: 10). In this respect, combining elements of TBLT and more structured approaches has been suggested as a pedagogically balanced solution, like a modular curriculum model (Ellis 2019). Cook (2008: 261–262), for instance, argues that task-based approaches should not necessarily replace other methods entirely but can be integrated with them to create a more flexible and responsive teaching practice.

Overall, the sequencing of tasks plays a crucial role in shaping classroom interaction and opportunities for language use. Whether implemented within a TBLT or TSLT framework, the design and organization of task phases can significantly influence learners' engagement, their focus on meaning and form, and ultimately their WTC in the target L2.

1.2.4. Tasks and Willingness to Communicate

The relationship between tasks and WTC lies in the extent to which classroom activities create conditions that encourage learners to engage in communication. Research on WTC suggests that learners are more likely to speak when they feel sufficiently prepared, when the topic is familiar, when the level of risk is manageable, and when the social environment is supportive of making mistakes. Task-based approaches, such as TBLT and TSLT, may provide a structured way to create these conditions in the classroom.

Within TBLT, tasks are designed to promote meaning-focused interaction, in which errors are treated as a natural part of the learning process and typically addressed during the post-task phase (Willis and Willis 2007: 25). This emphasis on communication and tolerance of errors may contribute to a more supportive learning environment. Empirical evidence supports this view: for example, Cutrone and Beh (2018) report that Japanese EFL learners participating in TBLT group expressed positive attitudes towards classroom interaction and demonstrated

increased levels of WTC. These learners described these lessons as more engaging and practical than lessons based on other approaches, which, in turn, enhanced their motivation to use the language (ibid: 584)

In contrast, TSLT incorporates tasks within a more structured instructional sequence, where specific language forms are introduced prior to task performance (Ellis 2024: 7). This approach aligns with perspectives emphasizing the importance of comprehensible input (Krashen 1985), as well as with pedagogical concerns that learners may require explicit guidance before engaging in communication (Cook 2008: 261-262). As Qi (2024: 206) suggests, pre-task focus on form can provide learners with a sense of security, particularly for those who may feel uncertain about their linguistic resources. While this may reduce the spontaneity of communication, it can also lower anxiety and facilitate participation.

Further insight into the relationship between tasks and WTC is provided by research on task design. Skehan (1998: 99) demonstrates that different task characteristics can shape patterns of language use. For example, time-pressured tasks tend to promote fluency, while tasks that require personal input or opinion encourage more complex language use. This suggests that task design is not merely a practical concern but a pedagogical tool that can influence learners' engagement and their WTC.

From a broader perspective, the CEFR conceptualizes language learners as social agents who use language to achieve communicative goals (Council of Europe 2020: 28). At the B1 level, learners are expected to manage familiar communicative situations, express opinions, and participate in interaction with a degree of independence. These descriptors highlight the importance of aligning classroom tasks with real-life communication and support the use of task-based approaches to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and its practical application.

Overall, these considerations demonstrate that tasks can play a crucial role in fostering learners' WTC. At the same time, not all educational contexts are suitable for a fully task-based curriculum (Carless 2007; Iveson 2015). In such situations, a task-supported approach may provide a more practical alternative, as tasks can be integrated into existing teaching programs without replacing the prescribed syllabus (Ellis 2024; Qi 2023: 59). Within this framework, tasks function as opportunities for meaningful oral interaction while remaining compatible with more traditional instructional structures. Consequently, task-supported instruction may be a flexible, context-sensitive way to promote learners' willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom.

1.2.5. Creation of Speaking Tasks as Materials for the EFL Classroom

Tomlinson (2011: 2) defines materials as “anything that is used by teachers and learners to facilitate the learning of a language”. Within this broad understanding, tasks can be viewed as a central type of pedagogical material, particularly for developing speaking skills. However, speaking materials have often been insufficiently developed and lack systematic organization, frequently consisting of isolated activities rather than structured progression (Mishan and Timmis 2015: 121-122). This highlights the need for a more principled approach to developing tasks as educational materials for SLA.

A key consideration in task development is the nature of speaking itself. Speaking is a complex cognitive process involving several interrelated sub-processes, including conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring (Burns and Hills 2013: 232, as cited by Mishan and Timmis 2015: 122). In addition, spoken communication is shaped by interactional and social factors, such as the relationship between interlocutors and the context in which communication occurs (Bygate 2001: 16, as cited by Mishan and Timmis 2015: 123).

Therefore, tasks designed as materials should reflect not only linguistic outcomes but also the cognitive and social demands of real-time communication.

Another important aspect of materials development concerns the features of spoken language. Research based on spoken corpora shows that natural conversation includes discourse markers, frequent collocations, and non-canonical grammatical structures (Mishan and Timmis 2015: 123). Moreover, effective communication depends on the use of conversational strategies, such as paraphrasing, clarification, and comprehension checks (*ibid.*). Consequently, tasks should not focus solely on grammatical accuracy but also provide opportunities for learners to develop these features of spoken interaction.

Furthermore, the design of speaking materials should move beyond unsystematic lists of activities and instead be guided by a clear syllabus. Mishan and Timmis (*ibid.*: 124) note that the treatment of spoken language in many coursebooks is often inconsistent and limited. To address this issue, they propose organizing speaking materials as an itemized speaking syllabus, with a basis on specific features of spoken language, such as lexis, grammar, functions, and communication strategies, or as a syllabus of discourse types, e.g., informal conversations, service encounters, interviews, and presentations (*ibid.*: 124-125). In the second variant, learners may become more aware of how spoken language varies across different communicative contexts. Consequently, speaking tasks can better reflect the realities of authentic L2 oral interaction.

In addition, task design should account for methodological considerations related to teaching speaking. Mishan and Timmis (*ibid.*: 103, 126) highlight the ongoing debate between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches. In the context of speaking instruction, a process-oriented approach emphasizes the development of interactional skills through participation in communicative activities, whereas a product-oriented approach focuses more

on the accurate production of specific linguistic forms or spoken outcomes. Mishan and Timmis (ibid: 126) also underline that effective speaking instruction may require a combination of both perspectives depending on the educational context and learners' needs.

Finally, research on task implementation suggests that specific design features can influence learners' performance. For example, pre-task planning has been shown to improve fluency and accuracy, while task repetition can lead to gains in complexity and confidence (ibid: 128). These findings indicate that tasks should be designed as part of a sequence that supports the gradual development of speaking skills rather than as isolated activities.

Overall, developing tasks as EFL materials requires a principled, research-informed approach. Tasks should reflect the complexity of spoken communication, incorporate features of authentic language use, and be aligned with the chosen methodological framework. In the context of the present study, a task-supported perspective is adopted, where speaking tasks are designed to complement existing materials and create additional opportunities for meaningful oral interaction. In this way, task development serves as a practical and context-sensitive means of fostering learners' communicative competence and their WTC in L2.

CHAPTER 2. DESIGN AND PILOTING OF SPEAKING TASKS

2.1. Objectives and Structure of the Study

The present study aims to explore how speaking tasks can foster Year 8 students' WTC in an EFL classroom. Also, the study is presented as a first-cycle action research project and is informed by its principles, which focus on addressing practical classroom challenges through the implementation and evaluation of pedagogical interventions (Efron and Ravid 2013). The process follows a series of steps, including identifying a problem, gathering background information, designing of he study, collecting data, analyzing the results, and reflecting on the findings (see Figure 5).

