Development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Integrated with the ESA Instructional Model to Enhance English-Speaking Skills in Basic Education High School Grade-Ten Students in Myo Chaung, Myanmar

Ven. Seintita

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,Thailand
Email: revseintita@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores a new teaching model that integrates Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with Jeremy Harmer's Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) framework to improve English-speaking skills among Grade 10 students at Basic Education High School in Myo Chaung, Myanmar. Recognizing English as the global lingua franca and the challenges faced by rural learners (e.g. limited practice opportunities and traditional grammar-focused instruction), the research adopts a Research and Development (R&D) approach. Seventy Grade Ten students participated in an eight-week instructional intervention designed around CLT-ESA principles: engaging activities, study of language forms, and activation through real communication tasks. Data collection included pre- and post-tests of speaking performance, classroom observations, student and teacher surveys, and expert validation (IOC).

The results show that students' speaking proficiency improved dramatically after the intervention. Average scores for pronunciation, grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, fluency, and comprehension rose substantially from pre-test to post-test. Statistical analysis confirmed these gains were highly significant. Qualitative feedback indicated that learners became more confident, motivated, and actively engaged in speaking activities. Teachers found the CLT-ESA method practical and effective in the resource-limited context of Myo Chaung. These findings align with theory: CLT emphasizes meaningful communication over rote practice, and the ESA sequence ensures sustained engagement while addressing both accuracy and fluency (Harmer, 1997).

The study demonstrates that the CLT-ESA model can effectively bridge the gap between traditional teaching and communicative competence in under-resourced rural schools. It recommends broader adoption of this integrated approach, accompanied by teacher training and curriculum support, to improve English education in Myanmar. Suggestions are offered for policy, teacher development, and future research on sustaining such innovations.

Keywords: Communicative Approach, ESA ⟶ Engage–Study–Activate, Speaking Proficiency

Introduction

English has become the dominant global lingua franca, essential for international communication, education, and economic opportunity. In Myanmar's rapidly evolving society, proficiency in English is increasingly linked to academic success and future careers. However, many students in rural areas, like Myo Chaung, remain left behind. Limitations such as scarce learning resources, minimal exposure to English outside class, and traditional teacher-centered methods make it difficult for students to develop real speaking ability. As a British Council study notes, English will remain the world's lingua franca, but learners will need to use it actively in diverse contexts. This underscores the urgency of teaching approaches that promote practical communication skills rather than only textbook knowledge.

Traditional instruction in Myanmar often emphasizes grammar rules and memorization. Research in language pedagogy has repeatedly shown that this focus on form does not equip learners to communicate in real time. In contrast, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that emphasizes using language for genuine communication. CLT shifts the classroom from teacher-dominated lectures to learner-centered interaction, using dialogues, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. Studies of CLT in diverse settings report that when students engage in meaningful communication, their speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence improve. However, implementing CLT effectively requires structure and planning, which can be challenging where teachers lack training or materials.

Jeremy Harmer's ESA (Engage-Study-Activate) model provides a structured framework that complements CLT principles. In the Engage phase, teachers use a motivating activity (story, game, or discussion) to spark interest. During Study, students focus on the form and meaning of new language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) through targeted practice. In Activate, learners use the language creatively in realistic tasks that resemble real-world communication (e.g. role-play, group project). This cycle supports both the communicative goals of CLT and the need for accurate language use. By combining CLT's focus on interaction with the organized phases of ESA, educators can maintain student interest, provide essential language input, and then give learners freedom to practice communicatively.

The present study addresses the problem of weak English-speaking skills among Grade Ten students in Myo Chaung. It proposes an integrated CLT-ESA teaching methodology tailored to local needs. The goals are to create engaging lesson plans that boost speaking performance and to empirically evaluate their effect. In doing so, the research fills a critical gap: there is little documented evidence on adapting interactive, communicative methods for Myanmar's rural schools. The findings could inform educational policy and teacher training, helping bridge the urban-rural divide in English education.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the current level of English-speaking skills among Grade Ten students in Myo Chaung, Myanmar.
2. To develop an integrated Communicative Language Teaching–ESA (CLT-ESA) instructional model tailored to Grade Ten English classes in Myo Chaung.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the CLT-ESA model in enhancing students' English-speaking skills, based on measurable improvements and feedback.

