

## Exploring the relationship between English speaking skills and the learning environment

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### Suggested Citation:

Lobanova, O., Fedorova, E., Vobolevich, A., Minakova, P., & Rybakova, L. (2022). Exploring the relationship between English speaking skills and the learning environment. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*. 14(6), 1886-1900. <https://doi.org/10.18844/wjet.v14i6.8361>

Received from July 13, 2022; revised from September 11, 2022; accepted from November 11, 2022.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Servet Bayram, Medipol University, Turkey

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### Abstract

The objective of this empirical study is to conduct a survey among linguistics students and teachers teaching English to non-linguistics students in order to identify possible obstacles to the speaking practice development. The purpose of the study is identification the factors forming obstacles to the speaking practice development from teachers and students' point of view and correlate them with each other in order to improve the teaching speaking skills. A total of 680 students and 125 teachers participated in the survey. This study is based on a survey of respondents and analysis of its results. Teachers identified the following challenges: class heterogeneity; low motivation; the lack of awareness of the importance of speaking for learning English; and the lack of conditions encouraging the speaking practice. The survey of linguistics students identified the following challenges: the lack of spontaneous speaking, communication with native speakers, non-applicability of speech skills in real life, the overall climate in the classroom. The research results can be practically used for improving the educational environment for acquiring spoken language skills and as a basis for other studies in the field of learning environment and English proficiency.

Keywords: communication skills, English, language learning, speaking practice, spoken English.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Conceptual or Theoretical Framework**

The spread of English around the world has led to a recent surge of English learning programs, the popularity of which soared, making the English language advantage by itself. Such power as the United States of America appeared in the world political and economic arena. English has become in demand in technical, industrial, scientific, banking, and other areas of modern life (Galloway & Rose, 2021). It gradually became the driving force behind progress throughout the world and practically the only way to exchange information. It gained popularity because, due to simplicity in its grammar, it became the language of diplomacy, trade, and business. The English vocabulary is one of the richest in the world, which allowed it to get leadership in the field of Internet resources, science, sports, news, entertainment, etc. (Ataeifar et al., 2019; Volkova et al., 2021).

English communication skills offer non-native English speakers many economic and employment opportunities. Therefore, its importance for global competitiveness cannot be denied (Hawkins, 2018; Khang et al., 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2021). For many students, the ability to speak English is a main goal, and the pursuit of mastery of speaking skills is an effective form of intrinsic motivation for good language learners (Mahalingam & Yunus, 2017). Therefore, the relevance of this study is due to the growing interest in studying the communicative aspect of teaching English. In today's world, some grammar rules fade into the background, and mistakes are not considered rude. The main task is the correct understanding and communication of people.

Some research indicates that a large percentage of world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. Therefore, it is worth paying special attention to the study of spoken English. Most often in the process of education, students want to complete their goals as quickly as possible. If they have a need and desire to speak the language they are learning, then its potential will be revealed in this aspect in the shortest possible time (Kassem, 2018).

Speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire, as it requires the possession of auxiliary skills such as vocabulary and grammar, as well as the sociocultural competence. It becomes even harder when students have limited access to the spoken language, both in and outside the classroom and this problem is typical for the whole world (Long, 2017). Chapelle and Sauro (2017) argues that spoken language is a foreign language learning aspect most commonly associated with anxiety. They analyze a quantity of academic literature; it is often reported that English teachers who are non-native speakers of English may also be worried about speaking and avoid speaking practices and communicative learning methods. The theories of foreign language learning propose different explanations for how the oral speech develops (Levis et al., 2017).

### **1.2. Related Research**

There are a number of empirical studies examining the challenges and obstacles faced by foreign language students and their willingness to communicate in the class (Abrar et al., 2018; Dewaele et al., 2018; Songbatumis, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). These studies, however, focus mainly on foreign students in an academic and social environment with English as the main language. Also noteworthy are the studies examined anxiety in non-English speaking students in oral English classes at the university predominantly in developing counties (Ningsih et al., 2018; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). The results show that anxiety seems to be a serious problem during oral English lessons, but students with a higher level of language proficiency seem more confident during speaking in the classroom.

