

UDK: 378.147.227

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN UZBEKISTAN

Gafurova Nodira Ravshanovna,

Associate professor at the Department of English Practical Course, PhD, Fergana State University, Uzbekistan

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6978-472X>.

nr.gafurova@pf.fdu.uz

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18932318>

Abstract. This study explores gender differences in speaking skill development among Uzbek EFL university students through an online survey. Results reveal strong links between confidence, motivation, strategy use, and classroom participation. Female students demonstrate higher communicative engagement, while male students show lower strategic involvement, highlighting the need for differentiated speaking instruction.

Keywords: gender differences, speaking skills, EFL, Uzbekistan, learning strategies, classroom engagement.

Аннотация. Данное исследование изучает гендерные различия в развитии навыков говорения среди узбекских студентов университета, изучающих английский как иностранный (EFL), с помощью онлайн-опроса. Результаты показывают сильные взаимосвязи между уверенностью, мотивацией, использованием стратегий и участием в классе. Женские студенты демонстрируют более высокую коммуникативную активность, в то время как мужские студенты проявляют менее значительное стратегическое вовлечение, подчеркивая необходимость дифференцированного обучения говорению.

Ключевые слова: гендерные различия, навыки говорения, EFL, Узбекистан, учебные стратегии, вовлеченность в классе.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekistondagi EFL universiteti talabalarida gapirish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishdagi gender farqlarini onlayn so'rov orqali o'rganadi. Natijalar ishonch, motivatsiya, strategiyalarni ishlatish va sinfda ishtirok o'rtasida kuchli bog'liqliklarni ko'rsatadi. Ayol talabalar yuqori kommunikativ jalb qilishni namoyon etishsa, erkak talabalar strategik faoliyatni kam ko'rsatadi, bu esa gapirishni o'rgatishda farqlangan yondashuv zarurligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: gender farqlari, gapirish ko'nikmalari, EFL, O'zbekiston, o'rganish strategiyalari, sinfda jalb qilish.

Introduction. Uzbekistan has made significant strides in promoting English language education, employing foreign English teachers to improve students' proficiency and prepare the younger generation for global engagement (Arshad, 2024, p. 65). Gender differences have emerged as a critical factor in shaping students' language learning experiences. Observations indicate that female students, particularly in secondary grades, show higher participation and academic achievement compared to male students. Such trends reflect the interplay of cultural, social, and educational influences on student motivation and engagement in EFL learning.

Literature review. In the Uzbek EFL context, gender dynamics significantly influence students' engagement and performance, particularly in communicative domains.

Arshad (2024) reports that female students demonstrate higher levels of interest and participation in language learning at the secondary level, where female enrollment and engagement surpass that of males (p. 65). This trend aligns with findings from Indonesia, Croatia, and Saudi Arabia, where female learners show greater classroom involvement and more frequent use of diverse learning strategies (Mahmud & Nur, 2018, p. 56; Božinović & Sindik, 2011, p. 10; Daif-Allah, 2012, p. 22). The correlation across these contexts suggests that while socio-cultural settings vary, female learners consistently display stronger motivational and strategic orientation toward EFL learning, particularly in school environments.

Gender disparities become especially pronounced in speaking skill development. Arshad (2024) found that 90% of female students expressed enthusiasm for improving pronunciation, speaking, and writing skills, compared to only 10% of male students (p. 68). Similar patterns were observed among Taiwanese learners, where female students showed greater interest in verbal interaction (Shakouri & Saligheh, 2012, p. 3). These convergent findings indicate that female learners are generally more proactive in engaging with communicative tasks, which are essential for developing oral proficiency. Consequently, the literature collectively underscores the need for targeted instructional strategies that specifically motivate male students to participate more actively in speaking-focused activities.

