Factors Influencing Minority Ethnic High School Students' Speaking Performance

Nguyen Lan Phuong[1], Pham Thi Kieu Oanh[2]

[1,2]Faculty of foreign languages education, Thai Nguyen University of Education

ABSTRACT: It has been commonly recognized that many Vietnamese students encounter difficulties communicating and speaking English. This study aims to explore the factors influencing minority ethnic high-school students' performance in learning English speaking skills. The researchers conducted this research by surveying 76 minority ethnic high-school students at Phu Luong High School. Questionnaires were used as the primary data collection instrument in this study. The findings from the analyzed quantitative data revealed that the respondents' difficulties mainly came from internal and external factors. The internal factors were categorized into six main aspects: motivation, confidence, anxiety, topical knowledge, listening ability, and fluency in practicing speaking. Some other external factors that have less impact on the students' speaking performance include practicing time, lack of constructive feedback, lack of access to English language resources, etc. This study was expected to help students overcome their internal problems and suggest recommendations to minimize the undesirable effects of negative factors.

KEYWORDS: external factors, internal factors, speaking performance, minority ethnic, impact.

I. INTRODUCTION

By the Prime Minister's 2008 Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg, "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008 to 2020," the National Project 2020 was authorized in Vietnam to increase the proficiency of Vietnamese citizens in foreign languages.

Even though the government has strongly emphasized teaching English, students still struggle greatly to become proficient in spoken English. Clear communication is frequently hampered by pronunciation issues influenced by the local language's structure. This issue is made worse by little exposure to native speakers and self-practice, which results in inadequate confidence and fluency. Further anxiety and obstacles are brought on by the fear of making blunders in front of friends and teachers. Rote learning is given precedence over interactive language use in educational settings. Because of this, students frequently struggle to use language in authentic contexts, which is essential for efficient communication in academic, professional, and classroom settings. Speaking English is particularly crucial for high school pupils as they prepare for college or the workforce in the age of technological change.

Of the four fundamental language abilities required to learn a second or foreign language, speaking is said to be the most crucial. Speaking is seen as a significant ability since it is necessary for oral communication, according to Islam et al. (2022). Additionally, speaking is described as the process of generating and sharing meaning using verbal and nonverbal cues in various contexts (Kuning, 2019). Speaking is a crucial part of learning and teaching a second language, claim Brown & Yule (1983). Good speaking skill is demonstrated by creating words that listeners can understand. To investigate to which factors can affect high-school students to speak up in their speaking classes, the following research question has been addressed:

What factors affect minority ethnic students' performance?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking, one of the four fundamental abilities has become increasingly significant in language instruction. Speaking, however, is not as simple an activity as it may appear. It requires a great deal of work. The main categories of obstacles that learners face can be attributed to both internal and external factors: (1) a lack of exposure to the target language, (2) low motivation, (3) anxiety and insecurity, (4) a lack of language knowledge, and (5) ineffective teaching pedagogy.

Understanding the factors that influence speaking performance may help improve oral communicative skills in learners. According to Chomsky (1965), drawing from linguistically sound insights, some salient factors that make speaking performance include the following (*see Figure 1*).
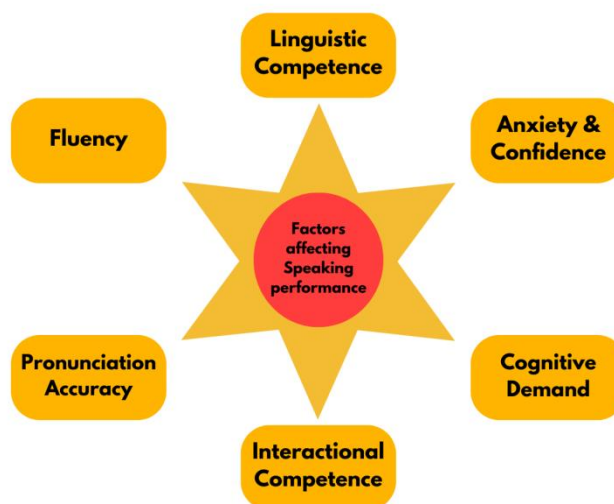
Factors Influencing Minority Ethnic High School Students' Speaking Performance

Figure 1. Factors affecting speaking performance

In term of Linguistic Competence, according to Chomsky (1965), a person's linguistic competence is the basis of his ability to create grammatically correct sentences. Speechace analyses language structure usage, providing feedback on grammatical accuracy and pronunciation.

