
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Factors Affecting Learners' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine what influences students' verbal engagement in the classroom. The speaking abilities of the kids are impacted by several things. While some students struggle with shyness, others might not know how to communicate in a foreign language. There might be fewer opportunities for some pupils to speak in class. Sometimes, students are afraid of their teachers and worry that they may receive a bad grade or something else. This study will help teachers and students identify the unfavourable emotions that keep them from participating in class. The results showed that a number of factors influence students' involvement in the classroom. These could include classroom layout, teacher-related characteristics, or social issues.

KEYWORDS

Speaking Skills, Anxiety, shy, Factors.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 September 2024

PUBLISHED: 26 September 2024

DOI: 10.32996/jeltal.2024.6.4.1

1. Introduction

For many students studying English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL), mastering the language is preferred. When assessing their progress in language acquisition, language learners occasionally look at how well their spoken language skills have developed. Either direct approaches, which focus on specific oral interaction skills like turn-taking and topic management, are used by teachers and textbooks, or indirect approaches, which create opportunities for oral interaction through task work, group projects, and other techniques (Richards 1990). Human communication is a difficult process, according to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016) and Harmer (2007). When someone wants to convey something or transmit information, they need to communicate. When speakers want to enlighten an audience, they employ communication. Language is used by speakers to achieve their own objectives. For effective communication, speakers must, therefore, simultaneously be listeners and speakers. Speaking is crucial when learning a second language. Speaking has been undervalued in schools and colleges despite its significance for a variety of reasons, including an emphasis on grammar and unfavourable teacher-student ratios. Due to the difficulty of objectively evaluating speaking and the length of time required to conduct speaking examinations, speaking has not been included in testing (Clifford, 1987). It is important to focus on speaking as a skill when learning a first or second language.

According to Ur (1996), speaking is the most crucial of the four language abilities since people who acquire a language are called speakers of that language.

Giving students the skills to communicate effectively and correctly in English is the primary goal of teaching them the language (Davies & Pearse, 2000). Nonetheless, it appears that a lack of understanding in this area prevents language learners from speaking clearly and effectively. Saying words out loud is not what we mean when we talk about speaking. It refers to communicating the message verbally. Some professors frequently overlook this ability in their lessons. Students do not have enough opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom. Regretfully, speaking is not a significant component of teacher exams. To learn to talk,

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students must practice a lot. By listening and repeating, students can get better at speaking. Instructors can present some structures to their students and ask them to repeat them. This can make their students less bashful. In order to help students improve their speaking abilities, teachers can utilize brief conversations and inquiries in the classroom (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011). Speaking is one of the hardest language acquisition skills for language learners. Of the four language skills, speaking is seen to be the most crucial. Many students claim that despite spending years studying the language, they are still unable to speak English clearly and effectively (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006). 146 first-year engineering students participated in an investigation by Zainal Abidin (2007) on oral classroom involvement by Malaysian students. The study discovered that pedagogical, affective, cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural elements are the five main determinants of students' classroom participation. They were connected to one another. The two-week observation time, the small number of interviews, and the observation of only two groups were the limitations of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Speaking

Researchers studying language acquisition have proposed many definitions for the term "speaking." Speaking is defined by the Webster New World Dictionary as saying things out loud, communicating by talking, making a request, and giving a speech (Nunan, 1995). Speaking, in the words of Chaney (1998), is the act of creating and conveying meaning in various circumstances via the use of both verbal and nonverbal symbols. Speaking is an interactive process of meaning-making that involves information production, reception, and processing, according to Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997). Speaking, according to Bygate (1987), is the act of producing auditory signals in order to elicit various verbal replies from listeners. It is thought of as methodically putting sounds together to create coherent phrases. According to Eckard and Kearny (1981), Florez (1999), Howarth (2001), and Abd El Fattah Torky (2006), speaking is a two-way process that involves the accurate transmission of ideas, facts, or feelings. According to this top-down perspective, spoken texts represent the collaborative efforts of two or more people within a shared time and environment.

2.2 The Importance of Speaking

Before learning to read and write, humans are wired to speak. Humans interact verbally with language far more often than they do with written forms of communication. Since speaking is one of the skills required to carry out a discussion, it is the most significant talent. Speaking English requires knowledge of several important concepts, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension; thus, it's not an easy effort. For learners to interact with others in an easy and productive manner, they should possess a sufficient level of English language proficiency. According to Rivers' (1981) research on language use outside of the classroom, speech is utilized twice as frequently as reading and writing put together. Speaking and listening are the linguistic tools that learners use, according to Brown (1994). Efrizal, 2012 Speaking is important for human contact, according to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016), who stated that people speak all the time and everywhere. Speaking is the spoken form of conveying concepts and thoughts. We should use the language in everyday conversation and invite pupils to follow suit if we wish to motivate them to speak in English. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), speaking skills were neglected in traditional approaches, with a focus on reading and writing abilities in the classroom. For instance, speaking and listening abilities were not as critical in The Grammar-Translation technique as reading and writing were. Speaking is the most crucial language ability that is required for efficient communication out of the four (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), according to Ur (2000).

