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The Role of Teachers in Improving Tertiary-Level Students' Academic Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

For tertiary level, academic speaking skills are important as it's a gateway to the proficiency required for professional life, where effective communication is the key to success. This study aims to explore the role of teachers with respect to developing adequate teaching methods for their students at the university level. Through open ended interview questions with probing, the teachers were able to explain and elaborate their stance regarding the means and methods they use to develop good resources and methods to develop their students' speaking skills. This research discovers the role of teachers in enhancing these skills, focusing on strategies, challenges, and their effectiveness in a classroom setting. By analysing qualitative data from teachers, the study aims to identifies some of the practices that the teachers have used in their classroom and found effective, further on, the study also identifies the teachers' concerns that may hinder the effectiveness of their teaching.

Keywords: tertiary level, teachers, role of teachers, academic speaking skills, proficiency, activity-based teaching.

INTRODUCTION

With reference to many countries, English is the official and most demanding language as opposed to any other language. English is considered to be the world language spoken and/or understood in many regions and acceptance universally. The ever-changing globalized world demands expert communication skills. Nevertheless, this proliferation of English has given occasion to both possibilities and pitfalls. Although it allows a higher level of communication between the various countries, it also introduces the possibility to alienate local languages and cultures. Though the world may have shrunken, however, that increased the need for a unified language, a universal language, to bridge the gap of communication and to cater to all nations. English became the world language, while also becoming a language killer (Mufwene, 2005).

Smith, & Taylor, (2020) discussed that, the current globalized world requires

a proficient communicative skill and must be considered an integral part of the contemporary tertiary education system. These skills not only aid in academic success but also prepare students for professional interactions (Hsu et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Thu et al., 2024). Fluency in the use of English and more so speaking, is more than just an acquaintance that can be achieved with academic prowess; it is an essential property to grow and succeed in career. In all this, the teachers play a crucial role in developing adequate skills and abilities essential for the changing world and more importantly the professional world. The importance of the language cannot be denied, however, giving it a status symbol is the unfortunate reality of the time. Many countries associate English with professionalism and class symbol (Hashmi,2023).

In spite of the paramount importance of language in the development of academic and professional performance, the teaching and learning of English, especially academic speaking skills at the high school level, are characterized by multiple problems. Among the most crucial challenges is the ineffective opportunity of direct application of knowledge in real life so that students could train their speaking abilities (Azhar, 2024; Azhar & Imran, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). In most education systems, even in Pakistan, English language is taught in purely theoretical interventions, where students hardly get the chance to be involved in meaningful, practical conversations. The outcome is the lack of relation between learning experience in the classroom and communication requirement in real life. Students can know grammar, vocabulary as well as writing styles in English; they find it difficult to speak especially those that apply to formal areas, especially studies, like presenting a research, discussion and debate.

Further the social position of English in most states including Pakistan makes the matter more complicated. English in diverse cultures is linked to prestige, professionalism and also class in many a society (Yazidi & Rana, 2025; Feng, et al., 2023). This has created an ugly scenario of English speaking and its general proficiency being a status and not a skill that needs to be cultivated. It is a perception which, as Hashmi (2023) has mentioned, can only widen the gap between the learners who can afford quality English education and those who cannot and many learners are left disadvantaged as a result. In Pakistan, as an example, students with more privileged backgrounds tend to have access to greater amounts of English-language resources and teaching, creating disparities in educational achievement (Hsu et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Thu et al., 2024).

A variety of reasons can explain this discrepancy in speech. One of them is that most learners, particularly second-language learners of English are not confident enough to speak fluently. Fear of failure (especially when one is in front of peers or instructors) can be a considerable obstacle to effective communication. It is evident, that many students struggle with proficient language skills, especially the second language, in many cases, English, due to lack of practical practices, lack of confidence or non-essential and ineffective teaching pedagogy and strategies. The paper intends to study and analyse factors that may aid a students' academic speaking

skills, especially at the tertiary level, in the Pakistani context.