With regard to Fluency, it does not mean speaking fast; it means speaking fluently and naturally. Lennon elaborates that fluency is the naturalness of the flow of speech, which is one of the effective ways of communication. Language exposure, practice, and cognitive processing are factors that determine fluency. Speechace measures fluency based on speech rate, pauses, and rhythm.

Regardless of Anxiety and Confidence, anxiety detracts from speaking performance. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), communication apprehension leads to hesitation and avoidance. Greater magnitudes of anxiety impede fluency and coherence, while confidence facilitates oral performance. Speechace offers a low-pressure environment to help reduce speaking anxiety over time.

With reference to Pronunciation Accuracy, clear pronunciation leads to comprehensible speech. Fraser posits that "comprehensible pronunciation forms the basis of effective communication among individuals, especially for second language learners" (2000, p. 167). Speechace's automatic speech recognition analyzes the learner's sound production, stress patterns, and intonation and gives feedback on where to improve pronunciation skills.

Regarding Cognitive Demand, the complexity of a speaking task also influences performance. Following Sweller's theory of cognitive load (1988), a task necessitating considerable amounts of brain-work could decrease performance when a speaker struggles with formulating and delivering his speech. Speechace tools reduce cognitive load by offering pre-structured practice, allowing learners to focus on aspects like fluency or vocabulary.

Pertinent to Interactional Competence, it refers to the effective management of conversation, including turn-taking, feedback, and topic management. Richards goes on to suggest that influential speakers also handle conversational settings well. In Speechace, the interactional competence is estimated based on how responsive and coherent the completion of the conversation-based task was.

In lieu of the motivation-exposure factor, generally, better speaking performance is possible with higher motivation and exposure to a target language. Dornyei (2005) considers motivation necessary in language learning, affecting how learners put effort into speaking practice. Speechace supports motivation, furthering engagement by providing interactive opportunities to practice speaking in an nonthreatening environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data collected from the questionnaire of 76 high school students will provide quantitative data for the study. The data will be compared and contrasted to see the main factors affecting the language teaching and learning process.

The questionnaire comprised 35 statements/items categorized under three domains such as Students' challenges of speaking English (20 items); external factors (9 items) and internal factors (6 items). The questionnaire items followed the five-point Likert scale construction ranging from 1 to 5, in which 5 indicated "*strongly agree*" and 1 was designated as "*strongly disagree*". The questionnaire was then translated into Vietnamese to maximize ease of administration. Participants' ratings were rated on the Likert scale, with five choices for each question. The categorization of levels of agreement is shown in the table below:

Factors Influencing Minority Ethnic High School Students' Speaking Performance

Table 1. Scoring range of the Likert-scale of the survey (Sözen, 2019)

Mean level	Value	Level of agreement
4.21 – 5.00	5	Strongly agree
3.41 – 4.20	4	Agree
2.61 – 3.40	3	Neutral/Nor agree
1.81 – 2.60	2	Disagree
1.00 – 1.80	1	Strongly disagree

IV. FINGDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' challenges of speaking English

Table 2 below depicts students' challenges of speaking English. As can be seen from the table, 57.9% of the students find difficulty in staying with ideas during speaking and consequently can suffer from hesitations and lack of smoothness in speech. Similarly, 66.9% report problems with producing fluent speech, which indicates fluency is still a significant problem. In addition, 67.4% struggle to express complicated ideas in English, which suggests proficiency in language prevents them from explaining things appropriately.

Table 2. Students' challenges of speaking English (%)

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Thought organization in English is not easy.	13.50	44.40	38.30	3.80	0
2. Fluent speech maintenance makes me trouble.	17.60	49.30	31.60	1.50	0
3. Expression of complex ideas in English is challenging.	14.40	53	30.30	2.30	0
4. Public English speaking makes me confused.	13.20	44.90	38.20	3.70	0
5. Idea retention in English speaking is difficult for me.	13.30	49.60	30.40	6.70	0
6. Quick thought structuring in speech makes me confused.	11.80	55.10	29.40	3.70	0
7. Word choice in English is rather difficult.	14.10	54.10	31.10	0.70	0
8. Conveying ideas with limited vocabulary is troublesome.	17.90	53.70	27.60	0.70	0
9. Translation reliance due to vocabulary gaps is my issue.	14.80	51.10	32.60	1.50	0
10. Use of diverse grammatical structures is rather challenging for me.	16.30	54.40	29.30	0	0
11. Grammar use in speech is difficult for me.	13.40	41.80	41.80	3	0
12. Hesitation from grammar uncertainty is my problem.	18	47.40	31.50	3.10	0
13. Aware of errors but unable to correct is my trouble.	12.70	45.50	35.80	5.20	0.70
14. My accent hinders understanding.	8.20	33.60	53	5.20	0
15. Mispronouncing similar words	10.50	34.60	46.60	5.30	3
16. Maintaining natural speech rhythm is difficult for me.	8.30	47.70	38.60	3.80	1.50
17. Linking words smoothly in speech is my issue.	13.40	44.80	37.30	3	1.50

