

Probing the Determinant Factors Affecting Students' English Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This study aimed to probe the determinant factors affecting students' English speaking skills at Rift Valley University, Ethiopia. For this study, a mixed research approach was employed. 180 students were chosen using simple random sampling techniques. A Likert-Scale questionnaire was used to collect data. The collected Data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. The study's results identified four major factors that affect students' English speaking skills: student-related factors, teachers related factors, classroom-related factors, and course materials-related factors. The findings revealed that the factors related to students, teachers, classroom and course materials significantly affect students' English speaking skills. This study is significant for students, teachers and curriculum designers. Therefore, it is recommended that educators and language instructors pay attention to the identified factors to enhance learners' speaking abilities. Future researchers may consider exploring the impact of technology and digital resources on improving students' speaking skills in higher education settings.

Keywords: probe, determinant, factor, affect, English speaking skills

1. Introduction

English is a widely spoken language all over the world. In many nations, including Ethiopia, English language is used as an official language. In Ethiopia, it is widely used in banks, telecommunications, educational institutions and federal government offices. "English language skills are increasingly important for social and economic mobility, particularly in countries where the language is not the native tongue. The ability to communicate in English can open up opportunities for travel, education, and business." (Dewaele, J. M. (2007, p. 391). Speaking is one of the four main language skills, along with reading, writing, and listening. It involves knowing and responding to people and communicating successfully (Elaine, 2005).

Ethiopian students at private universities are regarded as having low English skills. This is a severe issue since speaking abilities are essential for efficient communication and academic and professional success. Several kinds of research have been conducted concerning speaking skills. For instance, a study conducted by Dejene and Mekonnen (2016) found that many Ethiopian university students have poor speaking English language proficiency. The study identified factors such as inadequate language instruction, limited exposure to English outside of the classroom, and lack of emphasis on speaking skills in the curriculum as contributing factors to the students' poor proficiency.

Another study by Zeleke and Gebrehiwot (2018) found that most Ethiopian university students struggle with speaking skills, typically with pronunciation and fluency. The study also found that students' lack of exposure to English outside the classroom and limited opportunities to practice speaking were significant factors. Juniardi, Y. et al. (2020, p. 418) said, "The lack of speaking competence prohibits the opportunities for students to develop their communicative competence."

Similarly, Chane (2018) found that many Ethiopian university students, especially those in private universities, have poor English language proficiency. Besides, Zaim, M. et al. (2020, p. 590) stated, "English teachers have practical problems in implementing authentic assessment in the classrooms, especially when assessing their students speaking ability." It consequently impacts their academic performance and capacity for job competition.

Most Ethiopian private university students come from remote regions and have little English exposure. They struggle to acquire the language. Some learners lack English-speaking confidence. A fear of making errors, a lack of desire, or a bad attitude toward English might cause speaking difficulties. Many learners fear making mistakes while speaking English, so they avoid speaking English in the classroom. Furthermore, they have a negative attitude towards English language learning. This is due to a belief that English is unimportant. Ethiopian

students often struggle with social anxiety which might affect their English speaking skills. Gerencheal and Mishra (2019) discovered that students with significant social anxiety avoided speaking English in class and had poorer speaking scores.

Besides, many Ethiopian private university English lecturers lack proper training. This results in a lack of teaching expertise and confidence. In addition, some of them do not have sufficient course materials, supplies, or training. This may hinder instructors ability to teach their students. There is emerging evidence that Ethiopian private institutions' language instruction practices may be causing students' English speaking problems. Gebremichael (2019) observed that students taught English using a grammar-translation technique had considerably lower speaking scores than those taught communicatively.

Moreover, Ethiopian private institutions are characterized by high student-to-teacher ratios. Teachers struggle to provide each student the personalized attention they need to learn English and they do not provide their students adequate English speaking practice. This may lower students' English proficiency.

In addition, Ethiopian private universities utilize outdated course materials. Since course materials do not represent current English language teaching methods, learners struggle to learn English. Besides, Ethiopian private universities utilize inefficient English-teaching materials. Poor resources, curriculum misalignment, and no focus for students' needs may cause speaking difficulty.

There have been few researches on the private university sector, and the currently available studies on English language proficiency in Ethiopia have mainly concentrated on public universities. In addition, even though various researches have been conducted on the language proficiency of Ethiopian university students, private students still fail to communicate effectively in English. This is a significant gap in the literature as private universities are becoming increasingly popular in Ethiopia, and many students are enrolled in these institutions. This gap in the literature emphasizes the need for further research to understand better the factors contributing to poor students' speaking skills and to develop effective interventions to address this issue.

