

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFICULTIES STUDENTS FACE IN DEVELOPING PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: The ability to communicate effectively in English is a vital skill in today's globalized world. However, many students face significant challenges in developing proficiency in English speaking. This paper explores the multifaceted factors contributing to these difficulties, including educational system limitations, lack of exposure, psychological barriers, cultural influences, pedagogical approaches, and resource constraints. The study highlights how traditional curriculum design often prioritizes reading and writing over speaking skills, leaving students inadequately prepared for real-world communication. It also discusses the impact of limited practice opportunities outside the classroom, which hinders fluency development.

Keywords: English speaking skills, language learning challenges, educational system, psychological barriers, cultural influences, language pedagogy.

Introduction. The ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly important in today's globalized world. English is not only the most widely spoken second language but also serves as the lingua franca in numerous international domains such as business, education, and diplomacy. For students around the world, acquiring proficiency in English speaking skills is often seen as a critical step toward enhancing their academic and professional opportunities. Despite this, many students encounter significant obstacles in their journey to become fluent speakers of English. Understanding the myriad factors that contribute to these challenges is crucial for educators, policymakers, and learners themselves. One of the primary reasons for the difficulties students face in learning to speak English fluently is the disparity between the skills emphasized in traditional educational settings and the competencies required for effective oral communication. In many educational systems, especially in non-English speaking countries, there is a predominant focus on reading and writing skills. Grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension are often prioritized over speaking and listening abilities. This imbalance leads to a situation where students may excel in written English but struggle to express themselves orally. This challenge is compounded by the fact that speaking involves not only the correct use of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to engage in spontaneous conversation, articulate thoughts clearly, and adjust language use according to context—all of which are skills that require extensive practice and exposure.

Another significant factor that contributes to students' struggles with English speaking is the lack of an immersive language environment. Unlike in native English-speaking countries, where learners are constantly exposed to the language through media, social interactions, and daily life activities, students in non-English speaking regions often have limited opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom. This limited exposure hinders their ability to develop a natural fluency and comfort with the language. Moreover, even when opportunities for practice do exist, they are often in formal, structured settings that do not mimic the unpredictability and informality of real-world conversations. As a result, students may become proficient in academic or formal speech but find themselves at a loss in casual or spontaneous interactions. The psychological aspect of language learning also plays a crucial role in the challenges students face. Fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and a lack of confidence can severely inhibit a student's willingness to participate in speaking activities. This issue is often exacerbated by the societal and

cultural attitudes towards language errors. In many educational contexts, mistakes are viewed negatively, leading to a fear of embarrassment or criticism among students. This fear creates a significant barrier to language learning, as speaking a new language inherently involves trial and error. For many students, the pressure to speak perfectly from the outset is overwhelming, resulting in a reluctance to practice speaking at all.

Cultural factors also influence students' ability to learn English speaking skills effectively. Language is deeply intertwined with culture, and differences in cultural norms, values, and communication styles can pose challenges for students. For instance, the conventions of politeness, directness, and body language in English-speaking cultures may differ significantly from those in the students' native cultures. These differences can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications, further complicating the language learning process. Additionally, some students may struggle to find relevance or connection to the English language, especially if their immediate social and cultural environment does not prioritize or value English proficiency. Pedagogical methods and the quality of instruction are also significant contributors to the difficulties students face in learning English speaking skills. Traditional language teaching methods, which often focus on rote memorization and grammar drills, may not effectively prepare students for the dynamic and interactive nature of spoken communication. Furthermore, the use of native language as a medium of instruction in English classes can limit students' exposure to spoken English. In many cases, teachers themselves may not have adequate training or proficiency in spoken English, which can affect their ability to model effective communication and provide constructive feedback to students.

