

Lack of English-Speaking Skills among High School Students in English-Medium Schools: Challenges and Pedagogical Concerns

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Abstract: *English speaking skills play a significant role in academic, professional, and global communication in India. Over the years, the importance and use of English have increased considerably, leading to a growing interest among students in developing proficiency in the language. However, despite studying in English-medium schools, many high school students in cities like Ahmedabad continue to face difficulties in speaking English fluently and confidently. The present paper highlights the challenges and the existing problems of inadequate English-speaking skills among high school students studying in English-medium schools in Ahmedabad. The study is conceptual and discussion-based in nature and draws upon classroom observations, existing literature in English Language Teaching (ELT), and common learning experiences among students. The paper focuses on several factors responsible for poor speaking proficiency, including fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, mother tongue interference, classroom anxiety, and insufficient opportunities for practice. It further discusses the importance of communicative teaching methods, learner-centered classrooms, group discussions, role plays, and interactive classroom activities in enhancing speaking abilities. The study concludes that continuous practice, supportive learning environments, and effective pedagogy essential for improving students' spoken English and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use.*

Keywords: CLT, Classroom Anxiety, ELT, English-Medium Schools, High School Students, Speaking Skills

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1. Introduction

English is one of the most important global languages used in education, business, science, technology, and international communication. In India, English functions as a link language and plays a significant role in higher education, employment, and professional interaction. With increasing globalization and technological advancement, proficiency in English has become essential for academic and career success (Crystal 2003). As a result, the demand for English-medium education has increased considerably across urban and semi-urban regions of India.

In recent years, English-medium schools have expanded rapidly, particularly in cities such as Ahmedabad. Parents often prefer English-medium education with the expectation that their children will develop fluency and confidence in communication. However, despite studying in English-medium schools for several years, many students continue to struggle with spoken English. While students may perform reasonably well in reading and writing tasks, they often hesitate to communicate orally in English.

Speaking is considered one of the most difficult skills to acquire in second language learning because it requires not only grammatical knowledge but also fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and communicative competence (Richards and Renandya 2002). According to Brown (2001), speaking is an interactive process that demands active participation and spontaneous language use. Similarly, Hymes (1972) reports that communicative competence is essential for effective language learning, as learners must know how to use language appropriately in real-life situations.

Several factors contribute to poor speaking proficiency among students. Fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, classroom anxiety, limited vocabulary, and mother tongue interference are some of the major barriers that prevent learners from speaking English fluently (Horwitz et al. 1986). Krashen (1982) reported that anxiety and fear negatively affect language acquisition because learners become reluctant to participate in

communication. In many classrooms, students avoid speaking activities due to fear of criticism or embarrassment in front of peers and teachers.

Traditional teaching practices also contribute to this problem. In many schools, English teaching continues to focus mainly on grammar, textbook exercises, memorization, and examination performance rather than practical communication skills (Littlewood 1981). As a result, students often possess theoretical knowledge of English but fail to use the language confidently in real-life. Harmer (2007) observed that communicative activities such as role plays, group discussions, pair work, and classroom interaction are essential for developing speaking proficiency and learner confidence.

The communicative approach to language teaching has gained importance in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) because it encourages active learner participation and meaningful communication (Nunan 1991). Learner-centered classrooms provide students with greater opportunities for interaction and help reduce hesitation while speaking. Researchers have also highlighted that continuous speaking practice and supportive classroom environments play an important role in improving oral communication skills among learners (Thornbury 2005).

The present paper attempts to examine the major causes behind inadequate English speaking skills among high school students studying in English-medium schools in Ahmedabad. The study is conceptual and discussion-based in nature and is developed through classroom observations, existing literature, and common learner experiences. The paper further discusses various pedagogical strategies that may help improve students' communicative competence and spoken English proficiency. It concludes that effective communicative pedagogy, regular speaking practice, and supportive learning environments are essential for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study is conceptual and qualitative in nature. It is primarily based on classroom observations, learner behavior analysis, and a review of relevant literature in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The study focuses on identifying the common speaking difficulties faced by students studying in English-medium schools and understanding the pedagogical approaches that may help improve their oral communication skills.

