



Challenges And Influences On English Language Proficiency Among University Students In India

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Abstract: Speaking fluently is widely regarded as an indicator of language proficiency. In India, English is being taught as a second language and modern language from elementary to university levels, many students struggle with speaking fluency. In context of Hindi, the English language is taken as a foreign language. The aim of study to examines the factors affecting English language proficiency among university students in India, highlighting teacher influence, mother tongue interference, and educational practices. Using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, the research categorizes findings into difficulties and their causes in different subcategories of board themes. Key finding personal, social, environmental, psychological, and linguistic issues as primary obstacles, while teacher practices, course content, excessive use of the mother tongue, inadequate schooling, and classroom culture contribute to speaking deficiencies. The research emphasizes the need for improved teaching methodologies, classroom interaction and balanced course content to faster better English proficiency among learners. The study recommends fostering a supportive environment, enhancing learner autonomy, revising teaching methods and incorporating regular speaking activities.

Keywords: *English learning difficulties, speaking problems, speaking skills, teaching-learning*

[1] INTRODUCTION

In India, English is being taught as a second language and modern language. The English language entered into India at the beginning of the 17th century. The elementary school taught vernacular and the schools of higher learning adopted classical languages as their medium and mode of communication. In India, UG/PG level most of the universities like engineering, medical, science and technology follow English language is an essential part of learning and speaking, all the assessments system and examination papers are in English language because they believe that setting of examination papers in English may enhance the quality of Education. Depending on the students, methods of learning English are variable of English proficiency and the manner and settings in which they are taught. Teaching methods and approaches play an important role of English language acquisition as a foreign language. According to the census of 2011, 129 million Indians spoke English. 0.02 % Indians spoke English as their first language. Approximately, 6.8 % Indians reported English as their second language.

[2] LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Contemporary Era, the English as an international language which is also called the major window on the world, and it gives us the view of the various progresses taking place in the global world economically. Majority of Indian students and scholars, especially from rural areas considers the word of English as a magical and a mystical word.

Most of the cases, particularly with the use of English version, the latest technological and scientific innovations or resources are mainly written. The rapidly growing world's information and technology, forced everyone to use of, internet to learn English (Richards & Renandya, 2002). We need to require consistency in speaking and constant practice and patience to learn English fluently. The Researcher has tried to analyses several hindrances in learning English because for Indians, this language has a special place. It is a second language to us; it is not a foreign language. Nowadays, proficiency of English language is considered as an indicator of success and elite class culture also. A good level of proficiency is a pre requisite for getting a better job there. Each and every learner has their own problems while responding briefly. Few specific problems while speaking, such as personal problems, social problem, linguistic problem, environmental problems and fear of committing mistakes and problems in using appropriate grammatical patterns during classroom interaction, being an UG/PG student.

While individual differences, difficulties and disability in second language learning are varying and challenging to both students, learners and teachers, these problems take on a greater level of strength for immigrants who learn ESL, whose livelihood, social identity, and sense of community are frightened by often deceptive and unintelligible language learning de-merits. Adult ESL instructors and program directors must explore reasons for students' lack of expected progress and implement useful and beneficial adjustments, accommodations, and teaching methodologies to make ensure the better uplift-ment of a wider variety of learners, based on studying skills and neuromyth in education that have proven necessary to successful second language learning and for ESL learners, especially.

By Richards & Renandya, following are the major causes of speaking difficulties: Age or maturation constraints, aural medium, socio- cultural factors, and affective factors. the most determinant factor of language learning is regarded as Age. Various scholars argued that learners who begin their second or foreign language at an early age may learn that language more easily. Richards & Renandya, also points out that many adults fail to reach native-like proficiency in a second language in case of late starting off learning the language. The aural medium is the second affecting factor of speaking. Particularly, affecting factor of speaking pointed by Richards & Renandya is socio- cultural factors. The role of affective factors in speaking problems are pointed out by many famous scholars in the World. Those effective factors are mentioned below:

Self-esteem, motivation, empathy, the feeling of uneasiness, apprehension, emotions, attitude, frustration, anxiety and self- doubt play the crucial role in slowing down the speed and accuracy of presentation or speech of an individual speaker while speaking.

From the above discussion on the literature review, it can be concluded that the major causes of speaking difficulties and problems are the lack of appropriate vocabulary and the excess use of mother tongue. Along with the verbal communication system, those learners need to be familiar with the non-verbal communication system to be more competent in speaking and learning skills.