Differences in learning strategies further explain this gap. Studies by Liyanage and Bartlett (2012, p. 240) and Mahmud and Nur (2018, p. 58) demonstrate that female learners employ a broader range of social, affective, and metacognitive strategies, which positively influence oral performance. They frequently collaborate with peers, seek teacher feedback, and engage in reflective practices (Kao, Chen, & Craigie, 2017, p. 207), all of which create supportive conditions for speaking development. In contrast, male learners often prioritize instrumental objectives such as qualifications and employability over communicative competence (Saranraj, Khan, & Zafar, 2016, p. 4), limiting their engagement in oral tasks. This strategic divergence suggests that explicit strategy instruction and scaffolded collaborative activities could help reduce disparities in speaking achievement.

Empirical evidence also reveals lower classroom participation, homework completion, and attendance rates among male students in Uzbekistan—ranging from 10–20% compared to 80–90% for females (Arshad, 2024, p. 69). Comparable trends were identified in Saudi Arabia, where female students demonstrated stronger classroom engagement despite similar instructional access (Daif-Allah, 2012, p. 25). However, research indicates that gender differences are less evident in areas such as reading and grammar (Llach & Gallego, 2012, p. 112; Logan & Johnston, 2010, p. 180), suggesting that disparities are concentrated primarily in interactive, communicative skills. Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of differentiated pedagogy that

leverages female learners’ communicative strengths while incorporating motivational, collaborative, and gamified strategies to increase male students’ oral participation—thereby fostering balanced speaking proficiency within Uzbekistan’s broader educational development goals.

Methodology. The study was conducted through an online survey administered to 24 Bachelor’s students at Fergana State University. The questionnaire included multiple-choice and open-ended questions measuring speaking confidence, classroom participation, motivation, strategy use, and perceptions of teacher support. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic interpretation.

Results. The cross-tabulated data (N = 24) reveal a clear relationship between students’ speaking confidence (High/Medium/Low) and their classroom participation (Often/Sometimes/Rare). Among students who reported High confidence (8 students), all 8 (100%) participate often in speaking activities, with none reporting “sometimes” or “rare.” For those with Medium confidence (10 students), participation is more distributed: 4 participate often, 6 participate sometimes, and none report rare participation. In contrast, all 6 students (100%) with Low confidence participate rarely, with zero students in this group selecting “often” or “sometimes.”

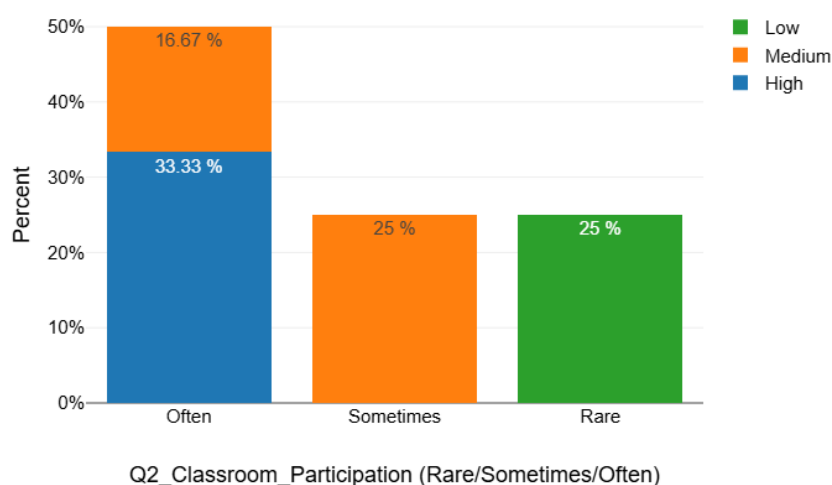


Figure 1. Speaking Confidence and Classroom Participation by Level

Overall participation patterns show that 12 students (50%) participate often, 6 students (25%) sometimes, and 6 students (25%) rarely. The total distribution of speaking confidence indicates 8 high-confidence students (33.3%), 10 medium-confidence students (41.7%), and 6 low-confidence students (25%). The data demonstrate a strong positive correlation between speaking confidence and classroom participation: higher confidence aligns consistently with more frequent participation, whereas low confidence corresponds exclusively with rare classroom involvement. This finding supports the broader literature suggesting that confidence plays a decisive role in oral engagement and communicative skill development.