Literature Review

This section reviews key concepts and prior studies relevant to the research problem. It covers the nature of speaking skills, the CLT-ESA approach, and evidence on communicative teaching methods. These insights establish the theoretical and empirical foundation for the study.

English-Speaking Skills

Definition and importance: Speaking proficiency is one of the four core language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), often regarded as critical because it enables real-time interaction. In second-language settings, the ability to speak English fluently and accurately is essential for academic participation and future employment. A fluent speaker can express ideas smoothly with minimal hesitation, while accuracy involves correct grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Pragmatic and interactional competence (knowing how to use language appropriately in context, negotiating meaning, turn-taking) are also key components of speaking proficiency. Together, fluency, accuracy, and confidence allow learners to communicate effectively in real-world situations, making speaking a crucial goal of language education.

Challenges in rural contexts: Students in rural Myanmar, including Myo Chaung, face significant obstacles to developing speaking skills. Limited exposure to English outside class means few opportunities to hear or use the language naturally. Classroom conditions may include large classes and scarce materials, which limit personalized speaking practice. Moreover, many rural English teachers have themselves had limited training and tend to default to grammar-translation methods. When classes emphasize memorizing grammar and vocabulary drills, students rarely practice spontaneous speaking. This perpetuates low confidence: learners become afraid of making mistakes and therefore avoid speaking altogether. Such factors create a vicious cycle where poor proficiency leads to even fewer opportunities and motivation to speak. Research on language learning warns that without active use and feedback, students plateau despite years of study.

Strategies for improvement: Educational literature suggests several approaches to overcome these barriers. Creating frequent opportunities for authentic speaking practice is vital. Classroom activities like role-plays, group discussions, storytelling, and presentations encourage regular use of English in a safe setting. Shifting the focus from teacher-led lectures to student-centered tasks aligns with communicative teaching principles. CLT emphasizes that language learning is driven by meaningful interaction: students learn grammar and vocabulary in context rather than in isolation. Research shows that when learners are engaged in real communication, their fluency and willingness to speak

improve significantly. Training teachers in CLT methods and providing them with creative materials also helps, as does community involvement (e.g., inviting native speakers or using multimedia). Overall, best practices point to an engaging, interactive learning environment that builds confidence through practice.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the ESA Model

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): CLT is an approach that makes communication the primary aim of language learning. It contrasts with traditional methods that treat language as abstract rules to be memorized. In a CLT classroom, the teacher's role shifts to a facilitator who designs activities around real-world tasks (e.g. role-plays, interviews, problem-solving). Grammar and vocabulary are taught not as ends in themselves but as tools for conveying meaning. Larsen-Freeman and others emphasize that effective language learning occurs when students engage in meaningful interaction, thereby acquiring language through use. Studies of CLT implementation report that it increases student motivation, participation, and practical skill development. For example, when learners collaborate on projects or discuss topics of interest, they use language more fluently and memorably than when simply filling worksheets. By prioritizing accuracy only as it relates to the communicative goal, CLT seeks to develop overall communicative competence (the ability to use language appropriately in context) rather than just grammatical knowledge.

The ESA instructional model: The Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) model provides a structured sequence of lesson stages that supports CLT-oriented teaching. First introduced by Harmer (1997), ESA divides each lesson into three phases. In *Engage*, the teacher uses an interesting warm-up (story, game, or discussion) to capture students' attention and relate the topic to their lives. Next, in the *Study* phase, learners focus on the target language forms (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) needed for the lesson, often through guided practice and analysis. This ensures accuracy by providing necessary scaffolding. Finally, in *Activate*, students apply what they have learned in open-ended communicative activities such as role-plays, debates, or problem-solving tasks. Here, accuracy is secondary: the goal is fluent communication. The ESA model can be used flexibly (stages can repeat in a "boomerang" or "patchwork" sequence) to respond to learners' needs. The key idea is that by deliberately engaging students first, then teaching form, and finally activating use, lessons remain dynamic and purposeful. Harmer and others have noted that this approach keeps learners motivated and balances fluency with structure.

