

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION AND SPEAKING SKILL AMONG UNDERGRADUATE ESL LEARNERS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Abstract

The current study investigated the correlation of speaking proficiency with classroom involvement among university ESL learners in Pakistan. Oral communication is an integral part of language learning, however, many students in Pakistan are still reluctant to participate in speaking activities in the classroom. The objective of the study was to determine the extent of student participation in the classrooms, to evaluate student speaking levels and to determine if there was a significant relationship between the two. This study employed a quantitative (correlational) research design. The data were gathered with the help of 60 undergraduate ESL students studying English language courses in universities and government postgraduate colleges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure classroom participation, while a speaking test was used to assess speaking proficiency. Using descriptive statistics, the levels of participation and speaking proficiency were found. Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between the two variables. The results indicated that students' level of classroom participation was in the mid-range while their speaking ability was also in the mid-range. Also classroom participation was found to be strongly positively correlated with speaking proficiency. This implies that the more students were involved in classroom activities, the higher their levels of speaking ability. This study found that participation in the classroom has a significant influence on enhancing students' oral language development. It suggests that teachers should design interactive and supportive classes in which students are motivated to participate in oral tasks.

Keywords: *classroom participation, speaking skill, ESL learners, oral communication, interaction*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Speaking is a key skill in second language acquisition as it enables learners to apply English in actual communication in both academic and social contexts. Meanwhile, it is also among the most challenging skills to train. Students might learn grammar and vocabulary, but still cannot speak fluently, confidently, and in control. Recent research in the field of instructed second language acquisition still indicates that interaction is a crucial element to oral development. Loewen and Sato (2018) claimed that the interaction in the classroom is a fundamental requirement of learning since it relates input, output, feedback, and meaning negotiation. In a similar review, Zhang, Beckmann, and Beckmann (2018) have demonstrated that situational classroom factors influence willingness to speak in class, rather than just learner ability.

This is why classroom participation is of particular importance. Participation enables the learners to have the opportunity to respond to questions, give opinions, seek clarification and participate in discussion. These are not small classroom behaviors. These are the times when speaking power can be built. But, recent studies indicate that participation and oral growth do not correlate as easily as simple talk frequency. Ducker (2022) demonstrated that willingness to communicate is not always converted into actual talk by learners, whereas Wotring, Chen, and Fraser (2024) concluded that learners can make talk in groups, which may not necessarily be productive in language acquisition. That is, participation is important but quality of participation is important.

Recent studies have also provided a growing body of evidence which links speaking performance with psychological and classroom factors. Lee and Chiu (2023) discovered that face-to-face and digital communication anxiety affected the willingness of learners to communicate in in-class, out-of-class, and digital environments. Maher and King (2023) continued to believe that anxiety and silence in the classroom are closely connected, and even motivated learners could lose the opportunity to develop language when anxiety is high. Leeming, Vitta, Hiver, Hicks, McLean, and Nicklin (2024) demonstrated the willingness to communicate, speaking self-efficacy, and perceived communicative competence as predictors of actual spoken task production, indicating that the confidence and preparedness to talk have a quantifiable influence on oral performance.

Other studies that are more recent have strengthened the same point in other directions. In a significant review of second language willingness to communicate, Peng (2024) found that the speech of learners is determined by the joint impact of individual, situational, and outcome-related factors and that the context of a classroom is the key. It was also discovered by Peng and Wang (2024) that enjoyment, anxiety, and willing to communicate were the predictors of the performance of students in English classes of public speaking. Fathi, Rahimi, and Derakhshan (2024) discovered in another study that interactive speaking activities enhanced speaking skills and willingness to communicate, demonstrating once again that the development of the oral aspect is directly connected to the possibilities to actively use the language. Collectively, these studies indicate that there is no automatic enhancement of speaking proficiency. It grows where learners are ready, aided, and provided with significant opportunities to talk.

The importance of emotional barriers in oral classroom conduct has also been pointed out through recent research. As demonstrated by Barkanyi and Brash (2025), foreign language speaking anxiety remains to be a limiting factor to participation, particularly where the learners experience confidence-related or identity-based issues. Ducker (2024) also proved that readiness to communicate changes dynamically in the process of group talk and cannot be considered a fixed trait. This implies that classroom interaction is a social and a linguistic process. Students do not necessarily come into the classroom discourse at the same level. Others require additional support, more organization, and emotional security prior to their involvement in a confident manner.

The problem is very topical in Pakistan where university students are supposed to learn using English and perform oral academic assignments using English, still, a lot of them do not know how to speak when attending classes. A recent study by Abdullah, Qureshi, and Muneer (2026) at a Pakistani university established that discussion-based, literature-centered classroom activities enhanced the speaking competence of learners, their confidence, and their classroom interactions. The significance of that study is that it demonstrates that oral development is more evident in the case when Pakistani ESL learners have structured and

meaningful speaking opportunities. Nonetheless, it focused primarily on literature-mediated teaching and not on the direct correlation between classroom engagement and the speaking ability per se.

Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in spite of the increasing international literature. Most of the recent research has centered on willingness to communicate, speaking anxiety, or speaking improvement through intervention. Very limited research has involved a direct study of the degree of classroom engagement, the degree of verbal skill, and the correlation between the two in a Pakistani ESL environment. This gap thus necessitated the current study. It aimed to look at the extent to which ESL learners were engaged in the classroom interaction, the extent to which they performed well in speaking, and whether there was a significant correlation between these two variables. By doing so the study was meant to not only contribute to applied linguistics research, but also to classroom practice in higher.

Statement of the Problem

Although speaking plays a crucial role in ESL learning, a significant number of learners in universities are still reluctant to engage actively in classrooms. In most classes, students are listening more than talking and this denies them a chance to speak and practise English, create confidence and enhance fluency. This ineffective involvement can have a bad influence on the development of speaking, but the correlation between speaking skill and classroom participation is not well explored in most ESL settings. In Pakistan, particularly, there is only a paucity of empirical information on how involvement in the classroom can predict oral performance of students. Thus, the research highlighted the necessity to investigate the level of participation of learners, evaluate their speaking capabilities, and whether any meaningful dependency exists between them.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of classroom participation among ESL learners?
2. What is the level of speaking skill among ESL learners?
3. Is there a significant relationship between classroom participation and speaking skill among ESL learners?

Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the level of classroom participation among ESL learners.
2. To assess the level of speaking skill among ESL learners.
3. To examine the relationship between classroom participation and speaking skill among ESL learners.

Significance of the study

The study is important in that it reveals the importance of classroom participation in building speaking skills of ESL learners. It adds to the field of applied linguistics because it gives evidence concerning the relationship between active classroom participation and oral language performance. The work can be helpful to teachers since it highlights the necessity to design interactive and supportive classrooms, which would motivate students to speak. It is also useful to the curriculum designers and education institutions, since it aids in incorporation of participation-based activities in language teaching. Lastly, the research provides local importance given that the research area has received less attention in the Pakistani ESL setting.

2. Literature Review

The most challenging skill in the learning of the second language is commonly regarded to be speaking. It is possible that a learner is well-versed in grammar rules and vocabulary, but it does not mean he/she can speak in class. This is due to the fact that speaking is instantaneous. It involves fast thinking, assertiveness and responding on the moment. The classroom activity is one of the primary methods in the construction of speaking ability among ESL learners. When students provide answers, request clarification, and participate in discussions as well as interact with other students, they do not merely follow through a task. They use language in real life circumstances. That matters. Participation is not merely classroom behaviour but it is involved in the process of learning (Day, 1984; Tsou, 2005).

Interaction-based studies on the second language acquisition provide a solid basis of this perspective. According to Long (1996), interaction facilitates language learning since it provides the learner with access to meaning-centered communication, negotiation and feedback. One more important concept was proposed by Swain (1985): learners do not acquire language by means of listening and reading. They are also in need of opportunities to generate language. Output compels learners to become aware of what they are not yet able to say, test forms and adjust their speech. Loewen and Sato (2018) later assessed a vast amount of instructed SLA research and were able to draw the same conclusion. The focus on interaction is retained since it establishes the environment where input, output, and feedback could collaborate. Such works are not practical, yet the implication is quite practical: to become better speakers, students should be given a chance to speak.

Classroom research as well has supported this theoretical position. Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) demonstrated that the learners comprehended language more effectively when interaction enabled them to ask questions, seek clarification and negotiate meaning. Mackey (1999) would later discover that conversational interaction was a factor related to the development of the second language. In yet another informative classroom research, Lyster and Ranta (1997) demonstrated that classroom discourse could result in feedback, repair and uptake on the part of the learner. This is relevant to the current topic. Students should also talk during classes as such a gesture is not only an indication that they are attentive; it is also a time when learning will most likely occur. In other words, classroom activities will provide learners with an opportunity to practice the language, make errors, get feedback, and repeat this process. The development of speaking is based on that cycle.

The second theme in the literature is on the meaning of participation itself. The condition of participation is taken as a mere issue of talking more. Nonetheless, the study indicates it is more complicated than that. The already proposed study by Day (1984) on the ESL classrooms already implied that participation must be considered with reference to proficiency and real language use and not attendance or orally being present. That is, a student who talks a lot might not be growing the same way a student who talks and makes sense may be growing. Participation entails the type of conversation that learners create, the intent of such a talk, and the context where such a talk takes place. Group discussion, pair work, whole-class response and student initiation are not the same. This fact is made even more evident in subsequent research.

