

Practicing and Assessing Simple English Dialogues in Pairs with Primary School Students Based on a Differentiated Approach

Mustafoyeva Bularoy

English Language Teacher at School No. 31, Bukhara City

mustafoyevabularoy@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper discusses teaching simple English dialogues through role-swapping in pairs and evaluating student speech based on observable criteria. Task supports are differentiated within the same communicative objective; specific aspects—such as the situational appropriateness of questions, the relevance of responses to the input speech, and the maintenance of conversational turn-taking—are assessed individually. The assessment results serve to determine the level of support provided in subsequent exercises.

Keywords: primary school, English language, simple dialogue, differentiated approach, pair work, role-swapping, assessment criteria.

Introduction. Teaching English dialogues in primary school requires students to ask their partners questions, listen to their answers, and respond with appropriate remarks. In pair work, both students must take turns initiating and continuing the conversation. While reciting a prepared text together can practice these speech acts, the task of listening comprehension does not arise if the partner's response is already known. Therefore, the information provided to each student in the pair differs, requiring them to obtain the necessary details by asking questions. Since students vary in their proficiency regarding listening comprehension, question formulation, and independent response, the type of support provided is adjusted within the context of the communicative goal. One student might rely on a picture and a written sentence pattern, another on a keyword, while a third formulates the question independently. By swapping roles within the pair, every child gets the opportunity to both ask questions and provide answers. Assessment considers not only grammatical accuracy but also the appropriateness of the question to the situation, the relevance of the answer to the spoken input, and the maintenance of conversational turn-taking.

Preparation for the dialogue begins with assessing the student's current capabilities. The teacher asks the students to say three or four familiar words related to the topic, listen to and understand a simple question, and provide a single-sentence response to their partner. During observation, in addition to a general assessment of whether the word is known, the teacher notes whether the student needs visual aids to answer, requires the question to be repeated, or struggles to initiate the response. Such a brief diagnostic task helps in planning the support needed for the next lesson. A key feature of this exercise is that the conversation partners must obtain information from one another to complete the task. If the teacher distributes a worksheet containing the answers to both students, the communicative purpose of the question is diminished. However, when using cards depicting different images or objects, the student waits for their partner's response and selects their next move based on the word they hear.

At the initial stage of instruction, the situation and the communicative goal are explained. For example, the task "Find out which color your friend likes" demonstrates to the student the

purpose of the question. The teacher models a short dialogue between two characters at a natural pace and then clarifies the core meaning through images and actions. First, the student must understand the content of the answer and then practice the sequence of the exchanges. When forming pairs, it is not advisable to assign students to fixed groups. A student who formulates questions quickly in one task might need assistance recalling vocabulary for a different topic; therefore, the choice of partner varies depending on the task's objective. Initially, the teacher demonstrates a model conversation between two students, while in the subsequent exercise, the children perform the conversation independently with a different partner. When partners switch, the question structure remains the same, but the content of the answer may change based on the information held by the conversation partner.

In the second stage, three types of scaffolding—all aimed at the same goal—are employed. A student requiring more support relies on a picture and a written question-and-answer template: "What colour do you like? — I like blue." A student with an intermediate level of proficiency uses only the question starter and a color card. A more independent student incorporates additional colors and uses a follow-up phrase like "And you?" In all three cases, the objective is to discover the conversation partner's preference.

Differences between tasks should not lead to mindless repetition of the conversation. If all pairs are assigned the task of recounting their partner's answer at the end of the conversation, the student will listen to the response attentively. Initially, the teacher allows the use of a support aid for speaking; in the next attempt, certain prompts are covered up, and the question-and-answer exchange is repeated with a new partner. In this way, the support aid serves as a temporary scaffold, and the student's reliance on it gradually decreases.