The low level of language proficiency among EFL (English as a foreign language) learners may be associated with increased attention to accuracy. Speaking skills associated with precision, word fluency and complexity, but fluency and complexity are not sufficiently practiced, and many English language teachers who are not native speakers, continue to focus on teaching vocabulary and grammar rules (Madalińska-Michalak & Bavli, 2018) and reading dialogues and stories from textbooks (McKinley et al., 2021). In most English courses in developing countries classroom curricula, students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge (Ahmed, 2017). In addition to paying too much attention to precision, other factors, also help explain poor conversational skills of EFL learners. These factors include: teachers' level of English proficiency, lack of opportunities for practice, and students' anxiety.

Foreign language teachers are masters of the language, demonstrating a high level of proficiency in the language they teach in reading, writing, and speaking. With these skills, teachers create an environment for effective student learning (Zhang & Zhang, 2015). Possession of these skills at a high level will allow students to successfully pass IELTS. Today, having an IELTS certificate opens the door to more than 9,000 universities, businesses, professional organizations, and government agencies in more than 140 countries, including the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and many more. The development of communication skills is also taken into account when passing this test (Green, 2019). Therefore, if a student has a goal and motivation, passing IELTS will be a good prospect for him or her.

Spoken language is a complex interactive skill requiring real-time interaction among speakers in situations where there is no opportunity for planning. The development of English spoken skills requires competence in various aspects of the target language, such as linguistic knowledge, socio-linguistic competence, discursive competence, pragmatic competence, use of body language and paralyzing elements (Oxford, 2019). The teaching of spoken English is one of the most challenging tasks foreign language teachers face in the classroom, especially if students are not familiar with the oral target language outside the classroom and can practice the language only during classes. In the context of foreign languages, there is empirical evidence that the teaching of spoken English is a serious issue. It was also noted that learning was often based on translation and memorization, with little attention paid to developing students' communication skills. This is precisely the evolution of the methods of teaching foreign languages.

Teachers are moving away from such practices as translating texts, retelling them, and memorizing words. At the same time, the main focus is on the development of students' communication skills. This includes communication in the classroom, with teachers, opening dialogues, group discussions, etc. (Gärdenfors, 2018).

Empirical studies show that in many developing countries only a small number of teachers teach listening and speaking skills in the classroom sufficient number of teaching hours (Hlas, 2018). Fojkar and Skubic (2017) found that most teachers of English first need to practice spoken language themselves to improve their knowledge in practice. This aspect of the situation indicates that teachers are often aware of the lack of their practical skills despite teaching experience.

A study conducted in the context of the Spanish language proves that course models that include face-to-face communication with native speakers help learners gain confidence, use their developing conversational skills and be aware that they can understand and produce more than they originally thought (Moreno-López et al., 2017). In French, the difficulty lies in understanding the language by ear. But by listening to it for a sufficiently short period, you can improve pronunciation and listening

comprehension. After overcoming this problem, the communication skills of students also reach a new level (Mitchell et al., 2015).

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The research question is to determine what environmental factors students and teachers consider to be the most significant challenges in teaching speaking skills and to what extent their opinions coincide. The objectives of the study are to:

- conduct a survey of teachers teaching language to linguistics students in order to identify possible barriers to the development of spoken language among students;
- conduct a survey of linguistics students to determine what disadvantages in the learning environment they may have affecting the development of speech practice in English;
- based on the results of both surveys, make recommendations for students.

## **2. Method and Materials**

### **2.1. Research Model**

In order to collect information, it was decided to conduct an empirical study, which consisted of surveying students and professors of Russian universities. Both groups of respondents were asked to answer questions related to the organizing of the learning environment, the learning process, and the spoken English practice. The survey method allows looking at the problem from the standpoint of both education recipients and its representatives.

Two consecutive surveys were conducted among students and professors. The first survey was conducted in the form of an unstructured survey with free answers. The received answers of the students were analyzed in terms of semantic and linguistic similarity. The analysis was carried out by the authors. As a result, groups of answers were identified, implying general content and, on their basis, the names of factors that, in the opinion of students, contribute to the development of their speaking skills were formulated.

