

# Factors Affecting Student Confidence in English Speaking Classes

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**Abstract:** *With the world changing to a village, the use of English language, and most importantly, the English speaking competence is becoming more important. Looking at its importance, students of every field are required to have high oral proficiency, most importantly, the students of the English departments. However, we find that undergraduate students show less desire to speaking English during the speaking classes. When it comes to oral communication, they still cannot communicate effectively and confidently. There might be many factors involved that stops them from communicating. This paper aims to find the factors that hinder students from speaking and producing oral communication. The paper will help instructors understand the weaknesses of their students in speaking classes and come up with possible solutions to those problems.*

**Keywords:** self-confidence, motivation, factors, anxiety, feedback, competence

## 1. Introduction

Humans have variety of characteristics that they live with. One of these characteristics may be referred to as self-confidence. Recently, self-confidence has become an important topic for research in education context and especially in language classes. Self-confidence refers to the image and view that students have about their knowledge. Heatherton (2011) expresses that self-confidence is called to have a good feeling, to have the ability to cope effectively with the challenges and negative feedback and to have a social world in which the students believe that the teachers value their ideas and respect them.

Self-confidence is one of the basic psychological items that is needed for learning a language. Many researches show that self-confidence affects many aspects our lives, such as our thinking, desires, emotions, choices and our objectives in daily life. In our individual and social life it has a significant role. To say exactly, it deals with students' concern of personal educational growth.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

I have taught speaking classes at the English Department of Kabul University. A big problem in my classes was no participation of students in class activities such as interactions and role-plays. My observation from these conversation classes showed that the main reason of not participating in class activities was that students do not have confidence on themselves. The students thought they might not be correct if they answered a question or had interaction in class. They thought that other students might laugh at their ideas if they produced it. This problem was a big obstacle in my classes; therefore, I conducted a research on finding the factors what caused the absence of self-confidence in the students.

## 3. Research Objectives and Question

The objective of this research is to find out the different factors that hinder students' participation in class activity in speaking classes. The research will also look for whether a

relationship exists between social status of students and self-confidence among students of the English conversation classes at the English department at Kabul University. The research question for my study is:

What are the students' perceptions of the factors that affect their confidence in conversation classes?

## 4. Significance of the Study

Considering the importance of self-confidence in today's educational context, there are various reasons by stating of which I justify the need of conducting this research. First, a research on such a topic will help to maximize peoples' knowledge about the concept of self-confidence. It will also offer people a more accurate understanding on the effects of social status on self-confidence.

Second, many other researches about this issues has been conducted in United States, Europe and other countries which have a completely different context than our country. Those researches have a generalization problem if they can be applied here in our context or not.

Third, as self-confidence has significant role in students' personal development, finding out its determinants will help us to develop and improve the methods of improving self-confidence. This research would help serve as a reference for any further studies or in any other educational context's reform. In order to help students to overcome their problems in speaking, it is necessary to figure out the factors that affect their oral communication.

## 5. Method of Research

The method for this research article is library method to understand what other language teaching scholars have expressed regarding the factors that affect students' confidence in English speaking classes. I have used updated and credible sources to collect the information. I have also provided examples from the Afghan context based on my professional experience and observations. After choosing credible sources, the important points were reviewed and

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highlighted. As factors of low confidence in speaking classes might be different from context to context, those points were considered that fit into Afghan context.

## 6. Literature Review

Oral communication competence is one of the important skills in learning English. Lazaraton (2001) said that speaking is a tool used to connect with others and understand the meaning and the words. All four language skills are closely connected and interdependent on each other. For example, listening and speaking are productive skills which supports each other, and reading and writing are receptive skills supporting each other, and vice versa, listening skill can support listening, reading and writing skills. However, some students fail or hesitate to speak English well in front of the class or any other public place. There seems to be a problem of self-confidence. Heatherton (2011) defined that self-confidence is called to have a good feeling, to have the ability to cope effectively with the challenges and negative feedback and to have a social world in which the students believe that the teachers value their idea and respect them. There have been many studies in different contexts around the world which had somehow similar kind of results.