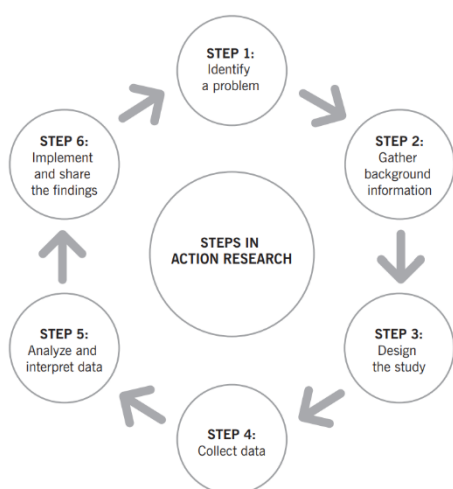


Figure 5. The six cyclical steps of action research (Efron and Ravid 2013: 8)

In the present study, Step 1 involves identifying a classroom-related problem: learners' limited WTC in English during oral classroom activities.

Step 2 involves gathering background information through a review of relevant theoretical literature on WTC and tasks in the EFL classroom. This theoretical background is presented in Chapter 1.

Step 3 focuses on designing the pedagogical intervention. For this purpose, a set of speaking tasks based on the principles of TSLT was developed for a small Year 8 EFL support group.

Step 4 involves piloting these tasks during regular classroom lessons over a two-week period, with one task per lesson.

Step 5 consists of collecting and analyzing classroom data. During the piloting period, classroom observations and learner feedback forms were used to document learners' participation, interaction, and responses to the speaking tasks.

Finally, Step 6 involves reflecting on the findings and identifying challenges encountered while piloting these speaking tasks in the EFL classroom. Also, this step includes key insights for a teacher and implications for the EFL classroom.

Accordingly, the following research questions guide the study:

- How can speaking tasks be designed and piloted to foster Year 8 students' WTC in EFL?
- What possible challenges may arise for both students and a teacher when piloting speaking tasks in the EFL classroom?

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted in an Estonian basic school with a small support group of three Year 8 learners (n=3). The school previously assigned participants to this group because they needed additional support in developing their English language skills.

The group includes learners with varying levels of EFL proficiency and diverse educational needs. Two of the learners are native Estonian speakers who experience difficulties

in language development, including challenges related to their first language. The third learner is bilingual and has a different previous non-Estonian educational background. This diversity makes the classroom multilingual, since the teacher sometimes needs to use Estonian, Russian, and Ukrainian with English in instruction of the same study group. Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that the participants demonstrate lower English proficiency than their peers or those in the same grade at this school.

This context is particularly relevant for the study of WTC. As highlighted in previous research, learners with limited linguistic resources or lower confidence may be more reluctant to engage in oral communication due to anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, or low perceived communicative competence (MacIntyre et al 1996; Horwitz et al 1986). Therefore, the implementation of supportive and well-structured speaking tasks is especially important in this setting.

2.3. Design of Speaking Tasks

The set of speaking tasks was developed to complement the *Solutions Pre-intermediate* coursebook (Falla and Davies 2017), specifically *Unit 1. Feelings* (see Appendix 1). Although the coursebook provides structured grammar and vocabulary practice, the existing speaking activities do not appear fully suitable for the present study group, as learners often tend to avoid extended oral interaction or rely on minimal responses during regular classroom tasks. Furthermore, the accompanying teacher's guide (de la Mare et al 2017) primarily assumes that learners can complete the provided speaking activities independently and offers only limited suggestions for adaptation or additional scaffolding.

In response to this context, a set of speaking tasks was designed to create more accessible and supportive opportunities for oral interaction in the classroom. The development of the tasks was informed by the principles of materials development discussed in Chapter 1, particularly the importance of meaningful communication, contextualized language use, and learner engagement. Rather than emphasizing grammatical accuracy alone, the tasks aim to encourage learners to use EFL for communicative purposes, including expressing feelings, giving opinions, asking questions, and maintaining interaction.

The tasks were designed within a TSLT framework, in which communicative tasks function as pedagogical tools integrated into an existing syllabus rather than replacing it entirely (Ellis 2024; Qi 2023). This approach was considered particularly appropriate for the present classroom context, as it allowed the integration of speaking tasks into regular lessons without major modifications to the current curriculum.

At the same time, the tasks followed the three-phase structure commonly associated with task-based instruction: pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases (Ellis 2002: 80). During the pre-task phase, learners received conceptual and linguistic support through vocabulary revision, grammar review, visual prompts, or model examples. The during-task phase focused on learners' oral interaction in a small-group setting, while the post-task phase included feedback, reflection, and brief discussion of language use.

A total of six speaking tasks were created and piloted across six lessons within *Unit 1. Feelings*. Each task aligns with the CEFR (2020) oral interaction descriptors for the A2 level (see Appendix 2), ensuring that the communicative demands remain appropriate for learners' proficiency and educational needs.

2.3.1. Overview of Designed Speaking Tasks

The designed speaking tasks addressed different communicative situations and language focuses connected to *Unit 1. Feelings* (see Appendix 1). Table 3 provides an overview of the designed speaking tasks, including their goals, grammar focus, and vocabulary. Although each task included practicing specific vocabulary and/or grammar structures from the coursebook, the primary emphasis remained on encouraging oral participation and interaction.

Table 3. Goals, Grammar Focus, and Vocabulary Used in the Designed Speaking Tasks.

TASK	Goal	Grammar focus	Vocabulary
Task 1	To learn how to express feelings and react to situations in English.	Present Simple, Modifying adverbs (e.g., a bit, a little, a little bit, extremely, rather, very)	Feelings and emotions (e.g., anxious, cross, sad, happy, confused, disappointed, excited, embarrassed, proud, suspicious)
Task 2	To learn how to narrate past events collaboratively in English.	Past Simple (affirmative), regular and irregular verbs	Vocabulary of the previous lesson, life events (e.g., birthday, graduation, vacation, funeral)
Task 3	To learn how to give advice and provide emotional support in English.	Should / shouldn't	Vocabulary of the previous lesson (Feelings and emotions)
Task 4	To learn how to ask and answer questions about past experiences in English.	Past Simple (negative and interrogative)	Question words (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, which, whose, and how)
Task 5	To learn how to describe reactions and express guesses in English.	-ed / -ing adjectives; How + adjective.	Participle adjectives (e.g., exhausted/exhausting, bored/boring, excited/exciting, shocked/shocking, annoyed/annoying)
Task 6	To learn how to describe accidents and discuss experiences in English.	Revision of Past Simple	Injuries and accidents (e.g., bleed, cut, hurt, fall, claim compensation, demand, warning sign)

Task 1 (Lesson 1A – *How do you feel?*) focuses on expressing emotions and reacting to familiar personal situations. Students are expected to describe feelings related to everyday scenarios, ask follow-up questions, and practice simple supportive expressions. The task aims to encourage initial participation in low-pressure interaction.

Task 2 (Lesson 1B – *Past Simple: affirmative*) requires students to organize mixed-up pictures into a coherent sequence and collaboratively create a story about a family across different years. This task encourages discussion, negotiation, and the use of past simple forms within meaningful communication.

