



## SPEAKING HABITS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL EFL LEARNERS: A SURVEY

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### **Abstract:**

Speaking skills are the most important and dominant skills of a language that a language learner can never avoid or underestimate. From academic life to professional life, strong speaking skills help students in all aspects of their lives. Good speaking skills also act as indicators of knowing a language. In spite of knowing the importance of having strong speaking skills, unluckily, the majority of the EFL learners are found very weak and incompetent in speaking. The current study explored the speaking habits of undergraduate-level EFL learners through a five-point Likert-scale survey and found that the learners are very careless about practicing and improving their speaking skills. They have lots of opportunities and resources around them, but they do not utilize them to practice these skills. As a result, they could not develop good speaking habits in their everyday lives.

**Keywords:** speaking skills; speaking habits; EFL learners; undergraduate level

### **1. Introduction**

*“Among the four key language skills, speaking is deemed to be the most important skill in learning a foreign or second language,”* stated Rao (2019). According to Egan (1990) and Tram (2020), *“Speaking is viewed to be at the heart of second language learning among the four language skills.”* Again, according to Nunan (1991) as Tram (2020), *“Among English language skills, speaking is the most important aspect of learning a foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in that language.”* Similarly, Ur. (1996) said as Leong & Ahmadi (2017), *“Speaking is one of the most important skills of all the four language skills because individuals who learn a language are referred to as the speakers of that language.”* Since we communicate primarily and mainly through speaking, it is also considered to be the most desired and used skill. Zafar (2022) mentioned, *“Speaking is fundamental to human communication. In our daily lives, we speak more than we read or write.”* Dilobar (2022) wrote,

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*“Many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language.”* Zafar (2022) also mentioned, *“Speaking reflects our knowledge of the language and our ability to use that language to express feelings, ideas, thoughts, and knowledge of the world.”* In addition, speaking facilitates learning and using new vocabulary and grammar. It helps demonstrate different functions of language like expressive, informative, directive, survival, etc. It also helps in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Strong speaking skills effectively contribute to students’ academic and professional careers. Students with strong speaking skills are more likely to participate actively not only in various classroom activities like group discussions, presentations, etc., but also in various extra-curricular activities like debates, dramas, etc. Good speaking skills help students to ask questions and seek information clearly. Students with strong speaking skills are more likely to get scholarships for higher studies. They can successfully attend international conferences, meetings, events, etc. Baker & Westrup (2003) said as Leong & Ahmadi (2017), *“Learners who speak English very well can have a greater chance for better education, finding good jobs, and getting a promotion.”*

Indeed, strong speaking skills determine success in students’ professional careers as well. Cutad *et al.* (2024) asserted, *“Strong English-speaking skills are essential for individuals to succeed in various professional and social contexts.”* Rao (2019) also proclaimed, *“Speaking skills are the most essential skills for all the learners who wish to learn English to enhance their career, improve business, build confidence levels, get better job opportunities, make public speeches, attend interviews, participate in debates and group discussions, give presentations and so on.”* Students with strong speaking skills are always confident in their jobs and businesses. They can communicate their messages clearly and convincingly, can provide the best customer service, can encourage and persuade their workmates, can facilitate better relationships between themselves, can build strong leadership quality and thus can get quick promotions. Kholkhodjaevich (2022) added furthermore, *“Good English speakers will be in a strong position to help themselves as well as their countries’ economic, social, a political development.”*

## **2. Research’s Rational**

Knowing a language apparently means being able to speak that language. For someone who cannot speak a language, it is considered that he does not know the language. In countries like Bangladesh, speaking skills have this much importance over other language skills. However, in spite of the importance of speaking in language learning as well as in the learners’ academic and professional lives, EFL learners are often found very weak in speaking English. Moreover, they are often found to be very reluctant to practice speaking. The main purpose of this research is to find out how seriously the learners have taken the speaking skills in their language learning process, how often they practice these skills, and most importantly, how much value they provide to the speaking skills in their language learning activities. The researcher tried to find the answers through the speaking habits of the learners in their daily lives.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were undergraduate students of the faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology and the faculty of Fisheries at Bangladesh Agricultural University. All of them were level-1, semester-1 students who studied English as a compulsory subject in the first year of their four-year BSc (honors) course. A total of 202 students participated in the survey.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The data for the present study were collected through a five-point Likert-scale survey sheet (see the Appendix). The survey sheet contains ten questions regarding the participants' daily habits of speaking English. As all the participants were the direct students of the researcher, the researcher took the opportunity to distribute the survey sheets to the participants in their English classes and asked them to put tick marks on appropriate options. The participants anonymously expressed their views through the survey sheets, and the researcher, in return, obtained a clear picture of their speaking habits.

