



Review Of Factors Affecting English Speaking Skills Among Foreign English Learners



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Abstract: *Speaking skills, for effective communication, are widely recognized as a formidable challenge for language learners (EFL). In Pakistan, at the university level, these learners face numerous hurdles which hinder the progress of their speaking abilities. The present study is based on a review of articles. The objective was to categorize and pinpoint problematic aspects and linguistic barriers encountered by university students, with a particular focus on applied linguistics students in Pakistan. The scrutinized papers delved into the details of speaking difficulties and weaknesses experienced by university-level learners, primarily those immersed in the realm of applied linguistics. In the previous studies, EFL learners, grapple with challenges spanning linguistic factors, psycholinguistic factors and sociolinguistic factors. Furthermore, problems based on education, such as designed-based courses and the inadequacy of proficiency of teachers, compound predicaments faced by these learners. The key findings from this study serve as a useful path towards resolving the difficulties and issues related to speaking skills.*

Key Words: Speaking Skills, foreign Learners, Applied Linguistic, Universities

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Introduction

In the contemporary world, acquiring languages, particularly English, has become a top priority for individuals seeking effective communication. However, it is essential to recognize that language acquisition is not always a straightforward endeavour (Riadil, 2020). Speaking stands out as one of the four major language skills that demand improvement for (EFL) learners, particularly in non-native contexts where access to

feedback and authentic language use is limited (Soodmand Afshar & Asakereh, 2016). By giving importance to effective communication in English, most of the linguistic experts consider proficiency in speaking a fundamental skill for learners at all stages of education, including schools, institutes of language, and universities, especially for students of applied linguistics (Hayati, 2008; Ahmed, Pathan, & Khan, 2017). Unfortunately, numerous studies have

revealed that university EFL learners, particularly those specializing in applied linguistics, often struggle to attain proficiency in speaking skills. They encounter a lot of difficulties and numerous challenges while getting an education at a university, in a non-native context, which hinders their potential of language learning in English (SoodmandAfshar & Asakereh, 2016; Zyoud, 2016). The previous studies show that these EFL students may encounter problems in the aspects of linguistics including areas of grammar, vocabulary items, issues in pronunciation and intonation and factors of psycholinguistics including anxiety issues, lack of self-confidence and issue of shyness, and factors of sociolinguistics including issues based on culture and identity, or having agency sense (SoodmandAfshar & Asakereh, 2016; Zyoud, 2016; Hayati, 2008; Ahmed, Pathan, & Khan, 2017).

Furthermore, a few scholars argue that most of the issues related to speaking proficiency stem from problems within educational systems, including inadequate course offerings and teachers' insufficient knowledge (SoodmandAfshar & Asakereh, 2016). In essence, addressing these encountered problems and challenges concerning speaking skills can guide researchers towards a more focused exploration of the primary issues and potential solutions. Recent studies have demonstrated that identifying and addressing speaking skill problems, especially in non-native countries like Pakistan, is the first step toward improving both teacher and learner education (Alroud, 2016). Learners of EFL in Pakistan in their language learning journey face a lot of challenges. These challenges include limited exposure to English outside the school, not having good quality teaching, differences in culture and language, and having negative perceptions about the language. (Tayyab, 2023).

Recognizing the significance of speaking skills in non-native contexts, this study endeavours to review some of the problematic and challenging aspects of Pakistani EFL learners' speaking proficiency. This study centres on Applied Linguistics students who are acquiring knowledge of speaking English at universities in Pakistan. To accomplish the study's objectives, it scrutinizes specific issues and obstacles faced by these learners, which may hinder their effective communication abilities.

Theoretical Backgrounds of Speaking Skill

Several theories have been put forth to elucidate learners' capacity for producing language. One of the foundational theories in this area, as posited by Austin (1975), delves into the concept of 'speech acts' in spoken communication. A speech act encompasses the speaker's intention and its impact on the listener, encompassing actions such as answering, promising, apologizing, and more. Austin (1975) categorizes speech acts into three types: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, each necessitating distinct definitions (Christison, 2018). The locutionary act is itself the utterance, involving both the speaker and the listener. In contrast, the illocutionary speech act, according to Austin, involves performing actions through speech. Finally, the perlocutionary speech act deals with the effect of the speech of the speaker on the speech of the listener, which affects the audience.

