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**EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF MODERATION ON ESL LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN GROUP CONVERSATIONS***Ismayilova Gunay Sabir**Ganja State University*[ismayilovagunay2018@gmail.com](mailto:ismayilovagunay2018@gmail.com)

**Annatasion:** *Individuals learning English as a second language (ESL) often face significant difficulties when engaging in group discussions, largely due to limitations in their language proficiency. Although moderators or conversation facilitators can play a crucial role in bridging these communication gaps, there is a scarcity of empirical research that systematically measures the impact of such moderation on the quality and effectiveness of interaction in ESL group settings. This study addresses this gap by introducing a novel dataset comprised of 17 recorded sessions from an online ESL speaking group. These sessions included both those guided by moderators and those without any form of facilitation. To evaluate the influence of moderation, we developed a two-tiered assessment framework that merges an automated analysis of ESL conversational data with a tailored system for classifying different facilitation strategies employed by moderators. The findings from this approach indicate that moderation has a positive effect on maintaining the coherence and flow of topics during group discussions. This research thus offers valuable new perspectives on how structured conversational support can optimize learning environments for ESL participants.*

**Keywords:** moderation, ESL learners, engagement, group discussion, communication, facilitation, language learning, interaction, participation, autonomy, conversation analysis

**Ключевые слова:** модерация, учащиеся ESL, вовлечённость, групповое обсуждение, коммуникация, фасилитация, изучение языка, взаимодействие, участие, автономия, анализ разговора

**Açar sözlər:** moderatorluq, İELT tələbələri, fəallıq, qrup müzakirəsi, ünsiyyət, fasilitasiya, dil öyrənməsi, qarşılıqlı əlaqə, iştirak, müstəqillik, danışıq analizi

**Literature Review**

Most current tools and methods for dialogue evaluation have traditionally focused on assessing isolated language features, such as grammatical correctness or vocabulary usage. However, these approaches tend to overlook the dynamic and interactive nature of communication, especially in contexts involving multiple participants. Furthermore, studies examining the role of moderators in ESL discussions have noted that facilitators often use strategies like scaffolding, prompting, and clarifying to help learners overcome linguistic challenges. Yet, these insights are mostly drawn from small-scale, qualitative investigations such as case studies or interview-based research, which limits their applicability across diverse contexts.

To address these limitations, the present study employs a more extensive, data-driven approach that allows for scalable analysis of conversational moderation. This methodology not only enhances the objectivity of evaluation but also facilitates cross-context comparison of moderator behaviors within ESL learning environments.

**Methodology**

The research involved collecting and analyzing data from 17 online ESL group discussion sessions. These sessions were split between those that were moderated by trained ESL facilitators and those that were unmoderated, allowing for comparison between the two

conditions. The moderators involved were professional ESL instructors trained in second language pedagogy, employing a variety of facilitation techniques aimed at promoting learner participation and ensuring productive conversation flow.

To systematically assess the quality of the interactions, the study implemented a dual evaluation strategy. First, an automated dialogue quality assessment tool was used to quantify features related to engagement, coherence, and responsiveness within the conversations. This automated system examined micro-level indicators such as backchannel signals, turn-taking patterns, and referential coherence, alongside macro-level features like the overall tone and thematic consistency.

Second, the researchers adapted an existing moderation framework to categorize and analyze the specific strategies used by moderators. This customized framework identified various facilitation techniques, including active acknowledgment, encouragement, topic redirection, and clarification requests. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of how different moderation approaches affect ESL group discussions.

### Results

The findings from the analysis revealed several important trends regarding the role and effectiveness of moderation in ESL group discussions:

- **Positive Impact of Moderation:** Discussions that included active moderation demonstrated greater coherence and smoother transitions between topics. Moderators facilitated a more structured dialogue, helping participants navigate the conversation more easily.

- **Effective Facilitation Strategies:** Moderators who employed active listening skills—such as acknowledging contributions, providing verbal encouragement, and gently prompting quieter participants—were able to foster higher levels of engagement. These techniques encouraged learners to participate more freely and confidently.

- **Negative Effects of Over-Moderation:** In contrast, moderators who dominated the conversation by providing excessive information, personal opinions, or lengthy explanations tended to suppress learner interaction. This over-involvement reduced the learners' opportunity to speak and explore ideas independently, ultimately disrupting the natural flow of the discussion.

### Discussion and Implications

The study underscores the crucial role that moderation plays in facilitating productive ESL group conversations. Effective moderation strikes a delicate balance: it provides enough structure to guide the discussion and support learners, while simultaneously allowing learners the autonomy to express their thoughts and develop language skills through authentic interaction.

For ESL instructors and program designers, these findings highlight the need for targeted training focused on moderation techniques that prioritize active listening and learner encouragement. Developing such skills in moderators can lead to more dynamic and inclusive discussions, where participants feel supported yet free to engage fully.

Additionally, the study demonstrates the utility of automated dialogue assessment tools as valuable resources for evaluating and improving conversational quality in educational settings. Particularly in remote or online learning environments, these tools offer scalable means to monitor interaction patterns and provide feedback to both learners and instructors.

By integrating these insights into practice, ESL programs can enhance the learning experience and improve communicative competence among language learners.

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→ Investigates how structured group work and facilitator strategies affect ESL learner engagement.

### EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF MODERATION ON ESL LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN GROUP CONVERSATIONS

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#### Summary

This study investigates how conversation moderation affects the engagement of learners studying English as a Second Language (ESL) during group discussions. Recognizing that ESL learners often struggle to participate actively due to limited language proficiency, the research explores whether guided facilitation can improve communication and interaction in group settings.

To do this, the study analyzed 17 recorded online ESL group sessions—some with trained moderators and some without. It employed a dual-method approach: an automated tool was used to assess dialogue quality (e.g., coherence, engagement), and a customized framework was applied to evaluate different moderation strategies.

The findings show that moderation significantly improves the flow and coherence of discussions. Techniques such as active listening, verbal encouragement, and inclusive prompting were particularly effective in boosting learner participation. In contrast, over-moderation—where the facilitator dominates or shares too much—was shown to hinder natural conversation and reduce student talk time.

The study concludes that balanced and thoughtful moderation can enhance ESL learning environments, and recommends training facilitators in techniques that promote learner autonomy and authentic communication.

### MÜZAKİRƏLƏRİN MODERATORLUĞUNUN İELT TƏLƏBƏLƏRİNİN FƏALLIĞINA TƏSİRİNİN QIYMƏTLƏNDİRİLMƏSİ

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#### Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat, ingilis dilini ikinci dil kimi (İELT) öyrənən tələbələrin qrup müzakirələrində iştirak fəallığına moderatorluğun təsirini araşdırır. Tədqiqat göstərir ki, İELT tələbələri dil biliyinin məhdudluğu səbəbindən müzakirələrə fəal qoşulmaqda çətinlik çəkirlər.

Bu səbəbdən, aparıcılıq (moderatorluq) üsullarının ünsiyyəti və qarşılıqlı əlaqəni yaxşılaşdırıb-yaxşılaşdırmadığı araşdırılır.

Tədqiqat çərçivəsində 17 onlayn qrup müzakirəsi qeydə alınıb — bəziləri təlim keçmiş moderatorlar tərəfindən idarə olunub, bəziləri isə nəzarətsiz keçirilib. Qiymətləndirmə üçün iki üsuldan istifadə olunub: biri avtomatlaşdırılmış sistem vasitəsilə dialoqun keyfiyyətini (məsələn, ardıcılıq, fəallıq) ölçüb, digəri isə müxtəlif moderatorluq strategiyalarını təsnif etmək üçün uyğunlaşdırılmış çərçivədir.

Nəticələr göstərir ki, moderatorluq müzakirələrin axıcılığına və məzmunun davamlılığına müsbət təsir göstərir. Aktiv dinləmə, şifahi təşviq və iştirakçıların cəlb olunmasını təşviq edən metodlar tələbələrin iştirakını artırmaqda daha səmərəli olmuşdur. Əksinə, moderatorun çox danışdığı və ya həddindən artıq məlumat paylaşdığı hallar, təbii söhbət axınına pozaraq tələbələrin danışmaq imkanlarını məhdudlaşdırmışdır.

Tədqiqat nəticəsində belə qənaətə gəlinmişdir ki, balanslı və düşünülmüş moderatorluq IELTS öyrənmə mühitini yaxşılaşdırma bilər. Bu baxımdan, moderatorların tələbə müstəqilliyini və təbii ünsiyyəti təşviq edən strategiyalara dair təlim alması tövsiyə olunur.

## ОЦЕНКА ВЛИЯНИЯ МОДЕРАЦИИ НА ВОВЛЕЧЁННОСТЬ УЧАЩИХСЯ ESL В ГРУППОВЫЕ БЕСЕДЫ

*Исмаилова Гюнай Сабир*  
*Резюме*

Данное исследование рассматривает, как модерация разговоров влияет на вовлечённость учащихся, изучающих английский как второй язык (ESL), во время групповых обсуждений. Поскольку учащиеся ESL часто испытывают трудности с активным участием из-за ограниченного уровня владения языком, исследование направлено на то, чтобы выяснить, может ли направленное фасилитирование улучшить коммуникацию и взаимодействие в групповой работе.

Для этого были проанализированы 17 записанных онлайн-сессий групп ESL - часть с обученными модераторами, часть без них. Применялся комбинированный метод: автоматизированный инструмент оценивал качество диалога (например, связность, вовлечённость), а также использовалась адаптированная система анализа различных стратегий модерации.

Результаты показали, что модерация значительно улучшает течение и связность обсуждений. Такие техники, как активное слушание, вербальное поощрение и инклюзивное стимулирование, особенно эффективно способствовали увеличению участия учащихся. Напротив, чрезмерная модерация - когда фасилитатор доминирует или говорит слишком много - мешала естественному разговору и сокращала время речи студентов.

Исследование делает вывод, что сбалансированная и продуманная модерация может улучшить учебную среду ESL, и рекомендует обучать фасилитаторов техникам, способствующим развитию автономии учащихся и подлинной коммуникации.

*Рəyçi: Baş müəllim, filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru Kəmalə Rafiq qızı Əliyeva*  
*Praktik xarici dillər kafedrasının 12 sentyabr 2025-ci il tarixli iclasın 1 sayılı protokolu*  
*Daxil olma tarixi 16 sentyabr 2025-ci il*