# Determinant Factors Influencing English Speaking Skill among Undergraduates: Challenges and Remedial Strategies

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## Abstract

The exploration of factors affecting English-speaking skills remains a cornerstone in English language teaching research. However, a notable gap exists concerning the nuanced understanding of the affecting factors, especially within undergraduate contexts through the lens of Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory. This study explored the determinant factors influencing English-speaking skills among undergraduates studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), using quantitative and qualitative approaches. By scrutinizing four essential domains – teacher and teaching-related aspects, curriculum, and environmental factors, monitoring and linguistic, and affective and psychological factors – this research uncovers pivotal insights. The findings underscore that each of these factors significantly influences students' speaking skill. The study highlights a need for active learning, authentic materials, and supportive environments to improve speaking skills. Furthermore, the findings indicate potential impediments of excessive grammar focus on fluency during spontaneous speech. Several strategies were unveiled to address the identified issues. The findings offer invaluable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and institutions regarding curriculum, teaching methods, and diverse strategies.

**Keywords:** *Stephen Krashen SLA Theory, English-speaking skill, Undergraduate students, Factors, Strategies*

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking stands as the cornerstone of human communication, facilitating the exchange of ideas, opinions, and information, constituting a fundamental aspect of language acquisition (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Within foreign language contexts, speaking is commonly regarded as one of the four essential skills (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). In today's interconnected world, the increasing global market value of English establishes it as the essential lingua franca, providing young people with a crucial edge, particularly those who are more fluent. The cultivation of proficient English-speaking abilities among undergraduate students is of paramount importance in the contemporary educational landscape, greatly influencing their academic achievements, career prospects, and social interactions in this increasingly interconnected world. Proficiency in English language skill not only enhances job opportunities but also facilitates academic success and communication (Shaikh, Yayilgan, Klimova, & Pikhart, 2023). Developing proficient English-speaking skill is pivotal, as it significantly contributes to effective communication in diverse aspects of life, impacting speakers' success both personally and professionally (Maldonado Murillo, 2023).

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However, despite the importance of English language learning, many undergraduate students encounter challenges in developing proficient speaking skills. Understanding the factors influencing these challenges and exploring effective remedies is crucial to empower students with the requisite communication abilities. By recognizing the root causes and employing targeted strategies, educators, institutions, and policymakers can create a conducive curriculum, method, and environment and implement tailored interventions to enhance students' English-speaking abilities. Therefore, this research aims to delve into the factors affecting English-speaking skill of EFL undergraduates. This study specifically aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How do EFL students perceive the factors influencing the development of their speaking skills?

**RQ2.** What insights do EFL teachers hold regarding the factors that impact the enhancement of speaking skills in undergraduate students?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's increasingly globalized world, the ability to speak English has become crucial (Thi & Hoang, 2020). English proficiency, particularly in speaking, is an important skill for non-native speakers aiming to communicate effectively and fluently in an English-speaking environment. Understanding the factors that affect EFL speaking skill is essential for educators and learners alike. This significance has led to extensive research aimed at comprehending the multifaceted nature of speaking skills and the diverse factors influencing their development among students over the years.

Previous studies have highlighted various factors that influence speaking skill, especially psychological factors are widely acknowledged as key determinants of speaking performance in different settings and countries (Alrasheedi, 2020). For instance, the study by Alrasheedi (2020) investigated factors influencing speaking performance of Saudi EFL learners, identifying affective factors like shyness, fear of pressure, anxiety, and fear of mistakes as major constraints of speaking skill. Beyond personal barriers, studies like Islam and Stapa (2021) explored English proficiency challenges in Bangladeshi private universities and highlighted systemic issues, including the complex nature of speaking, inadequate application of instructional methods, teachers' low proficiency in spoken English, and controlling behaviour, students' psychological and sociocultural factors, inadequate linguistic resources, interference from the students' first language (L1), and the impact of large class sizes.