If we consider speaking as one of the most crucial and challenging skills in teaching English, Nunan (1999) asserts that the production of language can be categorized into two primary parts: monologue and dialogue. A single speaker is used in a monologue, while dialogue entails multiple speakers engaging in conversation. Furthermore, Nunan (1999) advocates the

behaviourist theory and the method of audio-lingualism, focusing on the point that students should establish the habitual use of L2 second language acquisition, then, ultimately engage in interaction and communication using the language they are learning, aligning with the principles of 'communicative language teaching.'

Additionally, Edge, as cited in Penedidikan (2012), outlines three key abilities associated with language production (speaking): (1) the logical and clear development of meanings, (2) the unambiguous expression of the function of one's speech or writing, and (3) the use of language appropriate to the audience.

Furthermore, in Penedidikan (2012), Brown identifies sixteen of the micro-skills related to speaking skills. These encompass:

1. Generating language parts of varying lengths.
2. Distinguishing among phonemes of English and their variants in allophones.
3. Employing stress patterns in English word stress in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythm in structure, and intonation.
4. To produce reduced forms in words and phrases.
5. Using a sufficient amount of lexicons (words) for achieving pragmatic purposes.
6. During delivery, a fluent speech should be used at different rates.
7. To monitor one's own oral production and strategic devices such as pauses, fillers, self-correctors, and backtrackers to bring clarity to the message.
8. To utilize word classes in grammar, systems, orders of words and patterns, and use of elliptical forms.
9. To formulate speech in natural constituents, for creating phrases, pause groups, breathe groups, and sentences, appropriately.

10. To express a specific meaning in different forms of grammar.
11. To employ devices having cohesion in speaking discourse.
12. To fulfil functions in communication with the perspective of the given context.
13. To use specific registers for specific situations, implicature, presupposition, and other pragmatic features based on sociolinguistics in face-to-face conversations.
14. Establish connections between events between the main idea, and supporting ideas, and add new information, generalization, and exemplification where necessary.
15. Incorporate facial features, body gestures, and non-verbal language alongside verbal language to convey meaning.
16. To develop a range of strategies in speaking, for emphasizing keywords, rephrasing the context for describing word meanings, seeking assistance, and accurately assessing the level of understanding by the interlocutor (Penedidikan, 2012, p. 19-20).

Empirical Studies about Speaking Skill

For acquiring a new language, mastering speaking skills is ranked as the most formidable and challenging. Numerous scholars have put forth various theories in the realm of speaking skills and the pedagogy of spoken language.

The present study is primarily concerned with the myriad of difficulties in the process of teaching and learning speaking skills, particularly among EFL students at the university level. Several studies have illuminated the struggles and weaknesses that learners face in acquiring this skill. Notable contributions in this regard include the works of Nazara (2011), works of Dincer

and Yesilyurt (2013), works of Gürler (2015), works of Hanifa (2018), and works of Akkara, Anumula, and Mallampalli (2020). These studies have explored both the perspectives of educators and learners regarding speaking skills, highlighting a prevalent issue: many learners shy away from oral communication due to fear, anxiety, or a lack of confidence in expressing themselves verbally.

In essence, these practical studies collectively underscore the significance of instructing speaking skills in effective ways that empower learners to overcome their deficiencies in spoken communication. Therefore, the current research aims to consolidate the results of these past studies. These insights from the previous studies are presented in the 'Results and Findings' section of this study.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify factors affecting English speaking skills among foreign English learners.
2. To highlight the suggestion for improving speaking skills among foreign English learners.

Research Design

The research design is qualitative. This research read ten academic papers about speaking issues in students who are learning English, especially university students studying applied linguistics. These papers were published between 2010 and 2023. Descriptive and comparative designs have been used to highlight the purpose of this study.

Data Collection Procedure

A meta-analysis literature review approach was adopted by the researcher. The data has been taken from different research engines named, Google Scholar and Research Gate. Since the study aimed to investigate the speaking problems among university-level

EFL learners, particularly applied linguistics students, the researchers began to identify the main problems discussed in the collected materials. Then, the researcher proceeded to categorize and classify these identified factors in the form of problems and weaknesses by carefully reading and analyzing the extracted content. In simpler terms, the researcher read all the whole selected materials, highlighted the speaking problems experienced by EFL learners, and reported the difficulties she found in these papers.