18. Correct use of stress and intonation is difficult for me.	12	46.60	35.30	4.50	1.50
19. Uncorrected pronunciation mistakes is my weaknesses.	5.30	34.60	44.40	12.80	3
20. Lack of confidence due to native accent is my problem.	7.50	24.10	49.60	15.80	3

It is clearly seen from the table that 58.1% of people are uncomfortable giving presentations in English in front of others, indicating that public speaking anxiety is a significant issue. Additionally, 62.9% of people have trouble remembering what they say, which could affect coherence. Among communication difficulties, vocabulary restrictions rank highest because 66.2% of people use back-translation from their mother tongue, and 71.6% of people struggle to express their ideas because of a lack of vocabulary. Finding the right words is a typical problem, as 68.2% of people struggle to speak. The accuracy of communication is greatly impacted by grammatical errors. 55.2% of people find it difficult to utilize grammar, and 58.1% find it difficult to use a variety of grammatical structures.

Additionally, 65% struggle with reluctance because they are unsure of their language, which shows a lack of confidence while constructing phrases. Effective communication is also hampered by pronunciation. 45.1% find it difficult to distinguish words that sound alike, and 43.1% think their accent makes them difficult to comprehend. Additionally, 56.1% believe they have trouble using the proper intonation and stress.

Also, a lack of confidence exacerbates speaking problems. Due to their mother language accent, 31.6% are not confident when speaking English, and 49.4% are not aware of their pronunciation errors, making it challenging for them to rectify themselves. Studies show that students struggle with speaking English in various areas, from confidence and pronunciation to vocabulary and fluency. The data indicates that targeted assistance in structured practice, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation instruction is required to improve pupils' speaking abilities.

Factors enhancing English speaking performance

Table 3 below depicts external factors affecting students' English speaking performance in SpeechAce.

Table 3. External factors affecting students' English speaking performance in SpeechAce (%)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Time for preparation	14.9	41.8	40.3	3.0	0
2. Pressure to perform well	18.7	46.3	32.1	3.0	0
3. Listeners' support	18.7	44.8	33.6	3.0	0
4. Time allowed to perform a speaking activity	12.9	40.9	40.7	0.8	0.8
5. Access to English language learning resources	17.4	43.9	34.8	2.3	1.5
6. Constructive feedback from teachers	17.3	42.1	37.6	2.3	0.8
7. Using multimedia tools	19.5	39.8	36.8	2.3	1.5
8. Access to language learning apps or software	18.2	36.4	40.2	3.8	1.5
9. Having a supportive classroom environment	19.8	45	32.1	1.5	1.5

With 65.1% of participants (18.7% Strongly Agree, 46.3% Agree) stating they feel pressured to communicate in English, the desire to get a good grade is the most potent factor overall. Support from peers and teachers is another vital motivator; 63.5% of kids (18.7% Strongly Agree, 44.8% Agree) said this boosts their confidence when speaking. 53.8% of students (12.9% Strongly Agree, 40.9% Agree) emphasize that telling time is essential since it helps them perform better. The availability of English language learning resources was cited by 61.3% of students as a crucial component in fostering speaking abilities (17.4% Strongly Agree, 43.9% Agree).

With 59.4% of students believing that receiving feedback helps them improve (17.3% Strongly Agree, 42.1% Agree), good feedback from professors is also crucial. According to 59.3% of students, multimedia materials like films and interactive exercises might help them become more proficient speakers (19.5% strongly agree, 39.8% agree). Additionally, 54.6% of the students (18.2% Strongly Agree, 36.4% Agree) concurred that speaking performance is enhanced by using language learning apps or software.

Factors Influencing Minority Ethnic High School Students' Speaking Performance

Last but not least, 64.8% of the students (19.8% Strongly Agree, 45% Agree) believed that a positive classroom climate was essential because it created a comfortable learning setting where students could practice their English. In conclusion, pupils' performance when speaking English is greatly influenced by both internal and external influences. The most significant internal factors are motivation, confidence, speaking fear, subject-matter knowledge, listening skills, and practice frequency. Other factors affecting students' speaking ability include pressures, listener support, study time, study materials, feedback, multimedia materials, and classroom dynamics.

