

# Negative Factors Affecting Speaking Performance

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#### Abstract

In learning a foreign language, speaking is an essential component as it is used to deliver the meaning to interact and connect. It is also often seen as an indicator of success in learning a foreign language. However, due to its interactive character, speaking in a foreign language has been identified as the most difficult ability for language learners. The study was an integrative literature review that aimed to unfold the factors that might affect the speaking performance of foreign language learners. Due to the rapid pace of research, it is difficult to keep up with state-of-the-art research, so a literature review is necessary. The goal of the study is not to cover all articles ever published on the topic, but rather to combine information and ideas from different fields or past studies. In conducting the review, it will use taxonomy or classification in analyzing the reviewed studies. Approximately 20 studies including those published in research articles, book chapters, books, and other types of publications that concern the factors that may affect speaking performance are being reviewed. The finding suggests that five factors are named as determinants of speaking performance. Those are lack of L2 exposure, inhibition, anxiety, lack of learner autonomy, low motivation, and ineffective teaching pedagogy. Therefore, determining appropriate teaching pedagogies and providing a vast L2 exposure to support a learner's autonomy and motivation as well as to reduce inhibition and anxiety could be beneficial to boost FL learners' speaking performance.

Keywords: speaking performance, factors, affective factors, teaching pedagogy

## 1. Introduction

Performance, according to Chomsky (1965) is the actual use of language in settings. It includes internal processes of comprehension and production influenced by memory impairments, attentional gaps, emotional disturbances, physiological flaws, L1 interference, consciousness, and noise. Permanent or periodic individual shortcomings, environmental and contextual factors, and distinguishing features have all been linked to performance. Thus,



psychological factors are believed as crucial in performance. (Straight, 1976; Leech, 1992). It is argued that performance as a process is partly physical and partly psychological. (Leech, 1992). The psychological process is also considered in the performance process that goes into creating and interpreting a text. As a result, speaking ability is a direct indicator of command, and it is just as important as other foreign language skills. Speaking performance is the most visible evaluation of foreign language skills since students display language use right away in their speaking performance. The features of speaking performance are fluency and accuracy (Leong & Ahmedi, 2017).

Speaking is a crucial component of human language. People can communicate and engage with one another by acquiring and studying a language. However, it is challenging for second and foreign language learners to practice English in their daily lives. L2 Speaking has been considered the most challenging skill for language learners due to its interactive nature (Harumi, 2011; Méndez Lopez, 2011; Woodrow, 2006; Zhang & Head, 2010). It is a mental motor ability that involves the cooperation of sound, mechanics (which are generated by our muscles), and mental elements to put meaningful words and sounds together (Diep, 2017). Speaking, according to Brown (2004), is a dynamic way to build meaning which involves the production, reception, and processing of data. Meanwhile, Thornbury (2005) mentions that speech is produced in the form of words, sentences, and utterances in reaction to the utterance creations of the person to whom the speakers are speaking. It is a multilayer ability wherein high-level plans, such as speaker objectives, are achieved by stages of conceptualization and utterance under a variety of contexts and factual constraints (Bygate, 2012). Effective communication needs the ability to use language effectively in social relationships, as well as tone, stress, and intonation. Furthermore, for speakers to comprehend each other, physiological messages such as gestures, body language, and expressions are essential. (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Ur (1996) mentions several factors including inhibition and lack of practice as the sources of poor speaking performance. In line with it, Alrasheedi (2020) mentions lack of L2 exposure, anxiety, motivation, and teaching pedagogy are factors influencing speaking performance. Learners' listening skills, teacher's feedback, and performance conditions such as time pressure, planning, performance expectation, and level of assistance as well as affective attributes such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety can all affect students' speaking performance. (Tuan & Mai, 2015)

Related to the complex attributes of speaking performance, studies have been conducted to gain insight into attributive variables and determinants of speaking performance, as well as factors that might positively or negatively affect someone's speaking performance. To conduct effective L2 instructions, examining the factors related to speaking performance is crucial.