Integration of CLT and ESA: When combined, CLT and ESA form a powerful instructional approach. CLT's focus on interactive, meaningful tasks is operationalized within the ESA framework. In practice, teachers design lesson plans where each new communicative activity is preceded by careful preparation and followed by authentic use. For example, before a speaking role-play on shopping (Engage), the teacher might review shopping-related vocabulary and practice dialogues (Study), then let students act out buying and selling with minimal intervention (Activate). This integration ensures that learners remain centered in conversation (CLT) while also receiving the grammatical guidance they need (ESA). Research indicates that such integrated methods can significantly boost language skills. Studies in different contexts have found that students taught under CLT-ESA-style models tend to outperform peers taught by traditional methods in both test scores and classroom participation. Moreover, the step-by-step design helps teachers manage classrooms better and adapt to diverse learning styles. In summary, the literature suggests that merging CLT and ESA addresses the limitations of each approach alone: CLT without structure can feel aimless, and ESA without communicative tasks can be dry. Together, they provide a coherent methodology for improving speaking skills in challenging environments.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study envisions a cyclical R&D process that develops and tests the CLT-ESA instructional model (Figure 1). The independent variable is the CLT-ESA integrated teaching method, and the dependent variable is students' English-speaking skills (measured in terms of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, etc.). The model proceeds through four phases:

R1 (Analysis): Review of literature and field data to assess current speaking proficiency and teaching practices, identifying needs and challenges.

D1 (Design & Development): Creation of the lesson plans, activities, and materials that integrate CLT and ESA principles, drawing on linguistic theory and expert input.

R2 (Implementation): Classroom trial of the new methodology with Grade 10 students, using pre-tests and observations to collect data on effectiveness.

D2 (Evaluation & Refinement): Analysis of results (quantitative and qualitative) to revise the teaching model, ensuring it is effective and contextually appropriate.

This framework is informed by theories of language learning and instructional design. For example, it draws on Bygate's (1987) emphasis on speaking practice and Bachman's (1995) notions of communicative competence, alongside Harmer's ESA sequencing. The framework depicts how systematic development and empirical testing (R&D) can produce an optimized teaching method. Through this iterative cycle, feedback from each phase refines the approach.
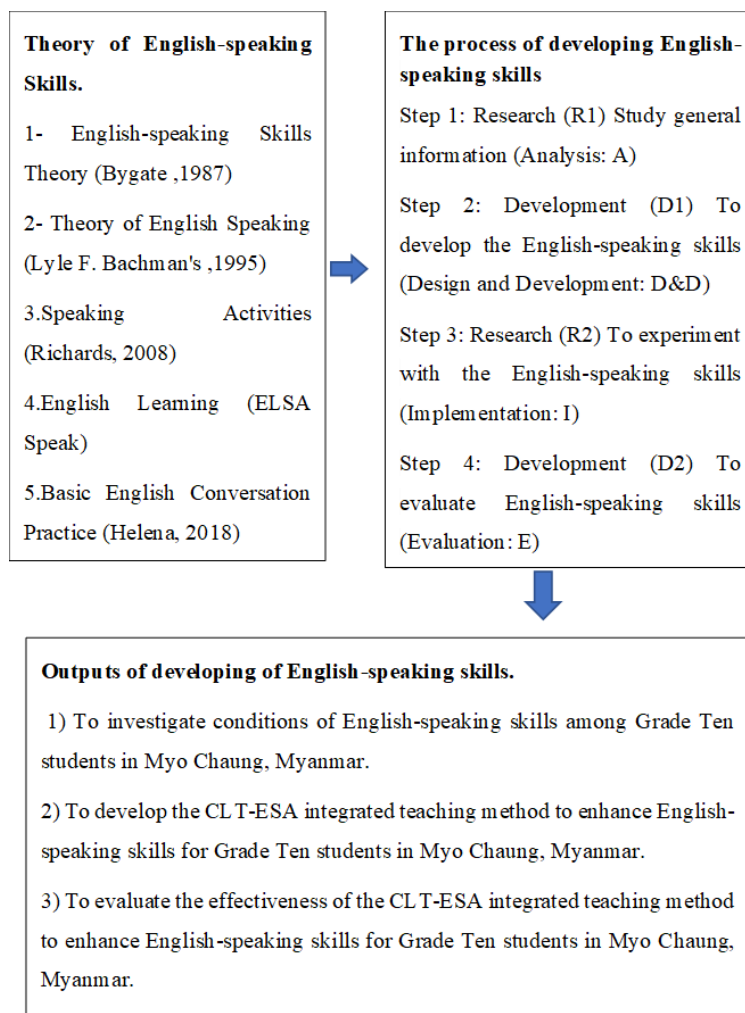
Theory of English-speaking Skills.