#### 3.3 Data Presentation

**Table 1:** English speaking habits of the learners (data in figures with percentage)

	Speaking Habits	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	Do you speak English with your teachers in the classroom?	62 (30.69%)	70 (34.65%)	56 (27.72%)	12 (5.94%)	2 (0.99%)
2.	Do you speak English with your teachers outside the classroom?	6 (2.97%)	8 (3.96%)	52 (25.74%)	64 (31.68%)	72 (35.64%)
3.	Do you speak English with your classmates in/outside the classroom?	2 (0.99%)	5 (2.48%)	31 (15.35%)	94 (46.53%)	70 (34.65%)
4.	Do you speak English with your parents/siblings at home?	1 (0.50%)	3 (1.49%)	20 (9.90%)	88 (43.56%)	90 (44.55%)
5.	Do you speak English with your cousins/other relatives?	2 (0.99%)	2 (0.99%)	18 (8.91%)	91 (45.05%)	89 (44.06%)
6.	Do you speak English with anyone you meet anywhere (in the offices, markets, parks, etc.)?	8 (3.96%)	12 (5.94%)	35 (17.33%)	78 (38.61%)	69 (34.16%)
7.	Do you speak English on social platforms?	9 (4.46%)	17 (8.42%)	42 (20.79%)	70 (34.65%)	64 (31.68%)
8.	Do you use any English-speaking apps?	5 (2.48%)	11 (5.45%)	25 (12.38%)	75 (37.13%)	86 (42.57%)
9.	Do you go to any English language clubs to practice speaking?	5 (2.48%)	3 (1.49%)	31 (15.35%)	62 (30.69%)	101 (50.00%)
10.	How often do you perform (debate, drama, song, etc.) in English?	1 (0.50%)	2 (0.99%)	21 (10.40%)	73 (36.14%)	105 (51.98%)

#### 4. Results and Discussion

According to the survey results, majority of the students do not usually speak English in different situations/occasions except with the teachers in the classroom. Since the medium of instruction at this university is English and the class teachers mostly take their classes in English, so the students are typically bound to speak English. However, they are usually found uninterested in speaking English in the classroom mainly because of their long-preserved inertia to speak English in public, lack of confidence, fear of making grammatical mistakes, or some other reasons. That is why we see the students who speak English with their teachers in the classroom. The same students do not speak English with the same teachers outside the classroom unless the teachers speak English. However, my personal experience says that even when the teachers speak English with the students outside the classroom, the students try to reply in their native language. It shows that the students still have not developed their English-speaking habits with their teachers even after many years of their academic lives.

The study also reveals that most of the students do not speak English with their classmates in/outside the classroom. The students spend a significant amount of time with their classmates every day. Nevertheless, while communicating with them, they prefer their native language to English. Similarly, while communicating with parents/siblings, or with cousins/other relatives, or even with someone they meet in the offices, markets, or somewhere else, the students typically do not speak English. Here, the reason behind their avoiding English in such personal communications is, perhaps, because they want to ensure fruitful and continuous communication between themselves. Besides, it is undeniable that sharing information with appropriate feelings and comfort is the best possible only in the native language.

The survey results also show that most students do not take the opportunity to speak English on various social platforms like Facebook, YouTube, etc., though they spend much time on these platforms. They also do not utilize any English-speaking apps available on the net, although most of them have smartphones. Even the students are found not going to the language clubs to practice speaking English, although they have access to a language club at this university. Furthermore, they are found not performing any extra-curricular activities like debate, drama, songs, etc. in English, though many of them might get interested in those activities if they are performed in their native language.

So, from the survey results, it is clear that students' failure to develop their English-speaking skills is mainly because of their poor speaking habits. They encounter a lot of different people and a lot of diverse situations every day, but they do not take the opportunities to practice their English-speaking skills. They have a variety of resources around them, such as Facebook, YouTube, apps, and different clubs and organizations, to practice speaking English, but they do not utilize them. They seem to be very reluctant in this regard, and hence, this reluctance has mainly contributed to their poor speaking habits, I think.

## 5. Conclusion

Out of the four language skills, speaking is the most dominant skill. Someone who wants to learn a new language must develop his speaking skills in that language. Unfortunately, in spite of having a variety of opportunities and resources, the EFL learners seem to be unwilling to use them to practice and improve their speaking skills. Thus, over time, they have developed poor speaking habits, and this is what has been reflected in the present study. The study, however, has some limitations. One of its major limitations is that the study was conducted in a small setting with a limited number of participants. So, the whole picture of the undergraduate level EFL learners' speaking habits could not be obtained by this study. Moreover, the study could not integrate all possible varieties of speaking situations/contexts, engaging more diverse participants with diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, I believe the discoveries of the present study will help the students find out their shortcomings, change their speaking habits, and improve their overall speaking skills.

### Conflicts of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### About the Author

Md. Arif Khan Pathan is working as an associate professor of English at Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh. His academic and research interests include task-based language teaching, teaching grammar through games, developing teaching methods and materials, oral communication, phonetics, etc.

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## Appendix 1

	<b>Speaking Habits</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
1.	Do you speak English with your teachers in the classroom?					
2.	Do you speak English with your teachers outside the classroom?					
3.	Do you speak English with your classmates in/outside the classroom?					
4.	Do you speak English with your parents/siblings at home?					
5.	Do you speak English with your cousins/other relatives?					
6.	Do you speak English with anyone you meet anywhere (in the offices, markets, parks, etc.)?					
7.	Do you speak English on social platforms?					
8.	Do you use any English-speaking apps?					
9.	Do you go to any English language clubs to practice speaking?					
10.	How often do you perform (debate, drama, song, etc.) in English?					

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