

The Practices and Challenges Associated With Speaking Skills Among Undergraduate Students

Tamirat Taye¹ , Gemechis Teshome² 

¹ Mizan Tepi University, Ethiopia

² Jimma University, Ethiopia

Abstract

Effective communication through speaking skills is essential for the academic and personal development of university students. This descriptive study aimed to investigate students' practices and challenges related to speaking skills. It focused on 480 regular undergraduate students selected through a simple random sampling method. The researcher employed classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews to collect data from both students and EFL instructors. Classroom observation was used to assess real-time speaking practices, interaction patterns, and the effectiveness of instructional methods in fostering speaking skills. Additionally, a structured questionnaire was administered to students to evaluate their awareness and practice of speaking skills, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with instructors to gain insights into students' speaking proficiency and perceptions. Statistical analysis was used for quantitative data, while qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed for themes and insights. The findings reveal a significant gap between students' awareness of the importance of speaking skills and their practical application. Various challenges contribute to this mismatch, including limited access to structured opportunities for practice, lack of confidence due to speaking anxiety, and inadequate support from educational institutions in providing resources for skill enhancement. Classroom observations further highlighted issues such as students' reluctance to participate in speaking activities, over-reliance on written assignments, and minimal use of interactive speaking exercises in lessons. Based on the study's outcomes, recommendations are proposed to improve speaking proficiency among students. These include dedicating more time to speaking practice, increasing awareness of the benefits of effective communication, implementing regular assessments to monitor progress, and integrating a dedicated speaking module into the curriculum. Emphasizing flexible teaching approaches and encouraging diverse speaking practices beyond the classroom is essential for enhancing overall language proficiency among students.

Keywords: Awareness, challenges, practice, speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are crucial in both educational and professional contexts, serving as essential competencies for effective communication and critical thinking among university students (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). Proficiency in speaking not only meets academic demands but also profoundly influences students' future career prospects. However, many students face considerable challenges that impede their ability to articulate ideas clearly and coherently. These challenges encompass linguistic barriers, struggles with organizing arguments, and difficulties in expressing thoughts effectively (Nadesan & Shah, 2020). It is imperative for teachers to grasp the nature and prevalence of these challenges to adapt instructional strategies effectively.

Effective speaking skills are crucial for university students as they prepare for academic success and professional endeavors (Gudu, 2015). Despite the importance of these skills, many students encounter challenges such as pronunciation, fluency, and organizing their ideas effectively (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020). These difficulties not only impact their academic performance but also hinder their participation in classroom discussions and other communicative activities. Proficiency in speaking plays a pivotal role in the academic and professional growth of university students (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). These skills not only enable effective communication but also foster critical thinking and engagement with academic material. However, many university students face significant difficulties in developing these skills, stemming from diverse language backgrounds, varying levels of exposure to communicative environments, and insufficient support in refining their oral communication abilities (Nadesan & Shah, 2020).

Corresponding Author

Tamirat Taye, Mizan Tepi University, Ethiopia

E-mail: tameeng17@gmail.com

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Despite these challenges, nurturing strong speaking skills is crucial as it enables students to express their ideas coherently and confidently. This capability enriches their interactions in academic settings and prepares them for future career opportunities where effective communication is paramount for success. Improving speaking proficiency among university students necessitates addressing these underlying challenges comprehensively (Nadesan & Shah, 2020). By bridging gaps in language backgrounds and providing ample opportunities for practice in communicative settings, educators can create an environment conducive to skill development. This approach not only enhances students' confidence in expressing themselves but also equips them with the competence needed to thrive in diverse academic and professional environments (Gudu, 2015). Ultimately, investing in the improvement of speaking skills not only enriches students' educational experiences but also prepares them for the demands of an increasingly interconnected and communicative world. Research consistently emphasizes the prevalence of deficiencies in speaking skills among university students, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions and educational reforms (Cronin et al., 2020). These studies emphasize the crucial role of investigating common challenges in speaking skills among university students to inform effective educational strategies. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing interventions that promote students' speaking abilities and enhance their overall academic performance.

In the context of university education, there is a growing recognition of the importance of speaking skills for academic achievement and future career prospects (Adem & Berkessa, 2022). As digital platforms expand and communication becomes increasingly crucial in academic and professional settings, the demand for strong speaking skills among students is more critical than ever. Therefore, integrating the development of speaking skills into the university curriculum is essential to adequately prepare students for the challenges of the modern world (Pardede, 2020). However, concerns persist regarding students' limited opportunities to authentically practice and develop these skills, which can hinder their ability to express themselves clearly and confidently, impacting both academic performance and interpersonal communication abilities (Khan & Ali, 2010).

We are motivated to conduct this study due to the significant challenges undergraduate students face in developing their speaking skills. Effective oral communication is crucial for academic success and future professional opportunities, yet many students struggle with fluency, pronunciation, and confidence when speaking in English (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). Previous research indicates that limited exposure to the language, lack of interactive classroom activities, and fear of making mistakes hinder students' ability to express themselves effectively (Nadesan & Shah, 2020). These issues highlight the need for an in-depth investigation to identify the key factors affecting students' speaking abilities and propose practical solutions to enhance their proficiency.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is a crucial skill for undergraduate students, yet many struggle with

fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. Speaking skills are often overlooked in traditional classrooms, leaving students unprepared for real-world communication (Sada et al., 2023). Factors such as limited exposure to English, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of interactive learning opportunities further hinder their progress (Nadesan & Shah, 2020). Recognizing these challenges, we are driven to explore the barriers that prevent students from achieving oral proficiency and uncover solutions that will empower them to speak with clarity and confidence. By shedding light on these issues, our study aims to bridge the gap between language learning and effective communication. Beyond merely identifying challenges, our research seeks to revolutionize the way speaking skills are taught in higher education. Many current teaching methods prioritize grammar and writing over interactive speaking exercises, creating a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical communication (Gudu, 2015). We believe that by integrating more engaging and student-centered approaches, we can transform the learning experience and equip students with the skills they need to thrive. Through this study, we aspire to inspire educators, reshape classroom methodologies, and pave the way for a more dynamic and communicative English learning environment (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020). Consequently; this study aims to investigate practices and challenges associated with speaking Skills among Undergraduate Students. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do students practice and improve their speaking skills?
2. What specific challenges do students encounter in developing effective speaking skills?

Literature review

Speaking skills are fundamental for both academic success and social integration among university students. Research highlights that proficiency in speaking enables students not only to articulate their thoughts clearly but also to actively engage in classroom discussions and collaborative activities (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). In Ethiopia, where educational policies emphasize the development of language and communication competencies (Sada et al., 2023), speaking abilities play a crucial role in students' capacity to grasp subjects deeply, communicate their ideas convincingly, and interact meaningfully with peers. Additionally, (Sada et al., 2023) highlights the significance of enhancing students' awareness and practice of speaking skills to adequately prepare them for future academic pursuits and professional challenges.

Despite the recognized importance of speaking skills, Ethiopian university education faces several challenges in effectively developing these competencies. Educational practices often prioritize written assessments over oral communication, which limits opportunities for students to practice and refine their speaking abilities in authentic contexts (Dheressa et al., 2024). This imbalance negatively impacts students' fluency and confidence in speaking, both of which are crucial for effective communication (Dheressa et al., 2024). Moreover, teachers encounter obstacles such as insufficient training in

communicative teaching methodologies and limited access to resources that support interactive learning activities (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires integrating speaking activities more prominently into the curriculum and providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their instructional practices (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). By overcoming these barriers, universities can create a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to actively participate in discussions, articulate their viewpoints effectively, and develop essential lifelong communication skills. This approach not only strengthens students' academic performance but also prepares them for professional success in a competitive global environment.

Effective speaking skills are integral not only to academic achievement but also to the development of strong interpersonal relationships and overall communication competence (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Students who possess proficient speaking skills can articulate their thoughts persuasively in diverse settings, enhancing their ability to engage meaningfully in academic debates and collaborative projects (Khan & Ali, 2010). This capability is particularly crucial in Ethiopia, where spoken communication skills are essential for navigating educational challenges and participating actively in social interactions.

