Learners' Perspectives and Experiences on the Factors Influencing Speaking: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This article reviews recent publications (n=23) on learners' perspectives and experiences on the factors influencing speaking. We downloaded articles using keywords such as "improving speaking skills," "learners' experiences on improving speaking," "factors influencing speaking," and "learners' perception of the factors influencing speaking" from different databases like Google Scholar and ERIC. Employing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework, we extracted findings from articles on learners' perceptions and experiences on factors influencing speaking and methodological trends applied in the selected studies. First, we categorized factors affecting speaking performance into sociocultural, pedagogical, linguistic, and psychological as per the perspectives and experiences of the learners. Then, we conducted the methodological review. The review result showed that the selected articles employed qualitative approaches, questionnaires, and interviews for data collection and thematic analysis to interpret the data. The review indicated that few studies are conducted in the Nepali context focusing on the learners' perspectives and experiences on the factors influencing speaking. The underrepresentation of these issues needs to be addressed to enable learners and instructors to develop effective strategies for enhancing speaking skills.

Keywords: *Speaking skills, Nepal, systematic review, factors affecting learners' speaking skill*

Introduction

This review presents the perceptions and experiences of English language learners on the challenges and factors that influence their speaking. Speaking is the fundamental skill a child learns, which plays a pivotal role in communicating and surviving in society. According to Al-Roud (2016), to foster successful communication between people in this contemporary time, among the four skills of language, speaking is claimed to be important (Limeranto & Bram, 2022). In the same way, Riadil (2020), putting forward a practical stand, argues that the English language is also exercised for social and higher education and in the workplace,

apart from day-to-day conversation (Limeranto & Bram, 2022). People in any field, from daily life to the professional or education sector, can realize the importance of speaking and its impact on using it properly. Following that, in 1983, Yuke and Brown considered that students would be judged based on their speaking skills (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021). According to a recent national study of the Basic Communication Course, Kelsen (2019) and Burns (2019) contended that for general education, the frequently needed communication skills course is public speaking (Hadi, Izzah, & Masae, 2020). Thomas (2019) defines fluency as "how well learners communicate meaning rather than how many mistakes they make in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary" (Hadi, Izzah, & Masae, 2020).

Many factors hinder mastering speaking skills, as found in research conducted in different areas. Riadil (2020) presents through research that Indonesian EFL learners cannot speak English fluently even though they have been learning it for several years in formal school (Limeranto & Bram, 2022). Likewise, in a study conducted in Gaza, Al Nakhalah (2016) found that a few issues like fear of committing mistakes, anxiety, shyness, and insufficient self-confidence that EFL undergraduate students encountered in speaking (Limeranto & Bram, 2022). Urrutia and Vega (2010) studied a similar issue with 40 students from a public school studying in 10th grade, 20 boys and 20 girls. Being afraid of getting humiliated and criticized, these students were not involved in the speaking activities, though they did well in listening and writing exercises (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021).

Knowing the perspectives and experiences of the learners concerning the challenges they face while speaking, learning, and mastering to gain confidence and fluency is very important. Though there are studies on how teachers develop and grow professionally (Neupane, 2023, 2024; Neupane & Bhatt, 2023; Neupane et al., 2022), studies on language learners' development, particularly speaking is scarce. Unless the learners and facilitators know the cause, the strategies to resolve for betterment cannot be found and worked on. Review results indicated that much research was conducted in different countries, but the same was not the case in Nepal. We found three research studies, one on perception and the other on experience regarding speaking skills. This showed the need to work on research concerning the perception and experience of difficulties in speaking skills in Nepal. The research would eventually support the learners as well as educators in being aware of the factors that influence speaking through the perspectives and experiences of the learners of different countries. Following this would help them make proper strategies according to the causes to improve the learning, which gives a sound output. In this review, answers to the following questions will be tried to be found:

- What are the learners' perspectives concerning the challenges influencing their speaking skills?
- What are the learners' experiences concerning the challenges influencing their speaking skills?

Method

In this review, we used the systematic review aligned with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) approach 2020. PRISMA 2020 offers revised reporting guidelines for systematic reviews that consider improvements in finding, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing studies (Page, 2021). It includes an enlarged checklist with reporting guidelines for every item, a 27-item checklist, the PRISMA 2020 abstract checklist, and updated flow diagrams for the original and updated reviews (Page, 2021). The tool is designed to be utilized in systematic reviews that either incorporate syntheses, such as paired meta-analysis or other statistical synthesis techniques or do not incorporate synthesis, as when just one suitable paper is found (Page, 2021). This can be used

to update, original, or continuously update (often known as "living") systematic reviews (Page, 2021).