1- English-speaking Skills Theory (Bygate ,1987)

2- Theory of English Speaking (Lyle F. Bachman's ,1995)

3.Speaking Activities (Richards, 2008)

4.English Learning (ELSA Speak)

5.Basic English Conversation Practice (Helena, 2018)

The process of developing English-speaking skills

Step 1: Research (R1) Study general information (Analysis: A)

Step 2: Development (D1) To develop the English-speaking skills (Design and Development: D&D)

Step 3: Research (R2) To experiment with the English-speaking skills (Implementation: I)

Step 4: Development (D2) To evaluate English-speaking skills (Evaluation: E)

Outputs of developing of English-speaking skills.

1) To investigate conditions of English-speaking skills among Grade Ten students in Myo Chaung, Myanmar.

2) To develop the CLT-ESA integrated teaching method to enhance English-speaking skills for Grade Ten students in Myo Chaung, Myanmar.

3) To evaluate the effectiveness of the CLT-ESA integrated teaching method to enhance English-speaking skills for Grade Ten students in Myo Chaung, Myanmar.

Figure 1 **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1. (Conceptual framework of the CLT-ESA instructional model development)

Research Methodology

This study follows a Research and Development (R&D) design to create and test the CLT-ESA teaching intervention. The process involved four main phases as outlined in the conceptual framework.

Participants: The target population consisted of Grade Ten students at Basic Education High School, Myo Chaung, in Kyauk Ta Ga Township, Bago Region, Myanmar. One intact class of 30 students (mixed gender, varying proficiency levels) was selected to participate in the intervention, with appropriate consent procedures followed.

Phase 1 – Initial Research (R1): A needs assessment was conducted through a literature review and preliminary field research. The literature review encompassed studies on CLT, ESA, and English education in Myanmar. Field data were gathered via a pre-intervention speaking test and questionnaires to document students' existing skills, attitudes, and learning context. Classroom observations of the regular English classes were also made to identify common teaching practices and gaps.

Phase 2 – Development (D1): Based on the R1 findings, the CLT-ESA teaching model was developed. The researcher designed five lesson units integrating CLT and ESA, each focused on relevant themes (e.g. daily life, school, community). Detailed lesson plans were created for each unit, outlining activities for the Engage, Study, and Activate phases. Supporting materials (dialogue sheets, visual aids, role-play cards, etc.) were produced. These materials were reviewed by a panel of five English education experts using an Index of Congruence (IOC) to validate alignment with communicative pedagogy. Feedback was used to revise the model, ensuring clarity, suitability, and cultural relevance.

Phase 3 – Implementation and Testing (R2): The refined CLT-ESA lessons were taught in the classroom over eight weeks (approximately two hours per week). The teacher (researcher) and co-teacher implemented the Engage-Study-Activate sequence as planned. At the start and end of the intervention, all students completed a standardized English-speaking test that assessed five components: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary usage, grammar, and comprehension. Classroom observations were conducted throughout to note student participation and any challenges. After the final lesson, student questionnaires and focus-group interviews were administered to gather feedback on the learning experience and perceived impact of the method. Teachers also provided reflective feedback.

Phase 4 – Evaluation (D2): Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests to determine the significance of changes in speaking scores. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and questionnaires were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in student engagement, confidence, and satisfaction. Together, these analyses evaluated the effectiveness of the CLT-ESA model. Based on the results, the teaching materials and approach were iteratively refined to address any observed weaknesses.

Throughout all phases, a mixed-methods approach ensured both numeric measurement and contextual understanding of outcomes. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis of test scores, while qualitative data were coded for themes such as "motivation" or "communicative confidence." This rigorous methodology ensured that improvements in speaking skills could be attributed to the intervention and that insights from students and teachers informed the final model.

Research Results

The findings are organized according to the study phases: baseline (pre-intervention), development outcomes, and effectiveness of the CLT-ESA model.