Technological and resource limitations present additional challenges. In many educational institutions, especially in developing countries, there is a lack of access to language learning resources such as language labs, audiovisual materials, and interactive language learning software. These tools are essential for providing students with diverse and engaging opportunities to practice speaking. The absence of such resources can result in a monotonous and less effective learning experience, where students have fewer opportunities to engage with the language in meaningful ways. The influence of social and peer dynamics should not be overlooked in the discussion of factors affecting students' English speaking skills. Peer pressure, the fear of judgment, and social anxiety can significantly impact a student's willingness to participate in speaking activities. In some cases, students may feel intimidated by their peers who are more proficient or may be hesitant to speak out in front of classmates due to fear of ridicule. This issue is particularly pronounced in cultures where academic competition is intense and failure is stigmatized.

The role of motivation and personal attitudes towards learning English is another critical factor. Students who view English as a necessary but unenjoyable subject may not engage with the language learning process as deeply as those who have intrinsic motivation and genuine interest in the language. This lack of motivation can lead to passive learning, where students focus solely on meeting course requirements rather than actively seeking to improve their speaking skills. Moreover, external motivations, such as the desire to pass exams or meet parental expectations, may not be sufficient to sustain the level of effort and practice required to achieve proficiency in spoken English. The challenges students face in learning English speaking skills are multifaceted, involving educational, psychological, cultural, pedagogical, and resource-related factors. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that considers the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners. Educators and policymakers must strive to create language learning environments that encourage active engagement, provide ample opportunities for meaningful practice, and support students in overcoming their fears and anxieties. By doing so, we can help

more students achieve the level of English speaking proficiency necessary for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

Main Body. The structure of educational systems and curriculum design plays a pivotal role in shaping how students learn English speaking skills. In many non-English speaking countries, the curriculum is often heavily focused on grammar, reading comprehension, and writing skills, with speaking and listening receiving much less emphasis. This imbalance can result in a scenario where students excel in theoretical aspects of the language but lack practical speaking abilities. The traditional approach to language teaching often relies on rote learning, with students memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary lists without sufficient opportunities to practice spoken communication. This method, while effective for passing written exams, does not equip students with the necessary skills for real-world conversations. Moreover, classroom activities are frequently dominated by teacher-led instructions and written exercises, leaving little room for interactive speaking activities. In such environments, students rarely get the chance to engage in discussions, debates, or role-plays that mimic real-life scenarios. This lack of interactive practice means that students do not develop the confidence and fluency required for effective communication. Furthermore, large class sizes in many educational institutions make it challenging for teachers to give individual attention to students or to organize speaking activities that involve every student. As a result, many learners progress through their education with limited speaking abilities, even after years of studying English.

Limited Exposure to the Language. Another significant factor contributing to students' difficulties in learning English speaking skills is the limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. In non-English speaking countries, opportunities to hear and use English in everyday life are often scarce. While students may read English texts or listen to English audio materials in class, they seldom have the chance to engage in spontaneous conversations in English. This lack of exposure makes it difficult for students to develop the listening comprehension and speaking fluency necessary for effective communication. Additionally, the types of English language materials that students are exposed to can influence their speaking skills. For example, textbooks often present dialogues and scenarios that are overly formal or simplified, failing to reflect the nuances of natural, everyday speech. This can lead to a situation where students are able to understand and produce formal English but struggle with the colloquial language used in casual conversations. Exposure to diverse forms of English, including different accents, slang, and idiomatic expressions, is essential for developing comprehensive speaking skills. Without this, students may find it difficult to understand native speakers or to express themselves in a way that feels authentic and natural.

Psychological Barriers. Psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence are major barriers to effective language learning, particularly when it comes to speaking. Many students experience significant anxiety when asked to speak English, especially in front of others. This anxiety can stem from a fear of being judged or ridiculed for making mistakes, which is often reinforced by the culture of perfectionism prevalent in many educational systems. The pressure to speak correctly from the outset can be overwhelming, leading students to avoid speaking altogether. The fear of making mistakes is particularly detrimental in language learning because it prevents students from experimenting with the language and learning from their errors. In a supportive learning environment, mistakes should be viewed as a natural part of the learning process. However, in many cases, students are so focused on avoiding errors that they are unable to express themselves freely or to take risks with new vocabulary and sentence structures. This can result in stilted, unnatural speech, where students rely heavily on pre-learned phrases and hesitate to engage in more spontaneous or

creative language use.