The wording of the student questions contained an implied neutral assessment or non-judgmental judgment. The students' real answers predominantly gravitated semantically to fixing challenges or negatively assessing obstacles in the development of speaking skills. For example, the first question received answers: "If everyone in our group had the same command of the language, it would be much easier to talk."

The implication is that there is an obstacle and it lies in the lack of heterogeneity in the group on the principle of equal or similar level of students' skills. Therefore, the factors that were highlighted in the course of the study of the primary survey of students actually formulate challenges and obstacles, as well as in the answers of teachers. The resulting formulations were offered to students in the second survey, in which it was necessary to indicate agreement with the factors formulated on the basis of the analysis of the first unstructured survey on a 5-point Likert scale. On the Likert scale, "1" meant "strongly disagree", "2" – "mostly disagree", "3" – "generally agree", "4" – "predominantly agree", "5" – "completely agree".

A double survey of similar content was conducted among teachers, but only the results of answers to only one question. The answers received in the first survey were semantically and linguistically analyzed and, on their basis, the authors identified and formulated a number of factors that are the main challenges in teaching students 'speaking skills from the teachers' point of view. In the second

survey, teachers were asked to assess the significance of these identified factors using a 5-point Likert scale. The results obtained were subjected to further statistical processing and analysis.

## 2.2. Participants

The survey was conducted among five universities. A total of 680 students participated in the survey, of whom 68 per cent were women and 32 per cent were men between the ages of 20 and 21. Accordingly, they were all fourth-year university students. All students were full-time students. The selection of universities was based on the fact that they are all diversified, but have approximately the same level of accreditation and teaching. Purposive sampling was considered the most appropriate sampling method (Table 1).

Table 1. Students responding to the survey

Number of students	Age	University	Faculty
141	20-21 year	Peoples` Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University),	Linguistics
161	20-21 year	Higher School of Economics	Foreign languages and intercultural communication
125	20-21 year	The Moscow State Institute of International Relations	Translation, linguistics and intercultural communication
133	20-21 year	Moscow State University	Faculty of Foreign Languages and Regional Studies
120	20-21 year	Far Eastern Federal University	Basic and applied linguistics

In addition, this survey involved 125 teachers, 25 from each education institution. Age from 27 to 65 (middle age 46.3). This brings the total number of respondents to 805.

## 2.3. Data Collection Tools

Students were asked the following questions:

1. What components of learning environment are conducive to the development of conversational English?
2. Would you like to change something in your learning environment?
3. How in your opinion you can improve your conversational English?

Teachers were asked to answer just one question: "What challenges non-linguistics students in the speaking practice?" Teachers were asked the following open questions. The survey was conducted remotely using the Google Forms service. Each respondent who took part in the survey was sent a link with instructions and a response form. The questionnaire is the author's and was compiled by the researchers of a special survey for this survey.

## 2.4. Data Collection Process

Participants were randomly selected from the number of those who study at the Faculty of Linguistics and non-linguistic specialties. Teachers and students from higher education institutions were selected to participate in the survey; this will make it possible to assess the problem from both

sides. The focus was on interview the linguistics students, as they are more likely to practice spoken English more often than non-language students. It was chose teachers those who teach English to students in other fields (both technical and humanities). This will help to assess how a non-linguistic learning environment affects speaking skills in a foreign language.

### **2.5. Data Analysis**

Survey responses received through the “Google Forms” were analyzed to identify and categorize the most frequent ones. Each category received a detailed explanation for better understanding. In relation to the results of the second test, the internal consistency and reliability of the test were checked using Cronbach alpha. The cross-correlation of answers in relation to each factor was compared.

A number of factors that were identified in the first survey, but received very low Likert scores, as well as a high standard deviation, were discarded. To clarify the result for all the selected factors, the Student's t-test was carried out in pairs in order to identify the presence of significant statistical deviations in the mean values. Those factors that received a p value of 0.05 were also discarded. The results obtained in professors' surveys were also verified using the Cronbach alpha test and compared using the Student's t-test.

