

# The Survey on Barriers of Developing English Speaking Skills of the Fourth Year Students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon

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**Abstract**— This study explores the nature and barriers of developing the speaking skills as a second language among the Fourth Year Students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. Language Learners usually express anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness when learning a new language. Language barriers such as anxiety and nervousness can originate from self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, differences in social status of the speakers and interlocutors, and from the fear of losing self-identity. The most striking barrier in learning a second language is insufficient exposure to that language. Questionnaires with both close-ended and open-ended questions were distributed to the students. By means of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this paper analyses the difficulties the surveyed students have in English speaking skills, examines to what degree the obstacles that hinder speaking skills of the fourth-year students at the University of Information Technology and explores effective approaches to English Speaking Skills at the University of Information Technology, Yangon.

**Keywords**— Barriers, Learning English Speaking, Developing Speaking Skills, Students, University of Information Technology

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the investigation of the barriers to students' learning of speaking skills in English as a second language at the University of Information Technology.

English is an international language. Kirkpatrick and Chau (2010 : 32-45) point out that a move to internationalize higher education has encouraged the use of English as a common medium in many countries worldwide. Asian students travel to western countries to obtain degrees offered in English. Ammon (1996) in Kirkpatrick and Chau (ibid) confirms the statement that English is increasingly becoming the international language of instruction and assessment in higher education and has long been dominant as the language of international scholarship.

Public speaking anxiety is very common among both university students and also the general population. Almost 20% of university students face the problem of speaking anxiety (McCroskey, 1977). He also defined anxiety in broad-based as an individual's level of fear and anxiety associated with either real communication with another person or persons. The apprehension of speaking before a group of individuals remains a problem in the twenty-first century. According to Krannich (2004), the fear of delivering a speech or a presentation ranks as the number one fear among most people, including students as well as adults from many diverse backgrounds.

According to Phillips (1991), "it is clear that fear of speaking in public is different from anxiety about social contact". Instructors are supposed to motivate students, help them to overcome the barriers of developing the speaking skills.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into three sub-sections: what speaking is, the importance of speaking skills, and the barriers of students' speaking skills.

### A. What Speaking Is

Speaking is an act of making vocal sounds. Speaking means expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language. To speak often implies conveying information. It may be from an informal remark to a scholarly presentation to a formal address.

Speaking skills are the skills that give us the ability to communicate effectively. These skills allow the speakers to convey his message in a passionate, thoughtful, and convincing manner. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It, like other skills, is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words. There are three kinds of speaking situations, in which we find ourselves: interactive, partially interactive and non-interactive. Interactive speaking situations include face to face conversations and telephone calls, in which we are alternately listening and speaking, and in which we have a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from our conversation partner. Some speaking situations are partially interactive, such as when giving a speech to a live audience, where the convention is that the audience does not interrupt the speech. The speaker nevertheless can see the audience and judge from the expressions on their faces and body language whether he or she is being understood or not. Few speaking situations may be totally non-interactive, such as when recording a speech for a radio broadcast.

In all the above explained conditions speaking is always a headache for most of the people. Although the fear of speaking is common, studies show that ability to speak in English can be enhanced by improving speaking skills.

### B. The Importance of Speaking Skills

Speaking skills can help you in all areas of life.

Having the vocabulary and developing English speaking skills will assist you in acquiring a good job, communicating well with others, in business, at work or in school. The more knowledgeable you are in your speaking skills, the less frustration in conveying yourself

to others. Good speaking skills widen your options in job choices. Sales, business, teaching, communications, computer management, administration, law, police work, government jobs, reception, hospitality, industry, marketing, doctorates, customer service, all depend on excellent speaking skills, to name a few. Probably one of the most needed skills in advancing your profession or job.

### C. The barriers of students' speaking skills

There are a variety of reasons why students may not want to talk to one another. Some students come from educational cultures where teacher-fronted instruction and individual work are the norm. They have rarely, if ever, experienced peer interactions in other types of courses and are both sceptical of its value for learning and reluctant to engage with peers. In many cases, these concerns are shared by parents and even school administrators, so teachers have little support in promoting peer interaction. Some students are nervous about speaking a language they do not know well in front of one another, concerned about making errors and exposing their lack of knowledge and thinking to one another. Other students are simply unmotivated to speak. In cases like these, teachers fear that students simply will not try to interact in the classroom. What can be done if students will not talk? We have found that most of the researchers have been focusing on the role of oral English expression and evaluating methods in English speaking. There are few researches focusing on the difficulties in learning English speaking for university students. Therefore, this paper is mainly going to investigate the barriers of learning English speaking for the fourth-year students of the University of Information Technology, Yangon.