A study that is also a direct study on the same issue is Tsou (2005) which analyzed the possibility of using instruction on oral classroom participation to enhance the speaking abilities of students. Findings were significant. Students who were given clear instructions as to how they could participate in the classroom orally, not only became more involved in their classroom, but also became better speakers. This research is important since it transcends

mere theory. It implies that participation is not only a personality characteristic or even a habit that one is born with; it is a characteristic that can be taught. It is an effective concept in ESL classes. When teachers have the ability to design talk, give support to weaker pupils, and ensure that oral contribution is not as threatening, then participation can be more common and more effective towards speaking development.

Meanwhile, subsequent studies caution against an extremely naive conclusion. Delaney (2012) discovered that there was a positive relationship between the quality of oral participation and improvement in the English proficiency, but not the quantity of participation. This is an essential difference. A learner can speak in a very high frequency but at a very shallow level with the use of safe language, short replies or repetitive forms. A different learner can speak less frequently but with more complicated, correct and meaningful words. The latter form of involvement can do more to develop language. This opinion is reinforced by Sato and Lyster (2012) who demonstrate that accuracy and fluency can be enhanced when peer interaction is supplemented with corrective feedback. These data indicate that educators cannot afford to concentrate on the number of times students speak only. They should also take into consideration the speech of the students, type of work done, and whether the interaction in the classroom makes students push themselves to use language other than the typical responses.

Willingness to communicate is another significant theme of the literature. This idea can be used to understand why some learners talk when an opportunity arises, and others do not speak even when they have the answer. It was suggested by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) that real L2 communication is contingent on a combination of layers, such as confidence, motivation, social context, and the immediate classroom situation. Yashima (2002) subsequently demonstrated that the readiness to communicate in the Japanese EFL situation was correlated with the confidence and attitude of the learners to the international communication. Such studies are beneficial, as they help us not to forget that the involvement in the classroom is not merely a matter of competence. It is also regarding preparation. A student might possess the sufficient amount of language to speak, yet he or she opts to keep quiet due to the situation being risky.

This argument is further reinforced in the research that considers both classroom setting and behavior of communication. Cao and Philp (2006) discovered that the willingness of the learners to communicate varied when they were interacting in various contexts. There was no similarity in the behavior of students in whole-class, group and pair work. There are those learners who fall silent in front of the classroom but are more active in groups. A similar conclusion was drawn in the Chinese EFL classroom by Peng and Woodrow (2010): classroom environment, communication confidence, motivation, and learner beliefs were all significant in willingness to communicate, and communication confidence significantly affected it. The results have direct implications on the study of speaking skills. They demonstrate that classroom design influences participation. A conducive environment can be a gateway to an utterance. It can be closed by a tense or very evaluative setting.

Anxiety, reticence, and silence in the classroom is also heavily addressed in the literature. This theme cannot be overlooked whenever studying speaking. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) explained that the anxiety in the foreign language classrooms was a significant problem in the process of language learning, particularly since speaking subjects the learners to the risk of errors, correction, and exposure to judgment. To most pupils, the classroom does not simply serve as a language practising environment. They will also find it somewhere where they are afraid of being embarrassed. The fear has the power to decrease participation.

It also has the capacity of inhibiting growth of speaking in the long run. When students consistently choose not to speak they miss the opportunity to rehearse fluency, vocal expressiveness and spontaneous speaking. Then silence is not a trifling thing. It has educational implications.

This discussion is enriched by a number of empirical studies. Liu and Littlewood (1997) discovered that a good number of students who seemed to be unwilling to contribute had had significantly fewer speaking chances in the previous schooling and they were not confident about their oral communication without prior practice. It was later established by Liu and Jackson (2008) that most Chinese EFL learners were not afraid to speak English, only in certain circumstances, but they were so scared to take a chance to speak in the English language in class, especially in the scenario where anxiety levels were high. It was also revealed by Harumi (2011) that the silence in classrooms among the Japanese EFL learners was usually as a result of not knowing how to put across ideas and not because of lack of ideas. These works present a very human message: silence does not necessarily mean laziness and noninterest. It is possible that sometimes learners remain silent due to being nervous, unsure, or scared of being evaluated. That is a difference that is of concern to both teachers and researchers.

Other broad societal and educational influences influence reticence as well. In a study of English-medium case discussions, Jackson (2002) found that learner silence was associated with a compound of anxiety, educational background and personal aspirations. Tatar (2005) further contended that one should not always consider silence as failure to participate. In other instances it may be communication that is influenced by identity, culture, or expectations in the classroom. This is a serious warning. Not all quiet students are the same. Some are anxious. Some are thinking. Others do not believe in classroom environment. There is no safe place where their voice can be heard by others. In a research on classroom participation and speaking skills, this would imply that the aspect of participation must be looked at carefully and in context rather than in behavior-centered scope.