### **2.6. Research Issues and Restrictions**

One of the main limitations of this study is that it was conducted only among students in higher education. This makes it impossible to judge the relationship between the learning environment and English speaking skills in schools and colleges. This is why some of the problems and challenges identified in the present study, as well as recommendations for addressing them, may be applicable only to this group of respondents. Moreover, the study was conducted only among representatives of Russian universities, which hinder an assessment of the situation in other countries. Further research should involve more countries in order to assess the global situation and focus more on the relationship between the learning environment and English speaking skills at other levels of education (in schools and colleges). Also, the restrictions are due to the number of participants, since they cannot be applied beyond a certain number of students and teachers (805 respondents).

### **2.7. Ethical Issues**

The research was conducted ethically in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. The research was approved by the local ethics committees of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). Participation in the study was voluntary. Before the start of the survey, letters of invitation were emailed to the respective departments of the selected universities, and students were then informed about the possibility of every person wishing to register as a respondent. The research was anonymous. In order to ensure anonymity, the survey and the poll made with «Google Forms» did not include blocks for entering personal data. After receiving the link to the survey, respondents filled in and sent back the interview forms that were automatically counted by the service.

## **3. Results**

High level of Cronbach  $\alpha$  for surveys of teachers ( $\alpha = .811$ ) and students ( $\alpha = .796$ ) indicates the high reliability of the survey and the sufficient adequacy of certain factors to the actual opinion of the respondents. The first step of data processing involved analyzing teachers' answers. The following

categories were identified among them (Figure 1). Figures 1 and 2 include only factors that were deemed relevant by the researchers as described above.

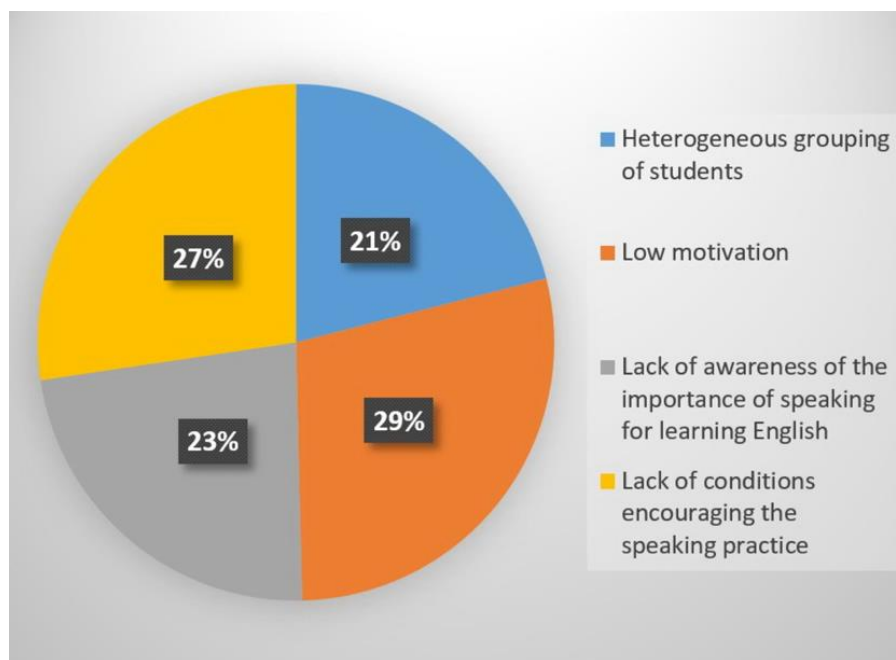


Figure 1. Problems with learning environment that non-linguistics students faced

The results of the statistical analysis of the answers of teachers obtained using the Student's t-test and the reliability of the test using the Cronbach  $\alpha$  are shown in Table 2. The table shows the highest level of significance for each of the factors from a series of pairwise comparisons of each of the factors with the others according to the Student's t-test. Thus, if the highest value of this test remains within the confidence interval of 0.05, then the factor is considered significant. Factors with low relevance excluded from consideration are highlighted in Tables 2 and 3 in gray.