Task 3 (Lesson 1C – *Problems, problems*) introduces a role-play interaction through situations involving advice-giving and emotional support. Students take on roles such as a new student, a parent, or an online friend and are expected to ask questions, explain problems, and respond with suggestions.

Task 4 (Lesson 1D – *Past Simple: negative and interrogative*) focuses on the use of past simple negative and interrogative forms through communicative questioning activities. Students are expected to practice asking and answering questions about experiences and situations while attempting to sustain interaction beyond isolated responses.

Task 5 (Lesson 1E – *Adjective endings*) concentrates on emotional vocabulary involving *-ed* and *-ing* adjectives. Students describe reactions to situations and images, compare opinions, and attempt to guess or interpret each other's descriptions.

Finally, Task 6 (Lesson 1F – *Painless*) involves a more extended role-play connected to accidents and compensation claims. Compared to previous tasks, this activity requires students to participate in longer exchanges, explain situations in greater detail, express opinions, and negotiate meaning more independently.

Across the sequence, the tasks gradually increased in communicative complexity. Earlier tasks provided more structured support and predictable interaction patterns, while later tasks encouraged more spontaneous communication and collaborative interaction.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument used in this cycle of action research was a structured observation checklist designed to capture observable classroom behaviors associated with WTC in EFL during task performance (see Appendix 3). Since WTC is understood primarily as a situational and affective construct, the checklist did not directly measure learners' internal motivation but rather focused on behaviors that may indicate their readiness to participate in oral interaction. The checklist included indicators such as initiative in communication, engagement in the task, use of English, partner support or cooperation with peers, confidence or low anxiety, response to feedback, and the ability to sustain speech beyond minimal responses.

Each indicator was assessed using a three-point scale (clearly observed, partially observed, not observed), allowing for a relatively systematic yet flexible evaluation of students' communicative behavior during the pilot. In general, an indicator was marked as "clearly observed" when learners demonstrated the behavior consistently during task performance, whereas "partially observed" referred to situations in which the behavior appeared inconsistently or was demonstrated only by some learners. "Not observed" was used when the behavior was largely absent during the lesson.

However, it should be acknowledged that the observation checklist was designed to evaluate the group rather than each learner separately. As a result, in some cases, indicators were

categorized as “partially observed” when certain learners demonstrated the behavior while others did not. Although this approach provided a general overview of classroom interaction patterns, individual observation sheets could have offered more detailed insight into each learner’s communicative behavior and fluctuations in WTC. These indicators were selected based on the conceptualization of WTC as a situational and dynamic construct (MacIntyre et al 1998; Cao 2011). Aspects such as initiative in communication and the ability to maintain speech reflect students’ moment-to-moment readiness to engage in oral interaction. This aligns with the view that WTC is not only a stable trait but also a variable that fluctuates across classroom conditions, task design, and interlocutor-related factors.

In addition to the observation checklist, brief students’ feedback was collected twice, at the end of tasks 3 and 6 (see Appendix 4). The feedback was gathered using a simple visual scale displayed on the board, in which students were asked to respond to two questions: “How would you rate this task?” and “How were you feeling during this task?” Instead of using written responses, students indicated their answers by placing marks along a continuum ranging from negative to positive (e.g., from “very bad” to “great”), as well as through visual symbols such as emotive faces and a plus sign.

This format allowed students to express both their evaluation of the task and their emotional experience in a quick and accessible way. The use of a continuum (including midpoint indicators such as “50/50”) enabled the capture of more nuanced responses, reflecting ambivalent or mixed perceptions. This kind of design seems particularly suitable for lower secondary students, as it reduces linguistic demands and encourages more spontaneous and honest feedback. Also, the feedback activity was conducted twice during the piloting phase rather than after every task, as overly frequent use of the same data gathering tool might have reduced learners’ engagement and resulted in less reflective or more random responses.

The inclusion of this type of feedback is especially relevant in WTC research, as affective factors such as enjoyment, difficulty, and emotional comfort are closely linked to students' readiness for oral interaction. By combining observational data with feedback form, the study adopts a mixed-method approach that captures both observable behavior and subjective experience.

As noted in previous research (Cao 2011; MacIntyre 2020), WTC can fluctuate rapidly even within a single lesson. Therefore, relying on a single measurement tool may not provide a complete picture. Although the present study did not aim to directly measure WTC development, the combination of classroom observation and brief post-task feedback provided additional insight into learners' communicative behavior and responses to speaking tasks during the piloting period.

2.5. Piloting of the Speaking Tasks

The speaking tasks were piloted over six lessons during two weeks in April 2026, with one task piloted per lesson. Each task followed a three-phase structure: a pre-task phase, a during-task phase, and a post-task phase. All these phases were completed during the last 20 minutes of each lesson, and students were not graded during the pilot. Table 4 presents the challenges and key insights that emerged during the piloting period.

Table 4. Overview of Challenges and Key Insights.

	Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
Challenges	Some learners seemed to lack confidence and needed additional vocabulary support before speaking activities.	Learners occasionally switched to L1 or relied on very short responses during interaction. Even though the students had cards, they sometimes needed the teacher's help to	Students are not accustomed to reflecting on their personal learning progress.

		understand who should start the dialogue first. The task format was new to students, so in some cases, they needed more time to complete tasks. Task 4 requires students to bring their own photos, but not all agreed to do so.	No time for the post-task phase leads to skipping it.
Key insights	Visual support (e.g., displaying useful vocabulary) and clear modeling (e.g., the teacher imitating the dialogue on a similar topic) can help learners prepare for designed tasks. Grading is not always needed in the classroom, so when it was announced that tasks were not for grading, students' behavior seemed more confident.	Changes in the study group's behavior during oral interaction with speaking tasks can indicate a gradual increase in learners' WTC. Lying or just making things up may be appropriate in speaking activities, allowing students to avoid saying, "I don't know", and still participate in speaking. AI-generated images may be useful for tasks that require students to describe their family or personal life. It helps to avoid potential emotional issues (e.g., students can find talks about their family very sensitive).	Continuous post-task reflection can help learners become more aware of their learning success and language use. Plan the post-task phase in advance, as it may be quite essential to the task's effectiveness. A digital student diary (e.g., Stuudium) can allow you to implement a part of the post-task phase like a feedback form, so it can also save your contact lesson time.

During the pre-task phase, the teacher introduced the topic and provided linguistic and conceptual support, including demonstrating key vocabulary, revising grammar, and/or modeling examples. Also, all activities (e.g., exercises from the student's book) completed before the during-task phase may be considered as pre-task activities or a part of the pre-task phase. This phase was particularly important in the given context, as students demonstrated low

confidence in oral interaction activities, and the provision of support aimed to reduce uncertainty and prepare students for participation in the during-task phase.

In the during-task phase, students worked as a group to complete the designed speaking tasks. The tasks required students to ask and answer questions, express opinions, and maintain interaction (see Appendix 1). However, during piloting of the first and second tasks, students had difficulty initiating oral interaction and often relied on minimal responses (e.g., “yes” or “no”). Interaction sometimes seemed limited, and students tended to wait for teacher guidance rather than engage spontaneously with one another, as was expected by the task. Also, Task 4 was not completed as expected because some students did not want to share their photos. Instead, they were allowed to use AI-generated pictures to complete the task. Additionally, L1 use was observed during the piloting phase. For example, students asked for clarification of the task or helped each other in L1. However, the main language used during task completion was still English.