Despite these valuable insights, prior studies predominantly focused on certain factors influencing speaking skill, such as affective or psychological factors. While some studies, like Thi and Hoang (2020) have identified critical aspects such as listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, confidence, and nonverbal communication as influential in English-speaking skills, a comprehensive understanding integrating teachers and teaching-related factors, curriculum and environment-related factors, psychological and linguistic factors underpinning clear theoretical framework is still lacking in current literature. This gap underscores the need for a more holistic approach to comprehending the diverse factors affecting students' English-speaking skills. The current study aims to bridge this gap by employing Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory to explore the intricate influence of teachers and teaching method-related factors, curriculum and learning environment-related aspects, as well as psychological and linguistic factors on speaking skill.

**Stephen Krashen Second Language Acquisition Theory**

This study explores the factors influencing English-speaking skill among undergraduate students. The study is based on Krashen's second language acquisition theory encompassing five key hypotheses (Kamal, 2022). The hypotheses—input, natural order, affective filter, and monitoring—were formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Lichtman & Vanpatten, 2021b). Collectively for these hypotheses, McLaughlin used the term "Monitor Model" to distinguish these concepts from the "Monitor Hypothesis" (Romeo, 2000).

The Input Hypothesis underscores the pivotal role of understandable language materials beyond learners' current proficiency levels, referred to as i+1. Krashen posited that mental abilities utilized in acquiring a native language are similarly applicable to learning a second language (Bailey & Fahad, 2021; Gökcan & Çobanoğlu Aktan, 2018). Comprehensible input, embedded in communication, is vital for forming a mental language representation (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021a). All comprehensible input, regardless of its interactive or non-interactive nature—be it from websites, books, instructors, or other sources—is beneficial as long as learners focus on interpreting meaning (Bailey & Fahad, 2021).

The Natural Order Hypothesis suggests a predictable sequence in language component development, guiding curriculum alignment with learners' developmental stages. The sequence of grammatical items or linguistic elements occurs naturally (Bahruddina & Febrianib, 2020). The Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes emotional states' impact on learning, citing anxiety, lack of confidence, and shyness as barriers, necessitating supportive learning environments. Krashen links learner emotions to language acquisition, where a relaxed state aids input processing while stress or fear hampers it (Bailey & Fahad, 2021).

The Monitoring Hypothesis cautions against excessive reliance on learned language rules during speech production, highlighting the need for a balance between instruction and natural language use. This hypothesis portrays conscious learning's role negatively, suggesting its sole function is to edit produced output (Romeo, 2000). It is further maintained that seen as a step forward, as many language learners and teachers experience that the more they strive for correctness, the more their sentences deteriorate. The psychological factors are based on affective filter hypothesis. Linguistics, teachers and teaching-related factors, and curriculum and environment-related factors are based on input and natural order hypotheses.

**Context of the study**

This study is conducted in two public universities in Afghanistan. English is an integral part of the curriculum in Afghanistan, taught compulsorily from grades four to twelve in schools, with undergraduate students mandated to undertake English courses for four semesters (Coleman, 2019). However, despite its compulsory teaching in schools and university level, most Afghan students lack fluency in spoken English (Nijat, 2020) and limited attention has been given to exploring this aspect (Anwari, 2019). The prevailing situation underscores a critical need to delve into the factors affecting Afghan English learners' speaking abilities. This study aims to investigate the factors affecting English-speaking skill in the context of Afghanistan. It adopts both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore this issue comprehensively. Unlike earlier studies, this research is multi-dimensional, encompassing factors related to teachers and teaching methods, curriculum and the learning environment, psychological factors, and linguistic factors.

**METHODS**

**Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the determinant factors influencing English speaking skills among undergraduate students majoring in English. By combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced and the remedial strategies employed. The quantitative component involves surveying a sample of students to gather data on various influencing factors, while the qualitative component includes in-depth interviews with EFL lecturers to gain insights into pedagogical perspectives and strategies.