Table 2. The results of the students' assessment of the factors that are a challenge for the development of students' speaking skills (the highest of the paired Student's t-tests and Cronbach  $\alpha$ ).

	Average mean	SD	p	Cronbach $\alpha$
Organizing of Speaking Practice	4.51	1.08	0.031	
Communication With Native Speakers	4.29	1.09	0.029	
Learning Speaking Skills That Are Non-applicable in Real Life	3.56	0.84	0.018	
The Overall Climate in the Classroom	3.89	0.65	0.042	
Poor Teaching Quality	3	1.22	0.982	
Insufficient Number of Hours of Practice	3.12	1.36	0.871	
Distractions	3.61	1.67	1.236	0.811

Below is a detailed description of each of these indicators. Based on the results of the survey, they were analysed for objectivity and rationality. Teachers stated that the most common factor is low motivation (29%).

### **3.1. Heterogeneous Grouping of Students**

Class heterogeneity is often perceived by teachers as a challenge, regardless of the class taught. This challenge stems from the diversity in ability. According to respondents these differences encompass: language skills, proficiency level, cultural background, style of teaching, native language and level of progress. Teachers' responses indicate the language proficiency levels of students varied across educational institutions, even among students in linguistics. Students on the other hand noted variation in learning ability, pre-learning motivation, socio-economic status, etc. These differences do not allow English teachers to work individually with each student during classes.

The effectiveness of the study program is also being threaten. One student easily understands the task and performs it better in less time, while others cannot understand it and fall behind fall behind. Class heterogeneity can create a problem with building of the study program. In addition, students can lose motivation by watching other students fall behind in the same class, and mutual learning and tutoring in these conditions are impossible.

### **3.2. Low Motivation**

Non-linguistics students often do not study English well enough. Not only they believe that they can pass the English test with minimum training, but they also heavily rely on «verbatim learning». As a result, they are not interested in English tasks and additional classes. The only thing these students want is to pass the exam and make the grade. Respondents noted that non-linguistics students often complain about the amount of tasks they get during specialized classes and that they always have an excuse to overlook English tasks. The education of students with weak motivation becomes a major obstacle, often forcing teachers to use Russian rather than English in their classes, which does not facilitate the development of speaking practice.

### **3.3. Lack of Awareness of the Importance of Speaking for Learning English**

As already noted, non-linguistics students are studying many subjects besides English. Learning English is a time-consuming and strenuous task, and it can give students the idea that learning a second language is optional, as it is not directly related to their professional success. Thus, non-linguistic students often study the basic aspects of the language, and concentrate on non-speaking tasks (text translation, word learning, reading, grammar, etc.). Concentration on basic language aspects and on non-speaking tasks may create difficulties for teachers.

### **3.4. Lack of Conditions Encouraging the Speaking Practice**

Respondents also note lack of conditions that could lead non-linguistics to speak in a foreign language. Foreign exchange programs, international competitions, exhibitions and fairs can create linguistic environment for non-linguistics students. However, in the opinion of the teachers, this contribution is not sufficient because, such practices are rather occasional, and involve only a small part of students, since not all students want to participate. There are several ways to solve these problems.

The first way may be a more detailed assessment of English language proficiency of non-linguistic students, which may be conducted (if not conducted before) during the first years of the first course. This will enable the teacher to better understand how to work with the group, to distinguish students who can handle assignments of higher complexity and those who should focus on learning the basics. This approach may have a positive impact on the motivation of the group, resulting in equal and the



highest outcomes possible with respect to language proficiency, which may simplify the speaking practice in the future.

In order to increase motivation and awareness of the importance of speaking and language learning in general, comprehensive work is needed, in which other teachers can participate. In addition, the university can organize meetings (including online meetings) with representatives of certain professions working abroad, where students can communicate and ask questions in English. It is also possible to organize contacts with foreign students who study in similar fields. Also, during speaking exercises, teachers may artificially create role-play scenarios depicting realistic work-related situations (such as a non-native patient visits a doctor (a role play scenario for medical students) or working with a foreign project manager (a role play scenario for engineers)) rather than focus on everyday scenarios.

The following difficulties were identified by the linguists interviewed. They may affect the development of spoken English. They are presented in Figure 2.