Findings

As mentioned before, the researcher concentrated on prior studies concerning the challenges of speaking faced by EFL learners. She gathered several relevant studies and organized their findings into four main categories, as outlined below.

Linguistic-related Issues

Numerous studies have explored speaking skills in the Pakistani context, as exemplified by Tariq et al. (2013) and Latifah (2015), both cited in Sirarangothom's work in 2020. However, the existing research gap in this context pertains to the insufficient attention paid to issues related to speaking skills. It is noteworthy that students at the university level often exhibit limited proficiency in speaking. This deficiency cannot solely be attributed to the students, as the educational system traditionally neglects speaking skills. The present study adopts a qualitative evaluation approach, revealing a range of learners' challenges, including accuracy in language, issues of pronunciation, issues in finding suitable vocabulary, grammatical errors, and issues in fluency. Additionally, the results of the interview highlighted the condition in performance, affective factors which play an affective role, ability to listen, and knowledge about the topic as contributing factors.

In a study conducted by Chand (reference [10]), the significance of speaking skills as an indicator of language proficiency was emphasized. This research delved into identifying challenges and issues encountered by the Bachelor Students while doing speaking English at Far Western University, Nepal. Employing a qualitative methodology, Chand employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to categorize problems into four major domains and subsequently proposed recommendations to address these issues. The suggested solutions encompass producing a conducive spoken English environment in the classroom, and to modify existing courses of English, and redefining the role of the teacher in the classroom.

Sulistiyo (2016) underscores several challenges associated with teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, including large class sizes, variable student motivation, and an educational emphasis primarily on reading skills, with limited attention to English grammar and vocabulary (Sawir, 2005).

Research findings indicate that many language learners struggle with linguistic proficiency, encompassing aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation. In Pakistan, it is estimated that approximately 62.56% of the population resides in regions with limited opportunities for English language practice (World Bank, 2017). Bolton (2008, as cited in Raza, 2008) notes that 11% of Pakistan's 220 million people are English speakers, making it the third-largest Asian country in terms of English speakers. Parveen and Mehmood (2013) corroborate this statistic. English's adaptability, including its capacity for incorporating elements from other languages, presents challenges for speakers who struggle with global expressions and vocabulary.

Additionally, the demand for English proficiency in the modern global economy is

on the rise (Paik, 2008). Vocabulary limitations often hinder effective communication among English Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Maftoon & Sharifi Haratmeh, 2012), as do grammatical errors stemming from insufficient grammar knowledge (Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011). Pronunciation also poses a challenge, with students frequently displaying inadequate phonological knowledge (Hashemian & Heidari Soureshjani, 2013). Teachers may neglect pronunciation instruction due to various constraints, such as time, resources, and lack of educational technology (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Moreover, the issue of accents and dialects among EFL learners in Iran is a salient concern (Tajeddin, Atai & Pashmforoosh, 2020). Many Iranian teachers prioritize native-like pronunciation over retaining their own accent, contributing to the complexity of the speaking process for learners.

Psycholinguistic-related Issues

After reviewing various articles on the present study topic, it becomes evident that language learners, particularly non-native (EFL) learners at the university level, encounter psycholinguistic-related challenges. In simpler terms, many EFL learners, who are students of applied linguistics, grapple with psychological issues that can significantly impact their speaking abilities. Previous studies have highlighted several psychological hurdles faced by these students, including a lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes and reluctance to speak (SoodmandAfshar & Asakereh, 2016; Ghanbarpour, 2016; Ghonsooly & Khajavi, 2012). For instance, having a lack of self-confidence can undermine a learner's speaking skills, as they may perceive themselves as inadequate for effective communication in a non-native language (Asakereh & Dehghanzad, 2015).

In Huang's 2022 correlational analysis, it was found that there was a significant correlation between classroom anxiety, classroom activities and teachers' roles. Furthermore, Tuomaité and Zita Zajankauskaité (2017:113) arranged a study on students' oral communication and foreign language within an academic setting. They identified issues related to teaching foreign languages at the university level, highlighting the necessity for a shift in the approach to teaching foreign languages for academic and professional purposes.