There have been many researches on causes of low confidence in English speaking classes in different contexts. The cause of low confidence in speaking classes based on Amelia's (2017) research's results were; not enough knowledge of grammar, pronunciation (accent), lack of vocabulary, fluency, and listening comprehension. Moreover, the students mentioned their problems in speaking classes such as, students fear of making mistake, losing face to speak in front of many students, no sufficient knowledge of the discussion topic.

Hamad (2013) found some negative factors that affected Saudi English speaking classes' students' participation. These factors were student's weakness in English. Sometimes the students used Arabic in speaking class. Besides, the classes had a lot of students which made speaking classes ineffective. Hamad also said that the students did not have enough vocabulary knowledge and no sufficient knowledge of grammar. He also added that different factors cause anxiety for learners in speaking classes. He said that student's feeling of stress and anxiety stop students 'language learning and performance abilities. Low language knowledge was another reason that prevented students from participation. To further elaborate on factors that affect the confidence of students, each factor will be looked into one by one.

### Factors Affecting Confidence in Speaking Classes

There are several factors that decreases students' confidence or stops students from speaking classes. The students feel worried that they will be criticized or they will lose face if they commit an error while producing a sentence. Therefore, despite of having a lot of knowledge about the topic of discussion, the students make a lot of mistake in the sentences they say or they choose not to participate in class activities. Looking at this problem, EFL learners should be motivated to speak confidently in order to improve their oral

communication competence because according to Gardner (2006), motivation is an important factor that leads language learning, especially a second or foreign language learning, towards success or failure. Students should be understood that if they make mistake, it is a natural process of learning a language. It means that they should be told that they have to go through the path of making mistakes in order to learn English. This lack of confidence inhibits students from learning the speaking skills which gradually lead them to low interest and not participating in the class discussions or other activities.

### English Background Knowledge

The students who perform seemingly bad and do not participate in class discussions in speaking classes seem to have low English background knowledge and experience in the field. Every skill and aspect of language knowledge can lead them to low confidence and stop them from participating in activities.

Listening skill is an important element in improvement confidence of students in speaking classes. Gilbert (1984) believed that listening skill and pronunciation are interdependent. Doff (1998) also approved that learners cannot improve their speaking unless they develop their listening skill. He believed that if students do not have good listening skill and are not able to grasp what others are saying, they will have no confidence to say something in response. Importantly, pronunciation is also an important factor that can increase confidence. He believed that if students' pronunciation is improved clearly, the students' confidence to produce oral communication is inclined. Doff (1998) said that pronunciation is able to mark people as an educated or uneducated person. It means that mispronunciation causes a negative image of a speaker and it also has an impact on our students' performance, as they are scared of making an error.

Grammar is also important in producing a spoken sentence and participation in class. Cook (1991) believed that patterns and regularities of language are used to convey meaning, and when students are not able to make good patterns they lose their interest in discussions.

Vocabulary knowledge is so important. Understanding correct collocations is more important. When students' vocabulary is not improved they have fear to say something. The more words our students know, the more options they will have to convey what they think in speaking. Brown (2001) mentioned that if people are able to create comprehensive utterance when they learn more vocabulary; though, they do not have any grammatical knowledge. Students with more vocabulary knowledge can have more confidence in taking part in discussions.

### Affective Factors

Student's confidence in English speaking classes is also influenced by affective factors. Anxiety and self-restriction can seriously affect speaking ability and prevent a student from participation. Cheryl and Cordell (1997) believed that communicator anxiety can be obstacle to effective communication. Anxiety is about the fear of being wrong or unhelpful. Students in anxiety lose their words or stops

saying something. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), anxiety is of two types: situational and trait. They defined situational anxiety as one caused by a new or different situation; on the other hand, trait anxiety is a result of a speaker's personal feelings that are not related to situation. Self-restriction, according to Wang (2014), is an opinion that the students think they will use face if the speak wrong. In result, the students are afraid to speak in class. In addition, they prefer to remain silent rather than speak.