The data (N = 24) demonstrate a strong association between students' motivation for speaking (Communication, Career, Personal, Grades) and their use of speaking strategies (Often, Sometimes, Never). Among students motivated by Communication (6 students), all 6 (100%) report using speaking strategies often, with none selecting "sometimes" or "never." Similarly, students driven by Personal motivation (6 students) also show high strategic engagement, with all 6 (100%) reporting that they use strategies often. In contrast, the Career-motivated group (6 students) displays moderate strategic involvement: all 6 (100%) report using strategies only sometimes, with none selecting "often" or "never." The most striking difference appears among students motivated primarily by Grades (6 students), where all 6 (100%) report never using speaking strategies.

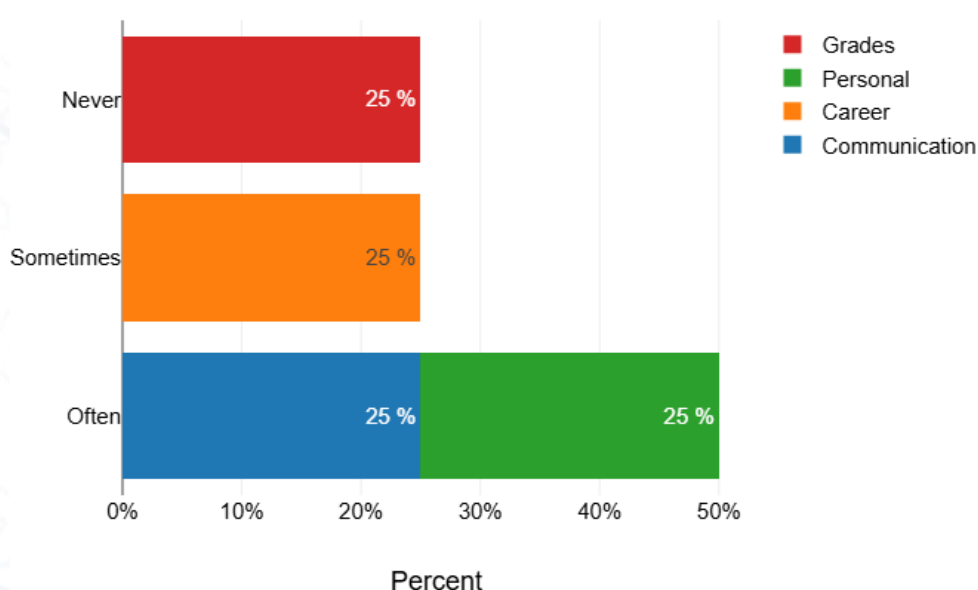


Figure 2. Motivation Type and Use of Speaking Strategies

In total, 12 students (50%) use speaking strategies often, 6 students (25%) use them sometimes, and 6 students (25%) never use them. The results indicate a clear motivational divide: intrinsic and communicative motivations (Communication and Personal) are strongly linked to frequent strategy use, while instrumental motivation focused on grades corresponds to complete absence of strategic engagement. Career-oriented students fall in the middle, demonstrating partial but not consistent strategy application. These findings align with the literature suggesting that intrinsic and communicative goals foster deeper strategic involvement in speaking skill development.

The data (N = 24) indicate that half of the respondents perceive teacher support as a decisive factor in improving their speaking skills. Specifically, 12 students (50%) answered "Yes," confirming that teacher support clearly helps their speaking development. Another 6 students (25%) selected "Somewhat," suggesting that while teacher support contributes to improvement, its effect may depend on instructional style or individual

learner differences. In contrast, 6 students (25%) reported “No,” indicating that they do not perceive teacher support as significantly influencing their speaking progress.