Cultural and Social Influences. Cultural factors significantly impact students' ability to learn and use English speaking skills. Different cultures have varying norms regarding communication, such as how direct or indirect speech should be, the appropriateness of interrupting during a conversation, and the use of nonverbal cues. These cultural differences can create confusion and misunderstandings for students learning English, as they may be unsure of how to adjust their communication style to fit the norms of English-speaking cultures. For example, a student from a culture that values indirectness and humility may struggle to adapt to the more direct and assertive communication style often associated with English-speaking cultures. Social influences, including peer dynamics and societal attitudes towards English, also play a role in shaping students' attitudes towards speaking the language. In some contexts, English proficiency is associated with social status or educational attainment, leading to a fear of failure and reluctance to speak. Conversely, in environments where speaking English is not valued or is viewed as a betrayal of cultural identity, students may feel self-conscious or even guilty about using the language. These social pressures can inhibit students' willingness to practice speaking, further hindering their progress.

Pedagogical Approaches and Teacher Proficiency. The methods and strategies employed by teachers in the classroom significantly impact students' speaking skills. Traditional teaching methods, which emphasize grammar translation and memorization, are often insufficient for developing communicative competence. More modern approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL), focus on using language as a tool for communication and encourage students to engage in real-life, meaningful interactions. However, these methods are not always widely adopted, particularly in regions where traditional pedagogical practices prevail. Moreover, the proficiency of teachers in spoken English can greatly influence the quality of instruction. In many cases, teachers may have strong theoretical knowledge of the language but lack confidence or fluency in speaking. This can limit their ability to model effective speaking strategies for students or to provide meaningful feedback on speaking activities. Teacher training programs need to emphasize not only linguistic knowledge but also practical speaking skills and strategies for fostering a communicative classroom environment.

Technological and Resource Constraints. Access to technological resources and learning materials is another crucial factor that affects students' ability to develop English speaking skills. In many educational settings, especially in developing countries, schools and universities lack the necessary resources, such as language labs, audiovisual equipment, and interactive language learning software, to support effective speaking practice. These tools can provide students with valuable opportunities to hear and interact with authentic English, to practice pronunciation and listening comprehension, and to engage in simulated conversations. Without access to such resources, students are limited to traditional, often passive forms of learning that do not adequately prepare them for spoken communication. Furthermore, the digital divide means that not all students have access to online resources or language learning apps outside of school. For students in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, this lack of access can significantly hinder their ability to practice and improve their speaking skills. While technology alone cannot solve all the challenges associated with language learning, it can play a vital role in supplementing classroom instruction and providing diverse and engaging opportunities for speaking practice.

Motivational and Attitudinal Factors. Students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English are critical determinants of their success in developing speaking skills. Intrinsic motivation, or a genuine interest in learning the language, tends to result in greater engagement

and perseverance, whereas extrinsic motivation, such as the desire to pass exams or fulfill parental expectations, may not sustain the effort required for proficiency. Students who view English as a valuable tool for personal or professional growth are more likely to seek out additional opportunities for speaking practice and to persist in the face of challenges. Attitudes towards English and the learning process itself also play a role. Students who have had negative experiences with language learning, such as harsh correction or a lack of encouragement, may develop a fear of speaking or a belief that they are not capable of mastering the language. Creating a positive, supportive learning environment where students feel safe to experiment and make mistakes is essential for fostering the confidence and resilience needed to develop strong speaking skills.

In conclusion, the challenges that students face in learning English speaking skills are multifaceted and interrelated. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes curriculum reform, improved teaching methods, increased exposure to the language, and support for students' psychological and social needs. By understanding and addressing these factors, educators and policymakers can help more students achieve fluency and confidence in English, preparing them for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

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