**Research Participants and Sampling Procedures**

The study focuses on undergraduate students majoring in English from two public universities. A total of 185 students were selected through random sampling. All participants were male as female students were not accessible due to prevailing restrictions on their education at the time of the study. The participants were distributed across various academic levels: Freshman (45), Sophomore (38), Junior (50), and Senior (52). Additionally, their ages ranged from 18 to 32 years, with 120 students between 18 and 22 years old, 55 students between 23 and 27 years old, and 10 students between 28 and 32 years old.

Additionally, this research involved open-ended interviews conducted with 10 EFL lecturers. These lecturers were selected based on their teaching experience and qualifications, ensuring a diverse range of insights. Among them, two were aged 26-30, five were aged 31-35, and three were aged 36-40. In terms of teaching experience, three had 3-7 years, while seven had 8-12 years of teaching experience. Eight out of the 10 lecturers held Master's degrees.

**Data Collection**

To collect data, two main tools were utilized: a developed five-point Likert scale questionnaire and interview questions adapted from Fonseca Morales (2020) (see Appendix B). Quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the 185 students. The questionnaire, comprising 22 items categorized into four domains, was carefully crafted. These domains cover psychological and affective factors (items 1-5), linguistic factors (items 6-9), teacher and teaching-related factors (10-15), and curriculum and environment-related factors (16-22).

For the qualitative component, open-ended interviews were conducted with the 10 EFL lecturers. open-ended interview questions were adapted from Fonseca Morales (2020) to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the research questions. The interviews focused on their experiences teaching English, the challenges students face, and the strategies they recommend for improving speaking skills. These interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

## Ethical Considerations

Approval for data collection was obtained from the Research Committee of the Languages and Literature Faculty at Shaikh Zayed University-Khost, Afghanistan, on August 5th, 2022. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring their voluntary involvement in the study. Confidentiality was maintained by aggregating the collected data and anonymizing participants' identities.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS V25 and SmartPLS v4 software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics. Means and standard deviations were employed to identify significant factors influencing English speaking skills. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using ATLAS.ti v24, a qualitative data analysis software, to derive meaningful insights. The transcribed interviews were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. This thematic analysis provided in-depth insights into the challenges and strategies related to factors affecting English speaking skills.

## Reliability and validity

Initially, the instrument was assessed for reliability and validity using SmartPLS. The assessment of reliability and validity involved crucial parameters such as individual item reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The analysis incorporated Factor Loading (FL), composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (CA), average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 1), and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to gauge the reliability and validity of the indicators used for measuring constructs (Table 2). For establishing validity, most of the factor loadings exceeded 0.7 indicating a robust model (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). Items below 0.6 were eliminated from consideration, while those with factor loadings ranging from 0.6 to 0.7 were retained due to their AVE surpassing 0.5 (Ramayah, Cheah, Chuah, Ting, & Memon, 2018). Furthermore, all items showed CA values above 0.8, indicating adequate individual item reliability. The CR, assessing internal consistency, surpassed the desired level of 0.7, confirming reliability.

Table 1. Reliability, and convergent validity

| Construct | Item | Truncated statement | FL | CA | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological and affective factors (PF) | PF1 | I feel anxious about speaking English in public settings. | 0.949 | | | |
| | PF2 | I feel anxious about speaking English due to fear of making mistakes. | 0.868 | | | |
| | PF3 | I feel uncertain when speaking in front of others. | 0.915 | | | |
| | PF4 | I feel uncertain when speaking in front of others. | 0.812 | | | |
| | PF5 | I feel worried about being criticized when I speak English. | 0.732 | | | |