For this review, we considered only the research article published in English concerning the perception and experience of learners regarding speaking difficulties. The research conducted solely focused on the teachers' perceptions and experiences in the same context were excluded. However, we considered learners' and teachers' combined perceptions and experiences in a few articles. While searching for the relevant articles, we used keywords like learners' perception of speaking skills, learners' experiences about speaking skills, and factors affecting learners' speaking skills on Google Scholar. we went through journals and articles published in NELTA and IJELTA. The screening, inclusion, and exclusion process and the total number of articles that were considered for the theme synthesis are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow chart
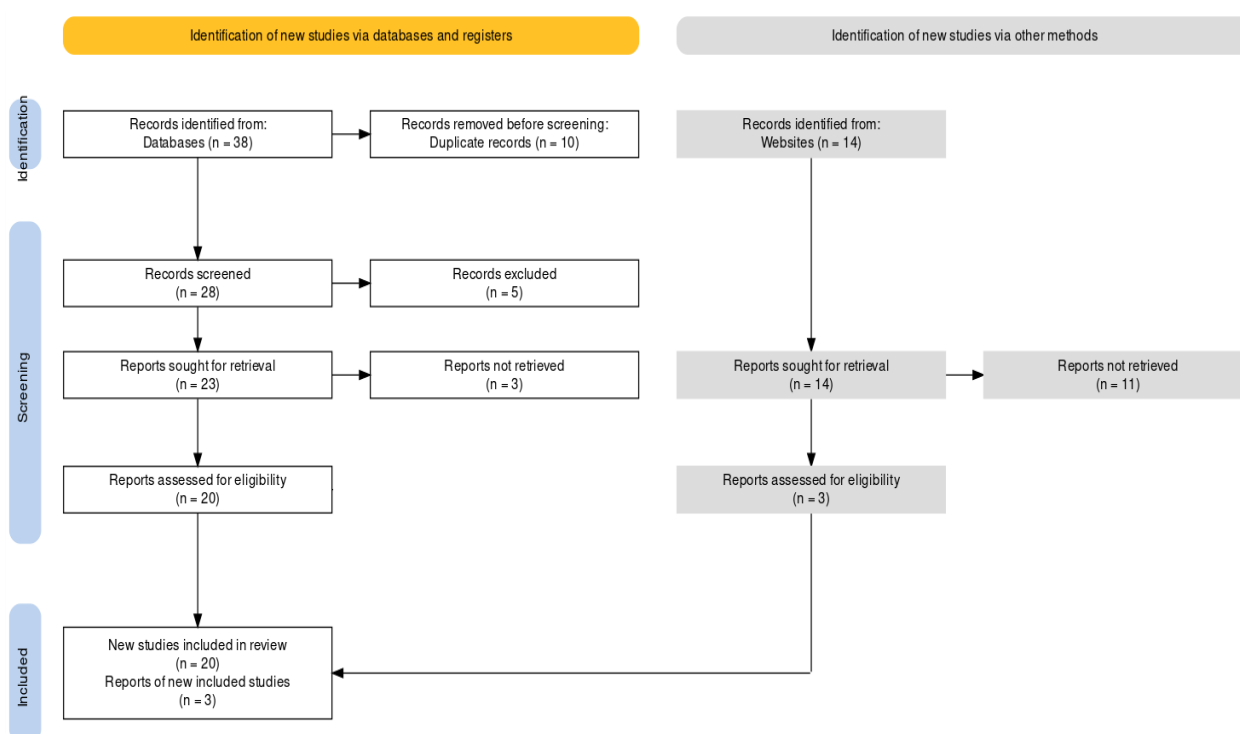
Initially, we downloaded 52 articles; 38 were from Google Scholar, and 14 were from NELTA & IJELTA. Upon checking later, we removed ten articles as they were duplicates, and similarly, in the next step, screening of the title and abstract, we excluded five more as they were way back in time for this study. After that, for the screening of the full text, 37 articles were taken into consideration. During this, 14 articles were excluded, three from the database downloaded and 11 from the website downloaded, as they were irrelevant and focused only on the teacher's perception. Finally, as Figure 1 clearly shows, by the end of the inclusion and exclusion process, 23 articles were taken for the thematic synthesis.

