



ENHANCING THE ENGLISH SPOKEN ABILITIES: A STUDY AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL STUDENTS

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Abstract

English is the dominant language around the world in the current era; hence, it is important to learn and hold the strong grip over the English spoken abilities. The key purpose of this study also is to explore the English spoken abilities in university level students. Total 60 students of BS (1st & 2nd) at university level were selected and a 20 questions questioner was prepared for subject purpose. The study found that on asking the different questions regarding the improving English speaking abilities, student's response was surprising. While they were asked to spent time on spoken English, using technology, and other methods to improve English and some other related questions, most of them respond as "NO" and showed disappointment for not using the modern techniques as well as showed interest. The research further, explores that students itself were also not giving time to enhance their abilities to improve English. Old teaching methods and not giving proper time for improving subject skills, students were showing hesitation. Further, some students highlighted the teachers are responsible for these issues; however, most of them accept the responsibility. Low confidence in speaking English and communication was also observed due to non-adoption of proper methods of improving subject skills. The study also tinted the paucity of English vocabulary, not interests of students in self-try, reading of English newspapers, never enjoy in speaking English activities and other activities for subject enhancement and found another big barrier to enhance their English spoken skills. The said research recommends using the latest technology, techniques, training, holding the seminars and using of tools and encouraging students to develop the spoken skills in the university students. The research further recommends the scholars to do furthered research at college level for more valuable results.

Keywords: English spoken language, speaking ability, improving, tools, class practice, teaching methods.

Introduction

The ability to communicate fluently in English has become a vital competence in the twenty-first century, particularly within academic, professional, and global domains. Among the four fundamental language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is frequently perceived as the most demanding to acquire (Brown, 2001; Nunan, 2015). For learners of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), oral proficiency is strongly associated with self-confidence, educational attainment, employability, and participation in international communication (Richards,



2008). Nevertheless, despite years of formal instruction, many students continue to experience significant difficulties in developing speaking proficiency. This persistent challenge calls into question the effectiveness of existing pedagogical approaches, the barriers faced by learners, and the strategies they employ to enhance their oral communication skills. The importance of speaking skills becomes particularly evident in domains such as higher education, international collaboration, and professional communication, where proficiency in English often determines access to academic, social, and career opportunities (Crystal, 2012). Consequently, enhancing students' oral communication skills is not merely a pedagogical objective but also a broader social and economic necessity.

For language learners, the development of speaking ability requires both linguistic competence, which includes vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and communicative competence, which encompasses pragmatic use, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and discourse management (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). This dual demand makes oral communication particularly challenging, as learners must move beyond rote memorization and instead construct meaning through active, dynamic interactions. Understanding learners' perspectives on these challenges and the strategies they employ offers valuable insights for improving instructional practices. Previous research highlights several obstacles to developing oral proficiency, including psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of errors, and lack of confidence; linguistic limitations related to restricted vocabulary, weak grammar, and inaccurate pronunciation; and contextual constraints such as limited exposure, insufficient opportunities for authentic interaction, and exam-driven teaching practices (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Tuan & Mai, 2015; Ur, 1996).

From the learners' perspective, speaking in English often emerges as a significant source of anxiety. In many EFL contexts, including Pakistan, China, and Saudi Arabia, students report that classroom instruction remains predominantly grammar-focused, providing limited opportunities for communicative practice (Khan, 2011; Zhang, 2009). Learners also highlight challenges such as restricted access to native or proficient speakers, inadequate practice environments, and misalignment between curricular objectives and real-life communicative needs (Wei & Zhou, 2020). Over recent decades, however, language teaching methodologies have shifted from traditional grammar-translation approaches toward more communicative frameworks. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, for instance, emphasizes interaction as both the means and ultimate goal of language acquisition (Littlewood, 2004), while Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) promotes authentic task engagement to foster both fluency and accuracy in spoken performance (Ellis, 2003).

Students' perspectives frequently highlight the discrepancy between theoretical language teaching methods and actual classroom practices. Many learners report that classroom instruction continues to emphasize rote memorization and written examinations over meaningful oral communication (Butler, 2011). At the same time, technological resources such as language laboratories, mobile applications, and online platforms—including Duolingo and Zoom-based discussions—are increasingly being integrated into instruction. However, the effectiveness of these tools often depends on factors such as learner motivation and institutional support (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Motivation, in particular, plays a central role in the development of speaking skills. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model distinguishes between integrative motivation, characterized by a desire to connect with the target language community, and instrumental motivation, which reflects practical incentives such as



academic achievement or employment opportunities. Research consistently demonstrates that learners who perceive English proficiency as essential for their future prospects are more committed to enhancing their oral communication skills (Dörnyei, 2001).