The study was an integrative literature review that aimed to unfold the factors that might affect the speaking performance of foreign language learners. Due to the rapid pace of research, it is difficult to keep up with state-of-the-art research, so a literature review is necessary. The literature review is a method of gathering and synthesizing past studies systematically. (Snyder, 2019). Meanwhile, an integrative review approach is beneficial when the goal of the review is to combine perspectives rather than to comprise all articles ever published on the topic (Snyder, 2019). The goal of the study is not to cover all articles ever published on the topic, but rather to combine information and ideas from different fields or past studies. In conducting the review, it will use taxonomy or classification in analyzing the



reviewed studies. Approximately 30 studies including those published in research articles, book chapters, books, and other types of publications that concern the factors that affect speaking performance are being reviewed. In retrieving the data, several search engines such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and ERIC were used to find existing research and studies related to the topic. Then, all those articles were read, reviewed, and analyzed carefully in four steps of literature review, i.e. designing the review, conducting a review, analyzing, and writing reports. Therefore, this study aims to overview how this topic has evolved. In general, the study aims to discover and comprehend all potentially relevant previous studies that have implications on L2 instruction related to factors of speaking performance.

## 2. Theoretical Discussion

Previous studies have examined and identified factors that can either enhance or hinder speaking performance in the L2 classroom. The identified factors are lack of L2 exposure, inhibition, anxiety, motivation, learner autonomy, and teaching pedagogy.

# Lack of L2 Exposure

Speaking performance in a second language can be challenging, especially when exposure to L2 is restricted (Bygate, 2012). Moreover, students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) in a non-English speaking country have fewer chances to boost their L2 speaking due to a lack of practice demands. (Zhang, 2009). Agree with Zhang (2009), (Ur, 1996; Alrasheedi, 2020) mentions that insufficient exposure to the target language is one of the barriers to learning a foreign language.

Through a questionnaire and observation, Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021) discovered that some Thai teachers hardly communicate in English during EFL learning activities. The student's comprehension issue of the material was the underlying reason. Teachers attempted to transfer the knowledge effectively, particularly in diverse courses. However, the extensive use of L1 hinders the development of language productive skills, particularly speaking abilities. As the students do not have adequate opportunities to speak, it affects their pronunciation. It is worsened by the fact that they also lack exposure at home.

Studies on language teaching agree that formal and casual language exposure could increase speaking skills by improving tone, stress, and intonation (Triwittayayon & Sarobol, 2018). Malik et al (2020) also found a lack of linguistic knowledge and communication practice in which L2 was not used as much as L1 as the reasons for speaking anxiety for Pakistani EFL university learners in a public sector university in Lahore. Therefore, besides being one prominent factor that affects a student's speaking performance directly, lack of the target language exposure could also lead to other negative factors that hinder speaking performance such as inhibition and speaking anxiety.

## Inhibition

Inhibitions are frequently found in the foreign language classroom (Littlewood, 2007) as the students are worried to attract attention in the classroom. Ur (1996) mentions that the students are afraid to make mistakes when they perform a speaking task and experienced shyness. Humaera (2015) found that inhibition has an impact on students' language acquisition, particularly when it comes to performing language comprehension. It is as crucial as well as other speech production issues. Speaking performance often focuses the audience's attention on the performers, therefore, it can sometimes cause stage fright. They could also be concerned with making mistakes, receiving negative feedback, or showing weakness in front of the class. This manifests in their performance, in which they either make a lot of blunders



despite having a lot of knowledge in the field, or they remain completely silent. It is suggested that inhibition is not only an affective phenomenon, but also cognitive (Leech, 1992; Humaera, 2015; Suryani, Suarnajaya, & Pratiwi, 2020).

#### Anxiety

Since speaking is such a difficult and complex language skill, negative emotional states are extremely important when learning a new language. Young (1990) considers speaking to be the most anxiety-inducing experience. Doing an L2 speaking performance task in front of an audience could be terrifying for some people. When EFL learners become tongue-tied or speechless in an unexpected scenario, it can cause tremendous anxiety, which can lead to despair and a sense of failure as they worry about how they are perceived by others. It creates an anxious feeling of losing face in some cultures that make the learners very careful not to make mistakes in what they say (Kang, 2002). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) as a type of anxiety that learners suffer when they have to speak in the target language. Worry produces anxiety, and anxiety always lowers performance on tasks that demand a lot of attention or short-term memory. According to the processing efficiency theory, worry affects a decline in the working memory system's storage capacity. (Eysenk & Calvo, 1992).

