

Extra-linguistic Factors Affecting Learner's English Speaking at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study investigates the primary speaking difficulties encountered by tertiary-level English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Bangladesh and explores the influence of extra-linguistic factors on their English-speaking abilities. The research involves 77 participants from six Bangladeshi universities who have completed at least one English-speaking course. Utilizing a Likert-scale questionnaire encompassing 13 closed-ended questions, the study employs a quantitative approach. The findings reveal that speaking challenges are prevalent among EFL learners, with major difficulties including lack of conceptual knowledge, fluency, vocabulary, confidence, and grammar. Additionally, cultural, psychological, educational, and social factors significantly influence speaking proficiency. The cultural influences encompass pronunciation, communication styles, and idiom comprehension—where psychological factors like confidence and fear of making mistakes play a vital role. Educational factors, including classroom environments and feedback mechanisms, play a vital role. Engagement with English media and real-life English interactions also affect speaking skills. The study suggests cultural sensitivity, psychological support, improved learning environments, feedback mechanisms, media engagement, and increased real-world contacts to boost speaking proficiency in EFL learners.

1. Introduction

In the field of language acquisition, the influences of extra-linguistic factors—which include cultural, psychological, educational, and social aspects—on learners' speaking ability are unquestionably significant and well-documented. Culturally, different communication norms, styles, and etiquette may present difficulties for learners, which may affect their speaking fluency (Gudykunst, 2003). Psychological factors, such as self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety, play a pivotal role in shaping learners' willingness to engage in spoken communication (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Educational factors, including teaching methodologies and exposure to authentic language contexts, directly influence learners' language speaking development (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Furthermore, social factors like peer interaction, societal expectations, and

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opportunities for real-world communication can either facilitate or hinder learners' speaking competencies (Firth & Wagner, 2007). These extra-linguistic aspects highlight the complexity of learning to speak English and the demand for a holistic approach in language education.

Extra-linguistic factors such as cultural, psychological, educational, and social factors can significantly affect the English-speaking abilities of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These factors can create obstacles to EFL learners' language acquisition and hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. One important extra-linguistic factor that affects EFL learners' English speaking abilities is their cultural background. According to Kim's (2017) study, EFL learners' cultural background can affect their English communication ability. For example, learners from cultures that value indirect communication may find it difficult to express themselves clearly in English, which typically values more direct communication.

Cultural factors significantly affect EFL learners' English speaking abilities. The learner's cultural background can impact their English speaking skills as their native language and culture may have different speech patterns, intonation, and grammar structures than English. One cultural factor that can affect EFL learners' English speaking abilities is the influence of their first language on their English pronunciation. For example, research by Anderson and Kuo (2010) found that Chinese EFL learners often struggle with English pronunciation due to the significant differences between Chinese and English phonology. These differences include differences in sound inventories, syllable structures, and tone. Also, communication style, another cultural factor, can affect EFL learners' English speaking abilities, which is evident in the research of Bennett (2013). He found that learners from cultures that value indirect communication may struggle with English speaking as English often emphasizes direct communication. These learners may struggle to express their ideas and opinions clearly in English.

Similarly, learners' psychological factors such as anxiety and self-confidence, which are significant extra-linguistic factors, affect EFL learners' English speaking skills. As noted in a study by Cheng and Wang (2018), learners who experience anxiety may be more likely to struggle with speaking English, as their worries may prevent them from expressing themselves confidently.

Educational factors, such as the quality of instruction, can also play a significant role in EFL learners' English speaking competence. According to a study by Lin and Zhang (2017), learners who receive high-quality instruction and access adequate language learning resources are more likely to develop their speaking capabilities quickly and effectively. Curriculum design plays a crucial role in shaping language learning outcomes. A well-designed curriculum emphasizes speaking tasks, encouraging learners to apply their language skills in real-life scenarios (Nunan, 2004). Integrating speaking activities into the

curriculum provides learners with opportunities to practice and enhance their oral communication skills. Assessment practices contribute to shaping instructional priorities and providing feedback to learners. Hughes (2003) emphasizes the importance of incorporating speaking tasks into assessments, as they not only evaluate proficiency but also drive learners to practice and improve their speaking skills. Constructive feedback on pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy is crucial for continuous improvement.