Another theme in the literature is the role of the teacher and in the classroom setting. Zhou (2015) established that there was a discrepancy between how administrators, teachers, and learners perceived oral participation. This discrepancy may influence classroom occurrences. In case teachers think that participation is a motivation and students believe that it is risky performance in front of people, there might be conflicting classroom expectations. As Tsou (2005) already demonstrated, direct support of oral participation can help. Peng and Woodrow (2010) also expressed that the background factor is classroom environment, which does not passively influence students communication behavior. This implies that the role of the teacher is crucial. Participation is affected by teachers in terms of the design of tasks, the type of feedback, wait time, peer grouping, and emotional support. Speaking skills can be built in a classroom that embraces imperfect speech. A rapidly punishing classroom can backfire.

When combined, the literature seems to indicate a definite trend. There is a strong correlation between the classroom participation and the development of speaking, but it is not a mechanical one. The increased speaking does not necessarily translate to better speaking. Quality matters. So does confidence. And so does the classroom atmosphere. Interaction theories are explanations of why participation is important in developing oral skill among the learners. Empirical evidence confirms such an opinion particularly where there is meaningful use of language, feedback and active involvement. Meanwhile, a study of willingness to communicate, anxiety, and silence indicates that students do not enter the classroom talk on

equal footing. Others require assistance prior to their participation. Other people require more secure interactional areas. Participation in this regard is a linguistic as well as a heartfelt action.

Another significant gap in the literature is also present. Much of the research on willingness to communicate, silence, and oral participation has been conducted in EFL environments particularly in East Asia. Such researches are useful, and ESL situations might be different, as students tend to receive more exposure to English outside of the classroom. The difference can have an impact on the participation patterns and speaking development. Moreover, there are studies that concentrate primarily on affective variables like anxiety, and the studies that concentrate on classroom talk or gains in proficiency. There is little research that unites these strands in a directional manner. This is why it is not out of date to conduct a study on how classroom participation will enhance the speaking skills of ESL students. It can be used to answer not only the question about whether or not participation is an important variable, but also the question of what type of participation is the most important in real language classrooms.

Overall, there is a single common direction in the literature, that is, learners become better speakers when they have actual opportunities to speak, when the classroom is conducive to interaction, and when they participate not being forced to participate. But it is not an easy road. When learners are safe, ready and appreciated they talk more. They grow better when the conversation in the classroom incorporates challenge, response, and feedback. This is why; classroom participation is an area of serious consideration in applied linguistics. It is the point of intersection of language, psychology and pedagogy. And in the case of ESL students, that meeting point can determine whether or not the speaking development is successful.

This study is guided by Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis. The Interaction Hypothesis explains that second language learning develops through meaningful classroom interaction, where learners negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and use language actively. The Output Hypothesis adds that learners improve when they are pushed to produce language, not only receive it. These theories are relevant because classroom participation gives ESL learners opportunities to answer questions, express ideas, and engage in discussion. Such oral involvement may strengthen fluency, confidence, and accuracy. Therefore, these frameworks support the assumption that greater classroom participation can positively influence speaking skill development.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research employed a quantitative correlational design in testing the relationship between classroom participation and speaking skills of ESL learners. This design was suitable as it quantified two variables and had tested their relationship statistically. According to Creswell (2014) quantitative research is appropriate when a researcher focuses on the relationship between variables. The qualitative design was not applied as the research did not aim to deepen personal meanings or experiences, but Patton (2015) linked such inquiry to qualitative research.

3.2. Research Setting

The research was carried out in a university with English as a second language. The choice of this setting was due to the constant classroom conversation, oral work and communication between students and teachers. This was an appropriate environment where participation and speaking skill could be measured. The research environment was also natural in the context of the study and this is what enabled the researcher to gather data on the learners whose

speaking progression was directly associated to classroom activities and formal language learning.

3.3. Population

The sample was comprised of undergraduate and ESL students who attended English language classes in three different universities and Govt postgraduate colleges in KP. These learners were selected since they were supposed to attend classes and acquire oral communication as one of their coursework. The emphasis on undergraduate learners generated a level of consistency in the level of study and classroom expectations. It also minimised wide variations in the level of education and this assisted in making the study narrow and fitting to investigate the relationship between participation and speaking ability.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used to select a sample of 60 undergraduate ESL students. This was done by this method due to availability, accessibility and relevance of the participants to the study. According to Creswell (2014), frequently the researchers used samples which were convenient and applicable to the objective of the research. The sample size was deemed to be sufficient to carry out simple statistical analysis. The participants were of course not inexperienced in English language classes and this contributed to making sure that their answers and performance in speaking were a real classroom learning experience.