Initial Conditions (Pre-Intervention): Demographic data showed that 60% of the students were male and 40% female, with 50% having studied English for over three years. Yet only 23% self-reported high speaking proficiency. The baseline speaking test revealed low average scores: students scored particularly poorly on *pronunciation* (mean 4.2/10) and *grammar* (3.9/10). *Fluency* (5.1/10) and *comprehension* (5.5/10) were moderate, while *vocabulary usage* averaged 4.5/10. These results confirmed that before the intervention, students struggled most with form-related aspects (pronunciation, grammar) and had limited confidence. Common challenges identified in classroom observations and surveys included fear of speaking mistakes, limited vocabulary, and monotonous traditional drills. This analysis highlighted the need for more interactive, supportive teaching methods.

Development of the CLT-ESA Model: The integrated teaching model was successfully designed and validated. Experts rated the lesson plans highly (IOC indices averaging 0.8–0.9), indicating good content validity in terms of pedagogical appropriateness and clarity. The ESA sequencing was adhered to in each unit, with varied activities: for example, a storytelling engage phase, targeted pronunciation practice in study, and a final group dialogue activation. Teachers implemented the model on schedule, covering five thematic units. Student feedback during implementation was positive: 85% of students agreed that the lessons were engaging, and they liked working in pairs and groups. Teachers noted that students became more willing to speak out. Any logistical issues (such as adjusting lesson pacing or managing resources) were addressed on-the-fly, refining the approach.

Effectiveness of the CLT-ESA Model: Post-intervention test scores showed significant improvement across all speaking components. The mean scores increased by the following percentages: Pronunciation +85.7%, Grammar +84.6%, Vocabulary Usage +66.7%, Fluency +60.8%, and Comprehension +52.7%. For example, average pronunciation rose from 4.2/10 to 7.8/10, and grammar from 3.9/10 to 7.2/10. A paired t-test for each component confirmed that these gains were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). In other words, students' speaking proficiency improved markedly after experiencing the CLT-ESA lessons.

Qualitative data supported these outcomes. Students reported feeling more confident and less afraid to speak, attributing this to the interactive activities and supportive classroom atmosphere. They highlighted role-plays, picture talks, and group projects as enjoyable and useful for practice. Teachers observed increased student participation and noted that even lower-proficiency learners began forming sentences more freely. On satisfaction surveys, 90% of students said they would like more lessons taught in this manner, and all participating teachers agreed that the method was effective. In summary, the integrated CLT-ESA approach led to higher engagement, confidence, and concrete gains in English-speaking skills in this rural classroom.

Discussions

The results demonstrate that combining CLT with the ESA model can substantially enhance speaking skills in an under-resourced setting. The large improvements across pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension indicate that the intervention addressed multiple facets of speaking proficiency. These findings are consistent with the communicative paradigm: active practice in realistic contexts (the Activate phase) translated into fluency gains, while the structured Study phase helped remedy foundational errors. The significant increase in grammar and pronunciation scores suggests that even though the approach was student-centered, it did not neglect form accuracy; instead, it taught form through practice.

The observed gains align with prior research on CLT's benefits. For instance, Larsen-Freeman (2015) found that learner interaction and real communication tasks are key drivers of language acquisition. By engaging students in dialogues and role-plays, this study similarly saw confidence and fluency rise. Additionally, Harmer (1997) noted that ESA's alternating focus on engagement, study, and activation keeps learners motivated and consolidates learning in a way rigid drills cannot. The high satisfaction ratings and active participation we observed echo these claims. The model's flexibility also helped accommodate diverse student needs, as anticipated in the literature on learner-centered pedagogy.

In the Myanmar context, the success of the CLT-ESA method has practical implications. It shows that even in a rural school with limited technology, a well-designed communicative curriculum can yield significant learning gains. This suggests that reforms aiming to modernize English teaching in Myanmar should emphasize teacher training in interactive methods. The study also highlights the role of contextually relevant materials: lessons were tied to students' lives (e.g. using local names, familiar scenarios), which likely boosted engagement.

However, some challenges emerged. Implementing a new approach required extra effort from the teacher and some adjustment time for students accustomed to passive learning. Class time was sometimes needed to explain tasks. These practical issues underscore the need for ongoing teacher support and perhaps smaller class sizes in the future. Despite these hurdles, the overall impact was clearly positive. In summary, the discussion confirms that a communicative, structured approach is well-suited to improving rural students' spoken English, supporting the study's hypothesis and expanding the evidence base in Myanmar's education research.