This research has the potential to close the gap between theory and practice in teaching and English language. It may be challenging for practitioners to apply studies from the literature on second language speaking, which is mostly concerned with theoretical difficulties. Therefore, this study wants to get insights that may be utilized by educators, students, and curriculum designers.

This research has the potential to encourage a more open strategy for learning a second language. Learners from non-English speaking backgrounds may struggle to discover materials that match their requirements since the literature on second language speaking usually targets native speakers. This research has the potential to provide a more inclusive strategy for second language interactions by attending to the requirements of all students.

The present study aimed to probe the major sources of students' English speaking difficulties. Therefore, the following research objectives were designed:

- To explore the students-related factors that affect their English speaking skills.
- To identify the teachers-related factors that affect students' English speaking skills.
- To investigate the classroom-related factors that affect students' English speaking skills.
- To find out the course materials-related factors that affect students' English speaking skills.

2. Review Literature

Imaniah (2018) conducted a study on "Students' Difficulties in Presenting Academic Speaking Presentation." This study aimed to discover students' difficulties during their academic speaking presentations. Qualitative research was used for this study. According to the study's findings, there was a lack of goal-setting, self-awareness, self-motivation, and planning.

Fitriani D. et al. (2015) researched the topic "Students' Speaking Problems in English Presentation." This study aimed to identify the students' difficulties in delivering their presentations in the sixth semester at Tanjungpura University. The descriptive research design was employed for the study. 38 students in total were chosen as samples from university students enrolled in the sixth semester of the English department. Data was gathered through the questionnaire. According to the findings, vocabulary was the most common problem students had while preparing their presentations. The other determinant factors are fear of making mistakes, confidence, grammar, and pronunciation.

Nadzirrotunnuha (2017) studied the topic "The Analysis of Students' Problems with Speaking Skills." The findings of the study indicated that learners had difficulty communicating in English. The result showed that 56% of respondents experienced inhibition, 54% experienced silence, 51% experienced low or uneven participation, and 35% experienced using their mother tongues. According to the results, students often struggle to speak a foreign language. Inhibition, a lack of idea, and low participation were all causes of speaking difficulties. Based on the data gathered through classroom observations, teachers used reward-based motivation to help students overcome their speaking difficulties. Based on the data gathered through classroom observations, teacher used reward-based motivation to help students overcome their speaking inhibitions.

In a study by V.P., H.T., and P.T.M. (2018), the study found that students' biggest problem was not having enough words to describe their thoughts when speaking English. More than two-thirds of the participants agreed (79.4%). Another problem that nearly 65% of people agree on is that English-speaking strategies are limited. The study then found that both teachers and students said that lack of language is one of the main reasons why students can't speak English (Khan, Radzuan, Shahbaz, Ibrahim, & Mustafa, 2018).

Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2013) did a study on the problems that students may face at six Jordanian public universities. They used a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gather data. They found that most of the students who took part in the study did face problems, with limited oral skills, not enough time to speak, and crowded classes being the most important ones. Ariyanti (2016) studied on how psychological barriers also show up in talk sessions, where some students don't want to take part because they're afraid of making mistakes or don't have enough self-esteem or drive, so they stay quiet in class.

Dina A. Al-Jamal and Ghadeer A. Al-Jamal (2014) did a study titled "An Investigation of the Difficulties Faced by EFL Undergraduates in Speaking Skills". The researcher did a study that was meant to describe problems that could happen in an EFL setting. The sample was chosen at random from six Jordanian public universities that were in different groups. In addition to the initial survey questions, 64 of the 566 students who filled out the survey took part in semi-structured conversations. The study's results showed that EFL students' English speaking skills aren't good enough to explain why they have trouble. The study's results also showed that EFL students have a "low" level of speaking skills and that speaking skills aren't taught much in university classes. This study also brought up problems with communicating in mother tongue, having too many students in a class, and not having enough time.

Generally, several linguists have investigated the major cause of students' speaking difficulties and suggested solutions for the research problems, but still, most foreign language learners face speaking difficulties. Therefore, the present study aimed to probe the major sources of students' English speaking difficulties.