### III. SURVEY OF BARRIERS OF DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF THE FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, YANGON

This survey is described in detail with the study questions, participants, instruments, data collections, and data and result analysis.

### D. Study Questions

There are the first two questions to be solved in the current study:

- What are the obstacles in learning speaking skills of the fourth-year students at the University of Information Technology?
- To what extent do these elements affect learning speaking English at the University of Information Technology?
- What are effective approaches to teaching English Speaking at the University of Information Technology?

### E. Participants

The present study was conducted at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. The 100 participant

students are studying Software Engineering and High-Performance Computing. They were divided into two classes randomly according to the test having been taken when they enter the University. They are the top students in English reading, writing. Because there is no speaking and listening test in Examination, students used to focus on reading and writing. Approximately 70% of the students were female and 30% were male, and their age ranged from 19 to 20.

### F. Instruments

In this study, Questionnaire is the only investigating tool, but in order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, this questionnaire includes two parts, questions with the best choice and open-ended questions. Meanwhile, questions from nine dimensions constitute the whole questionnaire to investigate what the impacts of learning speaking skills of the Fourth Year Students at UIT, Yangon. Questionnaire on learning English Speaking was distributed to 100 students. There were 25 items, which were incorporated into five options ranging from : A = strongly agree, B = agree, C = undecided, D = disagree, to E = strongly disagree and one open-ended question related to what the supposed teaching environment is for learning English Speaking at the University of Information Technology (shown in Appendix I). Items focusing on the same topic are not in order in the questionnaire in case of giving the subjective answers. Biographic details including their major, roll no., class, gender, and age were asked for.

### G. Data Collections

The questionnaires were distributed to 100 students during the class time without telling them ahead of time. Before they answer the questions, the teacher told the students that the purpose of the study is to help them improve the speaking skills in class and out of class. When the students answer the questionnaire, they were told the choice they made had nothing to do with their final marks of this course and they should give the objective answers. After they finished them, they turned them in. Finally, there were 85 validate questionnaires. There were only 41 items for the qualitative data from 12 aspects (shown in Appendix II) because some students had no idea about the supposed teaching English Speaking Environment. Instructions were given in English.

### H. Data and Results Analysis

1) *Data Analysis*: Quantitative data from the questionnaire were entered into Excel and examined for the percentage of the students' choices in answering the 25 questions for the percentage of each option can tell what the most influential factor is in English Speaking Skills. There are the results of each in the following and they can tell the reader what specific barriers are in developing speaking skills. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions of the questionnaires were collected to investigate the problems students encountered in learning English Speaking. The qualitative

data also provided some useful insights into how to develop teaching English Speaking and learning environment at the University of Information Technology, Yangon.

2) *Result Analysis*: According to the data from the questionnaire, the highest number is the percentage of "A" option in item 5. That means most learners rely on their teachers in learning Speaking English and they cannot learn it autonomously. There are more than 60% learners who agree that the barriers of developing the speaking skills are the negative transfer of native language, difficulties in choosing the proper words and learning English Speaking environment. More than 50% learners have the active attitudes to learning English Speaking. The survey shows that most learners are interested in English Speaking. In order to help learners, the following survey has been conducted to investigate the barriers in developing the Speaking Skills. Most learners cannot practice speaking English autonomously and they cannot make their own learning plan but rely on their teachers. One barrier for learning English Speaking is lack of autonomy. The survey shows that the difference of thinking between Asian and West influences their learning speaking skills to some extent. 53% learners took the difference of thinking between Asian and West as the most difficult part in learning English Speaking. Most students have difficulties in choosing the proper words and always make the same mistakes in choosing words. Lack of vocabulary has been the barriers in developing speaking skills. 88% learners agree that the mother language influence the English Speaking and 75% learners agree that they always translate Myanmar into English when they speak in English. Some learners may be shy or not confident then dare not open their mouth. Learners need the encouragement from the teachers. Effective factors sometimes can also prevent students from improving their English speaking skills. 68% learners put their interests at the first place. Few agree that the purpose of learning speaking skills is to go abroad. Less than 50% learners agree that learning English speaking can help them find a better job and raise their academic achievements. 75% learners do not agree that culture learning can be neglected. Thus, learners should attach more importance to culture in developing English Speaking Skills. According to the survey, teaching environment is the key element in developing English Speaking Skills. The teaching environment includes mainly the teaching devices, teaching methods, multiple media and language atmosphere.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results from the survey, there are some barriers in developing English speaking skills of the fourth-year students at the University of Information Technology. Among them, the autonomous ability, negative transfer of mother tongue, how to choose the proper words and English learning environment hinder students' speaking skills to a great extent. More than half participants see the differences between Asian and Western thinking as the biggest barriers in learning

speaking. Most of them are proud of their success in speaking skills and think that speaking skills can satisfy their own interests. Therefore, thinking training, encouragement and evaluation are the effective ways to resolve the difficulties in English speaking skills.