[3] RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the Department of English, A.P.S University affiliated college, by the using a qualitative research design. Using purposive sampling procedure 30 participants, UG level student of final year who's majorly studying English, who were less fluent in speech. Class room presentation was used to evaluate the participants speaking skill and presentation skill. Faculty of the department observed their presentation skill and spoken English fluency in the classroom presentation, as per that participant selected, who were problem in English speaking.

Study data was collected using a set of open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview for participants or candidates. *The Q&I developed into two parts: Part 01: Speaking Difficulties / Part 02: Possible Cause of Difficulties.*

For each candidate was asked questions: *Write the answer of the following questions at least 5 point each.*

- a) *What difficulties do you face in speaking English?*
- b) *What are the causes of speaking difficulties?*

Question survey was developed in google form and distributed using email and messenger and interviewed based on semi-structured interview protocols by the using google meet with their permission. After completion of questionnaire, interview was conducted using mother tongue for better understanding of candidates causes with max 15 minutes time for each participant interviews.

After that all the data was recognized and suggestion given to improve the English speaking on the basis of their responses to both question and interview.

[4] RESULT & DISCUSSION

Collected data was grouped into problem and causes, categorized into two categories. One '*Speaking Difficulties*' and another one '*Causes of Speaking Difficulties*'.

Struggling to maintain a smooth flow of speech.

Difficult to clearly express nuanced and sophisticated concepts in a concise and understandable manner.

Sometimes lacking the precise academic vocabulary accurately.

Experiencing nervousness or anxiety during presentations or group discussions.

Occasionally facing issues with accent and pronunciation that can lead to misunderstandings.

Academic language in everyday conversations can hinder fluency and confidence.

Academic communication can create pressure, making it challenging to express ideas naturally and fluidly.

Differences in communication styles and norms between my native culture.

Information from diverse sources can be cognitively demanding, leading to hesitation or uncertainty in speech.

Limited opportunities to practice speaking English, especially in academic settings.

Fig. 01: Sample of Answer Submitted by Participant

Category 01: Speaking Difficulties

Speaking difficulties, in both the questionnaire and interview, faculty inquired about the difficulties and causes faced by the students when speaking in English. From the 21 respondents, different types of challenges were identified, as listed in Table 01. Among the prevalent issues were feeling nervous, limited vocabulary, difficulty in applying grammatical structures, pronunciation concerns, fear of making errors, excessive use of the mother tongue, and lack of confidence. The students' feedback from both the interview and questionnaire was categorized into four subcategories: *Personal, social, environmental, and linguistic problems.*

- a) **Personal Problems:** Personal problems refer to challenges caused by individual characteristics such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, nervousness, hesitation and shyness etc. The majority of participants identified nervousness as their main problem. One participant said, "*My body shakes when I go to the front of the class*", which describes severe nervousness when speaking in English in public. Another participant said: "*My brain goes blank when I start talking in the classroom in front of my friends and the teacher*", indicating a significant decrease in self-confidence. In addition, one student

mentioned, *"I feel hesitant when I try to speak in front of the teacher and my throat is closed; the words don't come out"*. These examples show that these personality traits make it difficult for participants to speak or improve their speaking skills.

- b) Social Problems:** Social problems refer to problems that arise in a classroom society consisting of participants from various backgrounds with different interests and attitudes. This heterogeneity leads to different patterns of behaviour in bilingual classrooms. One participant reported, *"My friends laugh at me when I speak in class because my pronunciation is not that good,"* which led to hesitation due to fear of ridicule. Another participant said: *"Our teacher makes corrections in front of the class, which makes me ashamed."* These show that the classroom environment, including peer attitudes and teacher correction methods, can prevent participants from practicing English.
- c) Environmental Problems:** The environmental problems for study are related to the classroom culture of the study location, considered important by many of the participants in this study. One participant noted: *"We don't have English language speaking time in the classroom to improve fluency"* Another participant said: *"Even none of my friends are interested in speaking English in class, even though I asked them to start an English club, no one was interested."* These indicate a lack of opportunities and motivation to practice English both inside and outside classroom. The lack of a practical environment makes it difficult for participants to improve their language skills. Previous studies (Heriansyah, 2012; Sokip, 2020) emphasized the role of the environment in language learning.
- d) Linguistic/Language Problems:** Language problems are a big problem for EFL and ESL participants. Students often struggle to find the right words to express their thoughts to speak frequently. EFL learners tend to think in their mother tongue and then translate their thoughts into English, which can cause difficulties. One participant mentioned, *"I find it difficult to find the right word when speaking English because my local language comes to mind first."* Another participant said: *"I struggle to choose the right time when I speak."* Many participants reported problems with vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation that hindered their ability to speak fluently. They often face challenges in maintaining subject-verb agreement and pronouncing words correctly, leading to hesitation and speech errors.