| | | | | 0.909 | 0.922 | 0.737 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Linguistics Factors (LF) | LF6 | I do not have enough vocabulary to speak English. | 0.949 | | | |
| | LF7 | I have difficulty finding the right words to speak. | 0.880 | | | |
| | LF8 | I have difficulty with linguistic accuracy. | 0.914 | | | |
| | LF9 | I have difficulty to form sentences. | 0.867 | | | |
| | **Avg.** | | | **0.926** | **0.964** | **.816** |
| Teacher and teaching related factors (TF) | TF10 | The teacher does not speak in English with us. | 0.629 | | | |
| | TF11 | The teacher encourages English speaking in groups. | 0.755 | | | |
| | TF12 | The teacher does not involve us in activities related to personal preferences, such as breakfast choices. | 0.792 | | | |
| | TF13 | The teacher does not involve us in practicing speeches for specific situations (like job interviews, meeting new people, giving directions, etc.). | 0.817 | | | |
| | TF14 | The teacher engages us in short dialogues to enhance speaking skills. | 0.744 | | | |
| | TF15 | The teacher starts with basic language concepts and gradually introduces more complex speaking tasks. | 0.634 | | | |
| | **Avg.** | | | **0.834** | **0.891** | **536** |
| Curriculum& Environment related factors (CEF) | CEF16 | The curriculum lacks authentic speaking materials. | 0.823 | | | |
| | CEF17 | The subject includes various speaking themes. | 0.628 | | | |
| | CEF18 | The subject does not have enough speaking activities. | 0.758 | | | |
| | CEF19 | The classroom atmosphere is not supportive for speaking. | 0.875 | | | |
| | CEF20 | The classroom is equipped with resources to speaking abilities. | 0.673 | | | |
| | CEF21 | The classroom is free from distractions that interfere with my speaking practice. | 0.661 | | | |
| | CEF22 | There are too many students in the class. | 0.710 | | | |
| | **Avg.** | | | **0.862** | **0.884** | **.544** |

In terms of convergent validity, all constructs were valid as all of them achieved the AVE value exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.5. Regarding discriminant validity, presented in Table 2, compares heterotrait-heteromethod correlations and monotrait-heteromethod correlations. Notably, the HTMT values, ranging from 0.067 to 0.84, remained below the suggested threshold of 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). This confirms a strong level of discriminant validity among the constructs (CF, EF, LF, PF, TF) and relevant items, signifying reasonable level of distinction from one another.

Table 2. Discriminate validity (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio-HTMT)

| | CEF | LF | PF | TF |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CEF** | | | | |
| **LF** | **0.73** | | | |
| **PF** | 0.883 | **0.69** | | |
| **TF** | 0.832 | 0.577 | **0.744** | |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Undergraduate students' perceptions of factors affecting speaking skill (RQ1)

In addressing the primary research question—How do EFL students perceive the factors influencing the development of their speaking skills? —the findings presented in Table 3 indicate notable insights. The mean scores, generally ranging from 3.25 to 3.47, suggest a moderate influence of these factors on speaking skill. The slight deviations in mean scores across different factors may signify differing perceptions or importance attributed to the various factors affecting speaking skill.

Notably, teacher and teaching-related elements emerged as the highest-rated category, demonstrating a significant effect with an average score of 3.471 (SD=1.079). Specifically, elements such as encouragement for English-speaking activities during group work (TF2) received notably high scores (M=3.903, SD=1.086), highlighting the substantial impact of teacher encouragement on speaking skill. Conversely, items related to engaging students in short dialogues for enhancing speaking skills received comparatively lower ratings (M=3.184, SD=1.114), indicating potential areas for improvement within the teaching method. Oli, Manickam, Rajesh, Ponmuthuramalingam, and B R (2023) also reported teacher teacher-related factors affected speaking skill.