Similarly, in Table 1 (see Appendix), it can be seen that 23 articles have been considered for this systematic review. These 23 articles are from different contexts as you can see Britain (n = 1), Iraq (n = 1), Bangladesh (n = 1), Indonesia (n = 5), Iran (n = 1), Malaysia (n = 2), Nepal (n = 3), Philippines (n = 1), Saudi Arabia (n = 2), Taiwan (n = 1), Thailand (n =

2), Turkey (n = 2), and United Kingdom (n = 1). This systematic review includes research articles from 2007 to 2023 concentrating on the perception and experience of English learners regarding the factors influencing speaking skills. For the analysis process, we extracted thematic concentration, categories and influencing factors, findings, and remarks in a table after thoroughly reading the articles. We compared, contrasted, and synthesized the findings of both research questions as follows.

Learners Perceptions of Factors Influencing Speaking

Among the 23 articles, nine are on learners' perceptions about the factors that influence one's ability to speak. In research conducted in Iraq (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021), university learners perceive that speaking skills are affected majorly by three categories of facto: methodology, linguistics, and psychology. Methods of teaching that include listening, oral practice, games, and group work activities support the learning. Similarly, background knowledge and rich vocabulary positively affect speaking performance. Though a lack of grammatical knowledge doesn't negatively affect, corrective feedback hurts speaking performance. As per Indonesian English as Foreign Language (EFL) graduate students' perspectives, similar to the above-mentioned research, a lack of advanced vocabulary affects speaking, and adds up that a lack of pronunciation affects speaking (Limeranto & Bram, 2022).

EFL undergraduate learners in Turkey (Basöz & Erten, 2019) have the same belief that speaking is influenced by instructional methods, teachers, materials, and practice (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021), pronunciation (Limeranto & Bram, 2022), and vocabulary knowledge (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021 and Limeranto & Bram, 2022). Classmates, the environment in the classroom, the number of students, motivation, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, fear of mockery, topic interest, familiarity with the issue, shyness, introversion, self-perceived communication ability, and prior communication experience are also the factors affecting English communication included in the same study. Likewise, findings similar to the above research can be received that the oral proficiency of pupils is mainly affected by factors like motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and teaching strategies along with a different factor, curriculum, from the research mentioned above (Pangket, 2019). A study in Nepal agrees that curriculum, practice, activities, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation affect learners' acquisition of speaking abilities, as reported by community school students (Kandel, 2022).

Malaysian students are fearful of making mistakes, are too shy to speak or are not accustomed to speaking in English, and lack motivation and preparation (Basöz & Erten, 2019) and correcting students' mistakes (Jezhny & Bapir, 2021) affects their speaking performance (Shalihah, Supramaniam, & Kholidi, 2022). A review article written in Malaysia shows even with adequate language abilities, students who have low self-esteem, high anxiety, and low motivation have significant trouble speaking (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Another study in Iran on EFL learners' perceptions adds further that willingness to speak English is influenced by task type, the interviewee's age, sex, familiarity, grade, speech correctness, the topic of discussion, personal characteristics, perceived speaking anxiety, teacher's role, some teachers are dictators, and classroom atmosphere (Riasati, 2012). Similar to some of the above studies, university students in Bangladesh believe that anxiety, poor English background, inadequate self-assurance, insufficient drive, anxiety, little practice, inadequate vocabulary, and poor pronunciation are some hurdles in speaking English (Suchona & Shorna, 2019).

Learners' Experiences of Factors Influencing Speaking

The experiences of English language learners concerning the factors influencing speaking abilities are discussed in the remaining 14 articles. According to EFL university students in Saudi Arabia, learning to speak English requires a variety of factors, including psychological ones like drive, self-doubt, anxiety about learning a second language, shyness, and introversion; pedagogical ones like instructor feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge, and interest; and linguistic ones like vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, and accurate pronunciation (Elsayed, 2022). In addition to psychological elements such as pupils' lack of motivation, confidence, shyness, and anxiety over making mistakes, the high school students provide reasons for lack of vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation to be the use of their mother tongue in linguistic factors (Jahbel, 2017).

In her narrative inquiry, Azizi (2022) from Indonesia shares her experience that strategies like reading on social media, focusing on vocabulary development, watching YouTube, singing, and using Discord App helped improve her English speaking skills (Azizi, 2022). In the same way, Thai and Vietnamese EFL) students concur that the most important element influencing strategy selection is motivation, followed by experience learning English and gender, in that order (Khamkhien, 2010). Another narrative inquiry of Chinese pre-sessional students getting ready to enroll in a British institution sheds light on how prior experiences and desired outcomes influence the growth of communication in a second language (Wilson, 2023). Similar to the study of Elsayed (2022) and Khamkhien (2010), EFL learners in the United Kingdom describe the factors causing anxiety as cognitive and linguistic factors – rigid and formal classroom settings, classroom presentation, anxiety about making mistakes and others' opinions of you, the role of the language teacher, differences in how people view themselves, linguistic challenges, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and sociocultural factors Social milieu and restricted exposure to the language of interest, cultural distinctions, social standing and self-concept, and gender (Tanveer, 2007).