The third stage involves pair work. The composition of the pairs may vary depending on the task: students are grouped first in a way that fosters mutual support, and later in a way that encourages greater independence. It is inappropriate to consistently assign one student the role of "helper" and the other the role of "listener." Each child must take turns playing the roles of questioner and respondent. When observing pair exercises, it is not necessary to identify every single error at once. The teacher selects one key focus for each activity—for example, initiating the question in the first exercise, listening to the partner's answer in the next, and maintaining conversational turn-taking in the third. The brief notation sheet records whether the student acts without prompting, with the aid of an image, or using a full sentence template. Consequently, the conclusion regarding the level of support is based on a specific speech act rather than a general impression.

One form of differentiated support is the use of visual aids. An image of an object helps the student grasp the content of the question, a character card helps distinguish roles in the conversation, and an arrow serves as a reminder to take turns speaking. However, the mere presence of an image does not automatically generate communication. The student must perform a task where their partner holds information they do not possess; otherwise, the dialogue becomes nothing more than taking turns reading pre-written sentences. Before distributing the information sheets, the teacher demonstrates—using a single example—what information needs to be requested. It is essential that the student cannot see their partner's sheet yet possesses enough familiar vocabulary to formulate the question. For instance, if animal colors differ between the two sheets, the partners identify the discrepancy by asking about the color. At the end of the task, the teacher asks each pair to state the information they have discovered. This check helps

distinguish whether the interlocutor's answer was actually heard or if the question was merely repeated by rote.

An information-exchange task is well-suited for a simple dialogue. For instance, two students are each given images of animals marked in different colors, without showing their sheets to one another. Using the questions "What animal is it?" and "What colour is it?", the students identify the missing information. The student with a lower proficiency level is given a card with the questions written on it, while the other is shown only the image. The logic of the task remains the same, but the level of oral independence required differs.

Work on pronunciation should not be separated from the content of the dialogue. It is important that the student's question is understood by their partner and that the interrogative intonation is appropriate for the interaction. If the teacher interrupts to correct every single sound during the conversation, the natural flow of the dialogue is disrupted. Therefore, errors that impede meaning are corrected with brief assistance, while others are practiced later using a model. Pauses occurring during the asking and listening phases stem from different causes. Even if a student has formulated the question correctly, they might fail to extract the necessary information from their partner's answer. In such a case, instead of having the student rewrite the question, a listening comprehension exercise is assigned. If a student understands the answer but fails to yield the turn to their partner, the teacher briefly demonstrates the sequence of exchanges. Once the specific source of difficulty is identified, the support provided in the subsequent exercise targets that particular aspect; it is not necessary to assign the same additional exercise to every pair.

Teacher instructions must be brief and unambiguous. During the demonstration, simple commands such as "Ask," "Listen," "Answer," and "Change roles" are accompanied by corresponding actions. If a student is unable to begin a task, the problem is not always a lack of English vocabulary; sometimes, it is unclear who should ask a question or when to switch roles. Methodological observation must distinguish between linguistic difficulties and organizational ones.

The units of methodological analysis were defined as the communicative task, the type of support provided in the assignment, the student's utterance, and the act of responding to the interlocutor. The quality of the dialogue was evaluated not merely by the error-free repetition of words, but by the situational appropriateness of the question, the relevance of the answer to the content heard, turn-taking, and the ability to sustain the conversation as support is reduced. Such criteria make it possible to analyze the extent to which differentiated tasks serve the overall learning objective. For assessment purposes, the teacher has the student repeat the same dialogue using varying levels of support, observing which speech acts are maintained as that support is withdrawn. For instance, if a child has previously listened to a partner's answer while seeing the full written question, the next attempt might provide only the question's keywords. If the child successfully constructs the question and delivers a response appropriate to the content, the shift toward independence is noted. If the child struggles to initiate the sentence, the necessary portion of the previous support is temporarily reintroduced. This procedure clarifies the specific support each child requires for a given communicative task. The fourth stage tests independence by reducing the level of scaffolding. If the student initially speaks using a provided template but later responds by looking only at the image, this indicates a transition from rote speech to speech appropriate for the specific situation. If the dialogue stalls when the scaffolding is removed, the teacher reverts to the previous stage to re-practice the specific structure causing difficulty. These

stages do not constitute a rigid schedule but rather a flexible sequence adapted to the student's responses.