During the post-task phase, the teacher provided feedback and encouraged reflection. Students were also asked to consider their performance and participation, while the teacher highlighted both successful language use and areas for improvement. Here, two issues occurred. The first one was a time limit, since the post-task phase is the last phase of the sequence, and the piloting of tasks was completed before the end of each lesson. Despite this issue, the piloting of the second task showed that it was no longer an issue because the teacher had planned more time for the post-task phase in advance. The second issue was that these students were not accustomed to reflecting on their personal learning progress. For instance, in the post-phase of the second task, students could barely explain to the teacher what they had learned today.

Nevertheless, despite emerging challenges, gradual changes were observed throughout the piloting phase. From the third task onward, students began to demonstrate signs of increased

engagement, including more frequent attempts to sustain oral interaction and to respond beyond minimal answers. Instances of peer support (e.g., one student clarifying the unknown words to another) also became more noticeable, although still limited.

The teacher's role throughout the piloting of speaking tasks remained primarily facilitative, focusing on supporting interaction rather than directing it. Nevertheless, in the pre-task and post-task phases, the teacher's role was more managerial, since it required explicit work on language forms.

2.6. Analysis of Findings

The data collected through observation checklists and students' feedback forms were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns related to students' WTC during the piloting of the designed speaking tasks.

At the beginning of the piloting phase, participants' behavior showed low observable levels of WTC. For instance, the speech of students was largely limited to short responses (e.g., "yes" or "no"), and students rarely initiated oral interaction independently (e.g., in the pilot of task 1 and task 2). Such behavior appeared to reflect previously established classroom interaction patterns, in which communication was mainly teacher-led and involved little peer-to-peer interaction.

As piloting progressed, some situational behavioral changes in students' WTC became more observable. By the fourth lesson (or task 4), two students began producing longer responses and showed greater readiness to sustain oral interaction during tasks. In addition, all the students appeared to pay closer attention to each other's contributions, suggesting a gradual shift toward more interaction-oriented communication. These changes may indicate increased

communicative engagement and a greater willingness to participate in oral classroom interaction.

At the same time, the fifth indicator, “Confidence / Low anxiety,” on the checklist did not change throughout the entire piloting and remained partially observed. The reason may lie in the design of this checklist: if the behavior of one student does not indicate confidence in speaking (e.g., steady voice, eye contact), even if the majority does, then it must be considered partially observed for the entire study group.

Nevertheless, fluctuations in students’ WTC in EFL remained evident throughout the piloting period. Students continued to rely on L1 in some cases when facing linguistic difficulties or misunderstanding tasks, and hesitation could frequently interrupt oral interaction. However, students were generally able to participate in tasks, though full task completion was not always achieved due to limited interactional engagement or time constraints.

Students’ feedback indicated that the tasks were generally perceived positively. The first feedback after the third task showed that two of three students felt neutral and the tasks were rated similarly; later, the results ranged from neutral “50/50” to “smiling face” or “great”. This may indicate that students need some time to adjust to the new speaking activity format and become more accustomed to it.

Overall, the findings suggest that the piloting of speaking tasks led to partial changes in students’ observable WTC in EFL, particularly in response length, peer interaction, and communicative participation. However, persistent challenges related to confidence, speaking habits, and linguistic limitations continued to influence students’ WTC in EFL.

2.7. Discussion

The findings of the present study provide insight into both the potential and the limitations of using speaking tasks within a TSLT framework to foster learners' WTC in a lower secondary EFL context. Although the present study included only the first cycle of action research and involved a small support group of learners, the implementation of the designed speaking tasks revealed several important tendencies related to students' oral interaction and the situational nature of WTC in L2.

Firstly, the findings support the view that WTC should be understood as a dynamic situational construct rather than a stable learner trait (MacIntyre et al 1998; Kang 2005; Cao 2011). At the beginning of the piloting process, learners' behavioral signals indicated low levels of oral interaction, with many relying on minimal responses or waiting for teacher guidance before speaking. However, gradual changes in communicative behavior became noticeable during later lessons. Learners began to respond with longer utterances, pay more attention to each other's contributions, and demonstrate a greater willingness to participate in oral interaction. These observations align with the situational perspective on WTC discussed in Chapter 1, which holds that students' WTC in L2 may fluctuate in response to contextual and interactional factors.

At the same time, the findings also indicate that classroom interaction patterns and previous learning experiences strongly influenced students' behavior during task performance. The students involved in this study appeared to be accustomed to teacher-led instruction in which communication primarily followed an Initiation–Response–Feedback pattern rather than peer-to-peer interaction. As a result, learners initially had difficulty initiating independent communication and sustaining interaction with classmates. This observation supports Cao's

(2011) ecological perspective on WTC, which emphasizes that learners' WTC emerges from the interaction between individual and classroom-related factors rather than from individual confidence alone. In this respect, the study demonstrates that introducing communicative tasks into classrooms where learners have limited experience with interaction-based learning may require a gradual adjustment period.

Another important finding concerns the role of scaffolding and task structure. The study suggested that learners participated more actively when tasks included clear instructions, familiar topics, examples, and pre-task support. In particular, the pre-task phase appeared to play a significant role in reducing uncertainty and helping learners understand what was expected of them. During the first three piloted tasks, students often required additional clarification and occasionally relied on their L1 to understand task requirements. However, when sufficient support was provided through vocabulary revision, model examples, and guided preparation, learners became more capable of participating in oral interaction. This finding aligns with TSLT principles, which integrate tasks into a more structured pedagogical sequence that combines communicative practice with teacher support and a focus on form (Ellis 2024; Qi 2023).

From an action research perspective, the piloting process also provided the teacher with important pedagogical insights. One of the main observations was that lower secondary learners required considerably more structured support during the pre-task phase than initially expected. In particular, learners benefited from explicit modeling, visual vocabulary support, and clearly demonstrated interaction patterns before beginning the tasks. The piloting process also revealed that instructions sometimes needed to be simplified or clarified in learners' L1 to reduce confusion and maintain participation. Furthermore, the implementation process showed that some task procedures, such as turn-taking organization or reflection activities, required more

teacher guidance than anticipated. These observations suggest that future cycles of task implementation should include more carefully staged preparation, clearer turn-taking organization, and additional communicative scaffolding, especially during the early stages of introducing interaction-based learning.

The findings also suggest that task familiarity and repetition may have contributed to learners' increased participation. Although students continued to make grammatical mistakes and occasionally struggled to recall vocabulary introduced previously, repeated exposure to similar communicative patterns appeared to increase their perceived confidence during interaction. This observation is consistent with skill-learning perspectives discussed in Chapter 1, which hold that repeated communicative practice may gradually support the automatization of L2 use (Ellis 2018). Nevertheless, it should also be acknowledged that the observed changes remained relatively modest, and no major transformation in learners' WTC was identified during the short piloting period.