The materials used for the study include books, research articles, journals, and scholarly publications related to English speaking skills, communicative competence, second language acquisition, and classroom pedagogy. Important theories and concepts proposed by scholars such as Brown (2001), Krashen (1982), Hymes (1972), Harmer (2007), Thornbury (2005), and Richards and Renandya (2002) were referred to in order to understand the linguistic, psychological, and classroom-related factors affecting students' speaking proficiency.

In addition to literary sources, the study also draws upon real classroom situations, informal interactions with students and teachers, and practical teaching observations developed through nearly fifteen years of experience in IELTS speaking training. Continuous interaction with learners from different educational backgrounds provided useful insights into common communication difficulties such as hesitation, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and mother tongue interference.

The study does not involve statistical or experimental data collection; rather, it presents an analytical and discussion-based understanding of the issue. The paper is further supported by established ELT approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning, and learner-centered pedagogy, which emphasize meaningful interaction, active participation, and practical language use in the classroom.

Various academic resources, educational websites, and library materials were also consulted to ensure the authenticity and relevance of the study. These materials collectively helped in analyzing the challenges related to spoken English and in suggesting practical strategies for improving students' communicative competence and confidence in speaking English.

3. Results

The present study is conceptual and qualitative in nature; therefore, this section does not present statistical findings or experimentally collected numerical data. Instead, it presents general observations and patterns identified through classroom experiences, learner behavior analysis, practical teaching exposure, and review of relevant ELT literature related to English speaking skills among students studying in English-medium schools.

It is commonly observed that many students experience hesitation while speaking English in classroom situations despite studying the language for several years. Students often appear more comfortable communicating in their mother tongue rather than expressing themselves in English. Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, pronunciation difficulties, and classroom anxiety are frequently noticed as major barriers affecting oral communication.

Observations developed through long-term experience in IELTS speaking training also indicate that students from different educational backgrounds often struggle with fluency, spontaneous communication, and confidence during speaking tasks. Many learners possess theoretical knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but face difficulty using English naturally in real-life communication. Students tend to participate more actively when they are encouraged to speak in supportive and non-judgmental classroom environments.

The observations further indicate that traditional teaching methods continue to dominate classroom practices in many schools. In several classroom situations, greater importance is given to grammar exercises, textbook learning, memorization, and examination preparation rather than practical communication. As a result, students receive comparatively fewer opportunities to participate in meaningful speaking activities and interactive communication tasks.

At the same time, classroom situations suggest that communicative and learner-centered activities such as group discussions, pair work, presentations, and role plays help improve student participation and confidence. Continuous speaking practice, constructive teacher feedback, and interactive learning environments appear to reduce hesitation and gradually strengthen students' communicative competence.

Common Factors Affecting English Speaking Skills

Factors Identified	Common Classroom Observation
Fear of making mistakes	Students hesitate during speaking activities
Limited vocabulary	Difficulty expressing thoughts clearly
Mother tongue interference	Frequent use of Gujarati during communication
Lack of confidence	Reduced participation in oral activities
Examination-oriented teaching	Limited focus on communicative practice

Table 1: presents some commonly observed factors influencing students' English-speaking proficiency

4. Discussion

The present study highlights several important issues related to the development of English-speaking skills among students studying in English-medium schools. Although English is introduced as a major language of instruction and communication, many students continue to face difficulty in speaking the language confidently and fluently. The discussion suggests that the problem is not limited to grammatical knowledge alone but is also closely connected with psychological, social, and pedagogical factors.

One of the major issues observed during the study is the lack of confidence among students while speaking English. Many learners hesitate to participate in classroom interaction because they fear making mistakes or being judged by teachers and classmates. This observation supports Krashen's (1982) view that anxiety and fear can negatively affect language acquisition and reduce learner participation. Similarly, Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasized that classroom anxiety often prevents students from communicating freely in a second language.

The study also indicates that traditional teaching practices continue to influence English language classrooms in many schools. Greater emphasis is often placed on grammar exercises, textbook learning, memorization, and examination performance, while comparatively less attention is given to practical communication skills. As a result, students may develop theoretical knowledge of English but fail to use the language effectively in real-life situations. This observation is consistent with Littlewood's (1981) argument that language learning becomes ineffective when learners are not provided with meaningful opportunities for communication.