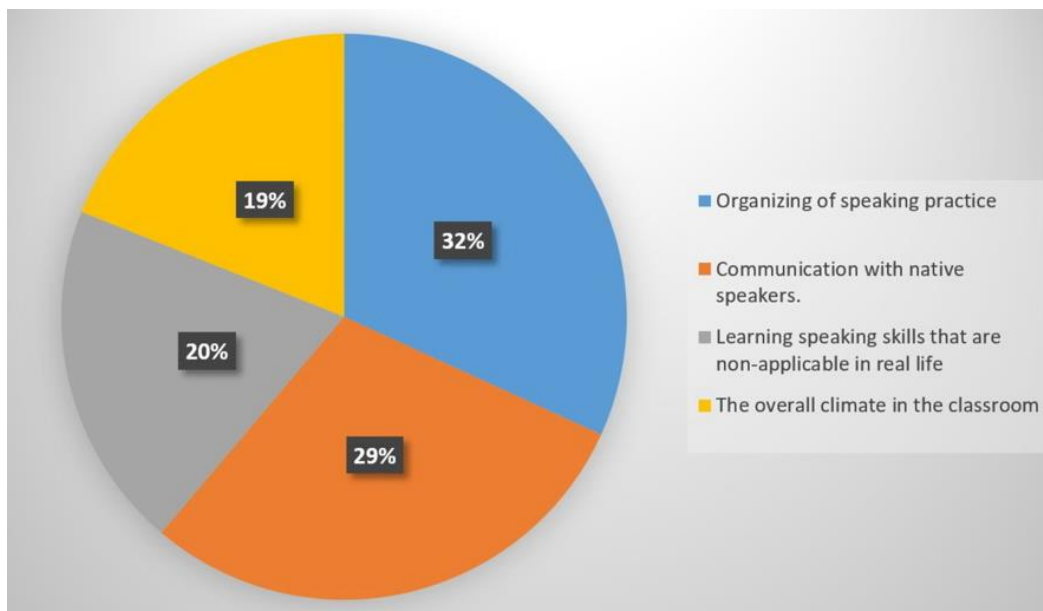


Figure 2. Problems with education environment that linguistics students faced

The results of the statistical analysis of the answers obtained using the Student's t-test and the reliability of the test using the Cronbach  $\alpha$  are shown in Table 3. The table shows the highest level of significance for each of the factors from a series of pairwise comparisons of each of the factors with the others according to the Student's t-test. Thus, if the highest value of this test remains within the confidence interval of 0.05, then the factor is considered significant. The factors that were excluded by the researchers due to their low relevance are highlighted in gray in the table.

Table 3. The results of the teachers' assessment of the factors that are a challenge for the development of students' speaking skills (the highest of the paired Student's t-tests and Cronbach  $\alpha$ ).

	Average mean	SD	p	Cronbach $\alpha$
Heterogeneous Grouping of Students	3.98	.89	.033	
Low Motivation	4.21	.72	.031	
Lack of Awareness of the	3.88	.63	.019	

Importance of Speaking for Learning English

Lack of Conditions Encouraging the Speaking Practice

Gaps in School Education	3.97	.71	.026	
Low General Literacy	3.02	.89	.412	
	3.01	.56	.091	.796

### **3.5. Organizing of Speaking Practice**

Although educational programs for linguistics students pay more attention to spoken language than programs for non-linguistics students, respondents indicated that this may not be enough. It was pointed out that such a speech practice was often not spontaneous. Students pre-prepare their monologues, create dialogues within the group, etc. Such tasks hinder the full development of speech skills.

### **3.6. Communication with Native Speakers**

Since a language is constantly changing, communication with native speakers allows these changes (for example, slang, language usage, etc.) to be recognized as soon as they occur. In addition, exposure to the language through listening to others speak allows a better understanding of what people say in different accents. Respondents mentioned the lack of such practice and reported that communication involved primarily students and teachers and that communication detached from the real-life speaking practice. Therefore, a strategy was developed that could become one of the methods for teaching students. It will be suitable for all universities of their given sample.