The Pakistani situation is that there are numerous students who experience extra difficulties developing academic speaking skills in English. Though English is introduced at early ages, it is not often used in everyday life, especially in suburbs rather than in cities. The result of this absence of exposure to English through informal settings is that the students might not gain sufficient confidence or fluency to perform well in academic-speaking-based tasks. Moreover, a lack of proper training in teaching speaking skills means that many English teachers themselves might not be well trained in teaching speaking skills and the result is that the skills in speaking are not given the emphasis they should.

Combined with these difficulties, as far as students are concerned, the role of teachers in enhancing the academic speaking skills of students at the tertiary level should not be underestimated (Khosro, et al., 2024; Sultana & Imran, 2024; Ahmad, Bibi & Imran, 2023). A learning environment that builds confidence and motivates students in participating in speaking activities is vital in the role of teachers. It is possible to accomplish it with the help of using different pedagogical techniques, like involving more interactive activities, discussions, and debates into the curriculum (Hsu et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Thu et al., 2024). Moreover, educators should assist their students in gaining confidence by offering them constructive remarks and assist in establishing a friendly tone in the classroom, which helps minimize the fear of error. By making speaking one of the key language learning components, the teachers will be able to help the students connect the knowledge learned in theory with the one necessary in practice to achieve success at communicating in educational and professional environments.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and examine the realities that have the potential to enhance the academic speaking skills of students especially within the Pakistani tertiary education system (Huang et al., 2025; Doan & Huynh, 2024; Hsu et al., 2024). It attempts to address how teachers can contribute to the development of the essential skills, discussing effective pedagogical practice, the problems, and possibilities of the existing educational system. The ultimate objective is crafting strategies that can be coupled at tertiary education to more efficiently prepare students to develop globalization world requirements, in which communication in English is a top priority.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of education, the teacher plays the most vital and necessary role, of a guide, mentor and the nurturer. At tertiary level, the task of the teacher as a guide is crucial to enhance the skills and abilities of their students, especially in terms of language acquisition. The necessary teaching pedagogy and strategies need to be developed to create an adequate learning environment for their students to enhance their language abilities, especially academic spoken skills. The teachers' involvement is essential in developing students' sociolinguistic competence and confidence in using English for academic purposes. Teachers can utilize innovative

methods and adapt their teaching styles to meet the diverse needs of students, thereby significantly improving their speaking abilities.

Academic spoken English skills are not solely significant with regard to classroom achievement, but additionally influence the capacity of students to engage in discourse, assume presentations, and communicate professionally in the globalized society. The teachers will, therefore, be expected to create a learning environment good to produce those skills (Saher, Masih & Raju, 2021; Hewawitharana, et al., 2020; Masih, et al., 2020). In this regard, teachers should employ various powerful instructional techniques and methodologies that would address the various requirements of students so that they would not only feel more confident and competent when speaking English in different academic environments but also be more knowledgeable of how to communicate in English.

Among the teaching approaches, curriculum design and adequate implementation is necessary. Szymanska-Czaplak, (2015), stated that, teachers can design curricula that progressively develop students' speaking skills from basic conversation to advanced academic discourse, as seen in the MA program at Opole University, which aided students to transition from general English to academic texts. Furthermore, Fauzi (2023) advocated that various activities can be incorporated for better learning. Incorporating role play and group discussions can significantly impact students' speaking abilities by encouraging communication and confidence in expressing ideas.

Moreover, the innovative teaching methods gamification is considered to be a new and upcoming means. Utilizing immersive virtual world platforms can enhance students' motivation and confidence in speaking English. This approach allows students to practice speaking in a gamified environment, which has been shown to improve fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Hoter, & Nagar., 2023).

The task of tertiary level teachers is not just to teach students knowledge on subject-specific content but to also enable students to acquire language skills in communicating academic concepts in an effective manner (Ali, et al., 2020; Ali, et al., 2020; Xu, et al., 2019). Speaking skills are the most important ones among all such skills (Huang et al., 2025; Doan & Huynh, 2024; Hsu et al., 2024). Academic use of English is not merely conversational especially in an academic setting; it encompasses good knowledge of academic language, clarity on delivery of ideas, and the art of discussing an academic topic.