3. Methods

This study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate the factor affecting speaking skills among Ethiopian private university students. The descriptive design also includes descriptions and extrapolations of student status to determine overall standards and student ability to assimilate conversation skills. A mixed research approach was employed. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze data. The sample size for the study was 180 students from Rift Valley University Burayu campus, Management Department. The samples were selected through a simple random sampling technique. 106 male and 74 female students participated in the study. For this study questionnaire was employed as tools of data collection. A Likert scale questionnaire was developed to gather data to probe the factors that contribute to students' speaking proficiency. Finally, the collected data were analyzed using a statistical software package which is commonly used for data analysis in social sciences research. The SPSS was used for both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This result section examined the determinant factors that affect students' English speaking skills. The findings of this study have important implications for educational institutions, English language instructors, curriculum and course designers and students to improve students' speaking proficiency.

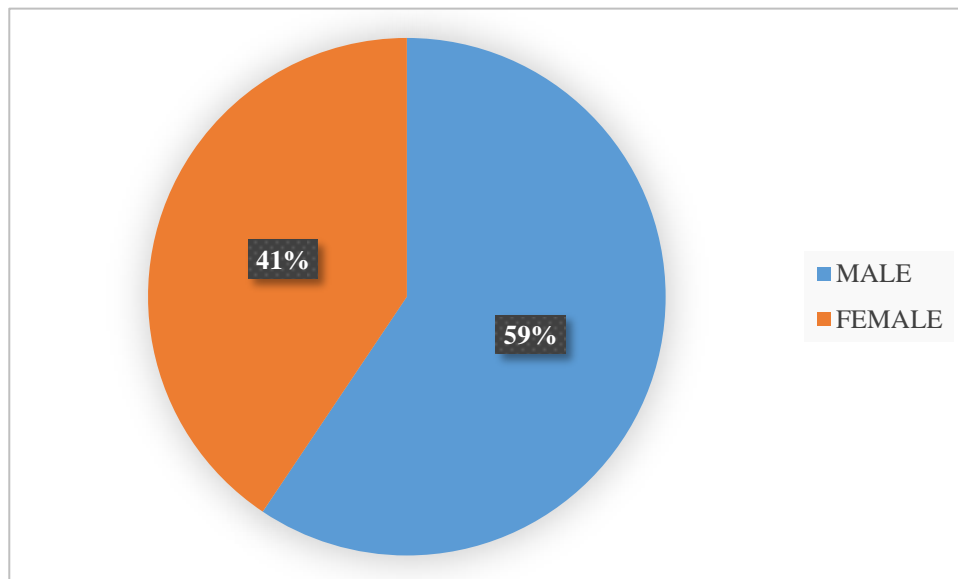


Figure 1. Percentage of male and female respondents who were chosen for the study

Figure 1 shows that 41% of respondents were female and 59.4% were male students. This indicates that research includes male and female students.

Table 1. Percentage of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Students Related Factors

	Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I have had enough opportunities to practice speaking in class.	33.3%	39.4%	5.6%	12.2%	9.5%
2	I am confident to express my thoughts clearly when speaking.	36.1%	41.1%	4.5%	7.7%	10.6%
3	I feel anxious when speaking in front of others.	9.5%	7.8%	2.2%	49.4%	31.1%
4	I have difficulty organizing my thoughts when speaking.	8.9%	11%	6.1%	44.5%	29.5%
5	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking.	4.4%	9.5%	3.9%	45%	37.2%

The findings presented in Table 1, Item No. 1 depicts that 33.3% of respondents strongly disagreed that they had an adequate opportunity to practice speaking in class. Also, 39.4% of respondents of students said they disagree that they get to practice public speaking in class. Among those asked, just 5.6% were agnostic. But 12.2% of students said they had enough of an opportunity to rehearse speaking in class, with 9.5% of those students strongly agreeing.

Most respondents (72.7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that they had enough opportunities to practice speaking in class. This lack of opportunities for speaking practice hinders the enhancement of students' speaking skills. Recent studies support this finding. For instance, a study by Fujii (2021) found that learners with more opportunities to speak in class demonstrate better speaking proficiency. Another study by Li Fu et al (2020) found that students who received more speaking practice in the classroom had better speaking skills and higher confidence levels. So, teachers should provide sufficient opportunities for learners to practice speaking in class to improve their speaking skills.

The result in Table 1, item no. 2 reveals that out of the total responses, 36.1% strongly disagreed that they lack confidence in their ability to express their thoughts clearly when they speak. 41.1% disagreed that they also lack the confidence to express their thoughts clearly. 4.5% of the samples was neutral. 10.6% were strongly agreed that could express their thoughts, and 7.7% firmly agreed that they could express their thoughts.