Motivation and autonomy in language learning is also an important process and not a product that many EFL students seek today. Autonomy requires understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses and accumulating a diverse set of resources that will maximize exposure and improvements in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Motivating students is seen by teachers as one of the most serious sources of difficulty in the classroom. Students' motivation depends on a variety of factors, among them how they perceive their own achievement. Another factor relates to materials and what tasks they do in and out of the classroom. Deci and Flaste (1995) has also pointed to some other factors including classroom methodology, especially fun and engaging methods; students' relationship to the classroom group as well as to the society at large; how they view their teacher and power relationships with the educational institution; and their own anxiety, especially in classroom activities such as speaking and test taking. Motivation should be considered as a key in learning a language. When students lack motivation they will not learn what they are intended to learn.

### Topical Knowledge

Knowledge and interest regarding the topic of discussion in speaking classes is another factor that prevents students from taking part in oral communication. The interest and knowledge of students under discussion eases the language use and gives confidence to students. Bachman and Palmer (1996) stated that students' knowledge and interest about the topic of discussion in a speaking class has a great effect on performance of the learners.

### Classroom Environment

Classroom environment is so effective in making a student take part in speaking class activities. The atmosphere of the class, its size, seat arrangement affect the motivation of the students. A cooperative environment is more supportive for learners. I have observed in many classes that students are usually willing and more active in a small class. It is because in small classes there is more attention to each student and students are more involved in the activities.

### Role of Teachers

What role should a teacher have in specific classes is a serious issue in modern methodology of teaching. The importance of teacher's role can never be neglected. A teacher's role in making students willing or unwilling to speak cannot be ignored. A teacher's attention to each student, motivating the students and integrating many elements in their teaching approaches can make students participate eagerly in all speaking activities.

## 7. Feedback

Positive effective feedback is another factor that is important in making a student participate in speaking class activities. All students expect their instructors to give them necessary feedback on their speaking. According to Harmer (1991), if instructors directly correct their students' problems, the flow of the dialogue and aim of the speaking task will be spoiled. Therefore, he suggested that the instructors should always correct their learners' mistakes positively and give them more support and motivation while speaking.

## 8. Results

The results of this paper shows the main factors that affected students' confidence in class. One factor was intensity the student felt by thinking that his classmates speak English better than him. Another factor which impacted confidence was the degree if motivation provided by the teacher. Motivation had positive effect on students' self-confidence. The motivation came both from the teacher and the family. Also, student's knowledge of English rules, vocabulary and skills was a major factor in students' low participation level. Class environment is also essential for a speaking class. Teacher's role in speaking class and the feedback provided by a teacher in speaking class is another important factor that can affect students' participation.

## 9. Discussion

Speaking as an important skill of language learning can never be ignored, but there are many factors that can inhibit a student to improve this important skill. This study was conducted to help the teachers of English speaking classes. It will help me and other teachers to overcome these factors and find a solution that can help motivate students to actively participate in class activities. The teachers should motivate their students to actively participate. The teacher should allow these students to speak freely without correcting them. This research has implication for parents as they try to motivate their sons and daughters to study. Likewise, the teachers should help students improve student's knowledge of the language and motivate them to study books regarding different issues. Considering the factors that prevent affects student confidence, the teachers of speaking classes should create activities that can activate students' interest in speaking class discussions.

## 10. Conclusion

In this study, as mentioned earlier, an attempt was made to find the important factors which prevent students from participation in English speaking classes. This research paper investigated the factors that affect students' confidence in English language speaking classes. The mentioned factors in this paper have an important role in improving a learner's speaking skill. The factors make learners less self-confident in their speaking classes. The findings of this paper showed that students with low-confidence, higher anxiety, and low motivation have serious difficulties in speaking in spite of having acceptable linguistic knowledge. Based on the review of literature of

the study, teachers should understand their students' interests and feelings, improve their students' self-confidence, and choose the best teaching method to keep their students involved in the speaking activities. In addition, teachers should know when and how to correct their students' mistakes so that they are not afraid of making mistake in speaking class activities.

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