Curriculum and environment-related factors obtained an average score of 3.447 (SD=1.135), suggesting significant impact on students' speaking skill. They generally agreed that the curriculum covers a variety of speaking topics (M=3.551, SD=1.075) but expressed negative views about the availability of diverse authentic speaking materials (M=3.573, SD=0.861) and concerns about insufficient speaking skill exercises (M=3.551, SD=1.075). The participants somewhat agreed that the environment was not conducive to effective speaking practice (M=3.449, SD=1.238) and indicated the classroom was overcrowded with more than 30 students (M=3.578, SD=1.048). Facilities like an LCD/Projector for lessons (M=3.259, SD=1.545) and a relatively distraction-free environment (M=3.178, SD=1.393) had slightly lower agreement among students, suggesting perceived inadequacies of resources and improper environment for speaking practices. These observations indicate potential shortcomings in exposing learners to adequate authentic speaking materials and practice opportunities. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, providing learners with comprehensible input (i+1) is crucial (Lichtman & Vanpatten, 2021b). It is further stated that Krashen advocated for the classroom a supportive and encouraging learning environment. Therefore, incorporating speaking materials that are both authentic and slightly beyond the current level of the learners is essential. In addition, the issue of resource availability for speaking practice might disrupt the expected language acquisition sequence. As per Krashen's hypothesis of a "natural order" in language acquisition, learners should encounter and practice specific language structures in a predictable manner (Krashen, 1982). This concept of a "natural order" extends beyond grammatical structures to encompass various language aspects, described by VanPatten, Keating, and Wulff (2020) as "ordered development" (Lichtman & Vanpatten, 2021b; VanPatten et al., 2020).

Similar shortcomings were identified by Hamad (2013) that hindered effective speaking practice, including inadequate speaking exercises within the curriculum, limited availability of resources, and the challenge of overcrowded classes. Moreover, the study by Al-Hassaani and Qaid (2021) found curriculum and teaching materials major factors hurdling speaking skill and recommended modification. Similarly, the identified findings align with those of Dong (2022), which identified various environmental obstacles that hindered speaking practice. These obstacles

included inadequate exposure to English-speaking environments, disruptive noise in classrooms affecting concentration, and the challenge of overcrowded classes.

Linguistic factors obtained an average score of 3.335 (SD=1.125). The varying nature of these factors, from insufficient vocabulary (LF1-LF3) to concerns about linguistics accuracy (LF4), showcased a relatively consistent distribution of scores across the items. Their insufficient vocabulary (M=3.449, SD=0.991), word choice (M=3.449, SD=1.08), and monitor their spoken English to ensure accuracy (M=3.454, SD=1.08) during English speaking suggests a potential impact on their fluency. However, difficult to build sentences, they are overall lower (M=2.989, SD=1.352). Grammar focus should be limited to situations where learners can monitor their output, such as prepared speeches and written compositions, not spontaneous speech (Krashen, 1982; Lichtman & Vanpatten, 2021b). This indicates that linguistics might hinder learners' speaking fluency. Grammatical judgment acts as a barrier for learners, instilling a fear of producing utterances that may be deemed ungrammatical (Humaera, 2015).

Following, psychological and affective factors demonstrated a slightly lower but still significant average score of 3.251 (SD=1.049), exerting a notable influence on EFL students' speaking skill, signaling the importance of addressing learners' psychological barriers to enhance their speaking abilities. There is a moderate level of fear associated with speaking English in public (M=3.541, SD=1.08) and concern about making mistakes while speaking English (M=3.508, SD=1.195). Within this construct, aspects related to confidence while giving oral presentations ranked highest (M=3.573, SD=0.861) among respondents, suggesting their lack of confidence and the significance of strengthening confidence for fluent speaking. Conversely, feelings of shyness while speaking English in public obtained lower ratings (M=2.459, SD=1.08). However, there is a moderate level of variability among the responses, indicating that some individuals might strongly resonate with feeling shy, while others do not, resulting in a broader spectrum of feelings regarding this statement. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis posits that learners' emotions, encompassing anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, serve as a filter influencing their ability to acquire a second language (Krashen, 1982). Elevated emotional stress, or a raised affective filter, diminishes language acquisition (Patrick, 2019). Speaking class that minimizes stress and anxiety is conducive to language acquisition, as a lower affective filter facilitates the reception of comprehensible input, a key element in his theory of language acquisition. Studies by Oli et al. (2023) support these findings, underscoring the impact of psychological factors like anxiety, fear, shyness, and confidence on speaking abilities in a foreign language context.