Studies have revealed varying levels of awareness among university students regarding the significance and applicability of speaking skills (Crisanita & Mandasari, 2022). Previous research often utilizes surveys and interviews as primary methods to assess students' understanding of speaking abilities, offering valuable insights into their attitudes toward communication (Crisanita & Mandasari, 2022). While some studies emphasize the necessity of improving students' spoken communication through structured training programs, others highlight the lack of institutional support as a key barrier (Crisanita & Mandasari, 2022). A comparative analysis of these studies suggests that while awareness of speaking skills is widespread, practical implementation remains a significant challenge due to curriculum constraints and pedagogical limitations. Surveys provide quantitative data on the extent to which students recognize the importance of speaking skills in academic settings and beyond. Interviews, on the other hand, offer qualitative insights by exploring students' personal experiences, challenges, and aspirations related to speaking proficiency. Together, these methods not only reveal the current state of students' awareness but also illuminate potential barriers that may hinder their development in this crucial area. By leveraging both quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of university students' perspectives on speaking skills and inform strategies to enhance these essential competencies effectively.

Teaching practices in Ethiopian universities often prioritize traditional methods centered on memorization and written examinations, which tend to sideline interactive speaking activities (Wado & Seid, 2020). This approach limits students' exposure to real-life speaking scenarios where they can develop fluency, confidence, and practical communication skills (Wado

& Seid, 2020). Consequently, students may struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into effective oral communication, which can impact their ability to communicate effectively in academic and professional settings. Moreover, educators face significant challenges in implementing communicative teaching methodologies due to inadequate training and support in techniques that promote speaking skills development (Mahbub & Hadina, 2021).

Additionally, limited access to instructional materials and resources further impedes educators' ability to create dynamic and engaging speaking-focused lessons. Previous studies on language pedagogy indicate that resource constraints are a recurring challenge in various educational contexts, not just in Ethiopia (Mahbub & Hadina, 2021). For instance, research from other regions highlights the role of technology-assisted learning in improving speaking skills by providing students with access to digital tools and language labs (Suban, 2021). However, Ethiopian universities often lack such facilities, further limiting students' ability to practice spoken English outside the classroom.

To address these challenges effectively, innovative approaches and targeted professional development opportunities for teachers are essential (Mahbub & Hadina, 2021). Integrating interactive speaking activities into the curriculum, providing workshops on communicative teaching strategies, and enhancing access to relevant teaching materials can empower educators to create more inclusive and stimulating learning environments. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources, educational stakeholders can foster a shift toward more effective teaching practices that prioritize the development of speaking skills alongside traditional academic competencies. This holistic approach not only enhances students' communicative abilities but also prepares them more comprehensively for future academic pursuits and professional success in an increasingly globalized world. Comparative studies from various educational settings highlight effective strategies for enhancing speaking skills among university students. In some educational systems, structured debate programs, peer discussion forums, and language immersion experiences have demonstrated significant success in improving students' speaking abilities (Suban, 2021). Additionally, professional development programs for educators focusing on interactive and communicative teaching methods have shown positive results in fostering student participation and engagement (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). These approaches not only enhance students' confidence and proficiency in oral communication but also foster their holistic development, preparing them for a variety of academic and social challenges.

Drawing insights from these best practices can significantly guide efforts to improve speaking skills among Ethiopian university students. By addressing key factors such as motivation, teaching methods, and access to resources, educators can cultivate a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to practice and enhance their speaking abilities. Unlike some international models where speaking activities are seamlessly integrated into coursework,

Ethiopian universities still face a significant gap in providing structured opportunities for speaking practice. This contrast underscores the need for policy revisions and curriculum adaptations to ensure that speaking skills receive adequate attention in higher education institutions. Thus, while previous studies provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in developing speaking skills, there remains a need for more localized research that examines the specific barriers and solutions within the Ethiopian higher education context. By learning from international best practices and tailoring them to the local educational landscape, universities can make meaningful progress in improving students' oral communication skills. Enhancing speaking skills will not only empower students academically but also prepare them for professional success and active participation in society.

METHOD

Research design and approach

This study employed a descriptive survey design, incorporating a mixed approach to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data.

Research site and participants

The study is conducted at Mizan Tepi University, emphasizing the undergraduate students of the university. This setting is targeted because of its proximity to the residence of the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher works at a university that offers various speaking courses to students. This firsthand experience with teaching speaking courses provides the researcher with unique insights into the challenges that students face in developing their speaking skills. The study targeted the undergraduate students of natural and computational science and engineering colleges of the university. Considering these colleges helped the researchers to realize representation across different academic disciplines and colleges. Since the population size of the colleges is difficult to manage within the scope of such a specific article, the researchers selected 480 students from the total of 4795 students of the college using stratified random sampling to guarantee proportional representation across departmental distribution and gender demographics. In addition, a simple random sampling methodology was employed to determine the number of participants within each college. This unbiased selection method ensures that every eligible student within the designated colleges has an equal opportunity to be included in the study, thereby enhancing the fairness and reliability of the findings. This represents 10% of the total population. All students who are enrolled in the 2023/2024 academic year are considered in the sampling process.

Data collection tools

To collect data from the samples, the researchers employed classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to assess students' real-time engagement in speaking activities, their interaction patterns, fluency, and confidence. It also provided insights into the teaching strategies used by instructors and the overall classroom dynamics that influence speaking skills. Observers

used structured checklists and field notes to systematically document speaking challenges, such as hesitation, pronunciation difficulties, and reluctance to participate in discussions.

The questionnaire, designed by the researcher, aimed to assess students' awareness and practice of speaking skills, along with identifying common problems and their causes. It was distributed to the selected 480 students. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 purposely selected EFL instructors. This method allowed for an open discussion on students' speaking challenges, teaching approaches used by instructors, mechanisms to address issues, and potential solutions. By integrating classroom observations with questionnaires and interviews, the researchers were able to gather comprehensive data, combining both real-time classroom practices and students' and teachers' perspectives on speaking skill development.

Data collection procedure

The initial instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire, which provided quantitative insights into students' awareness of their speaking skills. This method enabled the researcher to gather a broad range of perspectives from a larger number of students. Subsequently, interviews with instructors were conducted to obtain qualitative insights into their observations and perceptions of students' speaking challenges.

Data analysis

The data collected through the instruments was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Firstly, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the responses to the questionnaire. This involved organizing and presenting the data in a meaningful manner to provide an overview of student's perceptions of their speaking proficiency. Descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency and variability, were utilized to quantify and summarize the key findings derived from the questionnaire responses. These analyses enabled the researchers to identify significant trends regarding various aspects of speaking proficiency among undergraduate students. Additionally, the qualitative data obtained through the interview with instructors were thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis involved identifying frequent themes, patterns, and categories within the qualitative data.

RESULTS

Analysis of students' questionnaire

Based on the data provided in Figure 1, which presents a survey of 480 undergraduate students at Mizan Tepi University, it is clear that speaking skills are widely acknowledged as essential for academic success. The analysis shows that 230(47.9%) strongly agreed and 222(46.2%) agreed with this sentiment, totally (94.3%) who affirm the importance of speaking skills.