2.3 Characteristics of Speaking Skills

Speaking is a crucial part of the English language learning process for kids since it helps them apply the language. The ability to communicate orally has been crucial to human success. Speaking ability is important, as seen by people's daily actions. Speaking is a collaborative activity that takes place in real time. In other words, people can speak and write clearly and naturally without having to worry about it too much. Speaking ability allows people to construct sentences for genuine conversation; in other words, people genuinely enjoy using language to communicate in order to achieve particular goals (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). 4. Features of Speaking Ability As per Mazouzi (2013), the design of learners' activities ought to be predicated on the attainment of equivalency between accuracy and fluency.

Accuracy and fluency are crucial components of a communicative approach. Students' communication competency can be developed through classroom practice. Thus, they ought to be aware of how the linguistic system functions properly. The primary goal of speaking skill instruction is fluency, which is the first quality of a successful speaking performance. Hughes (2002) states that fluency is the ability of learners to communicate in a way that is understandable without disrupting conversation since the audience may become disinterested. According to Hedge (2000), fluency is the capacity to respond intelligibly by making connections between words and phrases, clearly articulating sounds, and employing emphasis and intonation.

Accuracy is the second quality of a spoken delivery. Students should be proficient in the language they are learning. As a result, when teaching, educators should place a strong emphasis on correctness. When speaking, students should focus on the precision

and completeness of the language form, which includes paying close attention to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation (Mazouzi, 2013). Thornbury (2005) states that the length, complexity, and well-structured clauses of learners' utterances are necessary for their proper application of grammatical structures. Accurate vocabulary acquisition requires choosing the right words for the right situations.

Sometimes, learners will use terms or idioms that are similar in one context but have different meanings. Thus, students ought to be able to employ language and terms appropriately. According to Thornbury (2005), pronunciation is the least important piece of information that students usually focus on. Learners must be proficient in phonological rules and cognizant of the pronunciations of the different sounds in order to speak English correctly. In addition, learners must be aware of pitch, intonation, and stress. These components are all designed to make learning English easier and more efficient.

2.4 Speaking Problems

When encouraging students to speak in class, teachers may run into a few speaking proficiency issues. According to Tuan and Mai (2015), these include inhibition, limited involvement, lack of topical understanding, and mother tongue use. The first issue that pupils run across in class is inhibition. They occasionally feel too shy to speak up in class when they want to. They worry about making errors and are afraid of being criticized. The attention that other students have directed at them makes them feel embarrassed. According to Little Wood (2007), pupils may develop anxiety and inhibitions in a language course. The second issue is that students often lament that they lack the drive to express themselves and that they are at a loss for words. This is corroborated by Rivers (1968), who believes that students frequently have nothing to say, most likely because their lecturers chose a topic that is too advanced for them or they already know enough about it. The aforementioned theory is further supported by Baker and Westrup (2003), who noted that learners find it extremely challenging to respond when asked to describe anything in a foreign language by their teachers because they lack guidance on what to say, what vocabulary to use, or how to correctly employ grammar. The third issue is low participation in the speaking class. Because only one student speaks at a time and the other students strive to hear him or her, each student in a large class will have very little time to speak. Some students speak during the speaking portion of the lesson, while others hardly speak at all. The final issue pertaining to speaking proficiency is that some students attempt to utilize their mother tongue in speaking classes since it comes naturally to them (Tuan & Mai, 2015). There are a few reasons why students speak in their native tongue in speaking lessons, according to Harmer (1991). The first reason is that students will attempt to use their language when teachers ask them to discuss a subject on which they are not very knowledgeable. The second reason is that using one's mother tongue naturally comes naturally to students. Learners will naturally utilize their native tongue to clarify concepts to their peers if teachers do not actively encourage them to communicate in English. The last justification is that students will feel more at ease speaking in class if lecturers consistently utilize their home tongue with them. Hyland (1997) examined students in five Hong Kong institutions across eight fields. The results of his study showed that academic success in an English-speaking setting was significantly influenced by English proficiency. The results also demonstrated a connection between the learners' linguistic challenges and their productive speaking and writing abilities. Evans and Green (2007) looked into the language barriers that university students in Hong Kong faced. The study's findings showed that the students' main areas of struggle were academic writing, style, grammar, and coherence, as well as academic speaking, which included issues with pronunciation, grammar, and fluency.