This task can be illustrated using the topic "What is in your bag?" The teacher demonstrates the meaning of the question using a real object or an image. The first type of card displays the template "What is in your bag? — A ..." alongside an image; the second shows only the objects; the third requires the student to ask about the object's color in addition to the basic question. Ultimately, every student must be able to identify an item in their partner's bag and respond appropriately to the partner's answer.

Assessment is based on four observable indicators: the ability to ask a context-appropriate question, the ability to provide a meaningful response after listening to a question, the ability to maintain conversational turn-taking, and the ability to produce an independent utterance after receiving assistance. Each indicator is recorded according to the level of support required: "independent," "with scaffolding," or "assistance still needed." Such a designation serves to track changes in the child's performance over time, rather than comparing them with another student. The assessment record should be linked to the assignment for the next lesson.

For a student who asks a question independently but fails to wait for their partner's response, an information-exchange task requiring active listening is selected instead of simply providing another question prompt. Meanwhile, a student who understands the content of the answer but cannot articulate the response is given a cue card to prompt the beginning of the answer. In this way, assessment shifts from comparing students to serving as a tool for planning the next stage of communication.

Assessment criteria must be fair relative to the level of support provided. A student who performs a dialogue using a fully written prompt is not considered to have the same level of independence as one who formulates the question independently; nevertheless, they are acknowledged for engaging in the interaction. The teacher records both the achieved result and any remaining need for support. The task for the next lesson is determined based on this information. At the start of the subsequent session, the same criteria are briefly reapplied in a different, familiar context. The goal is not for the student to recall and repeat a sentence from the previous dialogue, but to elicit the necessary information from a new partner. If an action previously marked as requiring support is performed independently, the reduction of support is justified. Conversely, if the student is unable to formulate the question when the topic changes, support is reintroduced for a short period. Such repeated observation allows the teacher to separate their judgment from a one-time impression.

Implementing a differentiated approach may increase the teacher's workload regarding material preparation. Instead of creating three entirely separate lessons for a single topic, one can use a single visual scenario and a shared communicative goal, then supplement it with task variations ranging from full scaffolding (templates) and brief prompts to unsupported tasks. This method enables the efficient use of visual aids and time resources.

Conclusion: In pair-based dialogue exercises, swapping the roles of questioner and respondent gives every student the opportunity to both listen and speak. Assessment is based on the appropriateness of the question to the communicative situation, the response to the answer received, turn-taking, and the extent to which scaffolding is utilized. Based on these criteria, the teacher determines which scaffolding elements to retain or reduce for the next dialogue task; however, the practical verification of the effectiveness of this theoretical-methodological recommendation requires further research.

References

1. Rsaliyev A.T. Developing Primary School Pupils' Lexical Competence through Didactic Games in English Lessons: PhD Dissertation Defence Announcement. - URL: <https://oak.uz/pages/24340>
2. Saydaliyeva M.A., Majidova Sh.I. Innovative Methods for Developing English Dialogic Speech Competence in Primary School Pupils // Yangi O'zbekiston, yangi tadqiqotlar jurnali. - 2026. - Vol. 5, No. 3. - URL: <https://phoenixpublication.net/index.php/TTVAL/article/view/13688>
3. Mutalliyeva M.B. The Didactic Potential of Communicative Tasks for Developing English Speaking Skills in Primary School Pupils // Farg'ona metodika maktabi. - 2026. - No. 5. - pp. 48–53.
4. Kurbanbayev I.M. A Methodology for Developing Primary School Pupils' "4K" Skills through English Lessons (the Case of Karakalpak Classes): Dissertation Abstract. - 2025. - URL: <https://library.ziyonet.uz/book/137834>