Anxiety is believed as the most significant hurdle to EFL learners' ability to communicate effectively. (Dil, 2009; Tuan & Mai, 2015) The fear of being incorrectly appraised when making a mistake can lead to anxiety and hesitation. Anxiety and fear harm cognitive abilities and foreign language acquisition, reducing the ability to think, concentrate, and focus, as well as academic performance. Anxiety and apprehension are linked to neurological and brain processes called the amygdala. It is located in the least conscious area of the human brain and is responsible for producing, maintaining, and modifying anxious feelings and apprehension. (Malik, et al, 2020). In line with this statement, Kumaradivelu (2006) argues that anxiety is a negative attribute that suspends the learning process because it prevents learners to focus on the task. Park and Lee (2005) investigate the relationship between anxiety, self-confidence, and speaking performance among 132-second language learners in Korea. It was revealed that students' anxiety levels were negatively associated with their speaking performance. It means that a higher level of anxiety leads to poor speaking performance and low grades. (Phillips, 2002; Tanveer, 2007)

Anxiety is originally derived from intrinsic factors, however, external circumstances can amplify or reduce them. (Mai, 2015). Maliki, Qin, and Soomro mention that introverted personality, low self-esteem, low confidence, fear of negative evaluation, lack of L2 knowledge, and exposure could exaggerate speaking anxiety. Meanwhile, anxiety could also be varied related to gender, the role of parents, geographical background, and social status. Tanveer (2007) who explores the elements that generate language anxiety among 20 foreign language learners learning found that tension, worry, or uneasiness, may hamper their language acquisition and performance abilities.

#### Motivation

Motivation is essential to attain proficiency in a foreign language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Turk, 2020). The cognitive theory of learning proposed that learning and motivation are inextricably linked as motivation can drive learning and learning can produce motivation. (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017).



When it comes to language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) recognized two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Integrative motivation is when people want to learn the L2 to "engage in the culture of its people". Meanwhile, instrumental motivation is when people want to learn the L2 considering the advantage such as improving their job opportunities or increasing their salary. (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012, p. 232). When it comes to learning a new language, both types of motivation are important. Integrative motivation is needed for learners to communicate, while instrumental motivation shape how the learners positively view the target language (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Therefore, L2 learners would endeavor to speak at every opportunity that could boost and deepen the learner's appreciation for the spoken language, as well as their motivation.

Lack of background knowledge of the topic is argued as a destructive factor of motivation (Rivers, 1968). When the teacher has picked a topic that is inappropriate for him or about which he has limited knowledge, the L2 learners claim that they are struggling to grasp the vocabulary as well as the idea to speak coherently. Thus, it obstructs their motivation to express themselves. In line with it, Baker and Westrup (2003) mention that L2 learners struggle to react when their teachers ask them to say something in a foreign language because they may have no idea what to say, what vocabulary to use, or how to appropriately apply the grammar (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

Uztosun (2021) conducted a study on 84 Turkish university student to examine the extent to of motivation contribute to foreign language speaking competence. Through multiple regression analysis, it was found that motivation predicts 34% of foreign language speaking performance. A significant positive association between foreign language speaking competence and self-regulated speaking motivation was discovered using the Pearson correlation coefficient. These findings show that controlling students' motivation could be beneficial for their speaking performance. Thus, the classroom environment must be designed to facilitate students' motivation.

#### Learner autonomy

Kalantzis et al. (2003) highlighted learner autonomy as one of ten critical abilities required for success in an information-based society. Learner autonomy is the condition in which the students are expected to choose their learning resources and strategies, use the language to the extent that they need it, and speak and write in it as fully prepared as possible. Learner autonomy should be gradually developed by the learners themselves, who expand their autonomy by relying on what they already know how to do (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014). Furthermore, it could be fostered by giving the students the freedom to choose their learning materials. This kind of freedom could reduce their apprehension about learning and promote a more positive attitude towards learning.

Speaking tasks are contingent on students' willingness and ability to handle their learning in the preparation and rehearsing of their speech both in and out of class (Boonmal & Swatevacharkul, 2020). The student's ability to reflect on their learning aids in the reduction of their affective filter and the creation of positive affect, allowing them to deliver speeches with confidence. Moreover, learners' autonomy in teaching speaking skills has received worldwide attention. It facilitates language learners in overcoming their shyness, anxiety, and apprehension of L2 learning by allowing them to take control of their learning. It aims to strengthen the students' responsibility when they use their resources to learn. (Qamar, 2016).



### Inappropriate teaching pedagogy

Speaking in a second language can be challenging, especially when exposure to L2 is restricted. (Bygate, 2012). This realization generated a movement favoring delaying oral production at the start of language programs in favor of exposing students to the oral language through a longer or shorter time of listening exercises. Consideration for the personal affective components of language acquisition led to the creation of resources with subject matter that would spark the interest and curiosity of learners. Teaching methodology can affect speaking performance (Diep, 2017). For learners to develop their speaking and interests, they need real-world circumstances and quick practice. Teachers should be adaptable in their techniques in order to get the best results for their students. According to Gorsuch (2011), communicative tasks can both help and impede language development due to an over-emphasis on communication when doing tasks that result in inaccurate speech.