Moreover, EFL learners may have difficulty speaking English because of factors associated with their social backgrounds. Studies have shown that social interactions and communication with native speakers or other English language learners may help or hinder EFL learners' English speaking skills development. In this context, studies found that social factors, such as peer feedback, significantly influence EFL learners' English speaking skills. Research conducted by Lee and Yoon (2018) examined the effects of peer feedback on the oral presentation skills of Korean EFL learners. The results indicated that peer feedback positively impacted learners' speaking proficiency, as learners could identify their weaknesses and receive constructive feedback on how to improve their performance. In addition, access to authentic English-speaking environments can also improve EFL learners' proficiency level. Research by Yang and Zhang (2020) found that learners who had more opportunities to practice speaking English with native speakers improved their speaking abilities more than those who only practiced with other learners or in controlled classroom environments.

This research intends to shed light on a crucial topic in order to enhance the English-speaking abilities of tertiary-level learners in Bangladesh, where many universities use English as the language of instruction. We set out an investigation to understand the profound impact of extra-linguistic elements on English proficiency at the tertiary level as more students struggle with speaking abilities. This research is done to bridge the gap related to extra-linguistic factors that impede the improvement of the English-speaking abilities of the tertiary level learners in Bangladesh. The present study investigates the following research question:

1. How do extra-linguistic factors impact English speaking among tertiary-level learners in Bangladesh?

2. Literature Review

In the context of Bangladeshi EFL learners' English speaking abilities, various cultural, psychological, educational, and social factors impact proficiency. Bengali phoneme structure poses challenges, hindering some English sounds utterance. The indirect communication style in Bangladeshi culture may impede expression in academic settings. Anxiety negatively affects confidence. Quality of English instruction, effective teaching strategies, and a supportive classroom environment

influence speaking proficiency. Limited opportunities for practice and constructive feedback also play vital roles. Socially, peer interaction, real-life English exposure, and engagement with English media contribute to speaking development.

2.1 Cultural Factors

According to literature, one cultural factor affecting Bangladeshi EFL learners' English speaking abilities is the phoneme of their mother tongue, which influences their pronunciation significantly. Bengali, the official mother tongue of Bangladesh, has a different set of phonemes than English. As a result, they find correct English pronunciation difficult. For example, a research by [Chowdhury and Kabir \(2015\)](#) found that Bangladeshi EFL learners often struggled with the English "th" sound and the difference between the "v" and "w" sounds.

Another cultural factor that can affect Bangladeshi EFL learners' English speaking skills is their communication style. Bangladeshi culture values indirect communication and avoiding confrontation ([Naghavi & Mubarak, 2018](#)), which may lead to difficulties in expressing opinions and ideas directly in English.

2.2 Psychological Factors

Psychological factors like anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, and confidence can play a vital role in EFL learners' English speaking abilities. Research by [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#) found that anxiety negatively impacts EFL learners' confidence, motivation, and ability to focus on the task at hand. Also, high levels of anxiety lead to avoidance and reluctance to participate in speaking activities in EFL classrooms. Moreover, Bangladeshi culture places a high value on academic success which can increase psychological stress during their performance in English speaking activities. [Akhtar and Haque \(2014\)](#) showed that Bangladeshi EFL learners, while speaking English in front of their peers and teachers, often experience anxiety.

In addition to psychological factors, self-efficacy can affect English speaking ability of EFL learners as well. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a particular task. [Alam \(2016\)](#) and [Bandura \(1977\)](#) found that learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in language learning activities and have higher levels of achievement. In EFL speaking, learners with high self-efficacy may be more confident in their abilities and more likely to participate in speaking activities, leading to improved performance.

2.3 Educational Factors

This part looks at how different ways of teaching English in colleges in Bangladesh affect how well students can speak English. [Ahmed \(2018\)](#) talks about good teaching methods, and [Rani \(2020\)](#) says having a helpful classroom is

important. Even though some students say they don't get enough chances to practice speaking (Akhtar & Haque, 2015), the essay says that getting feedback on how you speak is very important to get better at English.

In the context of Bangladesh, the quality of English language instruction at the tertiary level varies across institutions. In Bangladesh, different institutions offer different levels of tertiary English language teaching. According to Ahmed (2018), effective teaching strategies and the experience of the teachers have a big impact on students' ability to talk. When instructors use communicative and student-centered teaching strategies learners benefit. The classroom environment plays a pivotal role in shaping speaking skills. Rani (2020) underscores the importance of creating a supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere. Learners tend to perform better when they get the classroom as a safe space for practicing spoken English.