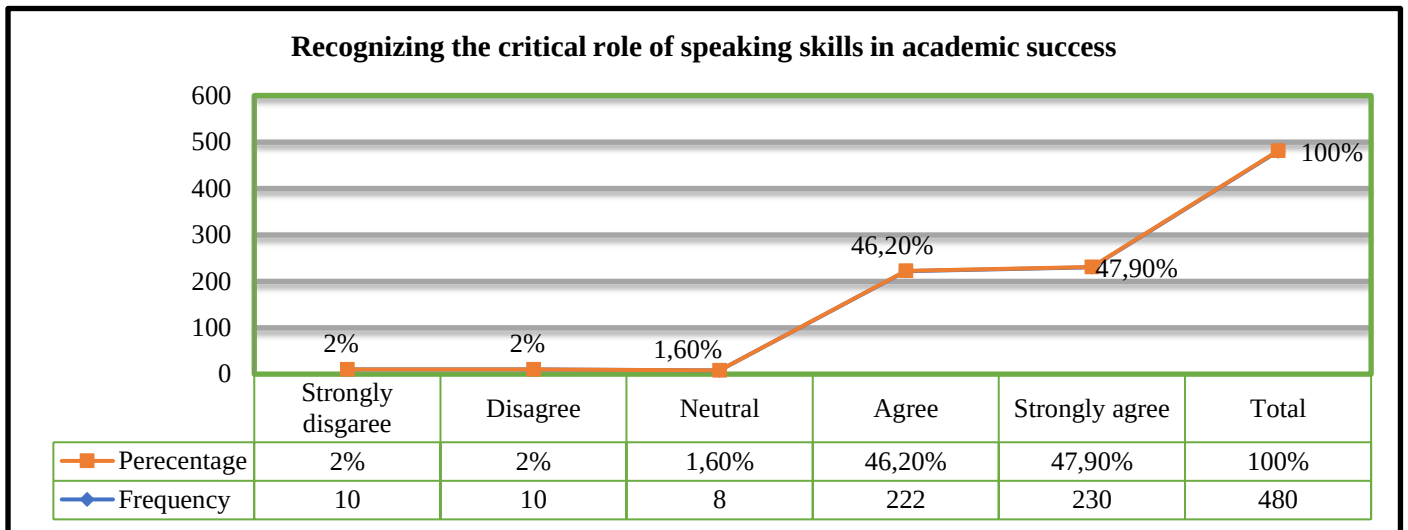


Figure 1. Students' recognition of the critical role of speaking skills in academic success

This strong agreement highlights the students' understanding of how effective communication can positively impact their academic journey. Scholars in the field support these findings, noting that good communication enhances students' ability to express ideas clearly, participate actively in class discussions, and excel in presentations (Zare & Othman, 2015). These skills are essential not only for academic achievement but also for future professional success. However, a minority of students expressed less certainty: 10(2.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 8(1.7%) were neutral on the matter. These viewpoints highlight areas where educational efforts could focus to better emphasize the importance of speaking skills among all students.

Based on the analysis of survey data in Figure 2 from 480 undergraduate students at Mizan Tepi University, a significant majority demonstrates a deep awareness of the crucial role that effective speaking skills play in shaping their future career opportunities. Specifically, 230(47.9%) strongly agreed and

222(46.2%) agreed on the criticality of speaking skills for career prospects. This high level of agreement, totally (94.1%) of respondents, emphasizes a widespread recognition among students regarding the importance of speaking proficiency in influencing their professional trajectories. Scholarly literature verifies these findings, highlighting speaking skills as essential for networking, delivering professional presentations, and advancing in careers (Maharani et al., 2024).

This scholarly agreement supports the practical understanding among students of the direct impact of communication abilities on their career development. In contrast, a minority of students holds different views: 10(2%) strongly disagreed or disagreed, and 8(1.6%) remain neutral on this matter. These perspectives suggest potential areas where educational interventions could emphasize the enduring benefits of proficient speaking skills in professional contexts. Thus, the overwhelming majority of students acknowledged the critical importance of effective speaking skills in shaping their academic and professional

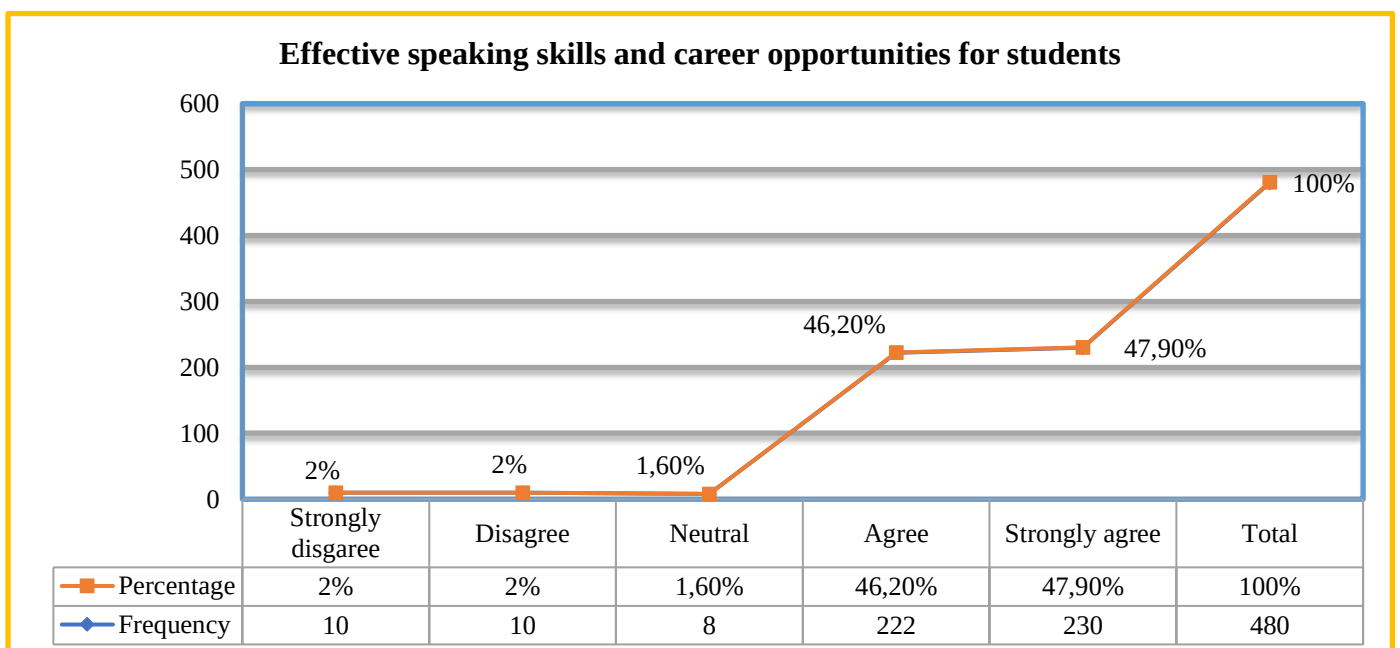


Figure 2. Effective speaking skills and career opportunities for students

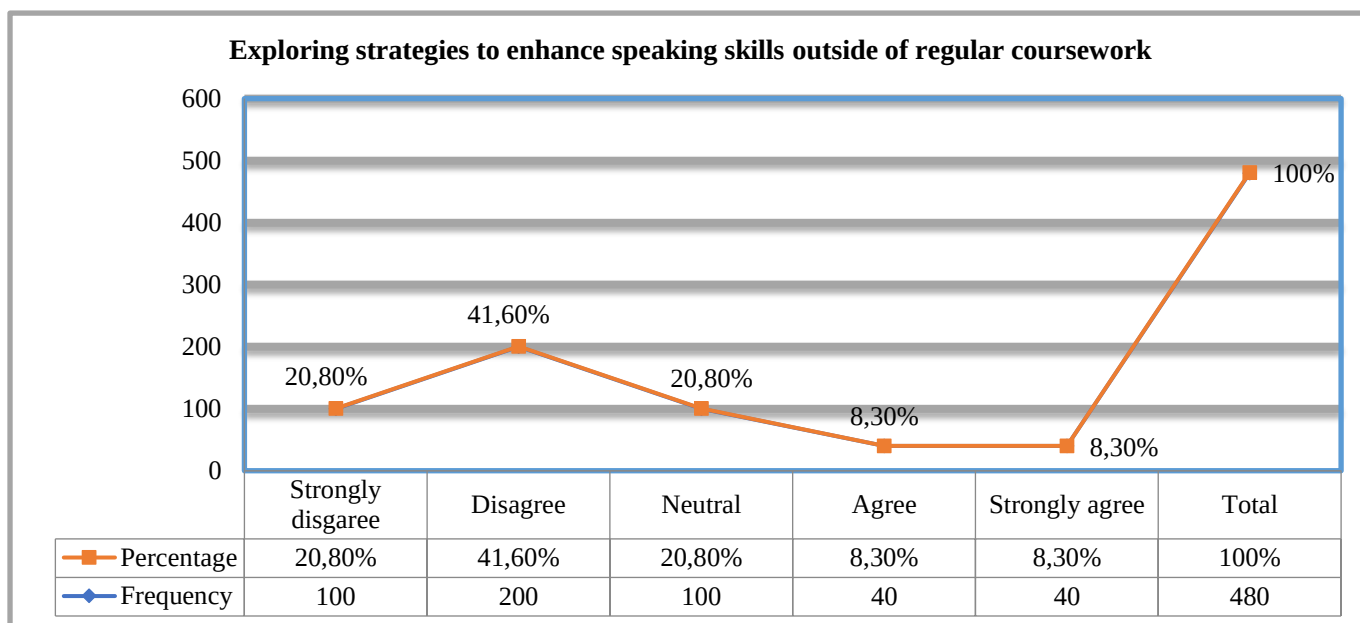


Figure 3. Exploring strategies to enhance speaking skills outside of regular coursework

success. Strengthening these skills through targeted educational strategies can significantly enhance students' readiness to achieve their career aspirations.