Category 02: Causes of Speaking Difficulties

Causes of speaking difficulties faced by student, in the second phase of the study, participants were asked to identify the causes of their speech difficulties while speaking English language. To find the most critical factors influencing speech problems. The responses revealed comprehensive reasons that focused on teachers and teaching methods, influence of the mother tongue and teaching-learning. These reasons can be grouped into five categories: *teacher and teaching practices, excessive reliance on the mother tongue, insufficient training of speaking, course content and classroom cultural influences.*

- e) Teacher and Teaching Factors:** The role of teachers and their teaching styles directly affect students learning experiences. Most students identified the teacher's role in developing speaking fluency as a crucial factor. Responses indicated that teachers often dominate classroom interactions, leaving students as passive listeners. *Harmer (2001) argues that student talking time should surpass teacher talking time for effective learning. Knowles (1973) suggests that teachers should act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures to enhance learning outcomes.*

Many students perceive that their teachers did not provide enough opportunities to practice English speaking. One participant remarked, *"Our teachers practice their own English but do not give us a chance to practice English in class"*, highlighting a neglect of student participation, especially in university. Another participant reported, *"The English teacher never creates an English-speaking environment in the classroom; instead, they use the mother tongue with students outside of class."* This underscores the importance of teachers serving as role models by consistently using English both inside and outside the classroom to motivate students to improve their English speaking. Some participants also pointed out the lack of motivation from both teachers and peers. Students believe that

teachers should play a crucial role in encouraging language practice. Participants mentioned that peers often ridicule those who attempt to speak English, indicating a lack of support from both teachers and classmates.

Teaching methods also significantly impact learning efficiency. Participants stated that traditional teaching methods neglect speaking skills. One participant said, *“Teacher comes to class, gives a lecture on the content, asks us to take notes from her note, and then finishes the class”*. According to Knowles et al. (2005), adult learners experiences and participation should be maximized to improve teaching and learning. This study found that many teachers still rely on outdated methods, disregarding the active role of learners in the educational process.

- f) **Course Content Factors:** During interviews, some students criticized the course content for lacking support for speaking activities as compare to writing activities. They noted that teachers often focus on writing rather than speaking activities. One participant reported, *“If we do not have speaking activities in the course as compare to writing activity, how can we practice English speaking, and how can our teacher teach us speaking English as much as possible? This is the fault of the university that designed the course.”* Another participant mentioned, *“There are no listening activities included in the course; if there is no listening, how can we speak fluently?”*
- g) **Classroom Culture Factor:** Classroom culture, including systems, traditions, and teacher-student dynamics, significantly impacts learning activity. In this study, students identified classroom culture as a key factor affecting their learning. Some participants shared that their backgrounds and classroom experiences varied widely. One participant said, *“We never spoke English with our teacher in school, and we were not allowed to speak in class. Our school teacher was very strict, so we stayed silent.”* Traditional classroom settings often valued silence, hindering active participation and group discussions. This study found that classroom culture plays an essential role in developing speaking skills.
- h) **Mother Tongue Factor:** Many participants highlighted the lack of a conducive environment and peer interest in practicing English in the classroom. 15 Participants mentioned that most students use their mother tongue during class. One participant reported, *“Even teachers use their local language with students outside of the classroom and sometimes in class.”* Another participant added, *“We do not have a system to ask questions in English; even teachers explain the content in Hindi or regional language, and the local language most of the time.”* The overuse of the mother tongue was found to be a major barrier to developing English language proficiency in speaking.
- i) **Poor Schooling:** Poor schooling as a significant factor in their inadequate English performance. One participant shared, *“We have a very poor background in English from the school level, making it very difficult to improve at this age.”* They felt that a better school environment for practicing English would have led to greater fluency at the university level. Thus, the school environment is crucial for developing English fluency.