Opportunities for speaking practice within the classroom are predominant for skill enhancement. Unfortunately, many Bangladeshi EFL learners report limited chances for oral communication during their coursework (Akhtar & Haque, 2015). The scarcity of opportunities hampers fluency development and inhibits learners from gaining confidence in spoken English. Receiving timely and constructive feedback from instructors is a crucial element in enhancing speaking skills. Akhtar and Haque (2015) emphasize the importance of effective feedback, pointing out that learners who consistently receive guidance on aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, and fluency are more likely to make significant progress in their spoken English abilities.

2.4 Social Factors

Peer interaction is a vital social factor that influences speaking development. Lee and Yoon (2018) stress the importance of peer feedback and collaborative activities in enhancing speaking skills. Learners often learn from their peers, identify their weaknesses, and receive feedbacks. How much learners use English beyond the classroom is a crucial factor in enhancing their speaking skills. Studies by Akhtar and Haque (2014) and Afroz and Hossain (2017) indicate that limited opportunities for real-life English conversation outside educational settings can hinder learners' progress. Exposure to English-language media, such as movies, TV shows, news, and music, is another important social factor. Research by Yang and Zhang (2020) suggests that learners who have more exposure to English media tend to show greater improvement in their speaking abilities compared to those with limited exposure. Bangladeshi EFL learners often turn to English-language media to improve their English speaking skills. A majority of participants in Rani's (2020) study agreed that exposure to English media helps them speak better in English.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This survey uses a quantitative approach to explore the extra-linguistic factors influencing English speaking among learners at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

3.2 Participants

Employing a convenience sampling method, the researchers selected 77 participants (both male and female) from six universities in Bangladesh. All participants have successfully completed at least one speaking course in the following universities' undergraduate programs: The International University of Business, Agriculture, and Technology (IUBAT), the Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology (BAUST), Jagannath University, and the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) are among the universities in the region. When data were collected, every participant had already finished more than two semesters. It was judged a very simple assignment for them to share their thoughts on the impact of the additional linguistic aspects on their English-speaking skills because they were accustomed to speaking in classroom settings and were aware of the factors that affected their English speaking.

3.3 Instruments

This research study is quantitative in nature. To investigate the main effects that additional linguistic elements have on the ability to speak English a five-point Likert scale was employed, with the options "Not at all" to "Extremely," and "always" to "never." The answers are scored as follows: always/never=1, usually/slightly=2, frequently/moderately=3, occasionally/very much=4, never/extremely=5. In order to examine the data, it comprises 13 closed-ended questions. Based on [Rani's \(2020\)](#) survey instrument, which examines the effects of extra-linguistic factors, this survey tool was designed. This survey had only close-ended items in 6 sections:

Section A: Personal Information

Section B: Speaking Difficulties

Section C: Cultural Factors

Section D: Psychological Factors

Section E: Educational Factors

Section F: Social Factors

3.4 Research Procedures

An online close-ended questionnaire was first given to each participant in order to achieve the study's objectives. With this method, we were able to create a group of students (participants) who had already finished more than two semesters and at least one English-speaking course in their graduate program. To complete the submission, the 13 items in the questionnaire had to be filled in.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Following the collection of the completed questionnaires, data entry was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Following that, the data were statistically evaluated using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The outcome was calculated as percentages, a mean, and a standard deviation using the frequency data. The results are displayed using tables and charts. Descriptive analysis was the main method used in this approach.

3.6 Ethical Issues

Since their identities are never mentioned in the publication, each student's privacy was maintained in this study. Participants received guarantees that their privacy would be scrupulously upheld. They gave their approval before the process began.

4. Findings

In this step, the data are analyzed with the research questions in mind. The first and second items seek to address the common speaking problems. In addition, items 3 to 13 will shed light on the consequences of the extra linguistic factors in English speaking.

Table 1: Speaking Difficulties

1. How often do you face difficulties when speaking in English?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
	77	3.4286	0.81803

The mean score for the first item, which asked participants to rate how often they faced difficulties when speaking in English, was found to be 3.42, with a standard deviation of 0.818. This indicates that, on average, the respondents reported facing speaking difficulties sometimes.

The findings from the data analysis suggest that the most significant difficulty reported by tertiary level EFL learners in Bangladesh is "Lack of Knowledge," with 58.4% of participants selecting this option. This indicates that a considerable number of respondents feel challenged in understanding in English.

