

## AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Annotation

Speaking is one of the most important skills to develop and improve to communicate effectively. Speaking skills are considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language. They generally have difficulty using a foreign language to express their thoughts effectively. They stop speaking because they encounter psychological barriers or cannot find the right words and expressions. The modern world of media and mass communication requires a good knowledge of English. This paper aims to highlight the need to focus on the factors influencing language learners' English proficiency. This review article outlines the research findings on the concept of language, the meaning of language, characteristics of language performance, language problems, and factors affecting language performance, in an area that needs more attention. This study may be useful for teachers and researchers to consider the speaking needs of their language learners in the context of English language teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** speaking, importance, characteristics, problems, factors

### Introduction

Learning to speak English is a preference of many learners of English as a Foreign Language/Second Language (EFL/ESL). Language learners sometimes measure their success in language learning by how well they have improved their spoken language skills. Teachers and textbooks use either direct approaches that focus on specific aspects of oral interaction, such as B.) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016), Human communication is a complex process. People need communication when they want to say something and convey information. Speakers use communication when they want to inform someone about something. Speakers apply language according to their own goals. Therefore, for effective communication, speakers should be listeners and speakers at the same time.



Speaking is very important in second language learning. Despite its importance, speaking in schools and universities has been overlooked for various reasons such as emphasis on grammar and unfavorable teacher-student ratios. Speaking was excluded from the tests because of the problem of objective assessment and the time required to administer language tests (Clifford, 1987). Speaking is a skill that deserves attention in both first and second languages. Learning to speak is the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured by the ability to carry on a conversation in the language (Nunan, 1995). Speaking is one of the most important skills of all four language skills because people who learn a language are referred to as speakers of that language (Ur, 1996). The main aim of teaching English is to provide learners with the ability to use the English language effectively and correctly in communication (Davies & Pearse, 2000). However, it seems that language learners are unable to communicate fluently and accurately because they do not have sufficient knowledge in the field.

When we speak of speaking, we don't just mean saying the words through the mouth. It means delivering the message through word of mouth. This ability is often ignored in some teacher classes. Learners do not have enough opportunities to speak English, either in the classroom or outside. Unfortunately, speaking is not an important part of teacher exams. Learners need a lot of practice to learn to speak. Learners can improve their speaking skills through listening and repetition. Teachers can give their learners some structures and ask them to repeat them. This can eliminate shyness in their learners. Teachers can use short questions and short dialogues in the classroom to develop their students' speaking skills (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011). One of the most difficult skills language learners face when learning a language is speaking. Speaking is believed to be the most important of the four language skills. Many learners report that they have spent so many years learning the English language but cannot speak it appropriately and clearly (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006).

### **Definition of speak:**

There are many definitions of the word speaking that has been proposed by language learning researchers. In Webster's New World Dictionary, speaking means saying words orally, speaking as if to communicate, making a request, and delivering a speech (Nunan, 1995). According to Chaney (1998), language is the process of creating and sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal symbols in different



contexts. Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997) define language as an interactive process of meaning formation, involving the production, reception, and processing of information and the systematic assembly of sounds into meaningful sentences. Eckard and Kearny (1981), Florez (1999), Howarth (2001), and Abd El Fattah Torky (2006) define language as a two-way process involving a genuine communication of opinion, information, or emotion. This top-down view views spoken texts as the collaboration of two or more people in a shared time and context.