Based on the data analysis in Figure 3, it is evident that a significant portion of the students do not actively seek opportunities to improve their speaking skills outside of regular coursework. Specifically, 300 (62.5%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, indicating a lack of proactive engagement in enhancing their speaking abilities beyond the classroom. Conversely, a minority of students, comprising 80 (16.7%) who either agreed or strongly agreed with seeking external opportunities, demonstrate an awareness of the benefits of practical experience in improving speaking skills. This aligns with scholarly views emphasizing the role of active

engagement in real-world contexts for deeper learning and skill development. Enhancing students' proactive engagement in seeking external opportunities could contribute significantly to their academic success and career readiness. Implications of these findings suggest the need for targeted interventions aimed at fostering a culture of self-directed learning and experiential practice among students. Implementing structured programs, workshops, and community engagements that promote practical speaking opportunities outside of coursework could bridge the identified gap. This proactive approach not only enhances communication proficiency but also prepares students more effectively for the demands of their future careers.

The data from Figure 4 reveals how students view the support provided by their department to improve their speaking skills.

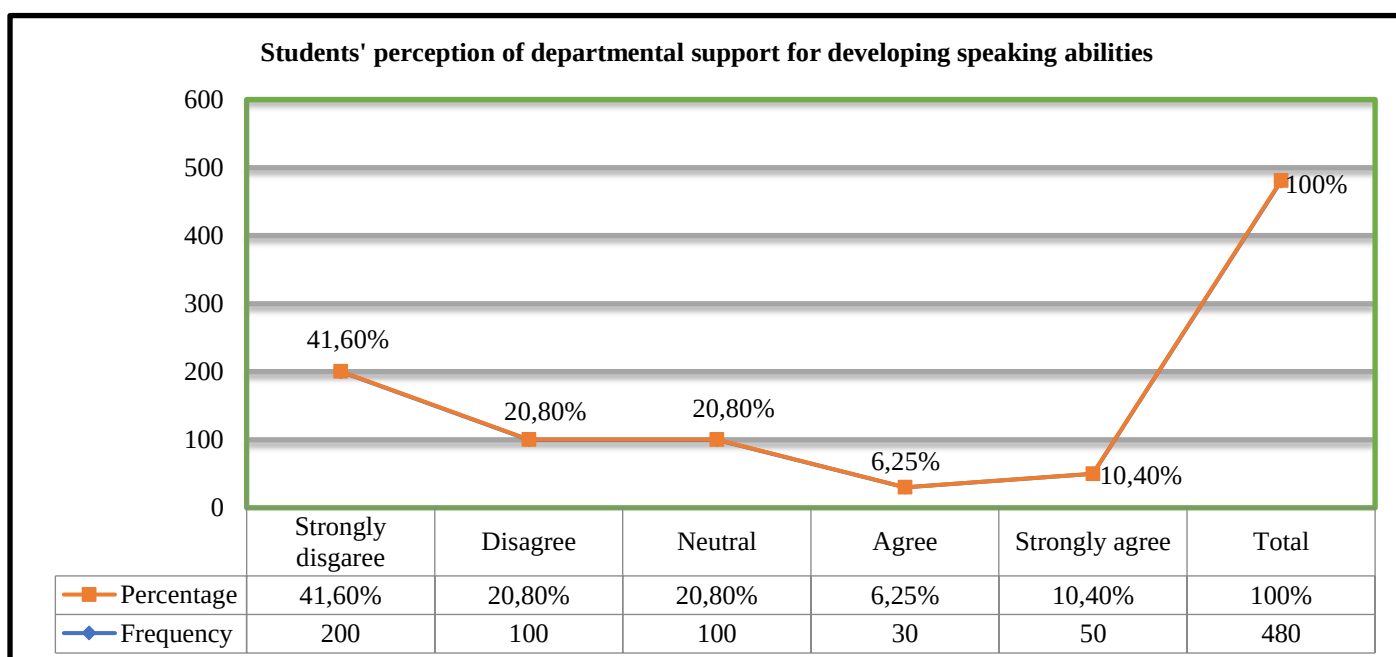


Figure 4. Students' Perception of departmental support for developing speaking abilities

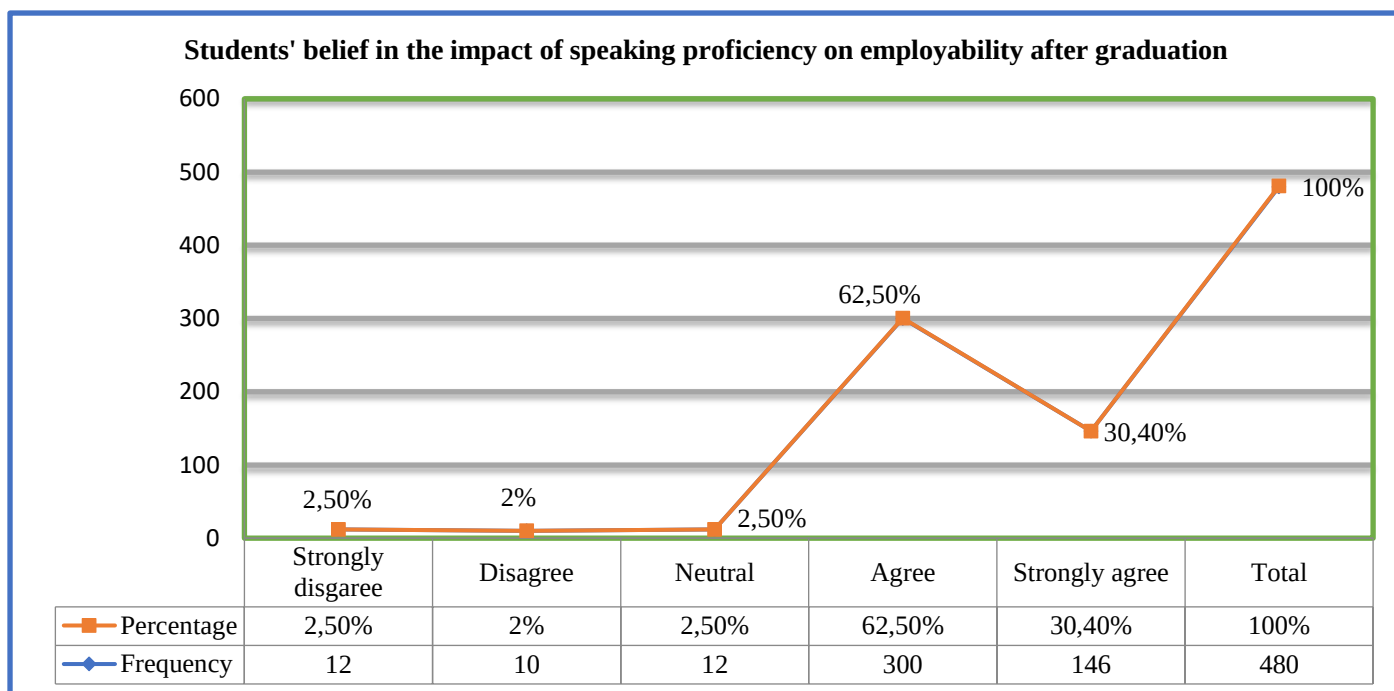


Figure 5. Students' Beliefs about Speaking Proficiency and Employability

Out of the 480 students surveyed, a majority of 62.40% expressed dissatisfaction with the support offered. This includes 41.60% who strongly disagreed and 20.80% who disagreed that the department provides enough resources for speaking development. These numbers indicate that many students feel the current support is insufficient. The 20.80% who responded neutrally suggest there's uncertainty or mixed feelings about the support available, possibly due to unclear communication or varying experiences.