Mohammadipur and Rasyid (2015) conducted a study with 72 undergraduate students to see how effective a task-based education program is at improving overall speaking proficiency. The experimental group received three months of training under the suggested task-based instruction approach, whereas the control group received standard instruction. As a pre and post-test assessment of speaking skills, the preliminary English Test (PET) was used. The findings revealed the participants exposed to the proposed program improved their overall speaking skills significantly. It implies that the task-based approach has the potential to improve undergraduate students' overall speaking ability. Mulyadi, et al. (2021) also employed a quasi-experiment to assess the effects of TBLT on ESP learners' speaking performance. In the study that enlisted the participation of 97 ESP students, three different activities; an online presentation, a role-play, and an online group discussion; were conducted. The result revealed that ESP trainees' speaking performances were different in those three activities.

Moeen et al. compared two types of instructions to 90 architecture students at Yazd Azad University: implicit instruction through scaffolding and explicit instruction in learners' speaking abilities, including correctness, fluency, and complexity. The findings of the study revealed that implicit teaching was more effective on learners' speaking fluency than explicit training. Meanwhile, explicit instruction was more effective than implicit teaching in terms of improving learners' speaking accuracy and complexity. It demonstrates how various instructions can lead to different levels of speaking ability. Yuan and Ellis (2003) examine how pre-task and online planning affect speaking performance. The findings suggest that pre-task planning improves grammatical complexity, but online planning improves accuracy and grammatical complexity. In comparison to the online planners, the pre-task planners produced more fluent and lexically diversified language. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the correlation between planning and speaking performance, as well as pedagogical implications, as they reveal the task circumstances that increase correctness, complexity, and fluency in monologic speech production.

The finding suggests that foreign language teaching must facilitate the students to have enough exposure to the target language. Designing student-centered activities and creating a supportive learning environment could widen L2 exposure and reduce the risk of inhibition. Then, to create effective L2 instruction, identifying students' characteristics and attitudes to design the learning materials, topic, teaching method, and feedback is necessary for the teachers. Speaking activities and the task should be presented in an interesting way to engage the students. Meanwhile, to reduce speaking anxiety and make them well-prepared



during speaking activities, the objective of the learning must be stated in the beginning. Conducting group activities to precede individual tasks will also be helpful for the students to overcome their apprehension in L2 learning. Giving feedback on their speaking task is crucial. It will motivate the students to carry on their speaking tasks and improve their speaking aspects. It also gives the insight to evaluate students' performance. Besides feedback, Bao & Liu (2021) add that giving a reward is probably also effective for young learners. Furthermore, various types of examinations might boost students' motivation in specific ways. Teachers can minimize the importance of the final exam in favor of assisting students in seeing benefits beyond the final exam.

# 3. Conclusion

Negative factors that inhibit speaking performance include lack of L2 exposure in the classroom, inhibition, speaking anxiety, low student motivation, lack of learner autonomy, and ineffective teaching pedagogy. Inhibition, the negative factor of speaking performance is also closely related to anxiety and L2 exposure. Inhibition could lead to anxiety. Speaking anxiety might not even require treatment, but it needs attention from the teacher to consider factors in the learning environment to properly address this complicated phenomenon. By giving them opportunities for more L2 exposure, the sign of inhibition and speaking anxiety could be prevented.

On the other hand, improving learner autonomy and motivation could lead to better speaking performance. Thus, creating autonomous learning will help students to develop their self-esteem, critical thinking, and problem-solving that would help them to solve the problems that arise during their performance. Consequently, motivation will also arise. Motivation is also closely linked to speaking performance and it is believed that higher perceived motivation will lead to better performance. To facilitate the positive factors to grow, teaching pedagogy tailored to students' needs that support student-centered learning is needed.

To widen L2 exposure, student-centered learning must be applied instead of a teachercentered one. It will give the students opportunities to practice their foreign language speaking in the classroom and improves their learner autonomy. Frequent practices will ultimately diminish their speaking anxiety due to habit formation. However, the teacher's support and guidance are also necessary to facilitate learning. To achieve the ideal learning condition, several teaching approaches such as task-based language learning and projectbased language learning could be implemented. Those approaches support the development of learning autonomy and critical thinking through student-centered activities and subsequently will improve students' motivation and decrease their anxiety. It will also give access to students to broader L2 exposure, thus it could prevent the symptoms of inhibition.

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