**The meaning of speaking:** Humans are programmed to speak before they learn to read and write. In any case, people spend far more time interacting with language orally than using it in its written form. Speaking is the most important skill because it is one of the skills needed to have a conversation. Speaking English is not an easy task as speakers should know many important components such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Learners should have sufficient English skills to communicate easily and effectively with other people. Rivers (1981) studied language use outside of the classroom and found that speaking is used twice as often as reading and writing combined. According to Brown (1994), listening and speaking are language tools of the learner. Efrizal (2012) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016) expressed that language is of great importance in the interaction between people where they speak everywhere and every day. Speaking is the way of communicating ideas and messages orally. If we want to encourage students to communicate in English, we should use the language in real communication and ask them to do the same. Richards and Rodgers (2001) found that traditional methods ignored speaking skills in classrooms where the emphasis was on literacy. For example, in the grammar-translation method, reading and writing were the most important skills, and speaking and listening were not of great importance. According to Ur (2000), of all four language skills called listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking is the most important, which is very important for effective communication. The importance of speaking is reflected in the integration of other language skills. Speaking helps learners develop their vocabulary and grammar skills, and then improve their writing skills. Students can express their feelings and ideas; tell stories; Inquiry; Speak, discuss and demonstrate the different functions of the language. Outside the classroom, speaking is vital. Therefore, speakers of languages have more opportunities to find jobs in different organizations and companies. These statements were supported by Baker and



Westrup (2003), who said that learners who speak English very well have better chances of getting a better education, finding good jobs, and being promoted.

Previous research confirms that people cannot learn a language without adequate opportunities for meaningful repetition. Oral language interactions and the opportunity to produce language in meaningful tasks provide the practice that is very important for language internalization. Asher (2003) supports the idea that very soon after teachers have modeled the language, learners like to imitate what is being said. Krashen (1988) studied the relationship between hearing and speaking ability. He found that when students speak, it is evidence they have acquired the language. This idea prompted some teachers to quickly switch from language classes to reading and writing classes.

When students learn English, speaking is important to support their ability to use the language. Speaking skills are very important to people's success. The importance of speaking skills is observed in people's daily activities. Speaking is an interactive activity and takes place under real-time conditions. That is, people can use words and phrases fluently without much conscious thought. Speech skills enable individuals to form sentences for actual communication, in other words, they enjoy using language to achieve specific goals (McDonough & Shaw, 1993).

Characteristics of speaking ability. According to Mazouzi (2013), learners' activities should be designed based on an equivalence between fluency and accuracy. Both fluency and accuracy are important elements of the communicative approach. Classroom practice can help learners to develop their communication skills. Therefore, they should know how the language system works appropriately. The first characteristic of speaking performance is fluency, and this is the main goal of teachers when teaching fluency, not to interrupt the communication because listeners might lose interest. Hedge (2000) expressed that fluency is the ability to respond coherently by connecting words and phrases, pronouncing the sounds clearly, and using stress and intonation. The second characteristic of voice performance is accuracy. Learners should be fluent in a foreign language. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to accuracy in their teaching process. Learners should pay sufficient attention to the accuracy and completeness of the language form when speaking, for example by focusing on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Mazouzi, 2013).

According to Thornbury (2005), the correct use of grammatical structures by learners requires the length and complexity of utterances and well-structured



sentences. Achieving vocabulary accuracy means choosing appropriate words in appropriate contexts. Learners sometimes use similar words or phrases in different contexts that mean nothing similar. Therefore, learners should be able to use words and expressions correctly. Thornbury (2005) explained that pronunciation is the lowest level of knowledge that learners normally focus their attention on about different sounds and their pronunciation. Learners should also know the stress, intonation, and pitch. All of these elements help learners to speak the English language easily and effectively.

**Language problems:** There are some speaking problems that teachers can encounter when helping students speak in the classroom. These are inhibition, lack of up-to-date knowledge, low participation, and use of the mother tongue (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Inhibition is the first problem students encounter in the classroom. When they want to say something in class, they are sometimes inhibited. They are afraid of making mistakes and afraid of criticism. They are ashamed of other students drawing attention to themselves. Littlewood (2007) has expressed that language teaching can also create inhibitions and fears in students. The second problem is that learners complain that they can't remember anything they should say and that they have no motivation to express themselves. This is supported by Rivers (1968) who suggests that learners often have nothing to say, probably because their teachers have chosen a topic that is not appropriate for them or because they do not have enough information about it. Baker and Westrup (2003) also support the above idea, noting that when their teachers ask learners to relate things in a foreign language, it is very difficult for learners to respond because they have little opinion about what they are saying, and say what vocabulary to use or how to use the grammar correctly. The third problem with language courses is that participation is very low. In a class with many students, each student has very little time to speak because only one student is speaking at a time and the other students are trying to listen. In speaking classes, some learners dominate the entire class while others speak very little or not at all. The final problem related to speaking ability is that some learners with the same mother tongue try to use it in speaking classes because it is very easy for them (Tuan & Mai, 2015). According to Harmer (1991), there are several reasons why learners use their mother tongue in language teaching. The first reason is that teachers try to use their language when asking their students to talk about a topic they don't know enough about. The second reason is that using the mother tongue is