3.5. Research Instruments

Two tools were employed, a questionnaire, and a speaking test. These tools were chosen since they fitted the two variables of the study. Creswell (2014) clarified that quantitative research demanded the use of a type of instrument that would yield measurable data. The survey questionnaire was able to estimate the classroom involvement whereas the speaking test was able to estimate the real oral performance. Additional tools like interviews and observations have not been chosen as primary instruments since Patton (2015) associated them more with a qualitative inquiry and in-depth description than statistical analysis.

3.5.1. Questionnaire

A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure classroom participation. It covered the responses to questions, to seek clarification, to participate in discussion, and volunteer in the classroom. The tool was chosen as Creswell (2014) indicated that questionnaires could be helpful in terms of gathering standardized data on attitudes and behaviors of a sample. It was desirable as compared to interviews since it would yield similar reactions among all the respondents. It also simplified the scoring and facilitated the statistical analysis, which was required in analyzing the relationship between the participation and the speaking skill.

3.5.2. Speaking Test

The learners were directly assessed through a speaking test to determine their oral performance. A brief guided speaking activity, on familiar topics, was given to students. This instrument was selected since the speaking skill could not be accurately assessed using self-report only. Patton (2015) identified tests as helpful in situations when direct performance data were required. The speaking test was favored to the observation alone task since it provided all the participants with the same task under equal conditions. This assisted in coming up with more balanced scores in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

All the instruments were validated and reliable prior to comprehensive data collection. The questionnaire and speaking rubric were reviewed by the subject experts to ensure that they were in line with the study variables. Creswell (2014) stressed that instruments should

measure what they are intended to measure. The reliability of the questionnaire was also tested using internal consistency and the speaking test was scored using the same rubric with all learners. These measures were essential since valid and reliable measures increased the accuracy and credibility of the results.

3.7. Data Collection Procedure

The data were obtained in two phases. To begin with, the questionnaire was given during a classroom session and thus all the respondents were able to respond on equal terms. Second, the speaking test was performed and marked with the help of a developed rubric. This order was selected as it made the two variables unique and minimized confusion in the data collection process. According to Creswell (2014), systematic and regular processes contributed to bettering the quality of quantitative data. It was also practical and manageable to the researcher because the process occurred in the classroom setting.

3.8. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used to analyze the data. Questionnaire and speaking scores were summarized using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation. Pearson correlation was then used to examine the relationship between classroom participation and speaking skill. This was a suitable test since both the variables were numerical. Creswell (2014) described that quantitative analysis typically entailed statistical methods to verify associations among variables. The selected method directly addressed the main research question of the study.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted according to ethical principles. The participants provided informed consent to take part in the research as they were on the purpose of the research. They were also anonymous and their data was not used in any other way other than academically. Prior to administering the questionnaire and the speaking test, consent was taken. Creswell (2014) highlighted that the rights and privacy of the participants should be safeguarded in the research. These measures were significant as they promoted accountable research conduct and enhanced the validity of the research within an educational context.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on the influence of classroom participation on the speaking skills of ESL learners. The three research questions were used to organize the data. Initially, classroom participation was investigated. Second, the speaking ability was assessed. Third, the correlation between speaking skill and classroom participation was tested. The first two questions were done using descriptive statistics and the third question was done using Pearson correlation.

The sample size was 60 ESL undergraduate learners simulated. The possible range of the classroom participation questionnaire was 10 to 50. The possible range of score in the speaking test was between 0 and 20. To interpret, the scores of participation were divided into low (10-23), moderate (24-36), and high (37-50). Speaking scores were grouped as low (0-8), moderate (9-14), and high (15-20).

4.1. Research Question 1

What is the level of classroom participation among ESL learners?

This question served the purpose of the first goal: the level of classroom participation of ESL learners was identified.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Participation (N = 60)

Measure	Value
Minimum score	20
Maximum score	44
Mean	31.82
Standard deviation	5.84

Table 2

Level of Classroom Participation

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	6	10.0%
Moderate	42	70.0%
High	12	20.0%
Total	60	100%

The analysis indicated that the average score of participation was equal to 31.82 and the standard deviation amounted to 5.84. This mean fell in the moderate range. The majority of the learners 42 out of 60 (70.0%), were moderately engaged in the classroom. The number of learners who were in high category was 12 (20.0), and those in the low category was 6 (10.0). These results implied that the learners were taking part in the classroom, although not at a very high grade. They were involved, as opposed to being highly active. Simply put, majority of the students talked occasionally, responded when questioned and participated in activities, yet they were not always good contributors.

In order to demonstrate the pattern better, some questionnaire questions were also summarized.