Teaching and the Language Acquisition/Speaking Skills

Additionally, teachers need to be actively engaged with the students and provide consistent support to foster an environment conducive to language learning. However, some studies indicate that teachers may prioritize grammar and reading over speaking, which can hinder students' language development (Asefa & Enashe, 2024). Though teachers should be aware of students' psychological needs and adapt their teaching methods to optimize learning outcome (Fauzi, 2023).

In addition, confidence plays a vital role as far as speaking the English language is concerned especially in second language context. The classroom

environment should be the one that helps students feel free to take risks with language use, to make errors, and to learn along the way through mistakes. The teachers should set this environment. Creating a comfortable environment during oral production is critical to helping students gain confidence in talking using the English language, more so in helping students who are most likely not used to oral speaking outside the classroom.

The importance of academic speaking skills has been widely acknowledged in literature. Studies suggest that interactive teaching methods, such as debates, presentations, and group discussions, significantly enhance students' speaking abilities (Brown, 2018). Furthermore, teacher feedback plays a crucial role in helping students identify and correct their mistakes (Ellis, 2019). However, research also highlights barriers such as large class sizes, limited resources, and students' varying proficiency levels (Smith & Taylor, 2020).

Pedagogies and Strategies of Developing the Speaking Skills

Effective instruction methods are important in enhancing the academic speaking skills of the students. Designing curriculum is arguably one of the most significant facets in development of the ability to speak. According to Szymanska-Czaplak (2015), educators can create curricula that help develop students in terms of speaking abilities, all the way to complex academic speech in English, starting with simple conversation (Khosro, et al., 2024; Sultana & Imran, 2024; Ahmad, Bibi & Imran, 2023). Ideally, such a curriculum would promote an informal to more formal speaking practice in students, as a natural way to learn to speak academically, e.g., present research results or engage in academic discussions.

In one case, at Opole University, the curriculum behind their MA program was set up in a way that allowed students to move out of general English and into more academic language. The activities in the program were designed to not only develop the general language proficiency but also to target the academic speaking skills so that students could speak English in formal academic situations (Hsu et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Thu et al., 2024). Exposing students to a gradual curriculum that develops gaining skills enhances the possibility of preparing students well in order to meet the challenges of academic speaking amongst form teachers.

Obstacles to Successful Development of Speaking Skills

emphasis on the written form, the result would be students who have mastered reading and writing but have failed in speaking (Huang et al., 2025; Doan & Huynh, 2024; Hsu et al., 2024). Teachers must also ensure that all skills of language are balanced off, and there should be no short change to speaking skills.

A notable setback in efficient language learning is the subject of classroom size. The issue of large classes that is being experienced in most tertiary institutions may pose a challenge to the teachers to deliver the individual attention required to build up the speaking skills of the students. Smith and Taylor (2020) marked this out as one of the most critical issues at the same time observing that teachers cannot productively deliver enough speaking practice or feedback to every student when there are large classes. Moreover, constraints on resources, i.e. the possibility to

apply language labs or other technological devices can also negatively affect the chance of applying proper speaking skills (Khosro, et al., 2024; Sultana & Imran, 2024; Ahmad, Bibi & Imran, 2023).

Along with that, another challenge is the different levels of proficiency of students. According to Fauzi (2023), the students arrive at their classes with varying degrees of pride in language, and this aspect might make a one-piece curriculum and instructional method in teaching speaking ill-fitting. The need, therefore, is to have those who are flexible in their delivery of instructions and ensure that they are addressing the needs of students that are of different levels of proficiency.

In spite of these findings, gaps remain in understanding the teachers' role at tertiary level academic speaking skills and in a more contextualised teaching setting and context to gather the impact and need of teachers' feedback and teaching pedagogy at such a level. This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical data and actionable insights from a teachers' perspective.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to;

- To identify effective teaching strategies for improving academic speaking skills.