very natural for learners. When teachers don't push their learners to speak English, learners automatically use their native language to explain it to their classmates.

The final reason relates to the fact that when teachers regularly use their learners' native language, learners feel comfortable in their speaking classes. Hyland (1997) studied learners from eight disciplines at five Hong Kong institutions. The results of his research indicated that proficiency in the English language was a key factor in academic success in an English environment. The results also showed that learners' language difficulties were related to productive writing and speaking skills. Evans and Green (2007) examined the language difficulties of students at a Hong Kong university. The results of this study showed that students' difficulties focused on academic speaking, such as grammar, fluency, and pronunciation, and academic writing, such as style, grammar, and cohesion.

Factors affecting speaking ability. If teachers want to help learners to overcome their difficulties in learning to speak, they should identify some factors that influence their speaking performance. Learners' speaking performance is influenced by factors such as performance conditions, affective factors, listening comprehension, and feedback during speaking tasks (Tuan & Mai, 2015). The first factor relates to performance conditions. Learners perform a speaking activity under different conditions. Performance conditions affect speaking performance, and these conditions include time constraints, planning, the quality of the performance, and the level of support (Nation & Newton, 2009). The second factor relates to affective factors. Oxford (1990) said that one of the most important factors in language learning is the affective side of the students. According to Krashen (1982), many affective variables have been associated with second language acquisition, and motivation, confidence, and anxiety were the three main types studied by many researchers.

**Hearing is the third factor:** Doff (1998) states that learners cannot improve their speaking skills unless they develop listening skills. Learners should understand what they are being told to have a successful dialogue. Shumin (1997) found that the other students listen when they speak. Speakers have the role of the listener as well as the speaker. This suggests that students cannot respond if they do not understand what is being said. Speaking is closely related to listening. Current knowledge is the fourth factor. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define it as the knowledge structures in long-term memory. That is, current knowledge is the speaker's knowledge of related current information. It allows students to use language concerning the world they



live in. Bachman and Palmer (1996) claim that subject knowledge has a major impact on learners' speaking performance.

### Conclusion:

This article examined the factors that affect student performance in English. The factors mentioned in this article play an important role in the development of learners' speaking skills. These factors make learners less self-confident and less comfortable during their office hours. The results of this work showed that learners with low self-esteem, higher anxiety, and low motivation have serious difficulties in speaking despite acceptable language skills. The work showed that students with higher motivation and less anxiety could speak easily and effectively. Therefore, students should have a friendly and cooperative environment that can help them overcome their difficulties in oral performance. Based on the study literature review, teachers should understand their students' interests and feelings, build their confidence, and choose the best teaching method to engage their students in a speaking activity. Teachers should commend their students for speaking English. They should develop a friendly relationship with their students, make them feel comfortable in the class, and have great enthusiasm and eagerness to learn English in general and to speak English in particular. The literature review for this study found that teachers should give their students enough time to develop their speaking skills, help them overcome shyness by acting kindly so that they feel comfortable speaking, remind their students not to worry about mistakes, and that they really should give instructions and enough guidance. Teachers should give their learners more opportunities to speak English by using some speaking activities that will help them speak and encourage them to participate in speaking activities. Also, teachers should know when and how to correct their students' mistakes so they are not afraid of making mistakes.

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