On the positive side, 16.65% of students either agreed (6.25%) or strongly agreed (10.40%) that the department does provide sufficient resources. Although this represents a smaller percentage, it shows that some students feel supported in their

speaking skill development. These findings underline the importance of departments addressing gaps in support through clear communication, more tailored resources, and practical opportunities for skill improvement. By listening to student feedback and drawing on research about effective support structures, departments can better meet students' needs and foster an environment where speaking abilities can thrive. These findings resonate with scholarly perspectives on the importance of robust support structures for skill development. (Al-Said et al., 2024) argue that comprehensive support systems, such as access to training programs and practical opportunities, are essential for fostering competence and confidence in communication skills among students.

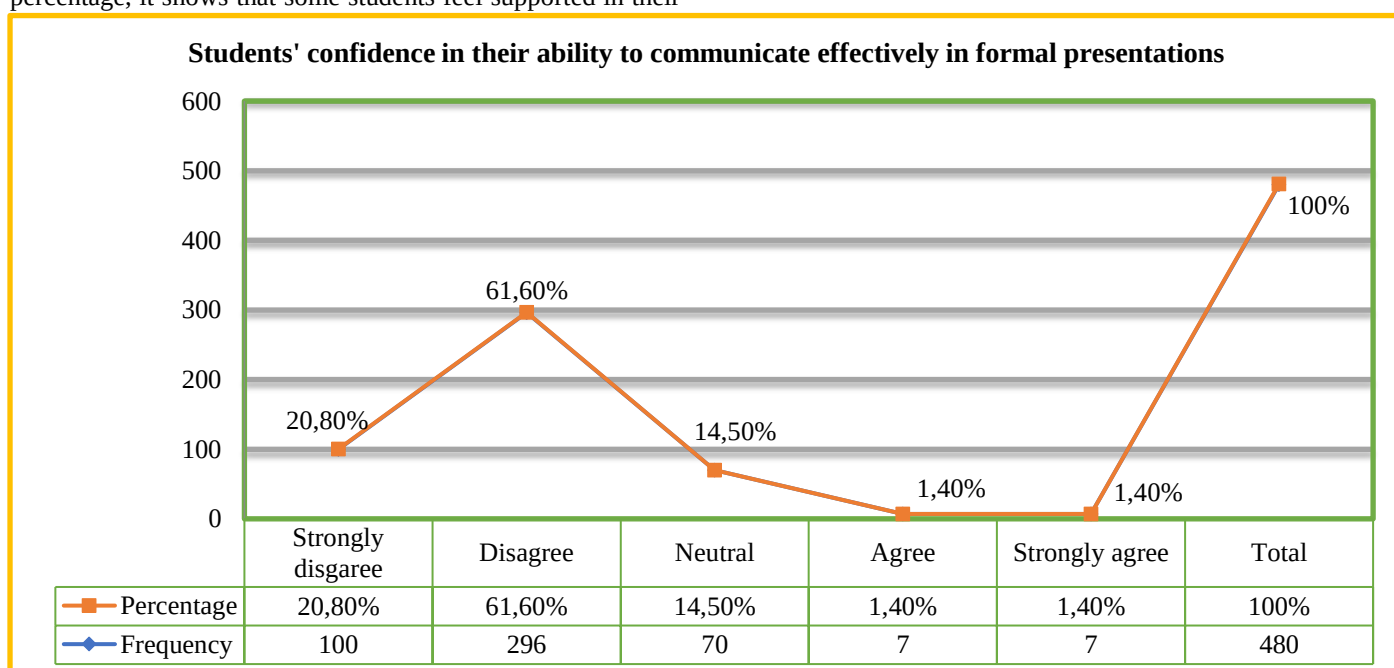


Figure 6. Students' confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in formal presentations

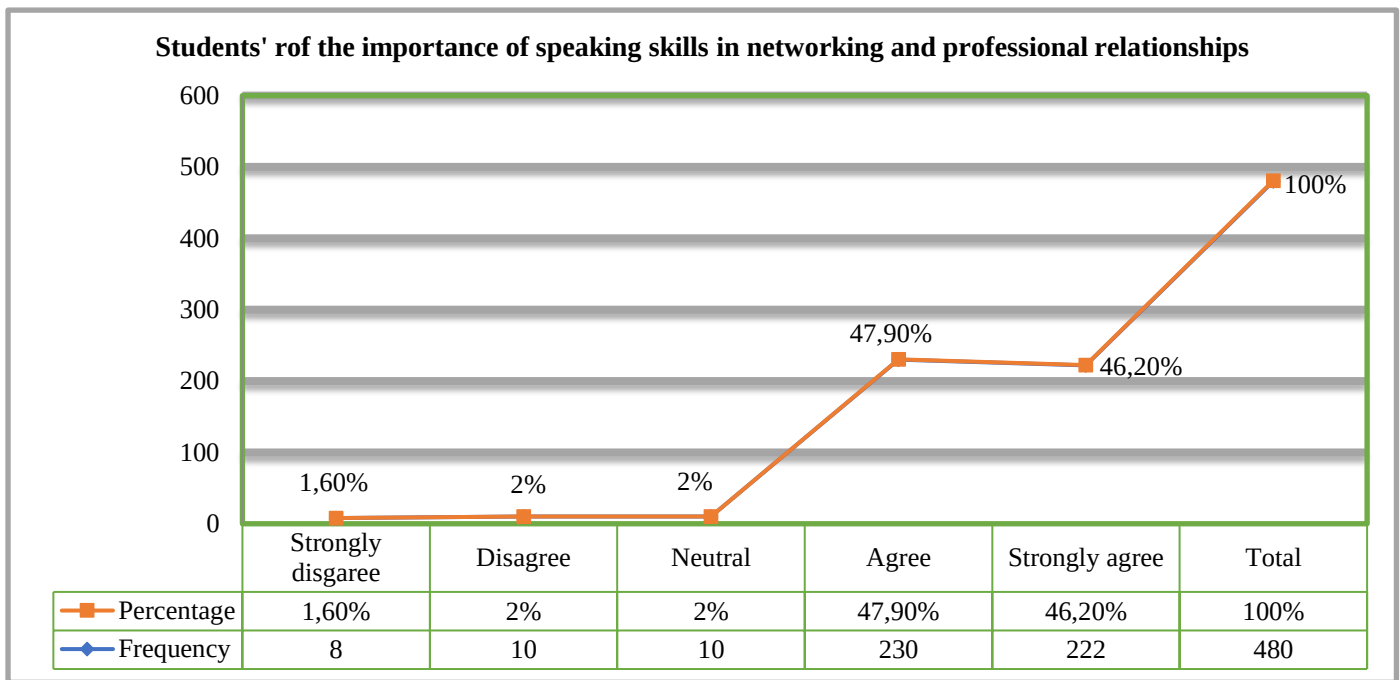


Figure 7. Students' recognition of the importance of speaking skills in networking and professional relationships

Figure 5 presents students' perceptions regarding the impact of speaking proficiency on their employability after graduation. Out of the 480 students surveyed, a significant majority, comprising (92.9%) (62.50% agreed and (30.40%) strongly agreed), believe that proficiency in speaking will enhance their employability. This strong agreement highlights the widespread recognition among students of the importance of speaking skills in shaping their future career opportunities. It aligns with scholarly perspectives that emphasize communication skills as essential for professional success (Tănaşcu et al., 2020). Conversely, a small percentage of students expressed reservations or neutrality, with (2.50%) strongly disagreed,

(2%) disagreed, and (2.5%) being neutral on the matter. These viewpoints suggest a minority perspective that may benefit from further exploration or education about the career benefits associated with effective speaking abilities. Overall, the data from Figure 5 highlights the critical role of speaking proficiency in students' perceptions of their employability, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to continue prioritizing the development of communication skills to better prepare students for the job market.