Another important aspect highlighted in the discussion is the role of classroom environment in developing speaking proficiency. Learners tend to participate more actively when classrooms are interactive, supportive, and learner-centered. Activities such as group discussions, pair work, presentations, and role plays appear to reduce hesitation and encourage students to communicate more confidently. Harmer (2007) and Thornbury (2005) also report that communicative activities and continuous speaking practice are essential for improving oral fluency and learner confidence.

The discussion further suggests that mother tongue interference and limited exposure to English outside the classroom significantly affect students' speaking ability. In many situations, students rely heavily on Gujarati for classroom interaction because they do not receive enough opportunities to use English in everyday communication. This limited exposure affects pronunciation, vocabulary development, and spontaneous language use.

Practical teaching experiences in IELTS speaking training additionally indicate that students often show gradual improvement when they are provided with regular speaking practice, constructive feedback, and a non-judgmental learning environment. Learners become more comfortable speaking English when teachers focus on communication and confidence-building rather than excessive correction of mistakes.

Overall, the discussion highlights the importance of communicative and learner-centered approaches in English language teaching. The study suggests that creating supportive classroom environments, increasing opportunities for oral interaction, and encouraging practical language use can play a significant role in improving students' English-speaking proficiency and communicative competence.

5. Conclusion

The present study emphasizes that the problem of inadequate English-speaking skills among students is influenced by multiple linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical factors. Although students study in English-medium schools for several years, many of them continue to experience hesitation, lack of confidence, and difficulty in communicating effectively in English. The study suggests that theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient for developing communicative competence unless learners receive regular opportunities for meaningful language use.

The discussion further indicates that traditional examination-oriented teaching practices often limit students' exposure to practical communication activities. Greater importance is frequently given to grammar, memorization, and written performance, while comparatively less attention is paid to oral interaction and fluency development. As a result, many learners remain dependent on their mother tongue and hesitate to participate actively in English communication.

The study also highlights the importance of supportive and learner-centered classroom environments in improving speaking proficiency. Interactive activities such as group discussions, presentations, role plays, and pair work appear to encourage participation and reduce fear among learners. Positive teacher encouragement, continuous speaking practice, and constructive feedback can gradually help students build confidence and improve oral communication skills.

Overall, the paper suggests that English language teaching should focus more on practical communication and active learner participation rather than only examination performance. The adoption of communicative and activity-based teaching approaches may contribute significantly toward improving students' fluency, confidence,

and communicative competence. The study may further help teachers, language trainers, and educational institutions understand the challenges faced by learners and encourage the use of more effective pedagogical practices for developing spoken English skills.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Common Classroom Speaking Activities Observed

The following classroom activities are commonly associated with the development of English speaking skills in learner-centered classrooms:

- Group discussions
- Pair work activities
- Role plays
- Classroom presentations
- Question-answer sessions
- Picture description activities
- Debate and interaction sessions

These activities encourage learner participation, improve confidence, and provide opportunities for meaningful communication in English language classrooms.

Appendix B: Common Factors Affecting Spoken English Proficiency

Some commonly observed factors affecting students' English speaking skills include:

- Fear of making mistakes
- Lack of confidence
- Limited vocabulary
- Mother tongue interference
- Classroom anxiety
- Limited exposure to spoken English
- Examination-oriented learning practices

These factors are frequently discussed in ELT literature and are often observed in classroom communication situations.

AUTHOR'S BIO-NOTE

Ms. Smriti Nirav Joshi is a Research Scholar at IISHLS, Indus University, Rancharda, Ahmedabad, Gujarat. She is currently working as a Senior Faculty and Academic Coordinator for IELTS, TOEFL, and CELPIP at Angel Edunext Pvt. Ltd., Ahmedabad, and has over eleven years of experience in English Language Teaching and international test preparation. Previously, she served at GLS University as an International Coordinator, Language Expert, English Language Program Coordinator, Event Coordinator, and Adjunct Professor of English. She completed her Master's degree in English from IGNOU with distinction and is presently pursuing her Ph.D. in English Language Teaching (ELT) from Indus University. Her academic and research interests include English speaking skills, writing proficiency, communicative competence, learner-centered pedagogy, and classroom-based approaches in ELT. Her work primarily focuses on improving speaking and writing skills among higher secondary learners in Indian educational contexts.