First of all, it is required to establish links with foreign universities, which could provide their teachers, students, or young trainees to conduct various practices for Russian students. This can be classes 1-2 times a week, which involve connecting to the lesson via video link (zoom, google meet, etc.) native speaker. The whole audience can hear and see it, and then develop a discussion of a particular topic. Control tests are not provided. This is only a communicative practice that is suitable for group classes at the university.

### **3.7. Learning Speaking Skills That Are Non-applicable in Real Life**

Many students noted that the practice of spoken English was limited to the walls of the educational institution. They noted that they could use English to communicate with friends from other countries (including in writing) and while traveling, but this practice was not very common, and not all students had foreign friends or the opportunity to travel abroad. This, as well as the lack of communication with native speakers, prevents students from practicing English in the real-life language situations.

### **3.8. The Overall Climate in the Classroom**

Although linguistics students are expected to be more responsible than in other disciplines, their motivation may vary. Moreover, not all students choose this profession are influenced by external factors (parents' opinion, random choice, etc.), which also negative impact on their desire to learn and to communicate, even within the classroom. According to respondents, weak motivation has a negative impact on speech abilities because their performance is unequal. Students with a lower level of motivation take no interest in conversational tasks, which makes it harder for other students to perform these tasks and prevents them from building the right pace of speech and work in general. In order to improve the speaking skills of linguistics students, teachers should organize, as often as possible, exercises such as debates or round tables, where mini-groups of students are asked to discuss a problem.

Furthermore, students can perform in daily situations with a minimum amount of time given for preparation (to distribute roles). All of these factors shape the classroom climate, which may or may not be conducive to learning. Often, more knowledgeable and responsible students influence those with low levels of motivation and desire. Thus, the general climate among students can change for the better. Among the respondents, according to the results of the survey, more than 80% of students with a high level of motivation to learn the language were identified.

#### 4. Discussion

This study presents the many challenges facing the formation of conversational skills, with students and faculty articulating different sets of challenges and requirements. Some researchers believe that most students may fall into a vicious circle of inadequate linguistic knowledge, negative consequences and low self-esteem, reticence, failure to see progress and feelings of uncertainty, which, in turn, may further demotivate them (Inayah & Lisdawati, 2017). The researches reveal that many learners of English typically encounter the process of translating the mother tongue into the target language when they speak English (Kassem, 2018; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019; Vo, 2017).

Also, the aspect of writing in language learning was analyzed in detail. English is used around the world as the lingua franca among different cultures. The ability to teach writing effectively in elementary schools is one of the vital skills of English teachers. In the literature review presented in the study (Moses & Mohamad, 2019), the requirements for writing skills in English, the goal of using various writing strategies, and the problems faced by both students and teachers in teaching were identified. By understanding the challenges of both students and teachers in teaching and teaching writing skills, teachers can choose the best possible approach to teaching writing skills by providing feedback and recommendations.

An interesting approach has been proposed to improve reading skills in English (Ahmmed, 2016). But it is ineffective for the development of the communicative aspect. By reading newspapers regularly, participants were able to improve the following scores: 43% strongly agree and the same percentage simply agree with improving their reading skills. They can improve their reading, writing, and vocabulary.

The researchers note that there are a number of factors related to spoken language that must be taken into account in order to be proficient in English. Among them are pronunciation and vocabulary. Giving students with a variety of situations and frequent conversational exercises plays an important role in improving speech fluency. Confidence and competence usually lead to strong English speakers (Dewaele et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2018; Mahalingam & Yunus, 2017; Sun et al., 2017).

Vo (2017) argued that strengthening student's confidence and eliminating the fear of error is a priority that the teacher must consider to make the student feel comfortable using the language. For this, it is often necessary to clearly set goals related to the development of intercultural communication. Students and teachers in this study also note the importance of communicating with native speakers and acquiring practical skills. Confidence in communication can be developed with the appropriate design of curricula, teaching methods, adequate tasks and materials and implementation positive psychology in learning process (Dewaele et al., 2019).