English oral proficiency plays a vital role in students' academic success, particularly in contexts where English serves as the primary medium of instruction. Learners who are able to express their ideas clearly and confidently tend to participate more actively in classroom discussions, collaborative projects, and academic presentations, which often leads to improved academic outcomes (Baker & Westrup, 2003). In contrast, limited speaking ability can contribute to challenges such as social isolation, weaker academic performance, or even higher dropout rates in English-medium institutions (Shamim, 2011). In multilingual contexts such as Pakistan and India, students frequently shift between English and their native languages, reflecting authentic communicative practices. However, strict classroom language policies that discourage bilingual interaction may restrict learners' opportunities for meaningful oral practice (Canagarajah, 2013).

Examining the development of English-speaking skills from students' perspectives is crucial for several reasons. First, as the central participants in the language learning process, students provide first-hand insights into the effectiveness of instructional approaches. Second, their perspectives highlight the affective, cognitive, and contextual aspects of learning that may not always be fully recognized by teachers or policymakers. Third, by understanding learners' challenges and strategies, educators can design more responsive and learner-centered interventions. In this context, the present study seeks to address the barriers that hinder students' oral communication skills.

Method

Through stratified random sampling procedure, 60 students (30 male students & 30 female students) studying at the BS 1st and 2nd year at the two different government universities of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The study was descriptive in nature. A questionnaire including twenty questions was developed by studying the review literature and through discussion with the experts. The data was collected personally, tabulated in the form of counting frequencies and then analyzed through percentages. The data collected through one source, i.e. the questionnaire served the purpose for the researcher, and the review of the related literature further throws light on the improving of speaking ability apart from the questionnaire.

Table - 1
Results Received from the Students

(N=60)

Boys-30

Girls-30

Question	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you use sufficient time to speak English	10 (17%)	20 (33%)	8 (13%)	22 (37%)
Did you practice different methods to improve spoken English	7 (12%)	23 (28%)	12 (20%)	18 (30%)
Do you complete task about spoken English in given time	14 (23%)	16 (27%)	17 (28%)	13 (22%)



Do you feel confidence while speaking English with others	7 (12%)	23 (28%)	9 (15%)	21 (35%)
Do you feel nervous to speak English in class	15 (25%)	15 (25%)	13 (22%)	17 (28%)
Do you practice regularly to speak English	9 (15%)	21 (35%)	8 (13%)	22 (37%)
Do you have grip to speak English correctly	6 (10%)	24 (40%)	8 (13%)	22 (37%)
Does your teacher speak English in class most of the time	4 (7%)	26 (43%)	6 (10%)	24 (40%)
Does teachers are responsible in poor spoken English	15 (25%)	15 (25%)	12 (20%)	18 (30%)
Does students are responsible in poor spoken English	15 (25%)	15 (25%)	12 (20%)	18 (30%)
Both are responsible	25 (42%)	5 (8%)	27 (45%)	3 (5%)
Do you feel enjoy while speaking in English	14 (23%)	16 (27%)	16 (27%)	14 (23%)
Do you watch English movies to improve English	12 (20%)	18 (30%)	8 (13%)	22 (37%)
Have you ever joined English spoken groups or class	16 (27%)	14 (23%)	7 (12%)	23 (38%)
Do you use English while chatting with friends online	19 (32%)	11 (19%)	15 (25%)	15 (25%)
Do you ever record yourself speaking English for practice	6 (10%)	24 (40%)	5 (8%)	25 (42%)
Do you have enough vocabulary to speak English fluently	18 (30%)	12 (20%)	22 (37%)	8 (13%)
Do you believe daily practice can improve you spoken English	28 (47%)	2 (4%)	29 (48%)	1 (7%)
Do you read English newspaper or article regularly	14 (23%)	16 (27%)	17 (28%)	13 (22%)
Do you find English grammar difficult	17 (28%)	13 (22%)	14 (23%)	16 (27%)

Results and Discussions

The results received from the students (boys and girls) are as under:

The question to “*use sufficient time to speak English*” was asked to the students of targeted group and the response from the 10 (17%) boys students was “YES” and 20 (33%) respond as “NO”. On the other side, 8 (13%) girls response was “YES” and 22 (37%) girls replied “NO” on asking the same question. Further, on asking to “*use different methods to improve spoken English*”, only 7 (12%) boys students replied as “YES” and 23 (28%) responses “NO”, beside, 12 (20%) girls students response as “YES” and 18 (30%) girls replied “NO” while they were asked the same question. Another question about to “*complete task about spoken English in given time*” was asked and only “14 (23%) boys students replied as “YES” and 16 (27%) responses “NO”, alongside, 17 (28%) girls students response “YES” and 12 (22%) girls replied “NO” on the same question. Question regarding “*feel confidence while speaking English with others student*” the answered of 7 (12%) boys students was “YES” and 23 (28%) said “NO”,