Overall, 77.2 % disagreed and strongly disagreed that they had confidence to express their thought in English. This lack of confidence in speaking negatively affects students' willingness to participate in speaking activities and hinders their speaking development. Recent studies have shown that confidence is crucial to speaking skills development. A study by Colliot and Jamet (2020) found that confidence was positively correlated with speaking proficiency. Unlike this, a study by Lianqi et al. (2022) found that confidence significantly predicted speaking success. Thus, educators should offer opportunities for students to build their confidence in speaking by giving positive feedback and constructive support. In addition, instructors should enhance learners' confidence by incorporating role-playing, debates and group discussions into classroom instruction.

The result in Table 1, item no. 3, shows that only 9.5% strongly disagreed that they feel anxious when speaking in front of others. 7.8% disagreed that they feel anxiety when speaking in front of others. 2.2% of respondents expressed neutrality. In contrary, 49.5% and 31.1% respectively agreed and strongly agreed that public speaking makes them nervous.

81% of sample respondents agreed and strongly agreed that public speaking made them nervous. This anxiety can be a significant barrier to speaking development and hinders students' progress. Recent studies have shown that speaking anxiety is a common issue for language learners and it negatively affects their speaking performance. A study by Kormos and Smith (2012) found that speaking anxiety was negatively correlated with speaking performance. In addition, Bin Ghali (2016) discovered that students' preparedness to participate in speaking activities in the classroom might be affected by their levels of anxiety. Therefore, teachers should consider employing anxiety-reducing strategies that include creating a safe and supportive classroom setting, using positive reinforcement, and giving constructive feedback.

Table 1 the fourth item indicates that 45% of respondents agreed that they had difficulties organizing their ideas while speaking, with 29 % firmly agreeing that they had a great deal of difficulty in this area. 8.9%, on the other hand, strongly disagreed with the assertion, demonstrating that they have no trouble speaking coherently. 11% disagreed that they have difficulty organizing their thoughts when speaking in English. only 6.1% of respondents were neutral.

74 % of those who took the survey agreed or strongly agreed that they had trouble organizing their ideas while speaking. This is a typical difficulty for language learners. Research by Buchholz (2013) backs up this conclusion, indicating that the ability to arrange and communicate ideas logically is crucial for successful communication in academic and professional contexts. Another study found that practice and experience can improve students' ability to organize their thoughts when they speak (Alrasheedi, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for students to regularly practice speaking to enhance their capacity to organize their thoughts when speaking. Additionally, support and guidance from a teacher can also be beneficial in improving speaking skills.

The results in Table 1, item no. 5, show that a considerable number of the participants (45% agreed and 37.2% strongly agreed) they had fear of making mistakes when speaking. However, 4.4% strongly disagreed that they were afraid of making mistakes when they speak. 9.5% disagreed, suggesting that they had a fear of making mistakes when they are speaking. Only a small percentage of respondents, 3.9%, were neutral.

Generally, most respondents (82.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that the fear of making mistakes when speaking is a common problem for them. This fear of making mistakes negatively affects students' confidence and ability to communicate effectively. Recent research has revealed that language learners frequently experience a fear of making mistakes, which can hinder efforts to increase students' fluency and proficiency in the target language (Haneen & Naciye, 2022; Panayiotis & Miranda, 2013). This demonstrates the importance of fostering an accepting and supporting environment for students to practice speaking English and make mistakes without worrying about negative consequences.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Teachers Related Factors

Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
6. My teacher provides enough opportunities for me to practice speaking in class.	30.6%	43.3%	5.6%	11.1%	9.4%
7. My teacher gives helpful feedback on my speaking.	30%	43.4%	2.8%	12.8%	11%
8. My teacher creates a supportive environment for me to speak.	27.2%	41.7%	4.4%	12.2%	14.5%
9. My teacher supports me in speaking even though I make mistakes.	18.3%	21.1%	3.3%	33.4%	23.9%
10. My teacher models good speaking behavior for me to learn from.	24.4%	43.3%	7.2%	9.5%	15.6%

According to the sixth item in Table 2, 30.6% of respondents strongly disagreed that their professors offered them adequate opportunities to practice speaking in class. It was also disagreed by 43.3% of respondents that there were enough chances for students to practice their speaking skills in the classroom. 5.6% of the participants were neutral. Only 11.1% and 9.4% of respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed that their instructors gave them enough time to practice speaking in class.