Furthermore, the study revealed several teaching challenges associated with implementing speaking tasks in a lower secondary support-group context. One challenge concerned learners' frequent reliance on L1 during moments of uncertainty. Although students gradually increased their use of English across lessons, they still occasionally reverted to their L1 when attempting to clarify meaning or request support from the teacher. From a pedagogical perspective, this may suggest that students with lower confidence or limited linguistic resources require additional time and exposure before they feel comfortable sustaining interaction in L2.

Another challenge involved pauses and difficulties in maintaining continuous interaction. Despite the use of role cards, structured turn-taking, and guided prompts, learners often hesitated before speaking or required additional time to formulate responses. This reflects previous findings suggesting that speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited

communicative habits can inhibit learners' WTC (Horwitz et al 1986; Dewaele and Dewaele 2018). At the same time, the gradual increase in peer support observed in later lessons suggests that learners may become more comfortable participating as interactional routines become familiar and the classroom environment feels less evaluative.

The piloting process also highlighted several practical aspects of task implementation that may be important for future classroom practice. For instance, the findings suggested that learners responded more confidently when speaking tasks were not graded, suggesting that reducing evaluative pressure can support participation in oral interaction. In addition, the use of visual support and model dialogues appeared particularly useful for helping learners understand task expectations. Some unexpected adaptations also emerged during the piloting period. For example, in Task 4, AI-generated images were used as an alternative to personal photographs when learners were unwilling to share private pictures. This adaptation appeared to reduce discomfort while still allowing students to participate in communicative interaction. Such observations demonstrate that flexibility and responsiveness to learners' needs are important when implementing speaking tasks in lower secondary classrooms.

The findings additionally highlight the importance of considering contextual limitations in classroom-based research. The study was conducted with a very small group of learners (n=3), and potential irregular attendance throughout the implementation period may occasionally influence lesson dynamics and data consistency. Furthermore, the piloting period lasted only two weeks, limiting the ability to observe long-term changes in students' communicative behavior. Since WTC is known to fluctuate rapidly and dynamically even within single classroom interactions (MacIntyre 2020), a longer implementation period combined with additional data collection methods, such as questionnaires or interviews, could provide a more detailed understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions of speaking tasks.

Since the present study represents only the first cycle of action research, the findings also serve as a basis for planning future pedagogical adjustments. In future implementation periods, speaking tasks could be integrated more consistently over a longer period to help learners become more familiar with interaction-based classroom practices. Greater attention could also be paid to simplifying task instructions, strengthening the pre-task phase, and gradually increasing the level of communicative independence required from learners. In addition, future cycles could incorporate more individualized observation tools and learner questionnaires to gain deeper insight into fluctuations in learners' WTC in English.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the study demonstrates that speaking tasks within a TSLT framework may create supportive conditions for oral participation in lower secondary EFL classrooms. The findings suggest that carefully scaffolded tasks, familiar topics, and gradual exposure to peer interaction may encourage learners to participate more actively in oral communication. At the same time, the study underlines that fostering WTC is not an immediate process but rather one that requires sustained pedagogical support, repeated opportunities for communication, and a classroom environment where learners feel sufficiently secure to experiment with L2 use.

Overall, the present study contributes to existing research on WTC and tasks by focusing specifically on lower secondary learners in the Estonian EFL context, an area that has received relatively limited attention. While the findings cannot be generalized broadly due to the small scale of the piloting period, they nevertheless suggest that speaking tasks may serve as a useful classroom tool for encouraging learners' oral participation and interaction within existing teaching practice.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the design and piloting of speaking tasks intended to foster WTC among Year 8 students in the EFL classroom. The study was motivated by the observation that, although communicative competence and active L2 use are emphasized in the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools (Riigi Teataja 2023a; Riigi Teataja 2023b), students may still avoid oral interaction in EFL lessons despite good knowledge of grammar and strong writing skills. Since speaking is often perceived by students as one of the most difficult language skills (Asassfeh et al 2011), the study examined how integrating speaking tasks within a TSLT framework could encourage learners' participation in oral interaction.

The theoretical part of the thesis reviewed the concept of WTC in SLA, including its origins, the heuristic model proposed by MacIntyre et al (1998), and the situational perspective on WTC. It was highlighted that WTC is influenced by a range of situational, individual, and affective factors, such as anxiety, confidence, classroom atmosphere, and task characteristics. Furthermore, the first chapter discussed the concept of tasks in SLA and their role in communicative language teaching approaches. Particular attention was paid to the use of tasks within TSLT, where tasks are integrated into existing classroom practice rather than functioning as the central organizing principle of the syllabus. The review also examined the relationship between speaking tasks and learners' WTC, as well as principles of designing speaking tasks suitable for lower secondary EFL learners.

The empirical part of the thesis consisted of the first cycle of an action research project involving the design and piloting of six speaking tasks implemented during regular EFL lessons over a two-week period in April 2026. The study involved a small group of Year 8 learners (n=3). Data collection relied primarily on structured classroom observations and learner feedback forms. Since WTC is a dynamic, situational construct, the study focused on learners'

oral participation and interaction during performance of designed tasks rather than on long-term learners' language development.

The findings suggest that speaking tasks may contribute to fostering learners' WTC in EFL classrooms, although this process appears gradual and highly dependent on classroom conditions. During the piloting period, learners initially demonstrated hesitation, limited initiative in communication, and reliance on minimal responses. However, gradual changes in participation patterns were observed over time. Learners became more willing to engage in oral interaction, demonstrated greater attention to their peers, and occasionally produced responses extending beyond single-word answers. These observations may support previous research suggesting that WTC may fluctuate within classroom interaction and can be influenced by pedagogical intervention even over relatively short periods of time.

The study also revealed several challenges associated with implementing speaking tasks in a lower secondary EFL context. Learners were accustomed to teacher-led interaction patterns and initially experienced difficulties participating in peer interaction tasks. Additional support and scaffolding were necessary, especially during the pre-task phase, where instructions, examples, and clarifications helped learners understand task expectations. Furthermore, using the learners' L1 was occasionally necessary to maintain task flow and ensure comprehension. Learners also demonstrated hesitation, pauses, and difficulty sustaining interaction for extended periods. These findings indicate that fostering WTC requires consistent communicative practice and supportive classroom conditions.

At the same time, the study demonstrated the importance of task structure within the TSLT framework. The pre-task and post-task phases appeared particularly valuable in supporting learners' participation and reducing uncertainty during task performance. Familiar topics, clear communicative goals, visual support, and structured interaction patterns helped

learners engage more actively in oral interaction. Learner feedback also indicated that the tasks were generally perceived positively, despite the difficulties encountered during piloting.

In addition to findings on learners' participation in speaking, the study also provided practical value for the teacher. The piloting process highlighted the importance of careful scaffolding, explicit modeling, and flexible classroom management when implementing speaking tasks with lower secondary learners. It also increased the teacher's awareness of how classroom interaction patterns and task structure may influence learners' readiness to communicate. As a result, the study contributed not only to the development of speaking materials but also to the teacher's professional understanding of how speaking tasks can be adapted to learners with differing educational needs and lower confidence in oral interaction.

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the piloting period was relatively short, comprising only six lessons over two weeks. As a result, the study cannot claim long-term changes in learners' WTC or speaking proficiency. Second, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. The realities of classroom-based research also influenced the consistency of observations. In addition, the study relied mainly on observational data and brief learner feedback forms. Future research could therefore benefit from longer implementation periods, larger participant groups, and additional instruments such as learner questionnaires or interviews to provide deeper insight into learners' perceptions and fluctuations in WTC.

