

## Exploring Speaking Difficulties Among English Major Students at Kabul University

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### Abstract

This study examined the speaking difficulties faced by English major students at Kabul University, focusing on challenges that hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 110 undergraduate students using a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed several key issues, including pronunciation errors, lack of fluency, and limited exposure to authentic English environments. Instructional barriers, such as overemphasizing grammar and insufficient communicative teaching methods, were significant obstacles. Institutional factors like overcrowded classrooms and inadequate feedback also hindered students' progress. Psychological factors, such as fear of negative evaluation, reduced students' participation in speaking activities. Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of English proficiency courses, noting an excessive focus on grammar and writing at the expense of speaking skills. Statistical analysis revealed significant variations in speaking difficulties across academic years and highlighted the influence of demographic factors like employment status. The study concludes with recommendations to enhance students' speaking skills for real-world communication.

**Keywords:** Communicative competence; English proficiency; Kabul University; Language Anxiety; Language learning; Speaking difficulties

### بررسی چالش‌های مهارت گفتاری در میان محصلان رشته زبان انگلیسی پوهنتون کابل

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### چکیده

این تحقیق به بررسی مشکلات گفتاری محصلان رشته زبان انگلیسی پوهنتون کابل می‌پردازد. داده‌ها از طریق پرسشنامه‌ای که به ۱۱۰ محصل دوره لیسانس توزیع شد، جمع‌آوری گردید. چالش‌های اصلی شامل اشتباهات در تلفظ، روان نبودن گفتار، و محدودیت در قرار گرفتن در محیط‌های واقعی انگلیسی‌زبان شناسایی شدند. عوامل آموزشی مانند تأکید بیش از حد بر گرامر و کمبود روش‌های تدریس ارتباطی، و همچنین عوامل نهادی مانند صنوف پرجمعیت و نبود بازخورد کافی، موانع مهمی بودند. عوامل روانی از جمله ترس از انتقاد منفی نیز باعث کاهش مشارکت محصلان در فعالیت‌های گفتاری شد. بسیاری از محصلان از دوره‌های آموزش زبان انگلیسی اظهار نارضایتی کردند و تمرکز زیاد بر گرامر و نوشتار را عامل این ضعف دانستند. تحلیل آماری تفاوت‌های معناداری در مشکلات گفتاری میان سال‌های تحصیلی مختلف را نشان داد. این تحقیق با ارائه توصیه‌های مبتنی بر شواهد برای تقویت مهارت‌های گفتاری محصلان و آماده‌سازی آنها برای ارتباطات در دنیای واقعی به پایان می‌رسد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** اضطراب زبانی؛ آموزش زبان؛ پوهنتون کابل؛ توانایی ارتباطی؛ چالش‌های مهارت گفتاری؛ مهارت زبان انگلیسی

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## Introduction

Effective oral communication is a cornerstone of language proficiency and a key skill for students majoring in English. However, many English major students at Kabul University face significant challenges in developing speaking skills despite completing proficiency courses. This problem is common in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, where learners often struggle to articulate their thoughts fluently and accurately due to linguistic, psychological, and environmental barriers (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Sayuri, 2016). This study seeks to investigate the nature of these difficulties, with the ultimate aim of proposing solutions to enhance communicative competence among students.

Speaking is arguably one of the most complex and demanding language skills, requiring the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and social competencies (Thornbury, 2016). Students must manage vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while organizing their ideas and responding to social cues. These demands are particularly challenging for learners in Afghanistan, where English exposure is mainly limited to academic settings. Despite studying English in a structured environment, many students at Kabul University fail to achieve the fluency and confidence expected of English majors (Shen & Chiu, 2019). This disconnect highlights a need to examine the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties and their impact on learners' academic and professional prospects.

The importance of speaking skills in English language learning has been widely emphasized in the literature. Harmer (2015) asserts that speaking is central to communication and serves as a critical medium for students to demonstrate their language proficiency. However, speaking is also a skill that most learners find intimidating due to the immediate feedback and judgment it entails (Heriansyah, 2012). This is especially true for Afghan learners, who often experience heightened anxiety in speaking situations due to cultural and educational norms that discourage public expression. Research by Leong and Ahmadi (2024) indicate that fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and anxiety are among the most significant barriers to speaking in EFL contexts.