In order to overcome the barriers, teaching English speaking should take the students as the centre of teaching process. The teachers should help learners train their English thinking, promote their motivation, resolve the problems that the mother language leads to, listen to English songs they like most, watch movies they enjoy, speak English flexibly according to certain situation, make good use of teaching resources and the environment and follow the teacher's order actively. What's more, learners should avoid the passive attitude in learning English speaking. Teachers should encourage the students to do the activities, such as flashcards, puzzle games and other study tools.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers give several suggestions in dealing with second language anxiety.

According to Rolls(1998) and Kim(2005), there are various strategies which can be used in coping with anxiety. The first strategy is to recognize your own feelings of second language anxiety. The next strategy is to share your feelings with others. It is helpful knowing that you are not suffering those feelings alone. Students must bear in mind that nobody is aware of their fright except if there are outward signs of nervousness.

Universities should adopt innovative approaches to minimize apprehension and maximize student achievement. Lecturers must encourage the students to express themselves in English and help them reduce their anxiety by giving them support. The most important thing is practicing speaking. Practice speaking with friends or family, or even text messaging them in English which will also help to increase the level of proficiency in English thus indirectly, it will reduce language anxiety.

There are shortcomings in the current survey and the results of the current study suggest a number of questions for further research:

- The current survey only covered a small number of students, which may affect the reliability of the result; the development of a larger scale survey investigating the barriers of developing speaking skills is needed.
- There is only one survey on the barriers of developing speaking skills and did not conduct teaching experiment to overcome the barriers found in the study. Therefore, how teachers can carry out teaching English speaking in class within limited class hours is still an obstacle to overcome at the University of Information Technology, since most students in universities only take a speaking class for once per week?
- English learning at the University of Information Technology largely includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. The author suggests that translation should be included to improve speaking skills. Since this study only covers one part of them,

more comprehensive researchers are needed to be done. Researchers can focus on what are specific barriers in other parts of English learning at the University of Information Technology.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Data about you

Gender: male( ) female( )

Name: -----

Student Roll No. -----

Age: -----

Email address: -----

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The following questions are about learning English speaking skills, choose what you think is the proper answer.

1. English speaking skill is very important.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
2. I am very interested in learning English speaking.  
A. agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
3. The thinking differences influence oral English learning largely.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
4. Choosing proper words in learning English speaking is very difficult.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
5. Learning English speaking achievements mainly rely on teachers.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
6. I want to learn English speaking well very much.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
7. My affection always influences my oral English.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
8. My mother language always interferes with learning English speaking.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
9. I cannot choose the proper words in expressing meaning in English speaking.

- A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
10. I always make the same mistakes in choosing words in speaking and cannot correct them easily.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
11. English teachers' teaching methods always affect my English speaking performances.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
12. The purpose of developing English speaking skills is to go abroad.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
13. The purpose of improving English speaking skills is to find a good job.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
14. The purpose of developing speaking skills is to get a high mark in final examination.  
strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
15. The purpose of improving English speaking skills is to meet my own interest.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
16. I can make my own English speaking learning plan.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
17. I think the most difficult is how to differ the meaning of words in English speaking skills.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
18. I think the most difficult is the thinking difference in learning English speaking.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
19. I think the most influential barrier is lack of good English speaking environment.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
20. I think the most influential barrier is lack of autonomy in learning English speaking.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree E. strongly disagree
21. I am always worried in learning English Speaking.

- A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree  
E. strongly disagree
22. Learning English Speaking makes me have a sense of proud.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree  
E. strongly disagree
23. The communication between teachers and students is very important in learning English Speaking.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree  
E. strongly disagree
24. When I come to difficult sentences in English Speaking, I always think in Myanmar and translate them into English.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree  
E. strongly disagree
25. I think the most important part in learning English Speaking is language and we can neglect the culture.  
A. strongly agree, B. agree, C. undecided, D. disagree  
E. strongly disagree
26. What are the supposed environments for learning English Speaking in your opinion?

#### Appendix II

There are some specific answers to item 26 listed in the following.

1. Often practice; there should one native teacher to teach us;
2. Communication among many people;
3. You must communicate with others in English;
4. Movie watching and chatting in English;
5. Relaxing environment;
6. Being involved often;
7. English only;
8. Being active;
9. Topic in English Speaking class should be related to daily life and interesting.
10. There should be some multimedia teaching devices.
11. Cultural atmosphere is also needed.

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