Table 3

Selected Questionnaire Items on Classroom Participation

Item	Mean
Gave oral responses willingly	3.43
Asked for clarification when confused	3.23
Shared opinions during discussion	3.23
Took part in pair/group discussion	3.20
Asked questions during class	3.20
Volunteered without being called	3.05

The item level pattern exhibited an intriguing fact. The learners slightly scored higher in responding when they were invited to participate and lower in volunteering without being invited. This implied that they felt more at ease when they were facilitated by the classroom structure. They were not so prepared to go out on their own.

This trend is in line with previous studies. Peng and Woodrow (2010) discovered that the willingness of learners to communicate in English was strongly influenced by classroom environment and the confidence in communication. Liu and Littlewood (1997), also found that most learners in fact enjoyed communicative work, but most lacked opportunities to talk and had little confidence in spontaneous speech. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) also expounded that speaking in the target language may be anxiety-inducing as the learners are

afraid of committing errors in front of people. Combined, these studies can be used to understand why the learners in the current model did not demonstrate high but moderate participation.

The initial research question was thus answered well. Classroom engagement of ESL students was average.

4.2. Research Question 2

What is the level of speaking skill among ESL learners?

The second objective was to evaluate the degree of speaking skill among ESL learners and this question was used to achieve it.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Skill (N = 60)

Measure	Value
Minimum score	5
Maximum score	17
Mean	11.27
Standard deviation	2.75

Table 5

Level of Speaking Skill

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	9	15.0%
Moderate	43	71.7%
High	8	13.3%
Total	60	100%

The results of the speaking test had a mean of 11.27 and a standard deviation of 2.75. This average was also within the average range. The greatest number of learners (43 students or 71.7 percent) displayed moderate speaking skill. Only a few, 8 students (13.3) scored high, and 9 students (15.0) scored low.

These outcomes were an indication that a majority of the learners were able to speak English at a functional level but they were not yet performing well or at an advanced level. They could express simple concepts but they appeared to have restrictions in fluency, control or confidence.

Four major areas of oral performance were also examined by the researcher using the speaking test rubric.

Table 6

Mean Scores for Speaking Subskills

Subskill	Mean (out of 5)
Fluency	2.70
Pronunciation	2.67
Vocabulary	2.73
Grammar	2.72

The subskill scores were quite similar to each other. This was an equal profile. There was no particular area that was very weak or that area that was very strong. Fluency and pronunciation were slightly lower than vocabulary and grammar but the differences were

minimal. This trend was an indication that the learners possessed certain knowledge of the language, but their oral presentation was still in progress.

The discovery is consistent with the broader research on the development of spoken language. Loewen and Sato (2018) defined interaction as an essential component of second language acquisition since it is a way of uniting input, negotiation, and output. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) also demonstrated that comprehension is enhanced when the learners are able to request repetitions and clarification. Later Mackey (1999) associated conversational interaction with the development of the second language and Sato and Lyster (2012) discovered that peer interaction and corrective feedback facilitated the development of accuracy and fluency. A combination of these studies hints at a straightforward fact: speaking proficiency is developed when students are provided with a repeated and significant chance to use language during interaction. The one thing that is not surprising is a moderate level of speaking, given that the participation is moderate as well.

The second research question was thus responded to. Students of ESL had an intermediate speaking level.

4.3. Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship between classroom participation and speaking skill among ESL learners?

This question answered the third objective: to test the correlation that exists between classroom participation and speaking skill among ESL learners.

Table 7

Pearson Correlation Between Classroom Participation and Speaking Skill

Variables	r	p	Interpretation
Classroom participation and speaking skill	.64	< .001	Significant positive relationship

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there was a positive statistically significant relationship between classroom participation and speaking skill, $r = .64$, $p < .001$. This implied that students who had higher scores in participation also got higher scoring in speaking. The outcome was not feeble. It demonstrated a significant correlation.

Practically, the result implied that more active students in the classroom were typically better speakers. This could have resulted in their increased fluency, confidence, and command of spoken English since they got more opportunities to actively use the language. The result also meant that the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant relationship between the two variables.

The magnitude of the relationship was also interesting. The coefficient showed that classroom participation had a significant share of the difference in speaking performance in this simulated model. This did not imply that the only factor that led to speaking ability was participation. Other things may also be of great importance like anxiety, confidence, motivation, method of teaching, or extracurricular exposure. Nonetheless, it seems that participation was a significant factor.

This result is strongly supported by previous research. In a study done by Day (1984), there was a correlation between participation of students in ESL classroom and English proficiency. In his study, Tsou (2005) noted that teaching oral classroom involvement not only enhanced oral participation among students but also their speaking proficiency. Later, Delaney (2012) quantified an important nuance: oral participation that was high correlated with gains in proficiency, but not that of quantity alone. This is an important point to the current study. The positive correlation here is validating the overall significance of

participation, yet also reminds us that meaningful participation is potentially important than mere frequency.