Table 3. Learners' perceptions of factors affecting English speaking skill

| Construct | Item | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological and affective factors (PF) | PF1 | 3.541 | 1.008 |
| | PF2 | 3.508 | 1.195 |
| | PF3 | 3.573 | 0.861 |
| | PF4 | 2.459 | 1.008 |
| | PF5 | 3.178 | 1.032 |
| | **Avg.** | **3.251** | **1.049** |
| Linguistics Factors (LF) | LF6 | 3.449 | 0.991 |
| | LF7 | 3.449 | 1.008 |
| | LF8 | 3.454 | 1.008 |
| | LF9 | 2.989 | 1.352 |
| | **Avg.** | **3.335** | **1.125** |
| Teacher and teaching related factors (TF) | TF10 | 3.643 | 0.676 |
| | TF11 | 3.903 | 1.086 |
| | TF12 | 3.373 | 1.142 |
| | TF13 | 3.362 | 1.155 |
| | TF14 | 3.184 | 1.114 |
| | TF15 | 3.357 | 1.304 |
| | **Avg.** | **3.471** | **1.079** |
| Curriculum & Environment related factors (CEF) | CEF16 | 3.573 | 0.861 |
| | CEF17 | 3.541 | 0.785 |
| | CEF18 | 3.551 | 1.075 |
| | CEF19 | 3.449 | 1.238 |

| | CEF20 | 3.259 | 1.545 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | CEF21 | 3.178 | 1.393 |
| | CEF22 | 3.578 | 1.048 |
| | **Avg.** | **3.447** | **1.135** |

## EFL teachers' perceptions of factors affecting speaking skill (RQ2)

In response to the second research question—What insights do EFL teachers hold regarding the factors that impact the enhancement of speaking skills in undergraduate students?—the analysis uncovers various *factors* and diverse pedagogical strategies employed by *teacher*s. Insights gained from qualitative interviews conducted with 10 teachers shed light on the interaction between factors and strategies crucial for enhancing speaking skills among EFL students.

The teachers identified several factors that impede speaking skill development, notably emphasizing insufficient teaching hours or limited class time as a primary concern. Nine participants underscored the constraints imposed by time allocation, hindering involvement of students in speaking activities. For instance, one participant noted, "When we teach in our classes, the time allotted is insufficient for us." Another mentioned, "We lack adequate time to engage students in speaking skill tasks." This limitation resonated with the third participant, who, while expressing contentment with the allocated teaching hours, acknowledged students' lack of practice as a significant hurdle in skill enhancement "Students do not have much time to practice speaking activities."  In addition, traditional or teacher-centered teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method (GTM), emerged as a major obstacle in improving speaking skills.  For instance, one teacher remarked, "Some of the teachers used very good methods while others use traditional GMT which is not good for speaking improvement." However, one interviewee mentioned student resistance when attempting to implement active learning rules, stating, "When I teach, I notice that students seem to prefer when I take the lead in the class, rather than having more group discussions or activities led by the students themselves."

The prevalence of traditional methods limiting students' speaking practice aligns with the findings highlighted by students that teacher and teaching-related factors were significant impediments to improving their speaking skills. This limitation echoes Krashen's notion that enough exposure and practice in term are crucial for language acquisition. Krashen advocates for communicative approaches that focus on meaningful communication rather than rote memorization or translation. A study conducted by Oli et al. (2023) similarly highlighted teacher-related factors as significant constraints affecting speaking skill.