Most respondents (73.9%) believed that their lecturers do not offer them enough classroom speaking practice. This shows that most professors do not provide their students sufficient time to practice speaking skills. Lack of enough time to practice speaking is the one major factors that affect students' speaking skills. To enhance communication skills, opportunities for practice and feedback are crucial. According to a recent study by Garcia-Ponce & Parvaneh (2022), students who received feedback and opportunities to practice their speaking abilities in class showed greater improvement in their speaking ability than those who did not. Xin Wang (2017) state, "Teachers can be highly effective in making students willing or unwilling to talk in class." (p. 78)

Based on the responses provided in Table 2, item no. 7, 30% of the respondents strongly disagreed that their teachers give them helpful feedback on their speaking. Besides, 43.4% of the respondents disagreed that their teachers give them helpful feedback. 2.8% of respondents remained neutral. However, 12.8% of respondents agreed and 11% strongly agreed that their professors provide helpful feedback on their speaking.

The majority of pupils (73.4%) do not feel they get helpful feedback from their professors on their English proficiency. Students can't improve their public speaking skills without constructive criticism. Research shows that students' learning achievements and ability to express themselves in public may be enhanced when professors offer constructive feedback (Wisniewski et al., 2020). However, the replies suggest that many students do not think their instructor provides constructive feedback on their oral communication skills. This implies that in order to enhance the learners' learning, instructors should deliver feedback in a more thoughtful manner.

According to the replies to the question presented in Table 2, item no. 8, 27.2% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement that says "My teacher creates a supportive environment for me to speak.", and 41.7% of respondents disagreed that their professors create a supportive atmosphere for them to speak. On the other side, 14.5 % of the respondents strongly agreed that they believe the classroom environment is extremely friendly, and 12.2 % of respondents strongly agreed that their instructor offers a favorable environment for them to speak in English. A few number of participants (4.4%) were remained neutral.

In general, most respondents (68.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement that their teachers foster an environment where they can speak English. This shows that their teachers do not help them by creating a supportive environment to enhance their speaking skills. Research has shown that a supportive classroom environment positively impacts students' language learning and speaking skills. A study by Vera et al. (2021) found that a supportive classroom environment can enhance students' motivation and confidence in speaking. Additionally, a study by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) found that a positive classroom atmosphere, low-anxiety environment and opportunities for interaction can improve language learning outcomes.

Table 2, item 9, shows that 18.3% of the participants strongly disagreed and 21.1% disagreed that their instructors encourage them to speak English even if they make errors. In contrary, 33.4% and 23.9% of the respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed that their instructors encourage them to speak English even when they make errors. 3.3% said neutral.

Overall, most respondents (59.4%) believed that their instructor encourages them to communicate, even if they make errors. Studies show that letting pupils make errors and learn from them helps them speak better and acquire new words faster. Farrokhi et al. (2017) found that students who were given feedback on their grammatical errors were more likely to improve their speaking correctness. The classroom setting can help reduce anxiety and increase motivation by providing a supportive and engaging atmosphere. Research by Munezane (2014) found that children learned a language more effectively when they were provided with a positive classroom atmosphere and positive teacher-student interactions. It is vital for teachers to encourage their pupils to talk even when they make errors in order to create a safe space where kids are willing to experiment with language. Students' language proficiency and speaking confidence may ultimately improve as a

result of this.

Table 2, question 10: "My teacher models good speaking behavior for me to learn from" indicates the extent to which students see the instructor as a successful role model regarding strong communication skills. 24.4% and 43.3% of students respectively strongly disagreed and disagreed with that their instructors are excellent speaking role models. However, 9.5% of the respondents agreed and 15.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that their teachers are excellent role models concerning English speaking. Only 3.3% of respondents were neutral. Generally, most respondents (67.7%) believed that majority of English teachers might not serve as good role models for students regarding to speaking skill. This result is supported by a study conducted by Xin Wang (2017) that examined the relationship between teacher modeling and students' speaking performance. This study found that teacher modeling had a significant positive effect on students' speaking performance. The result of the study indicated the importance of teachers serving as good role models for enhancing students' speaking skills. However, another study by Xin Wang (2017) explored the relationship between teacher modeling and students' speaking anxiety. The results of this study show that students' public-speaking nerves are significantly reduced when teachers demonstrate confident behavior. This study adds evidence that shows teachers who are also skilled in English have a beneficial influence on their pupils' linguistic competence and sense of personal efficacy. To this end, it is critical that educators are expected to not only provide students with enough opportunities to hone their speaking skills but also set good examples for their charges.