Q5_Teacher_Support_Helps_Speaking (Yes/Somewhat/No)

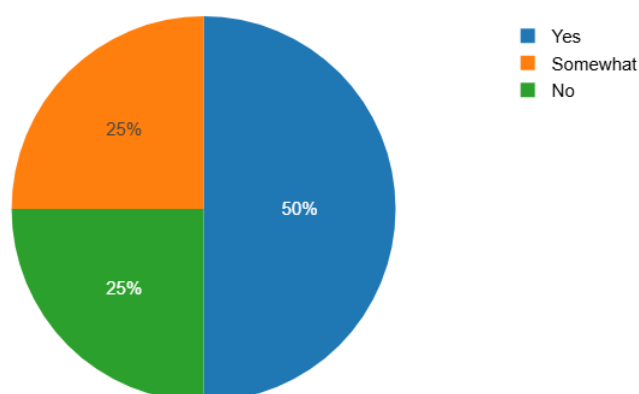


Figure 3. Perceived Impact of Teacher Support on Speaking Development

The dataset shows 100% valid responses with no missing or invalid data (0%), ensuring full reliability of interpretation. Overall, 75% of students (Yes + Somewhat) acknowledge at least a partial positive role of teacher support in speaking skill development, highlighting its pedagogical importance. However, the presence of 25% who perceive no impact suggests variability in how support strategies are delivered or received, underscoring the need for differentiated and responsive instructional approaches.

The qualitative responses (N = 24) reveal a clear division between students who perceive speaking activities positively and those who experience anxiety or low confidence. A substantial number of students express favorable attitudes toward interactive and collaborative formats: several mention that pair and group discussions, group work, and small-group activities help them feel more confident and reduce anxiety. Others highlight the benefits of role plays, debates, presentations, and interactive speaking activities, noting that these formats help them express ideas freely and improve confidence. Some responses emphasize supportive pedagogical conditions, such as teacher feedback, a supportive classroom atmosphere, clear instructions, interesting topics, and games, all of which are described as facilitating greater speaking engagement. Additionally, at least one student reports practicing speaking outside the classroom, indicating high intrinsic motivation.

Conversely, a noticeable portion of responses reflect speaking anxiety and avoidance. Several students state that they feel nervous, find speaking stressful, are afraid of making mistakes, lack confidence, or consider speaking English generally challenging. One student explicitly prefers writing tasks instead of speaking, and another prefers structured tasks, suggesting discomfort with spontaneous oral interaction. Overall, the data illustrate a dual pattern: while many students view communicative and collaborative speaking tasks as confidence-building and motivating, a significant minority experience

anxiety and reduced self-efficacy. This qualitative evidence supports the quantitative findings that confidence, classroom climate, and instructional strategies strongly influence students' engagement in speaking skill development.

Discussion. The findings of this study strongly support the existing literature on gender differences in speaking skill development within EFL contexts. The clear correlation between speaking confidence and classroom participation confirms that students with high confidence consistently engage more actively in communicative tasks. This aligns with Arshad (2024), who reported higher classroom involvement among female learners in Uzbekistan. Similarly, Shakouri and Saligheh (2012) found that female students demonstrate greater interest in verbal interaction, reinforcing the argument that confidence and participation are mutually reinforcing factors in oral proficiency development.

The results concerning motivation and strategy use further confirm previous research. Students motivated by communication and personal growth reported frequent use of speaking strategies, whereas those motivated primarily by grades reported no strategy use. This pattern supports Mahmud and Nur (2018) and Liyanage and Bartlett (2012), who emphasize that intrinsic and socially oriented motivations foster deeper strategic engagement. Moreover, the limited strategic involvement among grade-oriented students reflects Saranraj, Khan, and Zafar's (2016) observation that instrumental motivation alone may not encourage communicative competence. Thus, the current findings reinforce the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations in speaking development.