Figure 6 presents data on students' self-assessment of their confidence levels in communicating effectively during formal presentations or speeches. Out of the 480 students surveyed, a

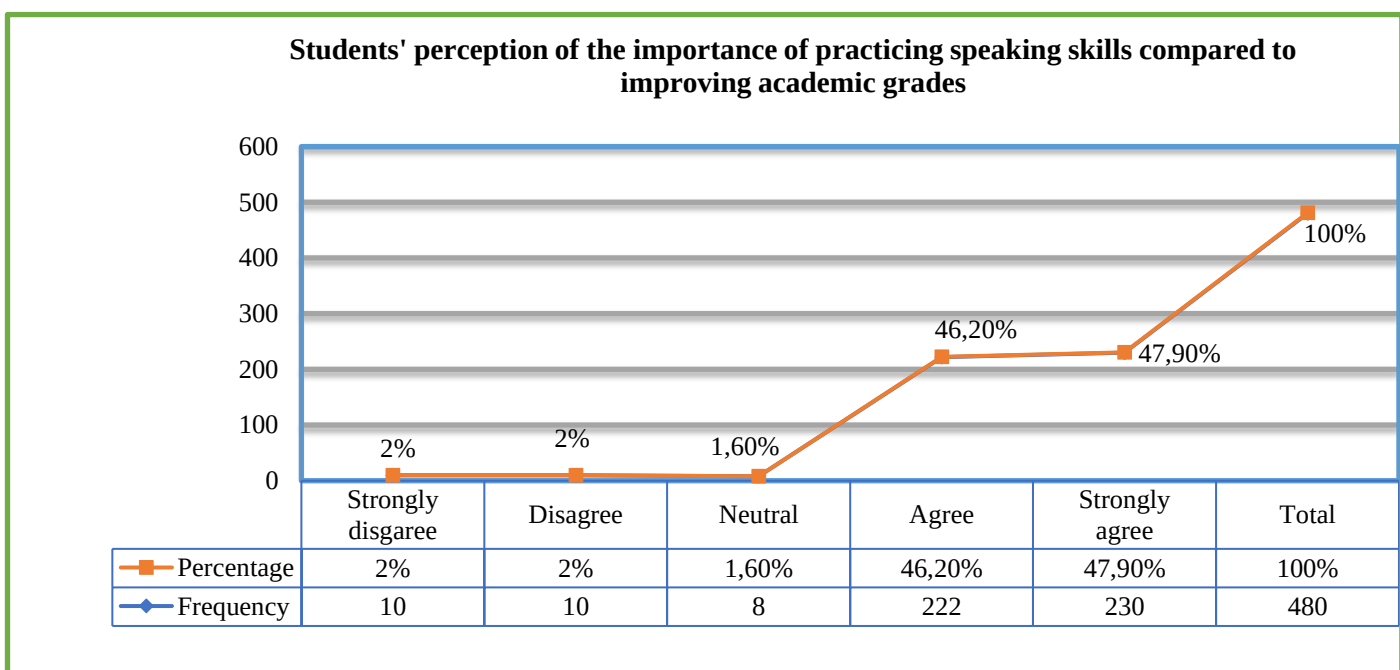


Figure 8. Students' perception of the importance of practicing speaking skills compared to improving academic grades

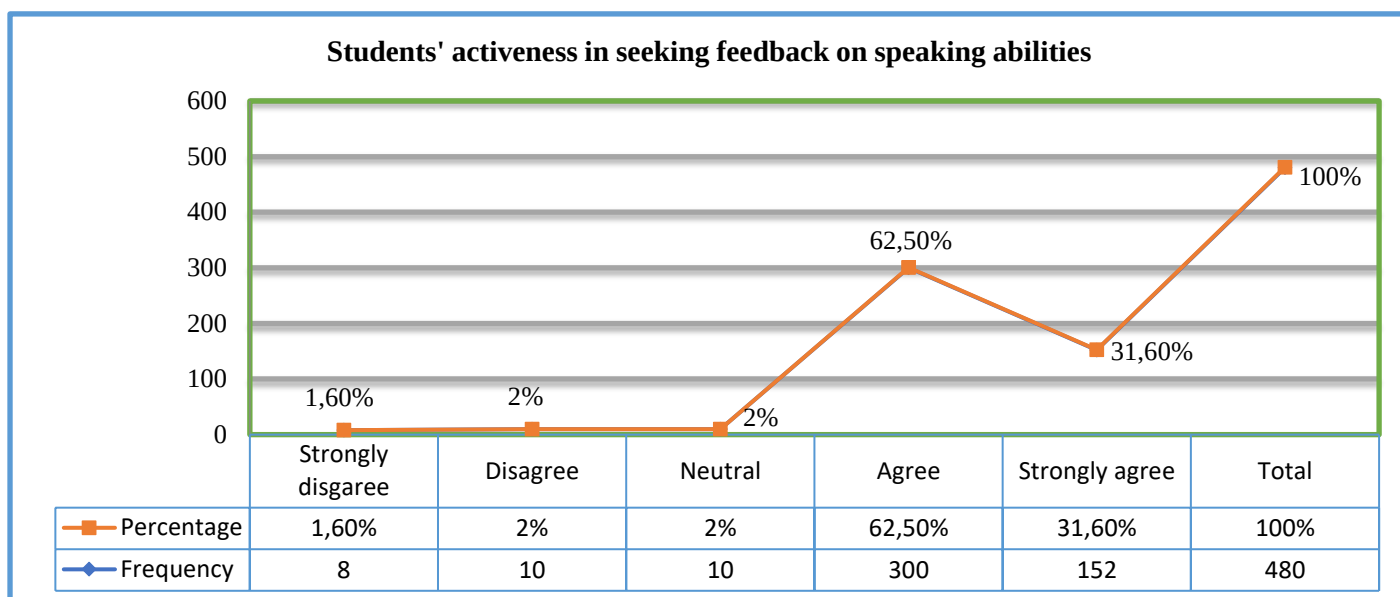


Figure 9. Students' activeness in seeking feedback on speaking abilities

significant majority, totally (82.4%) (20.80% strongly disagreed and 61.60% disagreed), indicated low confidence in their communication skills for formal settings. This finding aligns with research by (Naser & Isa., 2021) which emphasizes that public speaking anxiety is common among students and can significantly impact performance in academic and professional contexts.

The (14.50%) of students who responded neutrally suggest a notable degree of uncertainty or ambivalence regarding their proficiency in formal presentation scenarios. According to studies by (Quinn & Goody., 2019) neutral responses often reflect a lack of clarity or mixed feelings about one's capabilities, indicating potential areas for targeted support and skill development initiatives. Conversely, a minority of students, amounting to 2.80% (1.40% agreed and 1.40% strongly agreed), expressed confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in formal presentations or speeches.

Overall, the data from Figure 6 underlines the need for educational institutions to address public speaking apprehensions through structured interventions. Effective strategies could include offering communication skills workshops, providing opportunities for practice and feedback, and promoting a supportive learning environment.

Figure 7 presents data from a survey of 480 students regarding their perception of the importance of speaking skills in networking and professional relationships. The results indicate a strong consensus among students, with 93.10% (46.20% strongly agreed and 47.90% agreed) acknowledged the crucial role of speaking skills in fostering effective networking and professional relationships. This high percentage emphasizes the widespread understanding among students that proficient communication is essential for building connections and advancing in careers. In contrast, a small minority of students expressed differing views. Specifically, (1.60%) strongly