2. What are the major difficulties you face when speaking in English? (you can select more than one)

77 responses

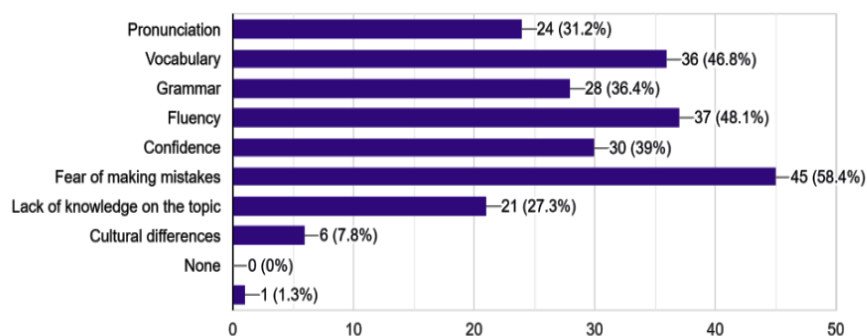


Figure 1: Major Difficulties

Following closely, "Fluency" and "Vocabulary" were identified as major difficulties by 48.1% and 46.8% of the participants, respectively. These results highlight the importance of fluency and vocabulary development in English language learning

Additionally, the respondents reported that "Confidence" and "Grammar" were significant problems with 39% and 36.4% of participants, respectively.

Table 2: Cultural Factors

Items	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Mean	SD
3. How often does your native language affect your pronunciation and intonation while speaking English?	5.2	13.0	48.1	24.7	9.1	3.194	0.960
4. How often does your culture affect the way you communicate in English?	6.5	14.3	42.9	26.0	10.4	3.194	1.026
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My culture affects my understanding of English idioms and expressions."	2.6	7.8	41.6	33.8	14.3	3.494	0.926

72.8% of the participants reported that their native language sometimes, often, or always affects their pronunciation and intonation while speaking English. This suggests that learners' first language may influence their English speech patterns to a considerable extent.

A significant majority of respondents (78.7%) acknowledged that their culture sometimes, often, or always affects the way they communicate in English. This highlights the influence of cultural norms and communication styles on English language interactions.

Notably, 48.1% of participants felt that their culture sometimes, often, or always affects their understanding of English idioms and expressions. This emphasizes that cultural backgrounds can impact learners' comprehension of figurative language and context-specific phrases.

Table 3: Psychological Factors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
6. How confident are you in your ability to speak English fluently?	77	1.00	4.00	2.3896	0.93409
7. To what extent do you believe that your fear of making mistakes affects your English speaking skills?	77	1.00	5.00	3.6104	0.96185

The mean score for the item "How confident are you in your ability to speak English fluently?" was found to be 2.3896, with a standard deviation of 0.934. The mean score indicates that, on average, the participants had moderate confidence in their ability to speak English fluently. The mean score for the item "To what extent do you believe that your fear of making mistakes affects your English speaking skills?" was 3.6104, with a standard deviation of 0.962. The mean score suggests that, on average, the participants perceived fear of making mistakes as it has a considerable impact on their English speaking skills.

Table 4: Educational Factors

	Not at all/Never (%)	Slightly/Rarely (%)	Moderately/Sometimes (%)	Very much/Often (%)	Extremely/Always (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
8. To what extent do you believe that the classroom environment affects your English speaking skills?	10.4	15.6	19.5	40.3	14.3	3.32	1.20
9. How often do you get opportunities to practice English	3.9	18.2	39.0	23.4	15.6	3.28	1.06

speaking in class?

10. How often do you receive feedback from your English language instructors on your speaking skills?	9.1	11.7	36.4	16.9	26.0	3.39	1.24
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The data analysis suggests that the majority of participants believed that the classroom environment has a significant impact on their English-speaking skills. A substantial portion (40.3%) expressed that the classroom environment affects their speaking skills "Very Much," emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive learning environment. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of participants (38.4%) reported having limited opportunities to practice English speaking in class, with 39.0% responding "Sometimes." The data analysis also indicates that while some participants (42.8%) receive feedback on their speaking skills sometimes or often, a significant proportion (20.8%) reported that they rarely or never receive feedback.