One of the primary challenges faced by Kabul University students is the lack of exposure to authentic English communication. In Afghanistan, English is primarily taught as a foreign language, and opportunities for real-world practice are scarce. This lack of exposure limits students' ability to internalize spoken English's rhythm, intonation, and cultural nuances (Richards, 2017). Without regular interaction with fluent speakers, learners struggle to develop the spontaneity and fluency required for effective communication. Moreover, classroom instruction often prioritizes grammatical accuracy over communicative competence, leaving students ill-prepared for real-life interactions.

Psychological factors further compound the difficulties faced by English major students. Language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-esteem are common among learners, particularly in oral communication tasks. Horwitz (2020) argues that speaking anxiety can significantly hinder language acquisition, as it reduces learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities and limits their practice opportunities. For Afghan students, these challenges are exacerbated by cultural expectations that place a high value on perfectionism and fear of failure. Many students avoid speaking in class to escape criticism, which further impedes their progress.

Linguistic barriers also play a crucial role in speaking difficulties. Limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and grammatical errors are common issues that hinder students' ability to express themselves clearly. According to Koizumi and In'nami (2013), vocabulary knowledge is critical to speaking fluency. However, many Afghan students struggle with acquiring and retaining sufficient vocabulary due to limited exposure to authentic materials and practice opportunities (Sayuri, 2016). Pronunciation difficulties, influenced by the phonological differences between English and Afghan languages, further complicate communication. For instance, the absence of certain English sounds in Dari and Pashto creates challenges for learners in producing accurate and intelligible speech.

Environmental factors, such as limited resources and inadequate teaching methodologies, also contribute to the problem. In many Afghan schools

and universities, language instruction relies heavily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches, prioritizing rote memorization over interactive learning. Such methods fail to give students meaningful, context-rich practice to develop speaking skills. The lack of language labs, multimedia resources, and extracurricular activities also limits students' opportunities to practice speaking in engaging and authentic contexts (Daar, 2020).

The significance of addressing speaking difficulties extends beyond the academic realm. Proficiency in spoken English is critical for Afghan EFL learners seeking employment in international organizations, non-governmental agencies, and global markets. By enhancing their speaking skills, students can increase their competitiveness in the job market and contribute to Afghanistan's socio-economic development. Moreover, improving oral communication skills can empower learners to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation in a globalized world.

Given this backdrop, the study seeks to explore specific aspects of students' challenges and barriers in developing their speaking proficiency. The following key questions were formulated to guide this research:

1. What are the most common speaking difficulties faced by English major students at Kabul University?
2. What are the contributing factors to speaking difficulties among English major students at Kabul University?
3. What is the perceived effectiveness of English proficiency courses in improving students' speaking skills?
4. Are there statistically significant relationships between students' demographics and the types or severity of their speaking difficulties?

## **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the speaking difficulties faced by English major students at Kabul University. A quantitative approach allows for collecting and analyzing numerical data, providing statistical insights into the prevalence and severity of speaking

challenges and the factors contributing to these issues. The research relies on a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, adapted from prior credible studies, to ensure validity and reliability.

### ***Population and Sampling***

The population of the study consisted of 278 English major students enrolled in the English Department of Kabul University. From this population, 110 students were selected as the study sample. Participants were drawn from all academic years (first to fourth year) to provide a comprehensive understanding of speaking difficulties across different levels of experience. The selection process employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation from each academic year, offering a balanced perspective on the challenges faced by both novice and advanced learners.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

A questionnaire was developed to gather data on participants' self-reported speaking difficulties. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by colleagues for feedback on its clarity, wording, and relevance. The instrument was then pilot-tested with a sample of 30 students to assess its reliability and internal consistency. The pilot test results revealed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.832, indicating good internal consistency. This level of reliability suggests that the questionnaire is an appropriate tool for measuring the intended constructs related to speaking difficulties.

The questionnaire consists of four sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** Includes participants' age, academic year, enrollment, and employment status.
2. **Speaking Challenges:** Focuses on specific difficulties such as pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, grammar, institutional, environmental, and psychological barriers.
3. **Contributing Factors:** Explores instructional methods, frequency of practice, access to authentic resources, and participants' perceptions of classroom activities and teacher feedback.

- 4. Perceived Effectiveness of English Proficiency Courses on Speaking Skills:** Examines students' evaluations of how their English-speaking proficiency courses have contributed to their speaking development. This section includes items assessing the perceived impact of course content, teaching methods, and opportunities for practice on their speaking abilities.

Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for nuanced insights into the severity and perception of the issues.

#### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Data collection occurred over four weeks during the Fall semester of 2023. Participants completed the questionnaire anonymously to encourage honest responses. Questionnaires were administered in a classroom setting under the researcher's supervision to address any clarifications and ensure the integrity of the process.

#### ***Data Analysis***

Quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the overall patterns of speaking difficulties. Inferential statistical techniques, such as ANOVA and t-tests, were employed to identify significant differences in speaking challenges across academic years, examine the relationships between contributing factors and speaking difficulties, and explore the relationship between speaking difficulties and student demographics. The analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 24) to ensure precision and consistency in the results.

#### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study adheres to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were strictly maintained, and data was used exclusively for research purposes.

## Findings

The findings are presented in two parts: the participants' demographic characteristics and detailed questionnaire results.

### *Demographics*

The demographic data of the participants is summarized in Table 1. The study involved 110 English major students from Kabul University, representing all four academic years. Among the participants, 25.5% were in their first year, 27.3% were in their second year, and 23.6% were in their third and fourth years. This balanced representation ensures that the findings capture students' experiences at different stages of their academic journey.

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Academic Year</b>	1st Year	28	25.5
	2nd Year	30	27.3
	3rd Year	26	23.6
	4th Year	26	23.6
<b>Enrollment Status</b>	Full-time	85	77.3
	Part-time	25	22.7
<b>Employment Status</b>	Employed	42	38.2
	Unemployed	68	61.8
<b>Age Group</b>	18–20 Years	46	41.8
	21–23 Years	51	46.4
	24 Years or Older	13	11.8

The enrollment status of respondents showed that 77.3% were full-time students, while 22.7% were part-time. This variation reflects the diverse commitments of students within the program. Regarding employment, 38.2% of the participants reported being employed, part-time or full-time, alongside their studies, while 61.8% were unemployed. This indicates that

many students balance academic responsibilities with professional commitments, which may influence their speaking practice and language development opportunities.

Regarding age distribution, the majority (46.4%) were between 21 and 23 years old, followed by 41.8% aged 18–20 and 11.8% aged 24 years or older. This age range demonstrates a typical progression through university, with slight variations due to part-time enrollment or external commitments.

### *Speaking Challenges*

The first part of the questionnaire identified specific challenges related to speaking English. Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Table 2 summarizes the data for all items.

**Table 2:** *Students' Speaking Challenges*

<b>Speaking Challenge Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Difficulty in Pronouncing Certain Words	4.3	0.84
Mispronunciation of Consonant or Vowel Sounds	4.1	0.88
Inability to Use Correct Intonation or Stress	4.2	0.90
Difficulty Retrieving Vocabulary During Speech	4.5	0.70
Lack of Vocabulary for Complex Topics	4.4	0.74
Trouble Forming Grammatically Correct Sentences	4.2	0.81
Pausing Frequently While Speaking	4.1	0.85
Speaking at a Slow Pace	4.0	0.86
Feeling Anxious While Speaking	4.5	0.67
Fear of Making Mistakes in Front of Others	4.6	0.65

Students reported several linguistic and psychological barriers to speaking proficiency. Pronunciation was a notable challenge, with many students struggling to pronounce specific words correctly ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) and maintaining appropriate intonation and stress patterns ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ). Vocabulary limitations emerged as a critical issue, with students reporting difficulty retrieving appropriate words during speech ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) and expressing themselves effectively on complex topics due



to insufficient lexical knowledge ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). These findings underline the inadequacy of existing vocabulary-building strategies within the curriculum.

Fluency issues were also prevalent. Participants frequently paused while speaking ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) and often spoke slower than desired ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ), reflecting a lack of practice in extended oral communication. Additionally, difficulties in constructing grammatically correct sentences ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) further compounded the challenges of fluency and coherence.

Psychological factors emerged as the most significant barriers. Students reported high levels of anxiety while speaking ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) and an overwhelming fear of making mistakes in front of peers or instructors ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ). These findings highlight the importance of addressing confidence and social dynamics in the classroom to foster a supportive environment for language practice.

### ***Contributing Factors to Speaking Challenges***

The second section of the questionnaire focused on students' perceptions of the factors influencing their speaking difficulties. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The results are summarized below.