Research Questions

The main research question of this study is;

- What strategies do teachers use to enhance academic speaking skills at the tertiary level?

METHODOLOGY

The study implied a more qualitative approach for the study, as this is a more teacher centred study, so the teachers' point of view is more the centre of focus; the details of the methodology is as follows;

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative data collection method to ensure comprehensive data bank and the thematic analysis enabled the researcher to understand the teachers' perspective of the objective of the study.

Participants

The research involves 4 tertiary-level language teachers from a private sector university, that has students coming in from all backgrounds and social structures, as well, the university location is centralised, accessible and a sort after university. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation. A consent was taken via email from them, regarding their availability and place to conduct the interview. The teachers were all with an MS degree with over 8 years of teaching experience at tertiary level, who were teaching the core English courses at the university.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to gain in-depth insights into their strategies and challenges. Probing was allowed to ensure

a more in depth and allowing a free flow of information from their perspective.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews was thematically analysed in order to understand the techniques they use for their language teaching pedagogy and what other means are utilized in class.

RESULTS

Effective teaching strategies that the teacher used in her classroom and narrated in the interviews were as follows;

Interactive Methods: Techniques such as role-plays, group discussions, and debates significantly improved student confidence and proficiency. Past studies also endorsed that activity based teaching is more effective and impactful. The teachers own words echo the same.

” role play, blogging, making and advertisement, obviously we are not setting any particular standards, rather follow the rubrics we have and cant expect them to be professional. Obviously it’s the fun bit that they engaged in and act out, with a good experience”

Technology Integration: google classroom was widely used and aided greatly in student engagement and practice opportunities. Use of standardised rubrics was also a very effective means for aiding academic speaking skills and language proficiency. As one of the teachers pointed out Covid times example;

“So for example, during one semester when we were supposed to be working from home online (Covid times), one of the activity that I gave them, talking precisely about writing course here, I asked them to do a reflection, in that reflection they were trying to figure out what kind of situation they are in, whether they are passive, aggressive or anything, so before I asked them to dive into their own writing, I gave them my own example, a written example, and it was from my own experience.”

Feedback Mechanisms: The most import means and most important strategy of the teachers is the feedback. A more personalized and constructive feedback helped students identify weaknesses and improve their skills, especially when native language is used to give compliments and constructive feedback, it gave the impression to be more impactful. Feedback is extremely important for effective teaching learning process.

“Well almost in every class it is important to keep the motivated, I noticed that it’s a great way of feedback.”

Medium of instructions: the medium with which instructions and teaching is done matters in language classes, especially with reference to mixed ability students and the kind of background especially language exposure wise they come from. As one of the teachers’ mention in their response

“...and I have noticed that when you speak in English and give out instructions in English, one is forceing the students to respond in English as well, but

again as I have mention earlier, using Urdu has become a need as students are coming from different circumstances and English is not something many have had an practice with, plus it's a mixed group so we have to accommodate to the need to every student”

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Large Class Sizes: Teachers reported difficulty in providing individual attention and/or maintaining a classroom decorum for effective teaching learning process.

Resource Constraints: Limited access to technology and teaching aids hindered effective implementation of strategies. The occasional lapse of internet or lack thereof, the required technical support in classroom or lack of adequate support at students end caused issues with the learning process.

Student Resistance: Some students were reluctant to participate due to anxiety or lack of motivation. Speech anxiety is a domain that is needs a lot of exploring but in speaking classes, students who report speak apprehension or anxiety have shown reduced progress in terms of skill and capability advancement.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research point to the fact that the tertiary-level teachers play an essential role in helping students learn the academic speaking skills necessary not just to succeed academically, but also to gain professional opportunities in the future. The participants were four language teachers in one of the universities in the private sector in Pakistan. Indeed, analysis of the data showed that though pedagogical strategies such as active learning, group discussions, role-plays, and presentations are used by teachers, there are a number of challenges that inhibit the growth of speaking skills among the students (Rana & Tuba, 2017).

