

MOTIVATION AND LINGUISTIC BARRIERS: WHY EFL LEARNERS STRUGGLE WITH SPEAKING SKILLS

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In the modern world, English is not just a subject in school, but a global tool for communication, education, and success. However, despite many years of learning English, a large number of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners still struggle with speaking skills. This article aims to explore the major reasons behind this issue, with a focus on motivation, learning atmosphere, strict grammar rules, and psychological barriers.

The Role of Motivation

Motivation is the internal drive or external influence that encourages a person to take action and keep working toward a goal.

What pushes students to study, practice and improve their skills - even when it is difficult or challenging. There are two main types of motivation: intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external). Intrinsic motivation comes from inside of individuals. For example, a students learn English, because they enjoy it or find it personally rewarding. I think, this type of motivation is long lasting and help people gain more.

Another type of motivation is more common among Uzbek learners;

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside sources. Example of this, students study hard to get good grades, passing exams or find a good job also traveling abroad. This type can be short and a student loses this type of motivation if he fails an exam or gets a bad result.

When students are not motivated, they often do not take risks to speak in class, avoid conversations in English, and depend too much on memorization rather than communication. Low motivation can come from a lack of clear goals, boring materials, fear of mistakes, or negative past experiences. On the other hand, motivated learners are more willing to practice speaking even if they make mistakes, because they see every conversation as a step forward.

Thinking in Uzbek and Limited Exposure.

One of the biggest barriers Uzbek learners face is the dominance of their native language in daily life. They are surrounded by Uzbek speakers, consume Uzbek media, and naturally think in Uzbek. As a result, when they try to speak in English, they often translate their thoughts from Uzbek rather than thinking directly in English. This habit of translation leads to hesitation, grammatical mistakes, and unnatural sentence structures. It also slows down fluency because learners pause to find the right English words for Uzbek thoughts. Unlike multilingual environments, where learners may be exposed to several languages every day, many Uzbek learners only use English in the classroom and for exams. This limited interaction makes it harder to develop spontaneous speaking skills.

The Pressure of Grammar Rules

Uzbek learners are often taught to follow grammar rules very strictly, and many believe that they should speak only when their sentences are completely correct. This belief causes hesitation and a fear of making mistakes. As an example, when I applied for institute, I pass the exam according to the grammar test as a state requirement, but after entering, I didn't use to have productive skills: Listening, writing, speaking. Although grammar is important, speaking fluently does not require perfection. Overemphasis on rules creates a mental block that prevents learners from expressing themselves freely. Instead, learners should focus on communicating ideas clearly and improving grammar gradually through practice and feedback.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological factors also play a significant role in speaking difficulties. Many learners feel nervous, shy, or embarrassed when speaking English, especially in front of others. They fear being judged for their pronunciation, accent, or mistakes. The fear leads to silence and avoidance. Some learners even believe they are not "good enough" to speak English fluently, which lowers their confidence and motivation further. To overcome these barriers, learners need supportive

environments, positive encouragement, and frequent low-pressure speaking opportunities. Small group discussions, friendly conversations, and creative speaking tasks can help reduce anxiety and build confidence.

Effective Methods to Improve Speaking Skills.

To overcome these challenges, teachers and learners can apply various methods that actively support the development of speaking skills:

1. Daily Speaking Practice

Learners should practice speaking English every day, even for just a few minutes. Talking to oneself in English, recording voice notes, or describing daily routines aloud can help build fluency and reduce hesitation.

2. Thinking in English

Training the mind to think in English instead of Uzbek helps learners form sentences more quickly. This can be practiced by mentally naming objects, forming short internal dialogues, or writing daily thoughts in English.

3. Role-Plays and Real-Life Situations

Role-playing conversations such as ordering food, asking for directions, or making phone calls helps learners use functional language in a realistic context.

4. Speaking Clubs and Language Exchange

Joining English-speaking clubs or having conversations with English-speaking peers (even online) allows learners to interact in a relaxed environment and apply their knowledge naturally.

5. Use of Technology

Language learning apps, online conversation platforms, podcasts, and videos can expose learners to native accents, new vocabulary, and improve pronunciation.

6. Shadowing Technique

Repeating after a native speaker (from videos or audio recordings) helps improve intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation. It also builds confidence by mimicking real speech patterns.

7. Error-Friendly Environment

Teachers should build a classroom culture where making mistakes is accepted as part of learning. Encouraging risk-taking in speaking without fear of correction boosts confidence and fluency.

In conclusion, the difficulty Uzbek EFL learners face in speaking English fluently is influenced by a combination of motivational and linguistic barriers. Thinking in Uzbek, strict attention to grammar, limited real-life use of English, and psychological fears all contribute to the problem. However, through consistent practice and use of effective speaking strategies—such as daily practice, role-playing, shadowing, and engaging in real conversations—learners can gradually overcome these obstacles. Speaking is not about perfection, but about connection, courage, and communication. With time, motivation, and the right approach, every learner can find their voice in English.

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