The findings revealed several instructional, institutional, environmental, and psychological factors contributing to the speaking challenges faced by English major students at Kabul University. From an instructional perspective, participants noted a strong emphasis on grammar and writing within the curriculum, with a mean score of 4.5 ( $SD = 0.69$ ). This focus, they felt, came at the expense of opportunities for speaking practice. Additionally, a lack of communicative teaching methods scored similarly ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). These findings suggest a critical need for curriculum reform that balances grammar instruction with more speaking activities and interaction-based learning methods.

Regarding institutional factors, overcrowded classrooms were identified as a significant barrier, with a mean score of 4.2 ( $SD = 0.80$ ). Participants reported that the large student-teacher ratio made it difficult to receive

individualized attention and practice speaking in smaller groups. Furthermore, students highlighted insufficient feedback on their speaking performance ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), which hindered their ability to improve their oral communication skills.

**Table 3:** *Contributing Factors to Speaking Challenges: Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Contributing Factor Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Limited opportunities for speaking practice in class	4.4	0.73
Excessive focus on grammar and writing in the curriculum	4.5	0.69
Lack of exposure to authentic English-speaking contexts	4.6	0.62
Insufficient feedback on speaking performance	4.3	0.75
Overcrowded classrooms limit individual participation	4.2	0.80
Lack of multimedia tools for language learning	4.3	0.72
Teachers' limited use of communicative teaching methods	4.5	0.68
Fear of negative evaluation by peers	4.6	0.64

Environmental factors also played a role in the students' difficulties. The lack of exposure to authentic English-speaking contexts was the most significant external barrier, with a mean score of 4.6 ( $SD = 0.62$ ). Students noted that without opportunities to engage with native speakers or experience real-world English interactions, their speaking skills remained limited. Additionally, the absence of multimedia tools ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) for language learning, such as video clips, audio recordings, or interactive software, was also reported to hinder engaging with diverse spoken materials.

Finally, psychological and social barriers significantly impacted students' willingness to participate in speaking activities. The fear of negative evaluation by peers ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) was one of the most prominent factors discouraging students from speaking freely in class. This fear underscores the importance of fostering a supportive and low-pressure environment to reduce students' fear of speaking in public. Students' psychological barriers align with broader trends in second language

acquisition, where social anxiety and fear of judgment are common obstacles to language use.

### ***Perceived Effectiveness of English Proficiency Courses***

The study also investigated students' perceptions of the effectiveness of English proficiency courses in addressing their speaking challenges. The findings indicated that students were generally dissatisfied with the courses' ability to develop key speaking skills.

Improvement in pronunciation was rated at a mean score of 2.9 (SD = 0.90), reflecting limited effectiveness in addressing phonetic issues. Similarly, the courses' impact on vocabulary development received a mean score of 3.1 (SD = 0.85), suggesting that while some gains were made, they were insufficient to meet the students' speaking needs.

The courses were perceived as even less effective in boosting fluency, rated at 2.7 (SD = 0.95). This finding supports the earlier data highlighting fluency as a significant area of difficulty. Confidence-building activities were the lowest-rated aspect, scoring a mean of 2.4 (SD = 1.00). This result suggests that the courses are not successfully addressing students' fear of speaking and anxiety, which are significant barriers to effective communication.

**Table 4:** *Perceived Effectiveness of English Proficiency Courses on Speaking Skills*

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
Improved pronunciation	2.9	0.90
Enhanced vocabulary for speaking	3.1	0.85
Boosted fluency in spoken communication	2.7	0.95
Increased confidence in speaking	2.4	1.00
Encouraged practice in authentic settings	2.2	1.05
Developed understanding of conversational grammar	3.0	0.88

The least effective area was encouraging practice in authentic settings, with a mean score of 2.2 (SD = 1.05). Students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of real-world speaking opportunities, such as interaction with native speakers or participation in immersive activities. The courses

performed slightly better in understanding conversational grammar, scoring a mean of 3.0 (SD = 0.88), indicating moderate effectiveness in teaching grammar relevant to spoken communication.

In short, while the English proficiency courses provide some foundational support in areas such as grammar and vocabulary, they fail to address the most critical aspects of speaking: fluency, confidence, and real-world application. This underscores the need for curriculum reforms to include more practical, interactive, and confidence-building activities to better equip students for effective oral communication.