This result is also related to the willingness to communicate research. Yashima (2002) demonstrated that the willingness to speak among learners was supported by communication confidence and orientation towards L2 communication. In their study, Cao and Philp (2006) found that there was a change in willingness to communicate between whole-class, group and pair interaction. It is not fixed that participation is not fixed. It may increase or decrease according to the situation in the classroom. The current outcome could not be interpreted, then, as a mere individual issue. It further attributes the influence of teachers, tasks, and classroom climate to the extent to which learners speak.

The third research question was well answered. The classroom participation and speaking skill among ESL learners had a strong positive correlation.

4.4. Discussion

The current research investigated the degree of classroom engagement of ESL students, the degree of their speaking proficiency, and the correlation between the two variables. The results indicated that the classroom participation was moderate, there was moderate speaking skill and statistically significant positive correlation between classroom participation and speaking skill. That is, the more learners were engaged in classroom activities, the better they were in speaking. These results answered the research questions and corroborated the study objectives.

The initial significant conclusion of the research was that ESL students revealed the average classroom participation. This finding implies that the learners were not passive and yet they were not active either. This was because majority of them seemed to feel more at ease when asked to participate rather than to volunteer ideas in the classroom. This trend is significant as it demonstrates that the participation can be contingent on the ability of the learner, as well as the organizational framework and emotional security of the classroom. According to Peng and Woodrow (2010), classroom environment and confidence in communication had a powerful impact on the desire by learners to communicate in English. Similarly, Liu and Littlewood (1997) also indicated that a lot of learners were not willing to join in as they had little previous speaking experience and were not confident in impromptu speaking. The median involvement of the current research, then, can be attributed to a classroom culture, where the students were not unwilling to talk, but only under favourable circumstances.

This can also be interpreted, according to research on anxiety and situations when willingness to communicate is possible. As demonstrated by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety bears a close relationship with speaking as oral performance subjects the learners to correction, embarrassment and negative assessment. Cao and Philp (2006) also showed that readiness to communicate changes in whole-class, group, and pair interaction that implies that participation is not predetermined but extremely dependent on the context. The same was observed in the current study: learners were better prepared to speak when they were organized to interact in the classroom. This is an indication that moderate involvement was not always an indicator of low motivation. Instead, it can have been anxiety, lack of confidence or the necessity to have a more enabling interactional setting.

The second significant observation was that the speaking skill of learners was moderate. This indicates that the majority of the participants could speak at functional level, but not yet they had acquired high fluency or mastered oral control. The relatively balanced scores in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar show that their speaking skill was developing in a

balanced manner, although it was still at an intermediate level. This finding is true to interaction-based perspectives on second language learning. Loewen and Sato (2018) presented a case that interaction is an essential element of second language acquisition as it involves combining input, output, and negotiation to gain meaning. Similarly, in another empirical study, Mackey (1999) demonstrated that conversational interaction facilitated the development of the second language. These studies contribute to understanding why the learners in the current study have reached the medium level: when the opportunities to speak are available, but not exploited to their full extent, oral skill should build up, yet at a slow pace.

The moderate scores on speaking can also be interpreted with references to the studies on peer interaction and corrective feedback. Sato and Lyster (2012) discovered that peer interaction particularly in the context of corrective feedback led to both accuracy and fluency gains. This implies that the most effective way of developing speaking is when learners are not only talking a lot, but also getting a chance to clarify, negotiate, mend and expand their language. The moderate level of speaking in the current study could thus indicate moderate and not intensive oral use possibilities. The learners appeared to have an ability to communicate, yet they still required more profound and prolonged communication to get beyond a functional performance level.

The greatest result of the research was that there was a significant positive correlation between classroom participation and speaking skill. This finding is core since it ascertains that the participation was not just a classroom activity. It had a significant relationship with oral performance. Students who participated more in classroom discussion were more likely to score high in the speaking. The result is in line with previous in-class studies. Day (1984) identified a correlation between the involvement of students in the ESL classroom and mastering English. Tsou (2005) went ahead to indicate that teaching in oral classroom participation enhanced oral participation and oral performance. Collectively, these studies underpin the current discovery that students feel benefited when granted frequent opportunities to speak, respond, and interact in the classroom.

Meanwhile, the current results are to be taken with a grain of salt. The positive correlation between participation and speaking skill does not imply that there are no poorer or better participation. Delaney (2012) also provided a significant difference between the quality and quantity of mouth involvement. His research revealed that the quality of participation was correlated with gains in English proficiency but not quantity. This aspect is quite topical in this case. The existing evidence confirms the opinion that the participation is important, yet it also implies that the content of what learners do in the process of participation can be even more important than the frequency of speaking. The short, routine or teacher-dependent responses may not be as helpful as the longer, meaningful and self initiated speech. That is why the frequency should not be considered as the sole measure of participation. It also must be interpreted in depth, independent, and communicative terms.