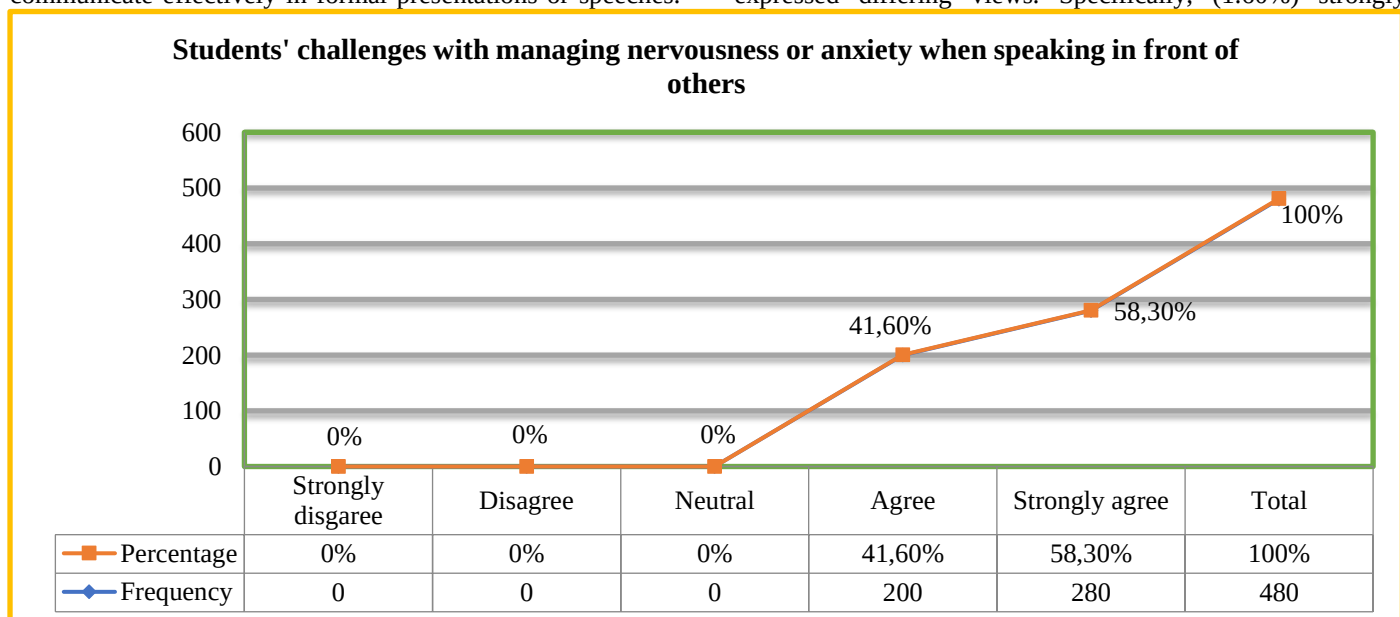


Figure 10. Students' challenges with managing nervousness or anxiety when speaking in front of others

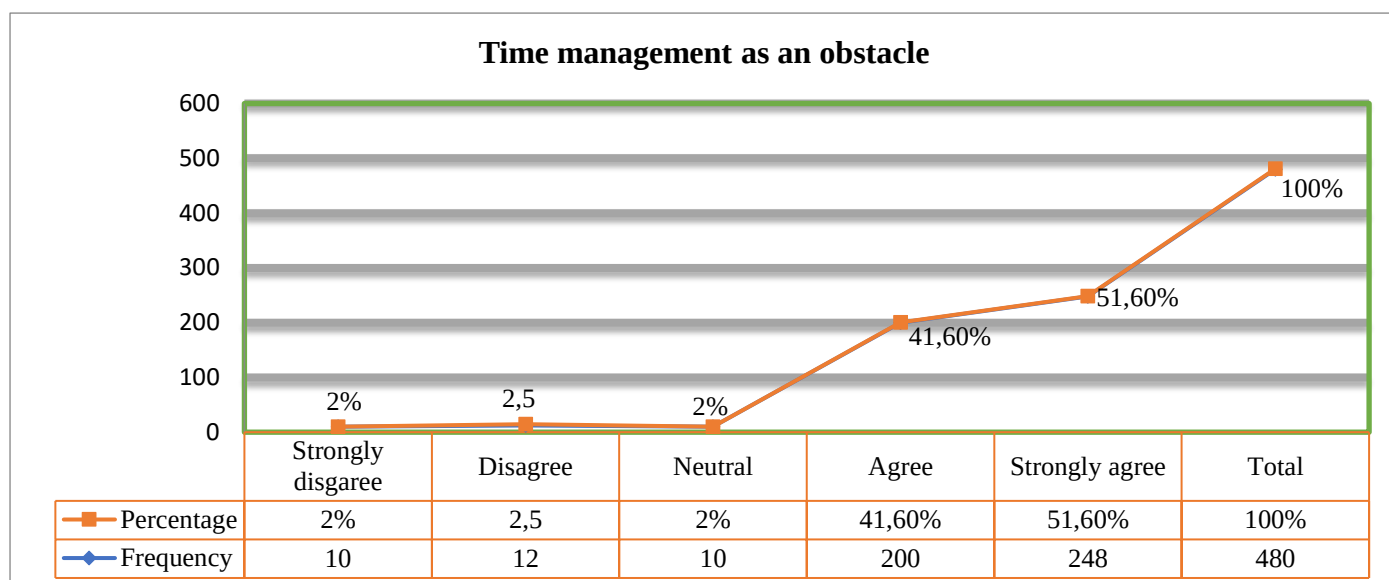


Figure 11. Perception of time management as an obstacle

disagreed and 2.00% disagreed with the statement about the importance of speaking skills in professional contexts. Additionally, (2.00%) responded neutrally, indicating some uncertainty or mixed perspectives on the matter. These findings align with research emphasizing communication skills as fundamental to career success (Naser & Isa., 2021). Effective communication, including speaking skills, enables individuals to convey ideas persuasively and establish meaningful professional connections. The strong agreement among students in Figure 7 highlights the importance of integrating communication training into educational programs to prepare students for future professional endeavors. Educational institutions can influence these insights by continuing to prioritize communication skill development through targeted coursework, workshops, and practical experiences. By enhancing students' speaking abilities and reinforcing their understanding of its significance in networking and

professional settings, institutions can better equip them to thrive in diverse professional environments.

Figure 8 presents insights from a survey of 480 students regarding their views on the importance of practicing speaking skills relative to improving academic grades. The data highlights a strong consensus among students, with 94.10% collectively (47.90% strongly agreed and 46.20% agreed) indicating that they believe practicing speaking skills is equally as important as achieving high academic grades. This indicates a widespread recognition among students that effective communication is crucial not only for academic success but also for their future professional endeavors. It reflects a balanced perspective where students value practical communication abilities alongside traditional academic achievements. A small minority of students held differing opinions, with 4.60% (2.00% disagreed and 2.00% strongly disagreed) expressing varying degrees of disagreement with the

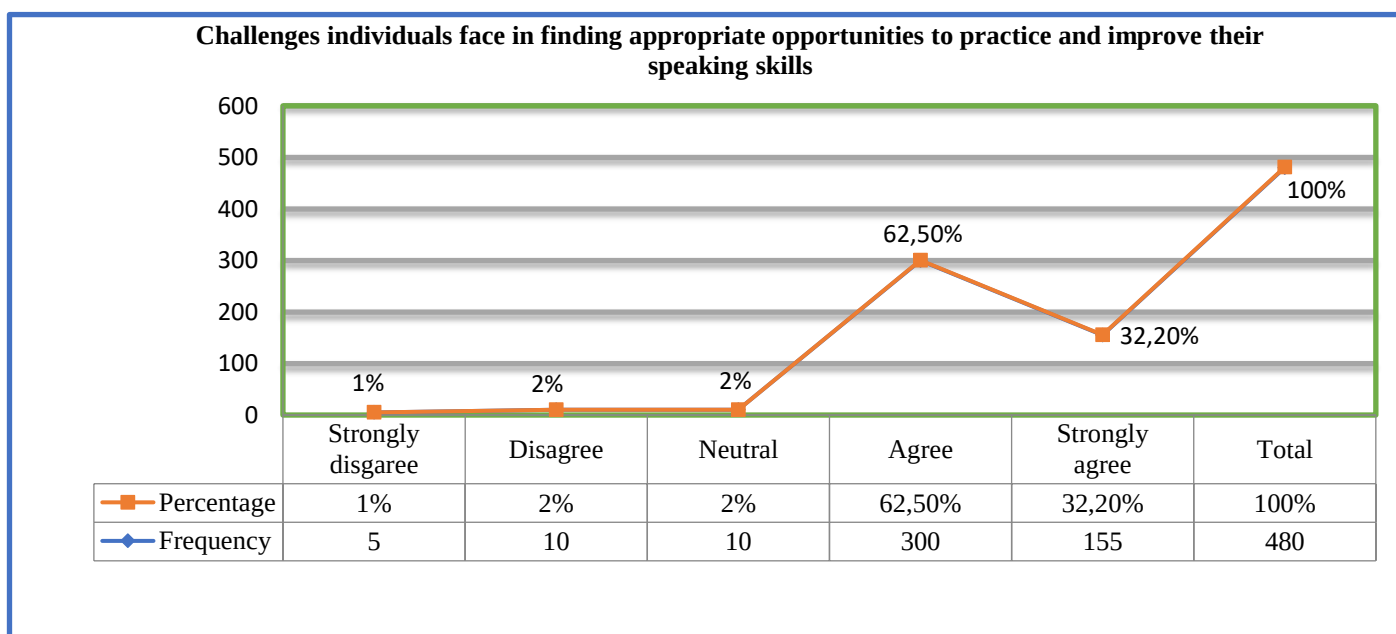


Figure 12. Challenges individuals face in finding appropriate opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills

statement.