Table 3. Percentage of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Classroom Related Factors

Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
11. The classroom environment is comfortable and conducive to speaking.	23.3%	36.1%	2.8%	16.7%	21.1%
12. I have enough opportunities to practice speaking in class.	32.2%	43.4%	5.6%	7.8%	11%
13. My classmates support me to speak in front of the class.	22.2%	44.4%	8.3%	13.3%	11.8%
14. The class size is small enough to allow for personal and practice.	33.3%	48.3%	2.2%	6.7%	9.5%
15. The classroom is free from distractions that interfere with my speaking practice.	26.7%	36.7%	7.8%	11%	17.8%

According to the responses to Table 3, item no. 11, reveals that 23.3% of the students strongly disagreed and 36.1% disagreed with the statement that the classroom environment was comfortable and conducive to speaking. Whereas, 16.7% and 21.1% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the learning environment in the classroom is relaxed and encouraging to speak. Few students (2.8%) were neutral. This demonstrates the need to establish a friendly and encouraging learning environment that motivates students to feel at ease speaking in front of the class.

The majority of respondents (59.4%) do not believe that the classroom environment is comfortable and encouraging for speaking. According to recent studies, students' speaking abilities and confidence can improve in a relaxed and encouraging learning environment. According to a study by Holland and Natalia (2018), students' speaking abilities and confidence can improve in a supportive classroom environment highlighted by helpful teachers, friendly classmates, and a relaxed atmosphere. Similarly, a study by Khajavy (2018) found that a supportive classroom environment is characterized by a positive teacher-student relationship, respect, and open communication. In a safe and encouraging classroom environment, students may learn to express themselves clearly and overcome their anxiety about speaking in front of an audience. Teachers may foster an atmosphere where students feel comfortable speaking out and contributing by providing a safe and accepting learning space.

According to the results in Table 3, item no. 12, 32.2% of respondents strongly disagreed and 43.4% disagreed that they had enough opportunities to practice speaking in class. However, 11% agreed and 7.8% strongly agreed that they have enough opportunities to practice. Only 5.6% of those surveyed remained neutral.

Most participants (75.6%) believed that they do not have enough opportunities to practice speaking in class. The students' speaking abilities, self-confidence, and overall language development could all be affected due to the lack of speaking practice opportunities in the classroom. Studies have shown that regular speaking practice is crucial for language learners to improve their speaking abilities and confidence. Another study found that frequent speaking practice in a supportive environment improved learners' speaking skills and increased their confidence levels (Murray & Christison, 2019). Similar to this, a study by Jarr ń and Kim (2019) discovered that pupils who have more chances to practice speaking in front of others tend to have higher levels of self-assurance in their speaking skills. Additionally, when students have ample speaking opportunities, they may feel more at ease and less anxious in the classroom, contributing to a more positive learning environment (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, teachers should give students plenty of chances to practice speaking in class and foster a supportive environment to help students become more confident. These possibilities might include discussions in pairs or groups, debates, role-plays, and presentations.

The results in Table 3, item no. 13, show that among the total responses, 22.2% strongly disagreed that their classmates are supportive when they speak in front of them. 44.4% of the respondents disagreed that their classmates were supportive. In contrast, 13% of respondents agreed and 11% strongly agreed that their classmates encourage them when they talk in front of them. Among those respondents, just 8.3% were neutral.

Generally, most respondents (66%) believed that their peers do not encourage them to speak out in class. This highlights the need to cultivate a classroom climate where students are actively listened to, discuss topics respectfully, and offer opportunities to improve their work. Studies have shown that students' confidence and public speaking skills benefit from a classroom atmosphere encouraging open dialogue. Howell (2008) discovered that students' tendency to speak up in class was influenced by the classroom's favorable environment. Baymot et

al. (2023) also found that students who were given positive feedback and support from their classmates were more successful in overcoming their anxiety about public speaking. Students' confidence can be raised and students become more comfortable in speaking in class when an atmosphere is pleasant and encouraging. In general, students' self-confidence and oral communication skills can benefit greatly from a classroom environment that encourages open discussion and constructive feedback.

According to the responses given for Table 3, item number 14, 33.3% and 48.3% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, with the statement that says the class size is small enough to permit giving attention and practice. However, 9.5% strongly agreed that the class size is small enough to provide individualized attention and speaking practice, while 6.7% of respondents agreed that the class size is adequate for giving individualized attention and practice. Only 2.2% of those surveyed remained neutral.