For effective conversation, scholars point to a number of elements involved, including listening skills, sociocultural factors, affective factors, and other linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies such as grammatical, discursive, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. Grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand the structures of the English language with precision and

without hesitation, which contributes to their fluidity and builds confidence in the conversation (Faez & Karas, 2019).

Various studies also provide empirical evidence that a linguistic competence (i.e. knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and phonological system) underpins the speech skills (Hawkins, 2018; Khang et al., 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2021). To speak fluently and accurately, students must practice knowledge of language systems to the extent that they can be spontaneously applied in practice when necessary. This observation is consistent with factors identified by both teachers and students in this study, such as “Organizing of Speaking Practice” and “Learning Speaking Skills That Are Non-applicable in Real Life” for students and “Lack of Awareness of the Importance of Speaking for Learning English” for teachers. A number of case studies show that teachers can engage students in grammar learning by involving them in communication tasks that require the use of grammatical constructs (Bikowski, 2018; Pawlak, 2018). Among the tools proposed is the use of technology to create a context in the learning environment, which is becoming increasingly feasible with advances in virtual reality (avatars and games, online games such as Minecraft, online courses as Quizlet). Similarly, vocabulary enhancement is a normal and repetitive process, and new words are better absorbed through meaningful use of language (Llanes et al., 2016).

The present findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that English is not available for oral communication within and outside the educational institution. In schools, this problem may also be related to the teacher and his or her teaching style that prevents students from using English to communicate orally in the classroom. Teaching English in the classroom is normally ineffective in activating language and providing necessary communication experience (McKinley et al., 2021; Uztosun, 2017). In addition, it was noted that the lack of language competence, both spoken and written, led to uncertainty, as students struggled to cope with the disciplinary acculturation of the university (Abrar et al., 2018; Madalińska-Michalak & Bavli, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

The speaking practice is one of the most significant parts of the foreign language learning and its development is of great interest for both teachers and students. The basic objectives of study were to organize and carry out a survey of teachers and undergraduate students in linguistics. The reliability of the formulations of the factors obtained as a result of a free survey was verified with the help of Cronbach alpha. The statistical significance of individual factors in the samples of students and teachers was tested using the pairwise calculation of the Student's t-test. The survey was conducted among five universities: 680 students and 125 teachers. This brings the total number of respondents to 805. Both groups of respondents were asked to answer questions related to the organizing of the learning environment, the learning process, and the spoken English practice.

The survey showed that, students who are not linguists face such problems in their percentage respectively: is low motivation - 29%, lack of conditions encouraging the speaking practice - 27%, lack of awareness of the importance of speaking for learning English - 23%, heterogeneous grouping of students - 21%. Linguistic students have other problems: organizing of speaking practice - 32%, communication with native speakers - 29%, learning speaking skills that are non-applicable in real life - 20%, the overall climate in the classroom - 19%. Students identified the following challenges: organizing of speaking practice (often speaking is not spontaneous in the classroom, which does not allow to fully develop speech skills; limited communication with native speakers; learning speaking skills that are non-applicable in real life (many students can only speak English in the school) and the overall climate within the group (students with weak motivation take no interest in conversational

tasks, which makes it harder for other students to perform these tasks and prevents them from building the right pace of speech and work in general). Based on the research results, recommendations were formulated for improving the teaching of English speaking skills. Its novelty lies in the study of the communicative aspect of learning English, relying on the responses of teachers and students. On the other hand, this made it possible to identify the shortcomings of educational systems and propose a variant of their change. The research results can be practically used for improving the educational environment for acquiring spoken language skills and as a basis for other studies in the field of learning environment and English proficiency.

## 6. Recommendations

To improve the speaking experience of language students, it is necessary to:

1. Communicate with native speakers is one of the best ways to improve speaking skills. It allows not only to enter into spontaneous dialogues, but also to learn the particularities of the language from the first hand.
2. Increase in the spontaneity of speech. Spontaneous conversation is the best way to enhance speaking skills that is why teachers need to pay more attention to this in the classroom.
3. Finally, teachers should pay attention to motivating unmotivated students, supporting and encouraging them to participate in speaking more.

## Acknowledgements

Alena Vobolevich has been supported by the RUDN University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

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