***Correlation Between Demographics and Speaking Challenges***

Inferential statistics were employed to investigate the relationships between demographic variables (academic year, enrollment status, employment status) and speaking challenges and the perceived effectiveness of English proficiency courses. The following tests were conducted based on the type of data and research questions:

1. **Independent Samples t-Test:** To explore differences in speaking challenges based on binary variables like employment status (employed vs. unemployed) and enrollment status (full-time vs. part-time).
2. **One-Way ANOVA:** To examine differences in speaking challenges across academic years (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th).

In terms of employment status and students speaking challenges, an Independent Samples t-Test was conducted.

***Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test Results: Employment and Speaking Challenges***

Variable	Group	Mean (M)	SD	t	p
Speaking Challenges Overall Score	Employed	3.9	0.65	-2.45	0.016*
	Unemployed	4.2	0.58		

The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that unemployed students reported significantly more significant speaking challenges (M = 4.2, SD = 0.58) compared to employed students (M = 3.9, SD = 0.65),  $t(108)=-2.45$ ,  $p<0.05$  ( $t(108)=-2.45$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This suggests that

employment may offer practical exposure to English, helping reduce speaking difficulties.

In terms of enrollment status and speaking challenges, an Independent Samples t-Test was conducted. The results revealed that part-time students experienced significantly more speaking challenges ( $M = 4.1, SD = 0.60$ ) compared to full-time students ( $M = 3.1, SD = 0.70$ ),  $t(108)=2.03, p<0.05$ . This may reflect heavier academic workloads or less exposure to diverse speaking contexts outside the classroom.

**Table 6:** Independent Samples t-Test Results: Enrollment Status and Speaking Challenges

Variable	Group	Mean (M)	SD	t	p
Speaking Challenges Overall Score	Part-time	4.1	0.60	2.03	0.045*
	Full-time	3.1	0.70		

Finally, regarding the year of study and speaking challenges, the results of the One-way ANOVA test revealed significant differences in speaking challenges across years of study,  $F(3,106)=2.78, p<0.05$ . Post-hoc tests revealed that 1st-year students faced more challenges than 4th-year students, suggesting improvement over time.

**Table 7:** One-Way ANOVA Results: Academic Year and Speaking Challenges

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	2.35	3	0.783	2.78	0.045*
Within Groups	29.95	106	0.283		
Total	32.30	109			

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the speaking difficulties faced by English major students at Kabul University, highlighting both common and unique challenges that these students encounter in developing their spoken English skills. These challenges, including pronunciation, fluency, and fear of negative evaluation, are consistent with similar findings in the literature on second language acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts. A significant concern for students in this study was pronunciation, often perceived as a significant barrier. This aligns with research by Gilakjani (2016), who emphasized

that pronunciation difficulties—such as mispronunciation of word stress and intonation—are common among non-native English speakers. This issue is compounded by limited exposure to native speakers, a factor frequently cited in global EFL contexts (Almusharraf et al., 2024). The students in this study echoed this sentiment, revealing that their learning environment lacked sufficient opportunities for authentic spoken English practice, which they identified as a major factor contributing to their speaking difficulties.

Another prominent issue reported by the students in this study was a lack of fluency, often exacerbated by anxiety and a lack of sufficient speaking practice. These findings are consistent with findings by Al Hosni (2014), who identified fluency as one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition, particularly in classroom environments where the focus is often placed on grammar and writing rather than speaking. The students at Kabul University similarly reported feeling more comfortable in written tasks than spoken tasks, which further hindered their fluency development. This lack of fluency was often tied to the students' psychological barriers, such as the fear of negative evaluation. These psychological challenges align with the concept of foreign language anxiety, as discussed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and further reinforced by Zulfikar (2022), who noted that students in EFL contexts often avoid speaking activities due to the fear of judgment and making mistakes. This fear was particularly pronounced among the students in this study, many of whom cited anxiety about being criticized by peers as a key factor preventing them from speaking confidently in English.