Most respondents (81.6%) believed that the class size is not small enough to allow individualized attention and practice. This demonstrates how crucial it is to take class size into account when developing instructional activities and assessments and offer opportunities for tailored feedback and support. Smaller class sizes have been found to improve student learning outcomes. This result correlates with Blatchford et al. (2003) that says smaller class sizes increase students' engagement and academic performance. Small classes allow teachers to devote more time to each student and give a more personalized learning environment, both of which benefit students' oral communication skills. Similarly, Hayat (2017) showed that students in public speaking groups with fewer than twenty-five to thirty participants benefited more from practice and criticism than those in bigger sessions. Students in smaller courses also tend to be more confident and comfortable raising their hands in class discussions. Teachers might further investigate alternate pedagogies, such as group projects and collaborative learning, that can assist pupils to obtain more individualized attention in a big class.

Table 3, question 15 shows that 26.7 % and 36.7% of respondents respectively strongly disagreed and agreed with the statement that says, "the classroom is free from distractions that prevent students from practicing their public speaking skills." But 11% of the samples agreed that the classroom is free from interruptions that prevent speaking practice, and 17% of the samples strongly agreed that the classroom is ideal for developing one's public speaking skills. Only 7.8 % of samples were uncertain.

Generally, most respondents (63%) believed that there are distractions during speaking class. This demonstrates that students face challenges in using their speaking talents in the classroom. A safe and quiet classroom helps students feel more at ease and motivated to participate in speaking activities. Similarly, Khajavy et al. (2018) revealed that classroom distractions can have a negative impact on students' capacity to learn and participate in speaking practice. In addition, research shows that students' concentration and public speaking abilities benefit from a calm and quiet setting (Murphy & Selfridge, 2020). Moreover, Holland and Natalia (2018) discovered that children who practiced speaking in a calm and distraction-free classroom outperformed their peers on speaking examinations by a large margin. This study reveals that classroom distractions significantly affect students' speaking ability. Therefore, creating a distraction-free environment enhances students' speaking practice and improves their performance.

Table 4. Percentage of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Course Materials Related Factors

Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
16. The course materials provide enough speaking practice opportunities.	27.2%	44%	7%	8.9%	12.8%
17. The course materials are relevant and interesting for speaking practice.	30%	45%	9.5%	6.1%	9.4%
18. The course materials cover a variety of speaking topics and situations.	33.3%	41.1%	3.4%	14.4%	7.8%
19. The course materials provide clear examples of good speaking behavior.	29%	42.8%	7%	8.4%	12.8%
20. The course materials are designed well to enhance speaking skills.	36%	35.6%	6.8%	11%	10.6%

According to Table 4, item no. 16, 27.2% of respondents disagreed and 44% disagreed that the course materials offer enough opportunities for speaking practice. In contrast, 8.9% and 12.8% of the participants respectively agreed and strongly agreed that the course materials provide enough speaking practice opportunities. The remaining 7% of respondents were neutral on the statement. The result shows that majority of the students agreed that the course materials were designed poorly. This emphasizes that it is important equip course materials with speaking practice activities, such as role-plays, debates, and discussions. By providing ample activities for speaking practice, teachers can develop students' speaking skills and help them feel more confident in using the language in real-life situations.

Some previous researches support the importance of providing adequate speaking practice opportunities in language learning. A study by Brown et al. (2023) found that increasing speaking practice in the classroom positively affected students' oral proficiency development. Similar findings were made by Garcia-Ponce & Parvaneh (2022) who discovered that task-based speaking activities added to the curriculum helped students become more proficient in both speaking and reading and writing. As a result, language teachers need to think about the quantity and quality of speaking practice opportunities offered in their course materials to make sure that students have enough opportunities to develop their speaking abilities.

Table 4's item no. 17 reveals that a sizable portion of participants, 75% (composed of 30% who strongly disagreed and 45% who disagreed), do not find the course materials interesting or relevant for practicing speaking 6.1% of participants agreed and 9.4% strongly agreed that the materials were useful and entertaining for speaking practice. 9.5% had a neutral opinion on the matter. This may dissatisfy and disinterest kids, affecting their speaking abilities.

Recent studies have shown that the relevance and interest level of course materials have a significant impact on students' motivation, engagement, and academic performance (Deci, et al., 2001). In the context of speaking practice, relevant and interesting course materials can help students develop their speaking skills more effectively. Additionally, it encourages and engages students to speak up during class

discussions and other speaking activities. Additionally, a study by Chen et al. (2014) discovered that using authentic materials that reflect real-world language use, significantly increases students' speaking proficiency. To aid students in honing their speaking abilities, creating relevant, engaging, and authentic course materials is crucial.