Since the present study represents only the first cycle of action research, the findings should also be viewed as a basis for future pedagogical development. Future implementation cycles could involve a longer period of task integration, more individualized observation procedures, and additional learner reflection tools. Greater attention could also be paid to

strengthening the pre-task phase, simplifying instructions, and gradually increasing learners' communicative independence during interaction tasks.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to existing research on WTC and speaking tasks in the Estonian EFL learning context, particularly regarding lower secondary learners, who have received less attention in previous studies at the University of Tartu (e.g., Ong 2024, Kõiv 2024). The findings suggest that speaking tasks integrated within a TSLT framework may support learners' oral participation when appropriate scaffolding and supportive classroom conditions are provided. Therefore, the study offers practical implications for EFL teachers seeking to encourage communication and interaction among learners in basic school classrooms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The Set of Speaking Tasks

Task 1 (Lesson 1A – How do you feel?)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can express feelings and emotions using simple language.
- Learners can ask and answer simple questions about personal situations.
- Learners can participate in short conversations on topics of feelings.
- Learners can react to another person's situation using simple supportive expressions.

Task (for students):

Read your prompt card. Describe how you feel in this situation. Explain why you feel this way. Ask other students questions about their situation. Tell them:

- How do you feel?
- Why do you feel like that?
- I'm sorry (or I'm happy) to hear this.

Be ready to report their situation to the class or to the teacher.

Instructions for teacher:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher introduces the topic using images from Lesson 1A or AI-generated ones. The teacher elicits feelings and revises key vocabulary. The teacher provides one model example.	The teacher distributes prompt cards. The teacher instructs students to work in a group. The teacher monitors interaction using an observation list. The teacher encourages the use of English and supports students if needed.	The teacher asks students to report their answers. The teacher provides feedback and highlights useful expressions. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials: Prompt cards

You have an important exam tomorrow. You think that you are not ready.	You've lost your phone. It was very expensive.	You got news: your family is moving to Tallinn. You don't have any friends there.
You missed your bus, so you'll have to wait a long time for the next one or order an expensive taxi.	You've received a bad mark at school. Mom and Dad are going to punish you at home.	Today is your birthday! Your family is going to the restaurant to celebrate.

Task 2 (Lesson 1B – Past Simple: affirmative)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can exchange simple information about past events.
- Learners can cooperate with peers to organize and discuss information.
- Learners can participate in short group discussions and express simple opinions.

Task (for students):

Work as a group.
 You have pictures of one family on the screen, but they are mixed.
 Look at these pictures.
 Try to put the pictures in the correct order and think of possible years when it happened.
 Describe the situation in each picture.
 Describe what people could feel at each moment.
 Prepare to tell the story to the teacher.

Teacher instructions:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher introduces the idea of telling a story in the past. The teacher revises the past simple tense and vocabulary from Lesson 1A–1B. The teacher shows one example picture from the study book and models a sentence (e.g., <i>I think he felt excited because he won money</i>).	The teacher asks students to work in a small group. The teacher demonstrates mixed-up pictures (generated by ChatGPT, 2026) of one family from different years. The teacher asks students to order the pictures and prepare a story. The teacher monitors group interaction, encourages the use of past simple, introduces vocabulary, and supports students when needed.	The teacher asks to present their story. The teacher provides feedback and highlights useful expressions. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials:

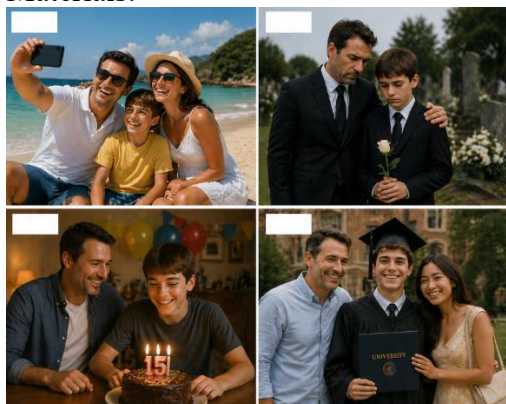


Figure 6. Pictures of one family from different years (generated by ChatGPT, 2026).

Task 3 (Lesson 1C – Problems, problems)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can describe a personal problem in simple terms.
- Learners can ask and answer questions related to everyday problems and their feelings about them.
- Learners can give and respond to simple advice and suggestions.
- Learners can express agreement, disagreement, and personal opinions in a limited way.

Preparation for a teacher: Put the task table on the screen. Prepare random cards with letters A, B, and C for the students.

Task (for students):

Student A	Student B	Student C
Imagine that you are a new student at school. You feel nervous because: • You don't know anyone in your class. • You want to make new friends. Your task: Describe your situation. Explain how you feel and why. Answer questions of "your parent" and "your online friend". Choose the best advice.	Imagine that you are the parent of a new student. Your task: Think about a piece of advice that you can give to "your child". Listen to "your child". Ask questions about the problem. Give advice.	Imagine that you are an online friend. Your task: Think about a piece of advice that you can give to "your friend". Listen to "your child". Ask questions about the problem. Give advice.

Teacher instructions:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher introduces the situation (new student at school). The teacher revises expressions for feelings and giving advice. The teacher models a short example dialogue.	The teacher distributes role-cards randomly to students and gives time for preparation (around 3 minutes). The teacher asks Student A to describe the problem. The teacher monitors interaction and encourages students to ask questions and give advice.	The teacher asks students to report their advice. The teacher provides feedback and highlights useful expressions. The teacher may ask which piece of advice was the most helpful. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials: Cards with letters A, B, and C.

Task 4 (Lesson 1D – Past Simple: negative and interrogative)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can ask and answer simple questions about past events.
- Learners can exchange information using simple negative and interrogative forms.
- Learners can give short explanations and respond to follow-up questions.

Preparation: Put the task table on the screen. Prepare random cards with letters A, B, and C for the students. Ask students to prepare some funny photos they keep on their phones. The reason why they keep these photos should not be obvious.

Task (for students):

Student A	Student B and C
Remember when and how you took one of your photos. Show this photo to other students. Answer the questions. Give clues using negative sentences.	Look at the photo of Student A. Ask at least 5 questions about this photo. Try to guess what happened.
Swap roles.	

Teacher instructions:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher revises past simple questions (e.g., <i>Where did you go?</i> , <i>Why did you...?</i>). The teacher introduces negative forms (e.g., <i>I didn't go...</i>). The teacher models a short example with a photo.	The teacher asks students to work together and distributes role-cards randomly to students, and gives time for preparation (around 3 minutes) to let them choose photos. The teacher instructs Students B and C to ask at least 5 questions. The teacher monitors interaction and encourages the use of past simple and negatives.	The teacher asks groups to share stories about their photos. The teacher provides feedback on question forms and negatives. The teacher highlights good examples. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials: Cards with letters A, B, C; students' and teacher's photos.

Task 5 (Lesson 1E – Adjective endings)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can express reactions and feelings using simple descriptive language.
- Learners can give simple clues and respond to guesses.
- Learners can participate in short spoken exchanges related to surprising situations.
- Learners can ask for clarification and respond to peers during interaction.