Anxiety further exacerbates the quality of speaking skills, even when students possess a good grasp of general English (Safarimoghadam & Ghafournia, 2019; Abedini & Chalak, 2017). Some researchers have emphasized the importance of investigating this aspect (e.g., Alghothani, 2010) and have stressed the role of teachers in both causing and addressing student anxiety.

Despite years of English education, university students often struggle to communicate effectively in English. Research suggests that nearly half of language learners experience anxiety in their language classes. For example, Tok [8] viewed communication obstacles in classrooms at Adiyaman University in Turkey, finding that anxiety and unwillingness were the main barriers to effective English communication with female students showing more willingness to participate. Sudirman [9] similarly explored the problems and some influencing factors faced by high school students speaking English.

Another psychological challenge for EFL learners, in university (EFL) learners, is shyness (Babapour, Seifoori, & Chehreh, 2018; Mohammadian, 2013). Shyness can hinder speaking skills by diverting the learner's focus. Alavinia and Salmasi (2012) found that shyness and low self-confidence can stem from unfriendly interactions with classmates or teachers. In contrast, excessive teacher emphasis on speaking can induce

anxiety in students (Safarimoghadam & Ghafournia, 2019; Abedini & Chalak, 2017). Consequently, less encouragement from teachers to improve their speaking skills can contribute to psychological problems among language learners (SoodmanAfshar & Asakereh, 2016).

In Indonesia, English is one of the best mandatory subjects taught at junior and senior secondary levels and in tertiary education. However, speaking a foreign language, especially for EFL learners, presents challenges such as pauses, hesitation, and fillers, particularly in spontaneous speech. Many factors contribute to these problems, including limited exposure to English, infrequent English practice in daily life, shyness, and a lack of motivation to learn English. According to Brown (2007), EFL learners often struggle with shyness and lack strategies to improve their speaking skills. The speaking itself is challenging for students due to a lack of exposure to English outside the classroom or infrequent use of English in daily life, shyness, and a general reluctance to learn the language. Research by Dil (2009) identified nervousness and reluctance as significant barriers to effective English speaking among Turkish EFL students.

Sociolinguistic-related Issues

Language learners often encounter challenges related to the absence of appropriate context, a sense of agency, and socio-linguistic factors, regarding the development of their speaking skills. One aspect which emphasises the learning process is the importance of cooperation and active participation within the learning community. This discussion will delve into the factors highlighted by previous researchers.

A significant factor that contributes to hesitancy in speaking is the limited opportunities learners have to converse

outside the classroom environment. In the case of Pakistan, where Urdu is the official language. EFL learners often are not given the chance to engage in English conversations beyond the classroom setting, which can hinder their speaking proficiency. Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini Fatemi, & Choi (2014) highly emphasized the role of cooperation during communication within the classroom as integral to the learning process. They found that a high level of cooperation among students correlated with increased proficiency in both learning and speaking.

Classrooms serve as environments where diverse individuals having different backgrounds, and styles of living, Mirhosseini, Sazvar, & Rashed (2017), and give cultural converge. Consequently, a classroom represents a mosaic of diversity. When individuals sit together, respecting diverse ideas and perspectives, the atmosphere becomes more conducive and friendly, which is highly conducive to an effective educational environment. Conversely, an unfriendly environment can also hinder communication and affect interaction.

Another factor that can affect learners' performance in speaking is feeling ignored by the teacher or classmates. It should be made sure that all learners have attained an opportunity to participate in classroom discussions at an equal level, as highlighted by Cortazzi, Jin, Kaivanpanah, & Nemati (2015).

Other Issues

Several other factors warrant consideration for enhancing speaking skills at the university level for Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These issues hold valuable insights for future studies conducted by EFL educators and researchers. Notably, a range of organizational challenges presents itself, including a shortage of speaking-focused courses within university programs,

scheduling classes during early mornings or late afternoons, the mismatch between available resources and the Iranian educational system, and instructors' varying levels of proficiency emphasized by [Eslami](#) & It is crucial to acknowledge that these issues lie beyond the control of the learners, Fatahi, 2010; [Khanzadeh](#), [Mirchenari](#), & [Bakhtiarivard](#), 2013).

These concerns should be subjected to further investigation within the Iranian educational system. Consequently, it becomes evident that the Iranian educational system could enhance university courses by proactively integrating pertinent research findings into syllabus and curriculum development. This proactive approach can contribute to mitigating the prevalence of these issues ([Abedini & Chalak](#), 2017).