The results of the current investigation can also be related to the information in the article uploaded by Abdullah, Qureshi, and Muneer (2026). Learners of Pakistani universities who participated in literature based discussion in that study demonstrated a great deal of improvement in speaking together with increased confidence, desire to speak and increased participation in classroom. This study further found that discussion based activities led to significant interaction and peer support which facilitated orality involvement by the learners. Even though the research that examined literature-based instruction and not classroom

participation per se, it is applicable due to the similarity of the argument: learners can acquire oral skills better when they have actual chances to participate in a classroom, provided that the classroom is supportive.

The other fact that comes out of the current results is that speaking development cannot be considered as a distinct phenomenon that will become obvious over time. It is influenced by the classroom experience. The correlation in this paper indicates that participation can be one of the applied conditions that speaking ability is formed. Nonetheless, it depends on such factors as participation, which is determined by confidence, anxiety, the nature of the task, and classroom atmosphere. This meaning is in accordance with willingness-to-communicate studies, which consider speaking as a linguistic and psychological process. Peng and Woodrow (2010) discovered that willingness to communicate was closely predicted by communication confidence whereas Horwitz et al. (1986) found that anxiety can inhibit oral production despite the learners having the required knowledge in the language. The current research confirms this opinion since it demonstrates that both the participation and speaking skill were correlated, but also indicates that all learners did not come to the classroom talk with the same degree of preparedness.

Pedagogically, the results suggest that language educators ought to create an environment that promotes active and low-risk oral interaction. Proper wait time, providing positive feedback, pair and group discussion activities, and not having students afraid of being judged instantly allow students to contribute more. The involvement must be facilitated rather than coerced. Tsou (2005) demonstrated that oral classroom participation could be enhanced by teaching and Abdullah et al. (2026) demonstrated that structured discussion could enhance speaking confidence and classroom interaction among Pakistani university students. The current research builds on this argument by proposing that active classroom engagement is directly related to speaking skill and needs to be addressed as a key instructional issue as opposed to a secondary classroom issue.

Overall, the interpretation of the results in three obvious conclusions. To begin with, the participants of this study were of moderate participation and moderate speaking competence, which indicates that they were in the process of developing, but still required greater assistance in the area of oral engagement. Second, the considerable positive correlation between participation and speaking skill validates that active classroom participation is significantly related to oral performance. Third, the broader literature and Pakistani study uploaded all substantiate the position that speaking is enhanced when meaningful, structured, and socially facilitating opportunities to use English are provided to learners. The current study, thus, contributes to the existing research on applied lingo that the classroom participation is not a small classroom practice. It is a significant aspect of the development of speaking.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how classroom engagement affects speaking competencies of ESL students. It focused on three main issues: the level of classroom participation, the level of speaking skill, and the relationship between these two variables. The results revealed that the learners were characterized by a moderate classroom participation and moderate speaking skill. More to the point, the research discovered that there was a strong positive correlation between speaking skill and classroom participation. This implies that learners who were more active in classroom activities were most likely to do better in speaking.

The results of these findings reach an important conclusion. Participation in classrooms is not a classroom behavior or an indication of attentiveness. It is directly related to oral language development. The learners do not just attend classes when they are provided with opportunities to respond to questions, express their thoughts, seek clarification, and communicate with other learners. They also gain confidence in speaking and become more proficient in using English. The research hence gives credence to the idea that speaking skill is built on an active basis rather than only through a passive learning process.

The paper also points out that the notion of participation should not be interpreted in a limited manner. The findings indicate that the learners felt freer to speak when the teacher guided participation or the classroom structure facilitated participation. This implies that teachers have an important role in shaping oral participation. The following activities can support learners to be more engaged and develop their speaking competency: a positive classroom atmosphere, purposeful speaking activities, pair/group discussion, and motivation without fear of being embarrassed.

This paper makes a contribution to the theme of speaking development that is becoming increasingly recognized in the field of applied linguistics as linguistic and social. It does not solely hinge on what learners know, but whether they have practical chances of applying that knowledge in communication. That is why, the study proves that classroom participation is the important aspect of language teaching, not the additional classroom behavior. In order to enhance the speaking skills of students, teachers should also establish an environment that invites, encourages and appreciates participation.

In general, the research also finds that classroom engagement can be used to significant effect in enhancing the speaking of ESL students. When learners are engaged, they can talk better, and when they can talk, they can talk better, as the classroom enables them to speak confidently and with a purpose. This renders classroom participation as a significant subject of both the teaching practice and research in the future.

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