Sl. No.	Group Name	Specific Problem
01	Personal Problem	Nervousness, lack of confidence, hesitation, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear of public speaking
02	Social Problem	Fear of criticism/insult from peers, fear of making mistakes, fear of incorrect pronunciation, peer pressure, lack of social support
03	Linguistic Problem	Difficulty in selecting appropriate words, issues with fluency, interference from mother tongue, challenges in using correct grammatical patterns, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties

04	<i>Environmental Problems</i>	<i>Ineffective teaching methods, lack of classroom interaction, rigid institutional system, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient learning resources.</i>
05	<i>Teacher And Teaching Factors</i>	<i>Outdated teaching methods, lack of encouragement to speak English, excessive teacher talking time, inadequate English-speaking environment, lack of personalized feedback, teacher's own language proficiency</i>
06	<i>Mother Tongue Factor</i>	<i>Overuse of mother tongue by students, teachers relying on native language explanations, influence of local dialects, negative transfer of language rules</i>
07	<i>Poor Schooling Course Content Factor</i>	<i>Students from under-resourced schools, courses emphasizing writing over speaking, absence of speaking activities in the curriculum, outdated syllabus, lack of practical communication exercises</i>
08	<i>Classroom Culture</i>	<i>Lack of motivation, linguistic deficiencies, teacher-centred activities, unsupportive classroom environment, competitive atmosphere, cultural barriers, lack of peer collaboration</i>

Table 01: Summary of Difficulties and Their Causes

This research developed into the primary difficulties students encounter when speaking English, such as feeling nervous, lacking confidence, having limited practice opportunities, fearing making mistakes, facing an unsupportive environment, having a restricted vocabulary, and struggling with grammatical patterns while speaking English. These challenges impede the development of speaking skills. Ur (1991) also identified similar issues, pointing out that low participation, use of the native language, and inhibitions act as significant barriers. Many participants emphasized the overuse of their native language as a major speaking challenge. The lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and improper grammar usage as common issues for EFL learners, along with inadequate interaction opportunities in the classroom by Brown (2001).

The findings are consistent with the observations of Richards & Renandya (2002), who pointed out that the fear of making mistakes can discourage students from achieving fluency. Several participants expressed discomfort speaking in front of peers due to a fear of being ridiculed. Heriansyah, 2012, identified a lack of vocabulary and confidence as major speaking challenges. Sokip (2020) discovered that university students in Indonesia faced anxiety and low motivation, which aligns with the current study's findings. In contrast, Bashir et al. (2011) reported positive outcomes from using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and promoting classroom interaction.

Speaking difficulties, categorizing them into teaching methods, environmental factors, and course content, poor schooling and mother tongue. Participants identified teacher practices, the classroom environment, and course focus as the primary causes. Heriansyah (2012) identified both linguistic and non-linguistic causes of speaking issues. Study highlighted nervousness, lack of practice of English, and teaching methods as key factors, with some students citing inadequate schooling as a significant cause, supporting Sokip (2020)'s findings on poor educational backgrounds. Akbari (2016) stressed the role of course content in affecting speaking proficiency, noting that insufficient focus on speaking activities can discourage language practice.

The study concludes that speaking is a vital skill that necessitates ample practice opportunities both in and out of the classroom (Brown, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Teachers should cultivate a supportive environment for English practice. Research has revealed that promoting classroom interaction and listening activities enhances speaking skills (Harmer, 2001; Sokip, 2020; Ur, 1991). Course design should strike a balance among all language skills, with a special emphasis on speaking to enhance fluency.

[5] CONCLUSION

English language is mostly used language for communication in all over the world. The first is the learner attitude, students' motivation, students' personality, the level of the students' exposure to English, learning capacity, and finally management in teaching and learning English. They face grammatical problems as correct use of verb, surface problems, content problems, structure of sentences, problems use of conditional sentences, lack of vocabulary, use of past tense and spelling difficulties, punctuation marks and proper pronunciation while speaking. Major reasons of these problems are less skilled and certified teachers, poorness of education system and assessment system, college, school environment, attitude to writing, strength of class, less qualified teachers using teaching strategies, use of Hindi language as well as mother tongue in classroom and inside and outside college campus and less practice of grammar. In many rural areas of India, the education is provided through the native languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Gujrati and Kannada, etc. with not much emphasis on learning in improving while using English as vocabulary. Learners and new speakers are scared about committing mistakes while they speak. Therefore, they cannot express themselves well or instantly because they lack adequate and appropriate vocabulary. The other factor that makes learners or students to hesitate to communicate in English is that they are shy and nervous. They feel fearful to speak a single sentence in full English in front of other people and peers because they lack confidence about their own competence in English and realise stage fear issues in general.

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