Conclusion

This research developed and tested a novel CLT-ESA instructional model aimed at enhancing English-speaking skills for Grade Ten students in a rural Myanmar school. The intervention proved successful: quantitative results showed statistically significant gains in all measured aspects of speaking proficiency after the eight-week program. Pronunciation and grammar accuracy, initially weakest, showed the largest improvements, indicating that even fundamentals can be effectively taught through communicative practice. Students also reported increased confidence, engagement, and enjoyment of speaking activities. Teachers confirmed that the approach was practical to implement and beneficial for learners.

The findings support the idea that integrating communicative approaches with a phased instructional design can transform language learning in traditional classrooms. By making lessons more interactive and meaningful, the CLT-ESA model helped students move beyond rote learning to actually use English. Importantly, this was achieved without requiring expensive technology or major curriculum changes, suggesting that such an approach is scalable in similar settings.

In summary, the study concludes that a carefully implemented CLT-ESA teaching method can significantly improve English-speaking outcomes in under-resourced, rural educational contexts. These results encourage education

stakeholders in Myanmar to continue exploring student-centered, communicative pedagogy and to invest in teacher training for such methods.

Suggestions

Based on the study's outcomes and constraints, the following suggestions are offered:

Teacher Training and Development: English teachers should receive training in CLT and ESA strategies. Professional development workshops can demonstrate how to conduct engaging activities and manage communicative classrooms. Mentoring programs could pair experienced CLT practitioners with rural teachers to share best practices.

Curriculum and Policy: Educational planners should consider revising the secondary English curriculum to allow more time for speaking and communicative tasks. National exams might be adapted to assess spoken English, thereby incentivizing schools to teach speaking. Official lesson plan guidelines could incorporate ESA sequencing.

Resource Design: Schools and teacher educators should develop and disseminate teaching materials (lesson plans, task banks, multimedia) aligned with CLT-ESA. Locally relevant content (e.g. themes reflecting Myanmar culture and contexts) will enhance student interest.

Classroom Strategies: Teachers are encouraged to incorporate frequent group work, pair dialogues, presentations, and role-plays. Even simple techniques like "find someone who…" surveys or information gap games can activate speaking practice. Creating a classroom atmosphere where mistakes are accepted will help build students' confidence.

Future Research: Additional studies should test the CLT-ESA model in other rural schools and different grade levels to verify generalizability. Longitudinal research could examine whether gains are maintained over time. Finally, exploring the use of technology (e.g. audio recordings, language apps) in supporting CLT-ESA activities may further enhance learning in low-resource settings.

By implementing these suggestions, educators and policymakers can help create more effective and equitable English language instruction in Myanmar.

References

Agao-Agao, Ana Margarita, Jamaica M. Guiali, Huda A. Madi, and Allan M. Agao-Agao. (2025). Applying Communicative Language Teaching in Science Instruction. *Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal, 6*(2), 219–230.

Aye, Win. (2021). *Interactive Techniques in Rural EFL Classrooms*. Educational Journal of Myanmar.

Brown, H. Douglas. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. Pearson Longman.

Cho, Myint Mo Tun. (2022). *Communicative Language Teaching in Myanmar*. University Press.

Derwing, Tracey M., & Munro, Murray J. (2015). *Pronunciation Fundamentals: Evidence-based Perspectives for L2 Teaching and Research*. John Benjamins.

Harmer, Jeremy. (1997). *How to Teach English: An Introduction to the Practice of English Language Teaching*. Longman.

Larsen-Freeman, Diane, & Anderson, Marti. (2013). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Patel, Mina. (2023). In our rapidly changing world what is the future of the English language? *British Council Voices Magazine*.

Richards, Jack C. (2015). *Key Issues in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Richards, Jack C. (2018). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Thornbury, Scott. (2014). *Natural Grammar*. Cambridge University Press.

Thornbury, Scott. (2016). *How to Teach Speaking*. Pearson.

Weller, David. (2022). What is 'Engage, Study, Activate'? *Barefoot TEFL Teacher*.