The research corroborates the existing scholars on the relevance of language skills, especially speaking, among students in the contemporary globalized society (Smith & Taylor, 2020). The results suggest that, although role plays and debates appear to be effective strategies to be employed by teachers, the involvement of students is usually constrained by psychological reasons (fear of error or language proficiency, etc.). These obstacles are an indication of past researches which have drawn attention to the influence of psychological preparedness in language acquisition (Asefa & Enashe, 2024). That is why it is crucial to provide a safe learning environment in which students feel welcome to speak without the fear of judgement.

The second major conclusion of this research is that teacher feedback is an essential point in developing the speech skills of students (Malik, et al., 2025; Hameed & Akhtar, 2023; Hashmi, et al., 2021). The importance of constructive teacher feedback as well as peer feedback is brought to light in this study by teachers themselves (Akhtar & Kayani, 2024; Akhtar, Anwar, et al., 2019). Feedback makes the students notice the areas that need to be improved and gives the students usable information on how to develop skills in speaking (Hsu et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2025; Thu et al., 2024). These results are confirmed by literature as Ellis (2019) notes that

timely and more precise feedback are extremely crucial in developing language skills.

The research highlights the necessity to converge curriculum design with the necessity of practicing speaking English. The difference between theoretical education and real-life language can be overcome with the help of curriculum that teaches students to speak by progressively developing their skills in basic conversations to more complicated academic styles (Szymanska-Czaplak, 2015; Fauzi, 2023). Nonetheless, its research results suggest that, at the university level, the curriculum tends to place more emphasis on reading and writing proficiency, and speaking skills are undertrained (Danish, Akhtar & Imran, 2025; Mankash, et al., 2025; Hafeez, Yaseen & Imran, 2019).

Effective teaching strategies, as narrated by teachers during interviews, revolved around fostering student engagement and enhancing language proficiency. One notable approach was the use of interactive methods, including role-plays, group discussions, and debates, which significantly boosted students' confidence and communicative abilities. The integration of technology, such as Google Classroom, also played a crucial role in improving student engagement and providing additional opportunities for practice. Teachers highlighted the importance of using standardized rubrics, which helped students develop academic speaking skills and refine their language proficiency.

However, another key strategy that the teachers had emphasized on was the use of feedback mechanisms. Teachers regarded personalized and constructive feedback as the most impactful strategy. Feedback tailored to individual student needs enabled learners to identify and address their weaknesses effectively. Additionally, delivering compliments and constructive feedback in the students' native language appeared to enhance its impact, fostering a supportive and encouraging environment for skill development.

A study by conducted by Yingxin, Singh, Singh, Bailey, & Arivayagan, (2024) on flipclassroom model highlighted the the importance of active, student-centered strategies in improving motivation and learning outcomes. It recommends integrating vocationally relevant tasks, diversifying assessment methods, and providing teacher training to implement interactive strategies effectively.

Despite of these effective teaching strategies, the teachers narrated that they do encounter a few challenges. Class sizes made it difficult to provide individualized attention, in some cases students were more than 45+, with limited the ability to cater to the specific needs of each student. Additionally, resource constraints, such as inadequate access to technology and teaching aids, hindered the implementation of effective teaching strategies. Lastly, teachers stated that they faced student resistance, with some learners reluctant to participate due to anxiety or a lack of motivation, which posed barriers to achieving the desired outcomes.

Recommendations:

Despite the interesting findings in this study relating to the means and problems of a more effective development of academic speaking skills, a number of avenues of further research can add to the knowledge of this issue. The possibility of

usage of a larger sample up-scaled and a larger scope of scenarios, including both the public and the private universities, can be a subject of future research. This would contribute towards increased research scope, which will provide information on the various strategies and challenges that teachers are going through in diverse environments and locations. In comparing and contrasting the experiences of teachers in different settings, researchers can understand more of the fine points of differences in pedagogy, as well as the performance of different teaching methods in various educational settings.