Likewise, linguistic factors include pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar; affective factors - anxiety, low self-confidence, and motivation, and performance conditions - teachers correct mistakes and plenty of time not given to speaking English have been experienced by 10th-grade students of Indonesia which bring difficulties in speaking performance (Afebri, Aderlaepe, & Muhsin, 2019). One more study on variables influencing Thai students' speaking anxiety concludes that a lack of vocabulary is the root cause of their inability to produce spoken utterances (Hadi, Izzah, & Masae, 2020). Similar factors were experienced by university students of Turkey that impacted the learners' motivation, which they divided into classroom effects – should be light, clean, and materials intact; parental factors – should motivate learners, and the attitude of the teacher-learners show low motivation when teachers couldn't use the technological materials during teaching (Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016).

Saudi EFL learners categorize the speaking performance influencing factors into external and internal factors - shyness, peer pressure, and anxiety, and sociocultural factors – fear of disappointing the teacher, lack of exposure to the target language outside of the classroom, ignorance of the cultural nuances, and fear of making a mistake or receiving negative feedback (Alrasheedi, 2020). Speaking in English frequently and being motivated to speak English turned out to be the best choices for Taiwanese students (Huang, 2010). Discussing the speaking problems in English, Thai students confirmed that the main causes were found to be a low degree of difficulty in terms of management in the teaching and learning of English, exposure to the language, personality, motivation, and attitude characteristics, and there was no discernible difference in the learning of males and girls (Jindathai, 2015).

In the context of Nepal, two articles were found in which learners' experiences with challenges in speaking skills have been discussed. Gambhir Bahadur Chand concludes that problems of speaking were personal, social, linguistic, environmental, and teacher-related issues were the root causes of speaking difficulties, along with mother language, inadequate course material, and classroom culture as shared by the Bachelor-level students (Chand, 2021). Similarly, in a case study, Surendra Prasad Ghimire talks about secondary students learning through social media in which the learners agree that Facebook and YouTube aided in improvement by fostering a cooperative learning atmosphere. They can improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities and develop their confidence in English speaking (Ghimire, 2022).

Conclusion

After a thorough exploration of the 23 articles, the factors affecting speaking skills according to the learners' perceptions and experiences shared in these research could be classified into four categories: psychological, pedagogical, linguistic, and sociocultural factors.

Figure 2

Speaking influencing factors as per learners' perceptions and experiences
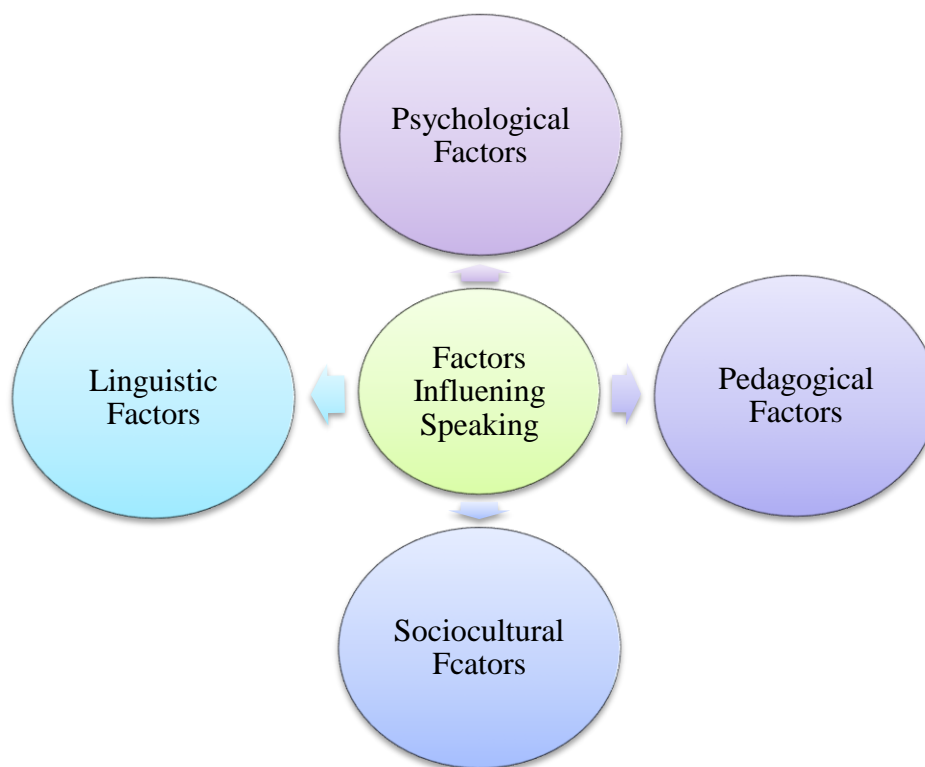
The psychological factors majorly include anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes. Similarly, in terms of pedagogical factors, classroom atmosphere, lack of practice, instructors' feedback, curriculum, teaching strategies, and student behaviour are the influencing factors. When it comes to linguistic factors, grammar knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation impact oral performance. Sociocultural factors that affect learners' speech include mother tongue influence, prior understanding of the target language, and lack of exposure to the language.