whereas, 9 (15%) girls students replied “YES” and 21 (35%) responses as “NO”. Another question to “*grip to speak English correctly*” was asked to student and only 6 (10%) boy students replied “YES” and 24 (40%) respond as “NO”, however, 8 (13%) girls students said “YES” and 22 (37%) answered “NO”. Further, when they were asked to “*practice regularly to speak English*” 9 (15%) boy students replied “YES” and 21 (35%) respond as “NO”, though, 8 (13%) girls students said “YES” and 22 (37%) answered “NO” on the same question. Question regarding “*feel nervous to speak English in class*” the answered of 15 (25%) boys students was “YES” and 15 (25%) said “NO”, whereas, 13 (22%) girls students replied “YES” and 17 (28%) responses as “NO”. Another question “*your teacher speak English in class most of the time*”, the answered of 4 (7%) boys students was “YES” and 26 (43%) said “NO”, while, 6 (10%) girls students replied “YES” and 24 (40%) responds as “NO” on the same question. Further, on asking “*teachers are responsible in poor spoken English*”, the fifty percent boys students i.e. 15 (25%) boys students replied as “YES” and 15 (25%) responses “NO”, beside, 12 (20%) girls students response “YES” and 18 (30%) girls replied “NO”. Further, when they were asked “*students are responsible in poor spoken English*” 15 (25%) boys students replied “YES” and 15 (25%) respond as “NO”, however, 12 (20%) girls students said “YES” and 18 (30%) answered “NO”. Regarding the question “*both are responsible*” the answer of 25 (42%) boys students was “YES” and 5 (8%) said “NO”, whereas, 27 (45%) girls students replied “YES” and 3 (5%) responses as “NO” on the same question. Then asked “*you feel enjoy while speaking in English*” the response of 14 (23%) boys students was “YES” and 16 (27%) said “NO”, whereas, 16 (27%) girls students replied “YES” and 14 (23%) responses as “NO”. Another questions about to “*watch English movies to improve English*” 12 (20%) boy students answered “YES” and 18 (30%) respond as “NO”, however, 8 (13%) girls students said “YES” and 22 (37%) responded “NO”. The question to “*ever joined English spoken groups or class*” “16 (27%) boys students replied as “YES” and 14 (23%) responses “NO”, alongside, 7 (12%) girls students response “YES” and 23 (38%) girls replied “NO”. Another question towards “*use of English while chatting with friends online*” was asked to students, only 19 (32%) boys students replied as “YES” and 11 (19%) said “NO”, whereas, 15 (25%) girls students replied “YES” and 15 (25%) responses as “NO”. Further, on asking about “*ever record yourself speaking English for practice*” only 6 (10%) boy students replied “YES” and 24 (40%) respond as “NO”, however, 5 (8%) girls students said “YES” and 25 (42%) answered “NO”. Question regarding “*you have enough vocabulary to speak English fluently*” the answered of 18 (30%) boys students was “YES” and 12 (20%) said “NO”, whereas, 22 (37%) girls students replied “YES” and 8 (13%) responses as “NO”. The questions to “*you believe daily practice can improve you spoken English*” 28 (47%) boy students replied “YES” and 2 (4%) respond as “NO”, however, 29 (48%) girls students said “YES” and 1 (7%) answered “NO”. While asked “*you read English newspaper or article regularly*” 14 (23%) boy students replied “YES” and 16 (27%) respond as “NO”, alongside, 17 (28%) girls students said “YES” and 13 (22%) answered “NO”. The questions “*you find English grammar difficult*” 17 (28%) boy students replied “YES” and 13 (22%) respond as “NO”, beside 14 (23%) girls students said “YES” and 16 (27%) answered “NO”, on the same question.



Conclusions

The study concluded that on asking the different questions regarding the improving English speaking abilities, student's response was surprising. While they were asked to spent time on spoken English, using technology, and other methods to improve English and some other related questions, most of them respond as "NO" and showed disappointment for not using the modern techniques as well as showed interest. The research further, explores that students itself were also not giving time to enhance their abilities to improve English. Old teaching methods and not giving proper time for improving subject skills, students were showing hesitation. Further, some students highlighted the teachers are responsible for these issues; however, most of them accept the responsibility. Low confidence in speaking English and communication was also observed due to non-adoption of proper methods of improving subject skills. The study also tinted the paucity of English vocabulary, not interests of students in self-try, reading of English newspapers, never enjoy in speaking English activities and other activities for subject enhancement and found another big barrier to enhance their English spoken skills. The said research recommends using the latest technology, techniques, training, holding the seminars and using of tools and encouraging students to develop the spoken skills in the university students.

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