2.5 Factors Affecting Speaking

Ability Teachers should identify some aspects that influence students' speaking performance if they want to assist them in overcoming their speaking skill acquisition challenges. Affective aspects, listening comprehension, speaking task conditions, and feedback all have an impact on learners' speaking performance (Tuan & Mai, 2015). The first consideration relates to the circumstances of performance. Students engage in a speaking exercise in several scenarios. Speaking performance is impacted by performance conditions, which include scheduling constraints, performance quality, level of assistance, and time constraints (Nation & Newton, 2009). Affective ones are connected to the second component. Oxford (1990) stated that a student's emotive side is one of the key components of language learning. Many affective variables have been linked to the acquisition of a second language (Krasen, 1982), with motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety being the three primary types that have been studied by numerous studies. Third is the skill of listening. According to Doff (1998), students cannot advance in speaking without first developing their listening skills. For a discussion to be successful, learners must understand what is being said to them. According to Shumin (1997), when a student speaks, the other students respond by listening. Both listeners and speakers are roles that speakers play. If kids are unable to understand what is being said, it can be concluded that they are unable to respond. In other words, speaking and listening are closely related. Finally, there is topical knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) defined it as the knowledge structures in long term memory. That is, topical knowledge is the speakers' understanding of related subject material. It gives students the ability to apply language to their everyday lives. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), learners' speaking performance is significantly influenced by their relevant knowledge. The sixth component has to do with the criticism given during speaking exercises. Many students assume that their teachers will provide them with the appropriate criticism regarding their speaking ability. Harmer (1991) asserts that the choices educators make regarding their students' performance are influenced by

the tasks, the phases of the lesson, and the types of errors they make. Harmer (1991) went on to say that the goal of the speaking assignment and the dialogue's flow will be compromised if teachers give their pupils immediate corrections for their errors.

In support of the aforementioned claim, Baker and Westrup (2003) stated that students who get constant corrections will become demotivated and fearful of speaking. It has been recommended that teachers should always constructively correct their students' errors and provide them with greater encouragement and persuasion when they talk. Mahripah (2014) asserts that psychological elements like motivation and personality, as well as linguistic elements like phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics, have an impact on the speaking abilities of EFL learners. For EFL learners, phonology is a challenging component of language learning. English is not a phonetic language as far as we are aware. In other words, English word pronunciation differs from word spelling. Similar-sounding words can occasionally have distinct pronunciations due to surrounding situations, such as phonemes and tenses. For non-native English speakers, this can lead to a lot of issues and can confuse them while forming English words. Word and phrase knowledge should be a prerequisite for EFL students. They must understand the division of words into distinct sounds as well as the unique ways in which sentences are stressed. Fluency in English can be attained by speakers applying and understanding the English language's structure correctly, which is made possible by grammatical competence (Latha, 2012). Because they are comfortable with the language, native speakers can express themselves without difficulty. When they find it difficult to convey a certain idea, they attempt to do it using alternative methods. They might occasionally make syntactic errors, but these errors don't significantly affect the content of the phrases they intend to convey or make it difficult for the listeners to understand them. However, the errors non-native speakers make might lead to difficulties in their understanding as they alter the meaning of the words they intend to convey (Mahripah, 2014). The elements of language learning can both impact and be influenced by motivation. Merisuo-Storm (2007) asserts that learners become more aware of the audio-lingual components of language and more perceptive of pronunciation and accent when they adopt an integrative and empathetic perspective toward the people whose language they are learning. Learners won't make much progress in picking up the various linguistic elements if they approach the language with a hostile attitude. The aforementioned phrases lend credence to the idea that students need more than simply verbal ability to advance their speaking abilities. For students, the goal of speaking will remain unattainable if they have a negative attitude toward their speaking performance. Fear of speaking in English is related to risk-taking, inhibition, anxiety, and several other personality traits. Anxiety can sometimes arise when speaking a language. Severe anxiety can occasionally cause students to feel hopeless and like failures (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar 2011). Woodrow (2006) asserts that speaking English aloud can be negatively impacted by nervousness. Adults make great efforts to avoid making mistakes in everything they say. They believe that making mistakes demonstrates a certain level of ignorance, which may make it difficult for them to speak English in public. The varying abilities of language learners in the classroom can be the root cause of speaking anxiety. There are two categories of learners: strong and weak. Fast and weak learners are frequently subjugated by strong learners. The weaker students typically remain silent during the entire class activity since they don't want to speak in front of the stronger students. Fear prevents people from expressing or acting on their desires; this is known as inhibition (Cambridge A. L. Dictionary, 2008). Every individual creates a variety of shields to shield the ego. Since making mistakes is a necessary part of learning a language, making blunders might pose a challenge to one's ego. These threats deter English language learners from speaking, and they would rather remain silent than face criticism in front of a huge gathering of people (Brown, 2000). Taking risks is related to self-respect and inhibition. Low self-esteem makes EFL students less willing to take chances and make mistakes when speaking, which inhibits them from improving their speaking abilities (Mahripah, 2014).