Preparation: Print out 8 pictures with different situations for students. Put a list of these situations on the screen.

Task (for students):

Student A	Student B and C
Look at the picture (others cannot see it). React to the picture with emotions. Use reaction phrases. Don't tell what it is, but give a small hint.	Look at the list of situations. Guess the correct situation. Choose one situation from the list on the screen.
Swap roles.	

Teacher instructions:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher introduces reaction phrases and revises <i>-ed</i> and <i>-ing</i> adjectives. The teacher shows one example and models both reaction and guessing.	The teacher asks students to work in one group. Student A picks a photo from the stock. Student A explores the photo and reacts. The teacher asks Students B and C to try to guess the situation. After the right answer, they swap the roles. The teacher monitors interaction and encourages participation.	The teacher asks groups to share answers. The teacher compares guesses. The teacher provides feedback on language use. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials:



Figure 7. Pictures of different situations (generated by ChatGPT, 2026).

Situations (for the screen)

The house is flooded.	The car is broken.	Someone has a huge meal.	Someone is on holiday.
He/she lost his/her phone.	He/she has got a good result.	He/she is running out of time.	The exam failed.

Task 6 (Lesson 1F – Painless)

Expected outcomes of the task based on A2-level CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020):

- Learners can describe simple everyday problems and situations.
- Learners can ask and answer follow-up questions to obtain information.
- Learners can express opinions, agree or disagree, and justify ideas in simple language.
- Learners can participate in short role-based discussions requiring information exchange and negotiation.

Preparation: Put the task table on the screen. Prepare random cards with letters A, B, and C for the students.

Task (for students):

Student A	Student B	Student C
Get a random card with an accident. Think about ways to exaggerate. Demand your money.	Ask questions about the accident. Check if the story is true. Ask for details. Decide if the claim is fair.	Say what you saw, or you can lie about it. Agree or disagree. Give your opinion.
Make a conclusion about what compensation would be fair.		

Teacher instructions:

Pre-task phase	During-task phase	Post-task phase
The teacher introduces accident vocabulary from Lesson 1F. The teacher models a short dialogue (customer–agent). The teacher explains roles.	The teacher asks students to work together, distributes role cards randomly, and gives time for preparation (about 3 minutes). The teacher instructs Students B and C to ask at least 5 questions. The teacher monitors interaction and encourages the use of past simple and negatives.	The teacher asks groups to share stories about their photos. The teacher provides feedback on question forms and negatives. The teacher highlights good examples. The teacher asks students to reflect on their performance and the language they used.

Materials: Cards with letters A, B, C. Prompt cards with different accidents for student A.

Your phone fell into water and stopped working. The witness might see you using it near a sink.	Your TV suddenly fell and broke. The witness might have heard a loud noise before it fell.	Your laptop stopped working after you dropped it. The witness might have seen you carrying many items at once.
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Appendix 2. A2-level Oral Interaction Descriptors

A2-level Oral Interaction Descriptors (adapted from Council of Europe 2020)

Category	Descriptor
Overall oral interaction	Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, provided the other person helps if necessary. Can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; can ask and answer questions and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters related to work and free time. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep the conversation going on their own accord.
Understanding an interlocutor	Can understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort. Can generally understand clear, standard speech/sign on familiar matters directed at them, provided they can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time. Can understand what is said clearly, slowly, and directly to them in simple everyday conversation; can be made to understand, if the interlocutor can take the trouble.
Conversation	Can establish social contact (e.g., greetings and farewells, introductions, giving thanks). Can generally understand clear, standard language on familiar matters directed at them, provided they can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time. Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest. Can express how they feel in simple terms, and express thanks. Can ask for a favor (e.g., to borrow something), can offer a favor, and can respond if someone asks them to do a favor for them. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep the conversation going of their own accord, though they can be made to understand if the interlocutor will take the trouble. Can use simple, everyday, polite forms of greeting and address. Can converse in simple language with peers, colleagues, or members of a host family, asking questions and understanding answers relating to most routine matters. Can make and respond to invitations, suggestions, and apologies. Can express how they are feeling, using very basic stock expressions. Can state what they like and dislike.
Informal discussion (with friends)	Can generally identify the topic of discussion around them when it is conducted slowly and clearly. Can exchange

	opinions and compare things and people using simple language. Can discuss what to do in the evening or at the weekend. Can make and respond to suggestions. Can agree and disagree with others. Can discuss everyday practical issues in a simple way when addressed clearly, slowly, and directly. Can discuss what to do, where to go, and make arrangements to meet. Can express opinions in a limited way.
Formal discussion (meetings)	Can generally follow changes of topic in formal discussion related to their field which is conducted slowly and clearly. Can exchange relevant information and give their opinion on practical problems when asked directly, provided they receive some help with formulation, and can ask for repetition of key points if necessary. Can express what they think about things when addressed directly in a formal meeting, provided they can ask for repetition of key points if necessary.
Goal-oriented co-operation (cooking together, discussing a document, organizing an event, etc.)	Can understand enough to manage simple, routine tasks without undue effort, asking very simply for repetition when they do not understand. Can discuss what to do next, making and responding to suggestions, and asking for and giving directions. Can indicate when they are following and can be made to understand what is necessary, if the interlocutor takes the trouble. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks using simple phrases to ask for and provide things, to get simple information, and to discuss what to do next.
Obtaining goods and services	Can deal with common aspects of everyday living such as travel, lodging, eating, and shopping. Can interact in predictable everyday situations (e.g., post office, station, shop), using a wide range of simple expressions. Can get all the information needed from a tourist office, as long as it is of a straightforward, non-specialized nature. Can ask for and provide everyday goods and services. Can get simple information about travel, use public transport (e.g., buses, trains, taxis), ask and give directions, and buy tickets. Can ask about things and make simple transactions in shops, post offices, or banks. Can give and receive information about quantities, numbers, prices, etc. Can make simple purchases by stating what is wanted and asking the price. Can order a meal. Can point out when something is wrong (e.g., "The food is cold" or "There is no light in my room"). Can ask (face-to-face) for a medical appointment and understand the reply. Can indicate the nature of a problem to a health professional, perhaps using gestures and body language.

Information exchange	Can understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort. Can deal with practical everyday demands: finding out and passing on straightforward factual information. Can ask and answer questions about habits and routines. Can ask and answer questions about pastimes and past activities. Can ask and answer questions about plans and intentions. Can give and follow simple directions and instructions, e.g., explain how to get somewhere. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information. Can exchange limited information on familiar and routine operational matters. Can ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in their free time. Can ask for and give directions referring to a map or plan. Can ask for and provide personal information. Can ask and answer simple questions about an event (e.g., ask where and when it took place, who was there, and what it was like).
Interviewing and being interviewed	Can make themselves understood in an interview and communicate ideas and information on familiar topics, provided they can ask for clarification occasionally, and are given some help to express what they want to. Can describe to a doctor very basic symptoms and ailments, such as a cold or the flu. Can answer simple questions and respond to simple statements in an interview. Can indicate in simple language the nature of a problem to a health professional, perhaps using gestures and body language.
Using telecommunications	Can use telecommunications with their friends to exchange simple news, make plans, and arrange to meet. Can, given repetition and clarifications, participate in a short, simple phone conversation with a known person on a predictable topic, e.g., arrival times, arrangements to meet. Can understand a simple message (e.g., "My flight is late. I will arrive at 10 o'clock."), Confirm the details of the message and pass it on by phone to other people concerned.