Teacher support also emerged as a significant factor, with 75% of participants acknowledging at least partial positive impact. This corresponds with Kao, Chen, and Craigie (2017), who highlight the importance of affective and supportive environments in reducing language anxiety. However, the fact that 25% of students perceived no benefit from teacher support suggests that instructional methods may not equally address diverse learner needs. This partially extends the literature by indicating that while teacher support is generally beneficial, its effectiveness depends on how it is implemented and perceived by different students.

The qualitative responses deepen this interpretation by revealing two contrasting learner profiles: confident, interaction-oriented students who value collaborative and communicative activities, and anxious students who fear mistakes and prefer structured or written tasks. This dual pattern is consistent with Daif-Allah (2012), who noted gender-related differences in classroom engagement despite equal instructional access. Overall, the findings support the broader scholarly consensus that gender differences are most visible in interactive and communicative domains rather than in structural aspects such as grammar or reading (Llach & Gallego, 2012; Logan & Johnston, 2010).

Conclusion. This study confirms that gender differences in speaking skill development are closely connected to confidence levels, motivational orientation, and strategy use. Students with higher communicative and personal motivation demonstrate stronger engagement and more frequent use of speaking strategies, which directly contributes to greater classroom participation. Conversely, students driven primarily by grades show limited strategic involvement and lower speaking confidence.

The findings emphasize the necessity of differentiated pedagogical approaches in Uzbek EFL classrooms. Teachers should integrate collaborative tasks, gamified activities, structured scaffolding, and anxiety-reducing strategies to increase male students' participation while maintaining female learners' high engagement levels.

Ultimately, fostering balanced speaking proficiency is essential for achieving Uzbekistan's broader educational reforms and global integration goals. Addressing motivational and affective dimensions in speaking instruction can contribute to more equitable and effective language development outcomes.

References:

1. Arshad, S. M. B. M. Beyond Borders: A Study Of Foreign English Teachers'perceptions On Gender Dynamics In Efl Students'interest And Involvement In English Language Learning In Uzbekistan.
2. Božinović, N., & Sindik, J. (2011). Gender differences in the use of learning strategies in adult foreign language learners. *Metodički obzori: časopis za odgojno-obrazovnu teoriju i praksu*, 6(11), 5-20.
3. Daif-Allah, A. S. (2012). Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning and Their Relationship to Gender. *English Language Teaching*, 5(10), 20-33.
4. Invest.gov.uz. (n.d.). Development strategy of the new Uzbekistan. Retrieved from <https://invest.gov.uz/mediacenter/news/development-strategy-of-the-new-uzbekistan/>
5. Kao, P. C., Chen, K. T. C., & Craigie, P. (2017). Gender differences in strategies for coping with foreign language learning anxiety. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 45(2), 205-210.
6. Liyanage, I., & Bartlett, B. J. (2012). Gender and language learning strategies: Looking beyond the categories. *The Language Learning Journal*, 40(2), 237-253.
7. Llach, M. P. A., & Gallego, M. T. (2012). VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN A SECOND LANGUAGE. *Elia: Estudios de lingüística inglesa aplicada*, 12.
8. Logan, S., & Johnston, R. (2010). Investigating gender differences in reading. *Educational Review*, 62(2), 175-187.
9. Mahmud, M., & Nur, S. (2018). Exploring Students' Learning Strategies and Gender Differences in English Language Teaching. *International Journal of Language Education*, 2(1), 51-64.
10. Saranraj, L., Khan, Z. A., & Zafar, S. (2016). Influence of motivational factors and gender differences on learning English as a second language: A case of engineering students from rural background. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(44), 1-7.
11. Shakouri, N., & Saligheh, M. (2012). Revisiting age and gender influence in second language acquisition. *Advances in English Linguistics (AEL)*, 1(1), 1-6.