Instructional and institutional factors also played a significant role in shaping the speaking difficulties faced by students. One of the major criticisms voiced by participants was the overemphasis on grammar and writing within the curriculum, with little attention given to speaking skills. This mirrors Thornbury's (2005) critique of traditional EFL teaching methods, which often prioritize linguistic accuracy over communicative competence. The findings in this study suggest that students at Kabul University may be receiving an education that does not sufficiently prepare them for real-world communication in English, where fluency and the ability to engage in spontaneous conversations are essential. This

overemphasis on grammar is not unique to Kabul University; studies by Almusharraf et al. (2019) in similar resource-constrained environments have highlighted the detrimental effects of focusing too heavily on written language at the expense of speaking practice.

Institutional barriers, such as overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teacher feedback, were also significant challenges identified in this study. Overcrowded classrooms are a common issue in many developing countries, with limited resources and large class sizes. This results in reduced opportunities for individualized attention, particularly in speaking practice. Roshan et al. (2022) have similarly found that large class sizes and limited opportunities for personalized feedback inhibit the development of speaking skills. Students in this study also expressed frustration with the lack of frequent, constructive feedback on their spoken English, which they felt could have helped them improve. This is consistent with the findings of Thornbury (2005), who argued that feedback is a crucial component in developing speaking proficiency.

The perceived effectiveness of English proficiency courses was also a significant theme in this study. Participants reported that while they appreciated the grammar and vocabulary instruction they received, they felt that the courses were not effective in improving their speaking skills. This finding contrasts somewhat with studies by Garni (2019), who argued that English proficiency courses can positively impact speaking performance if communicative methodologies are employed. However, the students at Kabul University felt that their courses lacked practical speaking components, leaving them unprepared for real-world speaking situations. This underscores the importance of curriculum reform that prioritizes speaking practice alongside grammar instruction.

Regarding demographic factors, the study found that academic year and employment status played a significant role in students' speaking abilities. Senior-year students and those with part-time employment reported fewer speaking difficulties, likely due to increased exposure to English in professional or academic settings. This finding is consistent with studies by Chen (2016), who highlighted the benefits of real-world exposure to English for language learners. On the other hand, first-year and full-time

students reported more significant challenges, reflecting the increased difficulty of transitioning from basic to more advanced language skills.

While many of the findings in this study are consistent with previous research, the unique socio-cultural and institutional context of Afghanistan adds additional layers of complexity to the challenges faced by these students. The impact of societal expectations and cultural norms on students' anxiety and language learning outcomes warrants further investigation, particularly in non-Western contexts like Afghanistan. Additionally, the lack of infrastructure and resources at Kabul University highlights the need for a more tailored approach to language teaching that considers the specific challenges faced by Afghan students.

## **Conclusion**

This study has identified various speaking challenges faced by English major students at Kabul University, including pronunciation difficulties, lack of fluency, fear of evaluation, and instructional and institutional barriers. These challenges are similar to those identified in other EFL contexts but are also shaped by Afghanistan's unique socio-cultural and educational environment. The study highlights the need for curriculum reforms that prioritize speaking practice, reduce overcrowded classrooms, and incorporate more communicative teaching methods. By addressing these issues, Kabul University can help its students improve their speaking skills and better prepare them for real-world communication in English. Future research should explore the specific socio-cultural factors that influence language learning in Afghanistan and other similar contexts and the impact of alternative teaching methods on speaking proficiency.

## **Recommendations**

Several key recommendations emerge from this study to improve English speaking skills at Kabul University:

- Curriculum reform is crucial. English proficiency courses should adopt a more communicative approach, integrating practical speaking activities like role-plays, debates, and group discussions to enhance student interaction and real-world English use. This



shift should balance grammar instruction with an increased focus on fluency and speaking practice.

- Reducing class sizes will give students more personalized attention, fostering a better environment for speaking practice. Smaller classes allow for more individual feedback and improved engagement, which has been identified as critical in language acquisition.
- Incorporating technology in the classroom can enhance learning opportunities. Tools like multimedia resources and online platforms for speaking practice will expose students to authentic English contexts and offer flexible learning outside traditional classroom settings. Virtual exchanges and speech recognition apps can also help bridge gaps in spoken English exposure.
- Providing psychological support through workshops focused on reducing speaking anxiety and fostering self-confidence is vital. Creating safe spaces for students to practice speaking—such as peer groups and informal speaking clubs—will encourage more active participation.
- Fostering practical speaking opportunities through internships, volunteer work, and exchange programs can help students apply their English in real-world settings. By collaborating with local and international organizations, Kabul University can offer its students opportunities to practice English outside of the academic environment, thus preparing them for future professional communication.

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