Discussion

The provided text discusses various issues related to the speaking skills of Foreign Language (EFL) learners, categorized into linguistic-related, psycholinguistic-related, sociolinguistic-related, and other issues.

In summary, the findings highlight the multifaceted nature of challenges that university-level EFL learners face in developing their speaking skills. These issues encompass linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic dimensions, along with organizational factors. Effective solutions will require a collaborative effort between learners and educators, emphasizing the need for curriculum adjustments to address these challenges in comprehension. The findings suggest that EFL learners from all over the world, particularly at the university level, face numerous challenges in speaking. These challenges include concerns about accents, limited vocabulary, and grammatical errors. Furthermore, psycholinguistic factors such as low self-confidence, anxiety, and shyness significantly affect speaking skills. Additionally, unfriendly behaviour from

teachers and peers, as well as a fear of making mistakes, are common obstacles.

Socio-linguistic aspects also play a role, with some students hesitating to participate in classroom discussions, ultimately hindering their speaking development. The research aligns with previous studies highlighting these issues and emphasizes the need for more speaking-focused courses in university programs, better scheduling of classes, appropriate resources, and instructor proficiency to address these challenges. In the researcher's opinion, all the articles under study are informative but out of ten, the two are the best. The first one is 'An Exploratory Study of Issues of EFL Learners in Pakistani University at Graduate Level' and the second one is 'EFL Students in Speaking Skill: Identifying English Education Students' Perceptions of Psychological Problems in Speaking'. The initial study is of a qualitative nature, and in this research, the investigator is also affiliated with the university where the study was conducted since she serves as a teacher there. Consequently, she closely monitored her students, leading to pristine results. In the subsequent study, the researcher focused on linguistic and psychological challenges, as well as issues related to instructors. Both studies successfully provided effective responses to the research questions posed in their respective investigations.

It is the researcher's perspective that reading all the chosen articles in-depth is advisable, with particular emphasis on the sixth and tenth articles. These two articles are noteworthy as their authors have effectively addressed all the research questions posed within their respective works. The current review suggests that upcoming researchers should conduct additional experimental studies, possibly employing mixed-methods research, to gain deeper insights into the identified issues and to provide clearer guidance for enhancing speaking skills in non-native contexts, such as those found in

the mentioned countries. Moreover, the outcomes of this study hold practical implications for various stakeholders, second language (L2) teachers and learners, and curriculum and material developers.

Teachers can take advantage of the study's findings to refine their teaching methods, taking into consideration the identified problematic areas and actively working to address them during the teaching process. Additionally, curriculum and material developers and the education system as a whole can take leverage from the study's findings to acknowledge and alleviate these challenges, particularly for EFL learners at the university level.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the findings and results that this current review study in future is expected to yield benefits and provide valuable assistance to Foreign Language (EFL) learners, both at the national and International levels. The aims of this study are to identify factors affecting English speaking skills among foreign English learners and to highlight the suggestions for speaking skills among foreign English learners.

The present study encompassed an examination of four primary factors which affect English speaking skills among foreign English learners, including linguistic aspects (comprising issues in grammar, lack of vocabulary items, wrong pronunciation, and right intonation), psycholinguistic factors (such as issues in anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and shyness), sociolinguistic considerations (including cultural barriers, identifying a sense of agency), and various other issues (such as the absence of speaking-focused courses in university programs, inconvenient class schedules, the lack of alignment between resources and the Pakistani educational system, as well as similar issues are found in countries like

Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, along with disparities in instructor proficiency).

It is crucial to emphasize that research is an ever-evolving journey, and each exploration opens doors to new inquiries. The domain of speaking skills, with its diverse complexities and nuances, cannot be fully examined within the confines of a single study. Therefore, it remains imperative for future research endeavours to delve deeper into other dimensions of the hurdles associated with speaking skills. The second objective is to highlight the suggestion for improving speaking skills among foreign

English learners. The suggestion is given below:

Suggestion

The current review suggests that upcoming researchers should conduct additional experimental studies, possibly employing mixed-methods research.

Recommendations

The outcomes of this study hold practical implications and recommendations for various stakeholders, including second language (L2) teachers, learners, syllabus designers, and material developers.

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