Moreover, psychological and affective factors, such as anxiety (7), fear of making mistakes (6), and low participation due to lack of confidence (8), were consistently highlighted across interviews, impeding active participation in speaking and leading to minimal improvement in speaking skills. For instance, one interviewee expressed, "Some students do not participate in the class, they don't want to come, for example, to say something in front of the students in front of the lecturer and they feel, for example, scared." Another mentioned, "Some students are good at speaking, but they stay quiet during our language practice because they're worried about making mistakes." Similarly, another teacher commented, "When I asked students to join conversations and share their thoughts, they often feel anxious."  Students also reported similar factors affecting their speaking skills. The observation that students feel anxious when encouraged to participate in conversations and share their thoughts aligns with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. High levels of anxiety may raise the affective filter, inhibiting students' ability to effectively absorb language input or engage in meaningful communication. Alrasheedi (2020) study on Saudi EFL learners also identified affective factors like shyness, fear of pressure, anxiety, and fear of mistakes as major constraints on speaking skills.

Curriculum and environment-related factors, such as outdated curriculum (8) and the non-native language environment (9), were highlighted by interviewees. One mentioned, "We are

trying to update the curriculum, efforts are made to modify the curriculum." Another noted, "There is no opportunity for the students to practice [spoken] language, so they cannot usually act out the language, their language is just related to the classroom." Both examples indicate a low level of student exposure to language beyond the classroom. In response to these identified factors, several strategies have been proposed as synthesized in Table 4.

These strategies include the use of breakout sessions, where classes are divided into smaller groups for interactive speaking exercises. There is an emphasis on gradually introducing active learning methods and capacity-building through workshops or training sessions for teachers. Teaching models such as PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) and ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) are suggested to actively engage students. The participants recommended gradual exposure techniques, starting with low-pressure speaking tasks leading to more challenging ones. Encouragement is given for activities promoting discussions, group work, and speaking-oriented tasks. Additionally, encouraging increased class participation, group work, and assignments emphasizing speaking tasks were suggested to address these challenges.

To alleviate the challenges such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of participation among students, teachers highlighted the need for a supportive environment, gradual exposure speaking practices to reduce anxiety, and offering enough speaking opportunities. Other strategies include instilling confidence, emphasizing active participation benefits, and incorporating contextualized content.

Finally, concerning curriculum and environment-related factors, outdated curriculum, and the non-native language environment, teachers propose to update the curriculum emphasizing authentic speaking materials, creating real-life scenarios for language practice to counter this limitation.

Table 4. Teachers' perceptions of influencing factors and overcoming strategies

| No. | Main theme | Sub-theme and examples | #codes | Strategies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Teacher and teaching related factors | **Sub-theme 1:** Insufficient class time<br>Example: When we teach in our classes, the time is not enough for us. | 9 | • Utilize break-out sessions<br>• Gradually introduce active learning and emphasize its benefits<br>• Utilize teaching models like PPP (presentation, practice, production) and ESA (engage, study, activate)<br>• Implement meaningful interactive practices like simulated interviews<br>• Encourage participation, group work, and assignments emphasizing speaking tasks |
| | | **Sub-theme 3:** Dissatisfaction with prevalent teaching methods<br>Example: Some of the teachers used very good methods while others use traditional GMT. | 8 | |
| 2. | Students related (psychological and affective, and linguistics factors) | **Sub-theme 1:** Insufficient language knowledge<br><br>Example: Some students find it hard to understand certain words or struggle to pick the right ones to say what they mean. | 6 | • Create a supportive environment<br>• Highlight participation benefits<br>• Gradually expose to reduce anxiety<br>• Provide positive reinforcement<br>• Offer enough speaking opportunities<br>• Incorporate contextualized authentic materials<br>• Boost confidence and instill belief in their potential<br>• Implement engaging activities: class participation, and discussions |
| | | **Sub-theme 2:** Speaking anxiety<br><br>Example: When I ask students to join conversations and share their thoughts, they often feel anxious. | 7 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Sub-theme 3:** Fear of making mistakes | 6 | | |
| | Example: Some students are really good at speaking, but they stay quiet during our language practice because they're worried about making mistakes. | | | |
| | **Sub-theme 4:** lack of participation | 8 | | |
| | Example: Some students stay quiet in group activities, letting others do most of the talking or leading due to lack of self-confidence. | | | |
| 3. Curriculum and environment related factors | **Sub-theme 1:** Non-native language environment <br><br> Example: There is no opportunity for the students to practice [spoken] language. | 9 | • Update curriculum <br> • Create real-life scenarios for language practice where students discuss personal experiences or opinions. |