Table 5: Social Factors

Items	Never (%)	Rarely(%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Mean	SD
11. How often do you use English outside the classroom?	24.7	15.6	50.6	9.1	00	2.442	0.966
12. How often are you exposed to English media (Movies, TV shows, News, Music and so on)?	6.5	3.9	39.0	22.1	28.6	3.623	1.136
13. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My exposure to English media helps me speak better in English"	3.9	3.9	23.4	31.2	37.7	3.948	1.062

The data analysis suggests that a majority of participants (75.3%) reported using English outside the classroom sometimes or less frequently. This indicates that opportunities for real-life English language interactions may be limited for many learners. The findings reveal that while some learners (50.7%) reported frequent exposure to English media, a significant number (10.4%) reported limited exposure or none at all. The data analysis indicates that a significant majority of participants (69.9%) agreed to some extent that exposure to English media helps them speak better in English, with 37.7% strongly agreeing.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The present study aimed to investigate the main speaking difficulties faced by tertiary level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Bangladesh and explore the extra-linguistic factors affecting their English-speaking skills. The findings reveal several key insights that shed light on the challenges and influences on English speaking proficiency among these learners.

5.1 Extra-Linguistic Factors: Cultural Factors

The research question explored the influence of extra-linguistic factors on English speaking proficiency among EFL learners in Bangladesh. Cultural factors emerged as a noteworthy aspect of this analysis.

Regarding the impact of the native language, culture and intonation, a significant 72.8% of participants reported that their native language sometimes, often, or always affects their English speech patterns. This suggests that the influence of learners' first language on their English pronunciation and intonation is considerable.

Furthermore, a substantial 78.7% of respondents acknowledged that their culture sometimes, often, or always affects the way they communicate in English.

5.2 Extra-Linguistic Factors: Psychological Factors

Psychological factors, including learners' confidence and fear of making mistakes, were also examined. With a mean score of 2.3896, the participants generally expressed modest confidence in their ability to speak English well. However, with a mean score of 3.6104, they believed that their fear of making mistakes had a significant impact on their English speaking abilities. This demonstrates the necessity of programs that increase learners' self-assurance and deal with their fear of making mistakes in order to improve their speaking skill.

5.3 Extra-Linguistic Factors: Educational Factors

Educational factors were another crucial aspect of the analysis. The majority of participants believed that the classroom environment significantly affects their English-speaking skills, with 40.3% indicating that it affects them "Very Much." However, a sizable portion (38.4%) claimed to have little opportunities to practice speaking English in class, and others (20.8%) claimed to receive little to no feedback on their speaking abilities. These results highlight how crucial it is to foster a positive learning environment and expand opportunities for speaking practice and feedback.

5.4 Extra-Linguistic Factors: Social Factors

Social factors, such as using English outside the classroom and exposure to English media, were also explored. The data indicated that many participants

reported using English outside the classroom sometimes or less frequently (75.3%), suggesting limited opportunities for real-life English language interactions. Additionally, a majority of participants (69.9%) agreed to some extent that exposure to English media helps them speak better in English, with 37.7% strongly agreeing. This highlights the positive impact of English media consumption on EFL learners' speaking skills.

6. Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to take into account its limitations. Firstly, the study's sample was selected from a particular area and institutions in Bangladesh, which restricts the results' applicability to a larger group of EFL students. Furthermore, the use of surveys that rely on self-reported data could induce response bias. The size of the participants is comparatively a smaller one but a bigger and more varied sample size could strengthen the validity of the results. The study also did not evaluate the participants' outside factors like socioeconomic backgrounds which may have limited the scope of the analysis.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has surveyed the primary speaking difficulties faced by tertiary level EFL learners in Bangladesh and has examined the extra-linguistic factors influencing their English speaking proficiency. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of these challenges and their implications for language education in this context.

The main speaking issues, such as “Lack of Knowledge,” “Fluency,” “Vocabulary,” “Confidence,” and “Grammar,” highlight the necessity of special teaching treatments. To improve how learners speak English, teachers can focus on these challenges. For example, they can teach more about language rules and structures for those who lack knowledge, practice speaking smoothly for better fluency, work on using a wider range of words for vocabulary issues, boost confidence by creating a positive and supportive learning environment, and teach the correct use of words and sentences for grammar improvement. Recognizing and dealing with each of these challenges is important to help learners become better at speaking English overall.

The study also highlighted the significance of extra-linguistic factors. Cultural influences were found to play an important role, affecting pronunciation, communication styles, and comprehension of idioms and expressions. Psychological factors, particularly learners' confidence and fear of making mistakes, were identified as important determinants of speaking proficiency. Educational factors, such as classroom environments, practice opportunities, and feedback mechanisms, played a pivotal role in learners' language development. Speaking abilities were affected differently by social factors, such as exposure to English outside of the classroom and involvement with English-language media.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to the research presented in the paper titled “Extra-linguistic Factors Affecting Learner’s English Speaking at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh”. There are no financial, personal, or professional affiliations that could potentially influence the objectivity or integrity of the research findings.

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