Table 4 below describes internal factors affecting students' English speaking performance in SpeechAce.

Table 4. Internal factors affecting students' English speaking performance in SpeechAce (%)

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Motivation to speak	21.1	37.6	36.1	4.5	0.8
2. Confidence	26.7	40.5	26	6.1	0.8
3. Anxiety	19.5	38.3	32.3	6.8	3
4. Topical knowledge	22.6	42.9	33.1	1.5	0
5. Listening ability	22.6	36.1	34.6	6.0	0.8
6. Frequency of practicing speaking English	19.2	30.8	43.8	6.2	0

It is clearly seen from Table 3, internal factors are essential for English-speaking performance. With 58.7% of the students (21.1% Strongly Agree, 37.6% Agree) supporting its significance, motivation is fundamental. Motivated pupils practice speaking more, which increases their fluency. Another crucial component is confidence; 67.2% of students (26.7% Strongly Agree, 40.5% Agree) support the idea that one's level of self-confidence directly affects one's ability to communicate in English. However, 57.8% of the students (19.5% Strongly Agree, 38.3% Agree) said they are anxious when speaking in English, indicating that anxiety harms speaking performance. This demonstrates the necessity of encouraging learning settings that aid in anxiety recovery.

Because 65.5% of the students (22.6% Strongly Agree, 42.9% Agree) stated that having prior knowledge of a topic increases their confidence while speaking, topical knowledge also affects speaking performance. Additionally, listening skills are essential because 58.7% of students (22.6% Strongly Agree, 36.1% Agree) report that having good listening skills helps their speaking fluency. Last but not least, 50% of students (19.2% Strongly Agree, 30.8% Agree) believe that regular speaking practice promotes progress, making consistency in verbal English practice essential. The oral performance of students is also greatly influenced by external influences.

In conclusion, internal and external factors significantly influence students' performance in speaking English. Confidence, motivation, anxiety, listening ability, frequency of practice, and subject knowledge are the primary internal parameters. At the same time, pressure, the support provided to learners, preparation time, teaching material, feedback, multimedia tools, and classroom environment also influence students' speaking ability. By addressing these elements through specialized strategies, like anxiety reduction, enhanced opportunities to speak, positive feedback, and incorporating technology, English communication skills can be improved among students, and fluency can be attained.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the factors influencing students' proficiency in speaking English. The factors discussed in this study are crucial for improving students' speaking abilities. These external and internal factors cause students to feel less confident and at ease in their speaking sessions. The results of this study showed that even though they have acceptable language abilities, students who have low self-esteem, high anxiety, and low motivation struggle incredibly with speaking. The study demonstrated that pupils who are more motivated and less anxious can communicate clearly and concisely. In order to overcome their challenges with oral presentation, students should be in a welcoming and collaborative setting.

Based on the study's findings, educators should choose the most effective teaching strategy to maintain students' interest in the speaking exercise, enhance their students' self-confidence, and comprehend their interests and sentiments. Teachers should commend pupils for speaking English. They should become friendly with their pupils, make them feel very joyful in class, and instill a strong sense of excitement and eagerness in them to learn English in general and speak it in particular. Teachers should encourage their students to participate in speaking activities and provide them with tasks that facilitate speaking in English. Teachers should also be aware of when and how to correct their students' errors so they don't fear making them.

Factors Influencing Minority Ethnic High School Students' Speaking Performance

REFERENCES

1) Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the Spoken Language*.
2) Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. MIT Press.
3) Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
4) Islam, W., Ahmad, S., & Islam, M. D. (2022). Investigating the Problems Faced by the University EFL Learners in Speaking English Language. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, *2*(2), 47–65. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.22223.
5) Fraser, H. (2000). The effectiveness of pronunciation instruction: A review of the literature. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(3), 579-607. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587658
6) Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.2307/327317.
7) Kuning, D. S. (2019). Technology in Teaching Speaking Skill. *Journal of English Education, Literature and Linguistics*, *2*(1), 50–59. https://doi.org/10.31540/jeell.v2i1.243.
8) Sözen, E., & Güven, U. (2019). The Effect of Online Assessments on Students' Attitudes Towards Undergraduate-Level Geography Courses. International Education Studies, 12(10), 1. https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n10p1.
9) Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science, 12*(2), 257-285. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1202_4.