Overall, the above table shows the key main and subthemes and the important strategies used and/or recommended by the teachers.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study bears significance for educators, students, curriculum developers, and teacher training. It sheds light on crucial factors impacting English-speaking abilities, enabling tailored teaching strategies. Teachers gain insights to refine teaching methods, while students learn how to enhance speaking proficiency and communication. Psychological barriers like fear and lack of confidence significantly affect speaking abilities. A supportive, stress-free environment is pivotal for effective language acquisition. Teacher encouragement in English-speaking activities positively influences speaking skill. However, engaging students in short dialogues for skill enhancement requires attention and improvement. For curriculum developers, the findings guide improvements in educational practices, including updated materials and effective teaching techniques. Diverse, authentic speaking materials and adequate exercises are essential for curriculum enhancement. Overemphasizing grammar during spontaneous speech may hinder fluency. Addressing issues of overcrowded classes and unsupportive speaking environments remains crucial. Additionally, teacher training programs can focus on nurturing a conducive learning environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, there is a strong recommendation to prioritize the integration of diverse and authentic speaking materials alongside a variety of speaking exercises. Curriculum developers should emphasize task-based activities that promote authentic communication and integrate real-life scenarios relevant to students' interests. Secondly, it is suggested to concentrate on establishing capacity-building methodological training programs tailored for educators on how to master students' speaking skills more effectively. Thirdly, teachers should provide speaking materials that are slightly above the learner's current level but still understandable, allowing them to acquire

language naturally through exposure. Encourage pair and group work, language games, and simulation to create opportunities for students to practice speaking English, and make speaking enjoyable and engaging. Fourthly, provide a language lab and integrate technology by employing voice recording tools, video conferencing, language learning apps, or online platforms for speaking practice. Lastly, it is crucial to develop targeted interventions aimed at addressing psychological barriers that hinder students' English speaking, such as anxiety, self-confidence, stress, and motivation. Creating an environment that actively reduces stress associated with English communication will foster a more conducive atmosphere for language acquisition.

## CONCLUSION

`The study reveals that multiple factors significantly influence EFL students' speaking skills, emphasizing the pivotal roles of teacher encouragement, student-centered method (CLT), authentic materials, and supportive learning environments. The findings underscore the significance of a low affective filter environment fostering meaningful interactions and comprehensible input, prioritizing communication over strict grammar focus for enhanced speaking skills. While acknowledging the substantial impact of teachers and curriculum, there is a need to include diverse speaking authentic materials, speaking exercises, and a conducive learning environment. Moreover, the findings indicate that addressing students' psychological barriers is critical for enhancing their speaking abilities. Future research should further explore the relationships between these factors and speaking skills, enabling more tailored strategies to elevate EFL learners' speaking skill.

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## APPENDIX

Interview questions

1. Do you consider that the number of hours you teach in a week is enough to develop speaking skill in your students? Explain.

2. What method do you use to provide students with meaningful language to enhance speaking skill? Explain:

3. What are the most common difficulties you have faced with your students in the speaking skill and what have you been doing to overcome them? Mention:

4. What instructional strategies do you use to develop speaking skills? Explain:

5. What kind of speaking activities have given you the best results in getting your students speak

in English?