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Appendix

Learners Perceptions and Experiences on Factors Influencing Speaking Research across Contexts

SN	Author(s) & Year	Thematic Concentration	Context
1	Muhammad Tanveer (2007)	Examining the elements that contribute to language anxiety in ESL/EFL learners during the speaking process and the impact it has on target language communication	UK
2	Attapol Khamkhien (2010)	Several factors influence Thai and Vietnamese EFL learners' reported usage of language learning strategies.	Thailand
3	Chiu-Ping Huang (2010)	Investigating factors that influence the use of oral communication techniques	Taiwan
4	Mohammad Javad Riasati (2012)	A qualitative study of the factors that EFL learners perceive as influencing their willingness to speak English in language classrooms	Iran
5	Supatsorn Jindathai (2015)	Factors associated with English speaking difficulties among Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology Engineering students	Thailand
6	Seda Ekiz and Zahitjan Kulmetov (2016)	The English language education factors impacting learners' motivation	Turkey
7	Khalil Jahbel (2017)	Factors influencing the speaking abilities of students at Malang High Schools	Indonesia
8	Lai-Mei Leong & Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi (2017)	Examination of the elements affecting students' ability to speak English	Malaysia
9	Tutku BAŞÖZ1 & İsmail Hakkı ERTEN (2019)	A qualitative investigation of the variables influencing EFL students' willingness to speak English in class	Turkey
10	Willow F. Pangket (2019)	Factors impacting learners' development in oral English proficiency	Philippines
11	Hendriati Afebri, Aderlaepe & Muh. Khusnun Muhsin (2019)	Factors affecting SMA Negeri 1 Tiworo Kepulauan students' difficulties in speaking performance in the tenth grade	Indonesia

12	Iffat Jahan Suchona and Sadia Afrin Shorna (2019)	Students' views on English-speaking issues and their solutions	Bangladesh
13	Muhamad Sofian Hadi, Lidiyatul Izzah, Mareena Masae (2020)	The following factors influence Thai students' speaking anxiety during oral presentations: TSAI Faculty of Education.	Indonesia
14	Saleh Alrasheedi (2020)	Examining the elements affecting Saudi EFL learners' speaking ability	Saudi Arabia
15	Karzan A. Jezhny and Nazenin S. M Bapir (2021)	The view of university students on the elements affecting speaking ability	Iraq
16	Gambhir Bahadur Chand (2021)	English speaking difficulties for Bachelor's level students	Nepal
17	Mustafa Mohammed Sadek Elsayed (2022)	Investigating elements that impact Qassim University EFL students' development of English language speaking proficiency	Saudi Arabia
18	Jeane Theresia Limerantoa and Barli Bramb (2022)	Examining EFL graduate students' views and methods for developing their English speaking capabilities	Indonesia
19	Shree Krishna Kandel (2022)	Perceptions of teaching and learning speaking skills by teachers and students	Nepal
20	Mar'atun Shalihah, Kaarthiyainy Supramaniam & Muh. Azhar Kholidi (2022)	Factors affecting students' speaking performance in learning English: teachers' and students' perspectives	Malaysia
21	Surendra Prasad Ghimire (2022)	English language learning for secondary students via social media	Nepal
22	Heather Wilson (2023)	An account of ten Chinese pre-semester students' reflections on their interaction practices in advance of their study at a British University	Britain
23	Pedja Rifki Azizi	Narrative inquiry on improving speaking skills	Indonesia