One more useful prospective research area is represented by longitudinal studies devoted to evaluating the long-term effects of various pedagogical interventions on improvement of the academic speaking skills among students. A longitudinal study that would follow students through the course of a valuable time might offer a precious input as to how speaking skills continue to develop and what the long-term impact of a certain instructional approach would be. It would assist in determining the effectiveness of different pedagogical methods and enable providing more evidence-based propositions regarding the future enhancement of speaking instructions.

As well, investigating into perception of teaching methodologies and feedback by students should be an area of future research. Although the participants in this study were largely teachers, it is still possible that learning the perceptions of students on their academic and academic speaking skills can give a more rounded perspective on the development of academic speaking skills in these individuals. To conduct a research on the difficulties students have to deal with, their interest in enhancing their speech mastery and their experiences with teaching techniques will present a clearer vision of what can be done to meet the need of the students. This type of research may reveal the reasons why academic speaking has become problematic to students, what motivates them to work on it, and how educators may adjust their efforts to satisfy their expectations and change their learning styles.

CONCLUSION

Teachers hold a crucial role in shaping tertiary-level students' academic speaking skills, as they serve not only as facilitators of learning but also as mentors who inspire confidence and critical thinking. Through various teaching methods, such as task-based learning, group discussions, and role-playing activities, teachers can create dynamic opportunities for students to practice and refine their speaking abilities. By mixing real-world scenarios and culturally relevant content into the curriculum, they can help students relate to and engage with the material, making the learning experience more meaningful. Moreover, constructive feedback tailored to individual needs plays a crucial role in guiding students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering continuous growth and self-awareness in their speaking skills.

Creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment is equally critical for developing academic speaking skills. Teachers can encourage

participation by adopting strategies that reduce student anxiety, such as setting clear expectations, using positive reinforcement, and providing a safe space for students to express themselves without fear of judgment. However, systemic challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and rigid curricula can hinder teachers' ability to implement these strategies effectively.

Among the main findings of this paper, it should be specified that teachers are the central figure, as they are involved in building the academic speaking skills of students. With the help of various teaching methods, including role plays, debates, group discussions, and presentations, a teacher prepares students with the opportunity to speak in real academic situations. Such techniques will increase not only fluency and vocabulary of the students but also make them acquire certain degree of confidence required to speak before any audience. However, it was concluded that communicative competence which is the key to success in learning and professional life can help the students to learn to communicate with better results in terms of communicative skills can be achieved via the means of the interactive activities.

Addressing these structural issues by investing in teacher training, reducing teacher-to-student ratios, and incorporating flexible, student-centered approaches to instruction is essential for empowering educators to maximize their impact. Future research should delve into the long-term effects of these teaching strategies across various cultural and institutional contexts to better understand how they can be adapted and sustained in diverse learning environments.

Nevertheless, whatever teaching methodologies were introduced, the paper also came across a series of obstacles impeding the growth of speaking skills among the children. Student anxiety, especially fear of making mistakes in the presences of peers, is one of the greatest obstacles. Such fear of failure does not allow many of them to engage in speaking practices and this is a limiting factor in terms of improving. The research has also shown that students have very disparate levels of proficiency, and the number of learners with different proficiency levels in the same classroom cannot be met by a single teacher effectively. Instructors are forced to move around such differences as having to orient their instructions to meet the needs of more diverse language skills.

Teacher feedback also proved to be a significant result of the study. Teachers stressed the importance of constructive and timely feedback, with which students were able to learn what was lacking in the speaking field. Giving concrete and useful feedback enables students to perfect their speaking skills and to get more confident. Besides the teacher feedback, peer one was also determined to be useful in establishing collaborative learning and creating a comfortable atmosphere, where everyone feels free to experiment with their spoken language.

Further researches can focus on student centred needs and approaches, with focus not just on speaking but on reading and listening skills as well. Research also requires a more contextualised approach as the research gap with this regard is evident.

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