According to the responses in Table 4, response item 18 shows that 33.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 41.1% disagreed with the statement that the course materials cover various speaking topics and situations. However, 7.8% of participants strongly agreed while 14.4% agreed that the course materials cover various speaking topics and situations. just 3.4% of the participants were neutral.

Overall, most respondents (74.4%) believed that the course materials do not offer enough variety in speaking topics and situations. This result is supported by a study by Saeb (2017) that investigated the efficiency of using authentic materials for language learning. They discovered from their research that authentic resources, like news articles, videos, and podcasts expose students to language usage and real-world situations. By providing exposure which enhance learners' capacity to express their opinion and idea, it is possible to help students develop their speaking abilities. Furthermore, Garcia-Ponce & Parvaneh (2022) revealed that students exposed to various speaking situations and topics in their course materials which motivate students to practice speaking and more involve in their speaking activities. Furthermore, including authentic materials also support learners' language acquisition and use in real-life situations. Therefore, it is important to consider that the course materials that cover various speaking topics and situations to enhance learners' engagement, motivation, and language proficiency.

Table 4, item no. 19, shows that 29% and 42.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that the course materials provided clear examples of good speaking behavior. However, 8.4% of the respondents agreed, and 12.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that the course materials provided clear examples of good speaking behavior. A few respondents (7%) were neutral on this statement.

Overall, most respondents (71.8%) strongly believed that the course materials do not provide them clear examples and good speaking exercises. This study aligns with a study by Kumaravadivelu (2002) that found using video-recorded models of proficient speakers and providing explicit instructions on the features of good speaking behavior positively influenced students' speaking performance. Another study found that incorporating peer evaluation and feedback on speaking skills into course materials can enhance students' speaking proficiency (Rachael, 2015). Overall, providing clear examples and instruction on good speaking behavior is important for improving students' speaking skills.

According to Table 4, item no. 20, 36.6% and 35.6% respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively with the statement that says, "The course materials are designed well to enhance speaking skills." However, some percentage (21.6%: agreed 11% and strongly agreed 10.6%) suggests that speaking is a significant component of the course curriculum as indicated by the course materials. Whereas, 6.8% of the respondents were uncertain.

Generally, most respondents (71.6%) believed that course materials do not encourage speaking and consider speaking as a fundamental to the program. This may indicate a lack of emphasis on speaking skills in the course materials. Similarly, a study by Andi and Arafah (2017) revealed that integrating speaking practice into the course curriculum can enhance students' language proficiency and communication skills. In addition, a study by Andi and Arafah (2017) found that integrating speaking activities into the curriculum improved students' speaking ability and self-efficacy. Similarly, Bao (2013) stated that integrating speaking activities into the course curriculum improved students' oral proficiency and engagement in class. According to these studies, instructors should emphasize the value of speaking skills in the course curriculum and include speaking activities in the course materials.

5. Conclusion

Speaking ability is essential for students' academic and personal success. The results of this study reveal that several factors influence students' speaking competence, including factors related to the students themselves, the instructors, the classroom environment, and the course materials used in class. To help pupils become more confident public speakers, professors must deal with these challenges. Teachers can help students improve their speaking abilities by providing engaging and interactive language instruction and a positive learning environment in the classroom. It is important to consider the class size. A smaller class size gives students more opportunities for personalized instruction and practice, enabling teachers to spend more time with each student and create a more personalized learning experience. The course materials should be equipped with a variety of speaking exercises in that cover a range of speaking contexts and subjects. Students should also actively participate in developing their public speaking skills by engaging in practice sessions both inside and outside of the classroom. The academic institutions can assist students in developing their speaking abilities and bringing them in an opportunity to succeed in both their academic and professional lives by addressing these issues.

Future researchers might consider conducting a more extensive and in-depth investigation to identify specific factors within each category that influence speaking abilities most. Researchers might also consider investigating how technology and digital resources can help students in higher education settings develop their speaking abilities.

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Authors' Contributions

Author 1 (Lamessa Oli): conceptualized and designed the study, developed the methodology, formulated the research questions, collected the data, performed the data analysis and wrote the manuscript.

Author 2 (Ramesh Manickam): contributed to the literature review, data validation, provided critical insights, and assisted in the interpretation of results, edited and ensured the overall coherence and clarity of the paper.

Author 3 (K. Rajesh): contributed to edit and revise the paper

Author 4 (M. Ponnuthuramalingam): contributed to edit and revise the paper

Author 5 (B. R. Aravind): contributed to edit and revise the paper

We, authors, discussed the findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, and reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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