2.6 Previous Studies on the Factors Affecting Speaking Skill

A few research that are relevant to the variables affecting speaking ability are reviewed in this section. Park and Lee (2005) looked at the relationship between speaking performance and the levels of anxiety and confidence experienced by second language learners. Participants in this study were 132 Korean language learners. The study's findings demonstrated a negative correlation between students' anxiety levels and oral ability. A study on the elements boosting learners' speaking skill development was conducted by Boonkit (2010). The findings showed that one effective tactic for reducing speakers' nervousness is to employ speaking-skills-appropriate exercises. The results also showed that giving participants the option to choose their own topics encouraged them to feel at ease, encouraged them to communicate in English, and gave EFL learners more confidence when speaking. Based on motivational orientations, Ali Dincer and Savas Yesilyurt (2013) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of speaking abilities. The study's findings showed that even though the teachers thought speaking education was very important for developing speaking skills, they had unfavourable attitudes about it. The findings also showed that, despite having different motivating approaches toward speaking English, the teachers felt unqualified for oral communication. The researchers found that learners' perceptions of the importance of speaking English fluently vary and that these perceptions are influenced by their motivational orientations as well as their experiences of competence and incompetence in speaking the language. The findings showed that students expressed themselves as poor English speakers and had a negative opinion of their own speaking abilities. Only a small percentage of them said they felt well-positioned to participate in speaking duties. Tanveer (2007) investigated the causes of anxiety in language learners, as well as the effects of anxiety on target language communication. The results showed that learners' performance and language acquisition are halted when they experience stress and worry. The study underlined that

learners' speaking performance is negatively impacted by increased anxiousness. A study was conducted in 1988 by Eissa, Misbah, and Najat regarding the challenges associated with utilizing English for communication and instruction. The study's findings showed that learners encountered numerous challenges when utilizing the English language as a medium of instruction. Many participants reported that their students' English competence is low. The findings also showed that many students had significant trouble comprehending the lectures' subject matter when it wasn't translated or presented in L1. Urrutia and Vega (2010) showed that learners' fear of being hated, lack of vocabulary, and lack of confidence affected their oral performance. Additionally, it was shown that students' collaboration, confidence, vocabulary, and the classroom setting all pushed them to get better at speaking. Prieto (2007) conducted research on cooperative learning activities. Her research's conclusions demonstrated that engaging in social interaction, picking up knowledge from others, and selecting lessons that align with students' interests can all help to strengthen speaking abilities. Bozorgian (2012) looked into the connection between linguistic proficiency in various areas and listening comprehension. The findings showed a strong relationship between linguistic competency and listening comprehension. In other words, the speaking score improves with the higher listening score. In 2003, Lukitasari conducted research on how students deal with speaking difficulties. The study's findings demonstrate that students encounter numerous speaking challenges in speaking lessons, including inhibition, having nothing to say, limited engagement, and speaking in their home tongue. The study's other findings show that students did not improve their speaking abilities because they had not studied vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—three essential components of speech.

3. Conclusion

The variables influencing students' performance in speaking English were examined in this study. The elements this paper discusses are crucial for helping students improve their speaking abilities. The elements lead to students feeling less at ease and confident in their speaking sessions. The results of this study showed that, despite having adequate language abilities, students with poor self-esteem, high anxiety, and low motivation struggle greatly when it comes to speaking. The study demonstrated that pupils may talk more fluently and effectively when they are more motivated and less anxious. As a result, classrooms ought to be welcoming and collaborative so that students can get past their challenges with oral presentations. Based on the analysis of the study's literature, educators should select the most effective teaching strategy to engage students in the speaking activity, as well as understand their interests and sentiments. They should also work to boost the confidence of their students. Instructors ought to commend their pupils for using English. Teachers should establish a cordial rapport with their pupils, ensure that they are comfortable in the classroom, and inspire a great deal of excitement and willingness in them to learn and speak English in particular.

According to the study's literature review, teachers should allow their students adequate time to practice speaking, assist them in overcoming their nervousness by acting amiably to put them at ease when speaking, reassure them that mistakes are inevitable, and provide them with sufficient guidance and accurate instructions. Instructors should encourage their students to participate in speaking activities and provide them with opportunities to speak English by assigning speaking tasks that facilitate speech. In order to help students overcome their fear of making mistakes, educators must also understand when and how to repair their mistakes.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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