Appendix 3. Observation Checklist

Indicator	Notes	✓ / ~ / X
Initiative in Communication	Initiates communication, offers ideas or questions without prompting or being nominated by the teacher	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Engagement in the Task	Listens, responds, and actively participates in interaction	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Use of Target Language	Uses English to communicate; L1 use is minimal	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Partner Support / Cooperation	Helps partner, asks questions, clarifies, maintains dialogue	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Confidence / Low Anxiety	Appears comfortable speaking (steady voice, eye contact, low hesitation)	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Response to Feedback	Accepts feedback and continues communication without withdrawal	☐ / ☐ / ☐
Sustained Speech	Maintains speech beyond minimal responses (e.g., “yes”, “no”)	☐ / ☐ / ☐

Notes:	Legend:
	✓ = clearly observed ~ = partially observed X = not observed

Appendix 4. Results of the Students' Feedback on Task 3 and Task 6

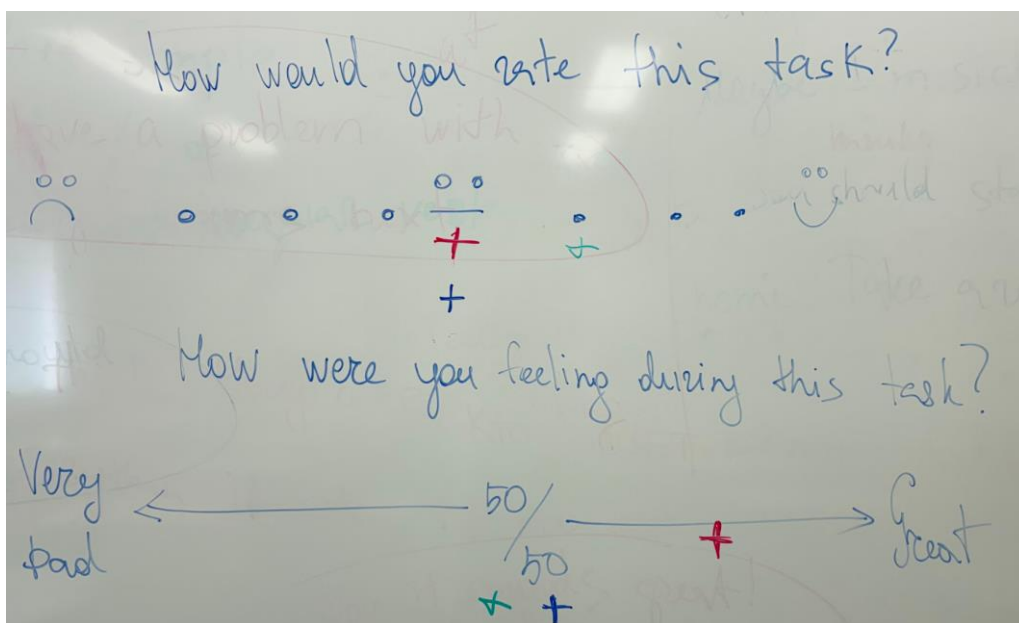


Figure 8. Feedback on Task 3 (Aiupov 2026).

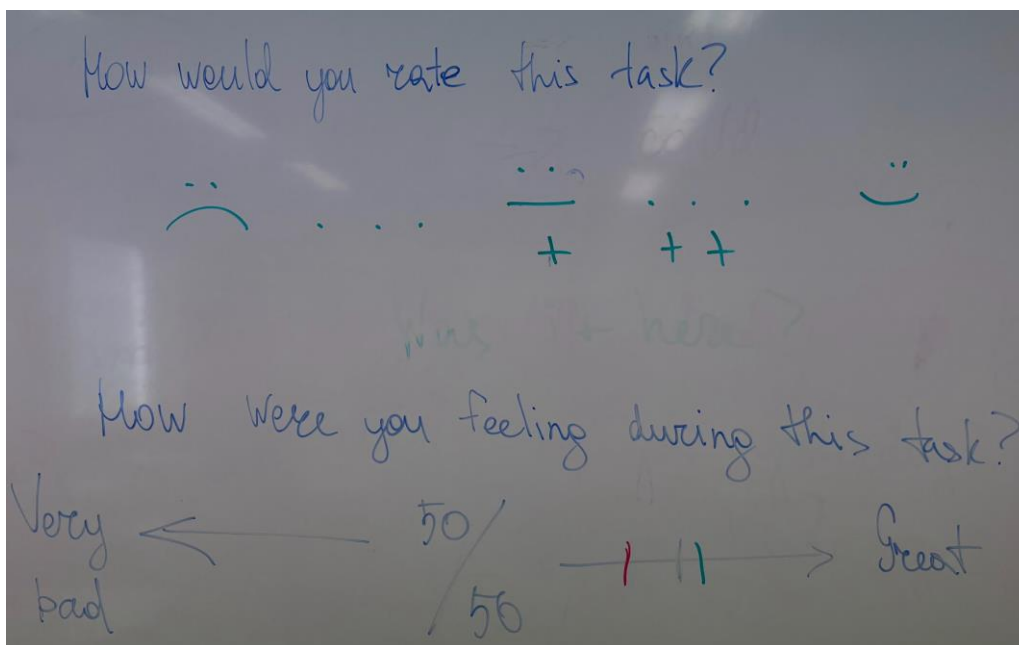


Figure 9. Feedback on Task 6 (Aiupov 2026).

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Stanislav Aiupov

ENG: Designing and Piloting Speaking Tasks to Foster Willingness to Communicate in a Year 8 EFL Class

EST: Rääkimisülesannete kavandamine ja piloteerimine suhtlustahe edendamiseks 8. klassi inglise keele tunnis

Magistritöö

2026

Lehekülgede arv: 72

Annotatsioon:

Käesolev magistritöö käsitleb rääkimisülesannete kavandamist ja piloteerimist eesmärgiga toetada 8. klassi inglise keele õppijate (n=3) suhtlustahe edendamist. Uuringus rakendati ülesandetoelist keeleõpet ning kahe nädala jooksul 2026. aasta aprillis viidi tavapärase inglise keele tundide raames läbi kuus rääkimisülesannet. Andmeid koguti klassivaatluste kaudu, kasutades struktureeritud vaatluslehte ja õppijate tagasisidevormi. Tulemused viitavad sellele, et rääkimisülesanded võivad järk-järgult toetada õppijate suulist osalemist vaatamata raskustele, mis on seotud kõhkluste, enesekindluse ja piiratud kogemusega rühmasuhtluses. Uuring tõstab esile ka toe pakkumise ja ülesannete struktuuri olulisuse õppijate osaluse toetamisel.

Märksõnad:

suhtlustahe; rääkimisülesanded; ülesandetoeline keeleõpe; tegevusuuring; õppematerjalide arendamine

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Stanislav Aiupov,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

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Stanislav Aiupov

12.05.2026

Autorsuse kinnitus

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Allkirjastatud digitaalselt

Stanislav Aiupov

12.05.2026

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

Anneli Sigus

12.05.2026