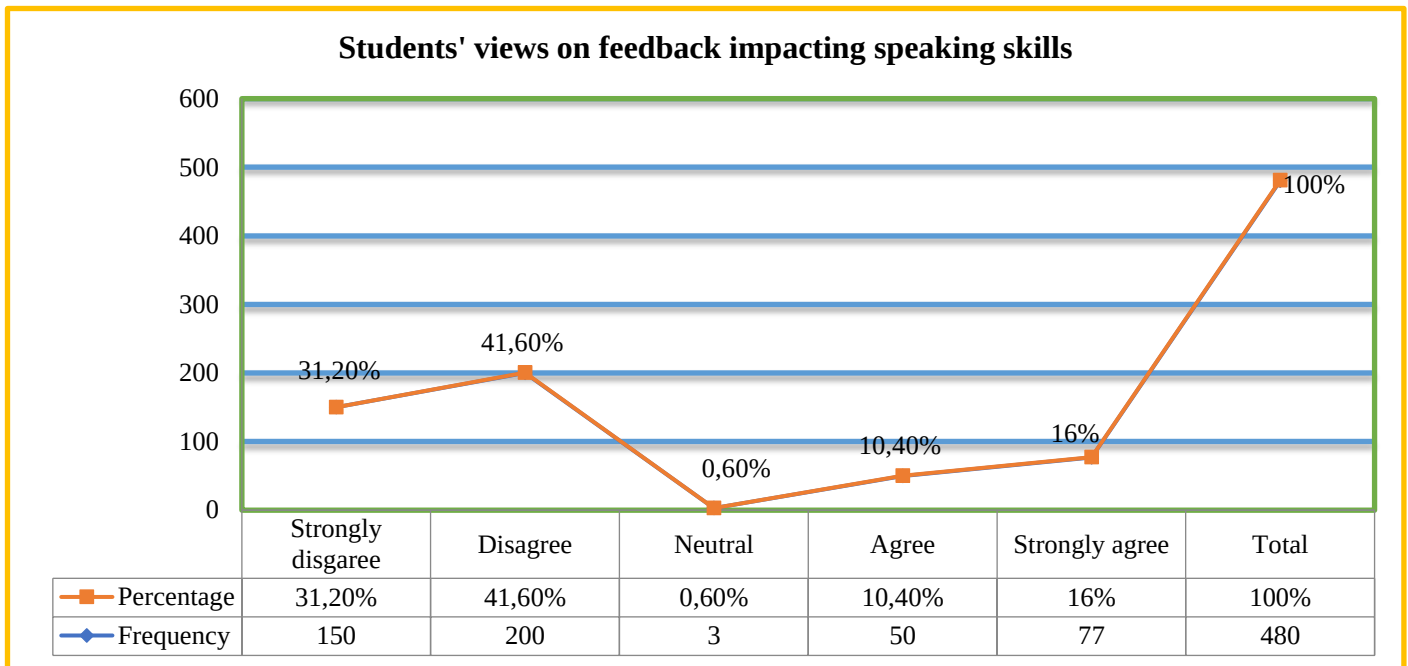


Figure 13. Students' views on feedback impacting speaking skills

ditionally, (1.60%) responded neutrally, indicating some uncertainty or mixed perspectives on the comparative importance of speaking skills versus academic grades. These findings resonate with current educational strategies emphasizing the development of comprehensive skills for career readiness (Quinn & Goody., 2019). Educational institutions can utilize these insights by integrating robust communication training into their curriculum, providing ample opportunities for practice, and fostering environments that support skill enhancement. By doing so, institutions can better equip students with the multidimensional competencies needed to excel both academically and professionally in today's competitive world.

Figure 9 shows data from a survey of 480 students about how they seek feedback on their speaking skills from peers, teachers, or mentors. The results indicate that most students are proactive about seeking feedback. About 94.10% (62.50% agreed and 31.60% strongly agreed) of students actively seek feedback to improve their speaking abilities. This shows that many students value getting advice and suggestions to become better speakers. On the other hand, a small number of students, 3.60% (1.60% strongly disagreed + 2% disagreed), are less likely to seek feedback on their speaking skills. Additionally, 2.00% responded neutrally, meaning they might not be sure or have mixed feelings about asking for feedback. These findings highlight the importance students place on improving their

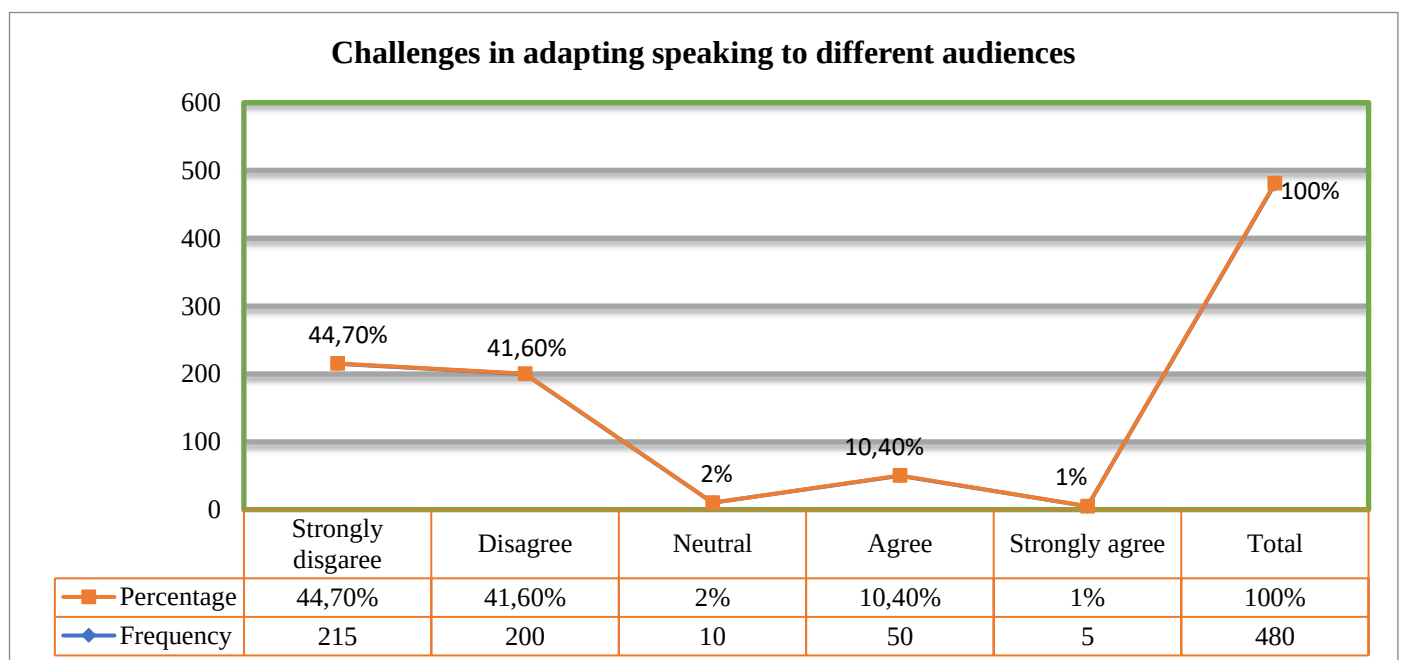


Figure 14. Challenges in adapting speaking to different audiences or contexts

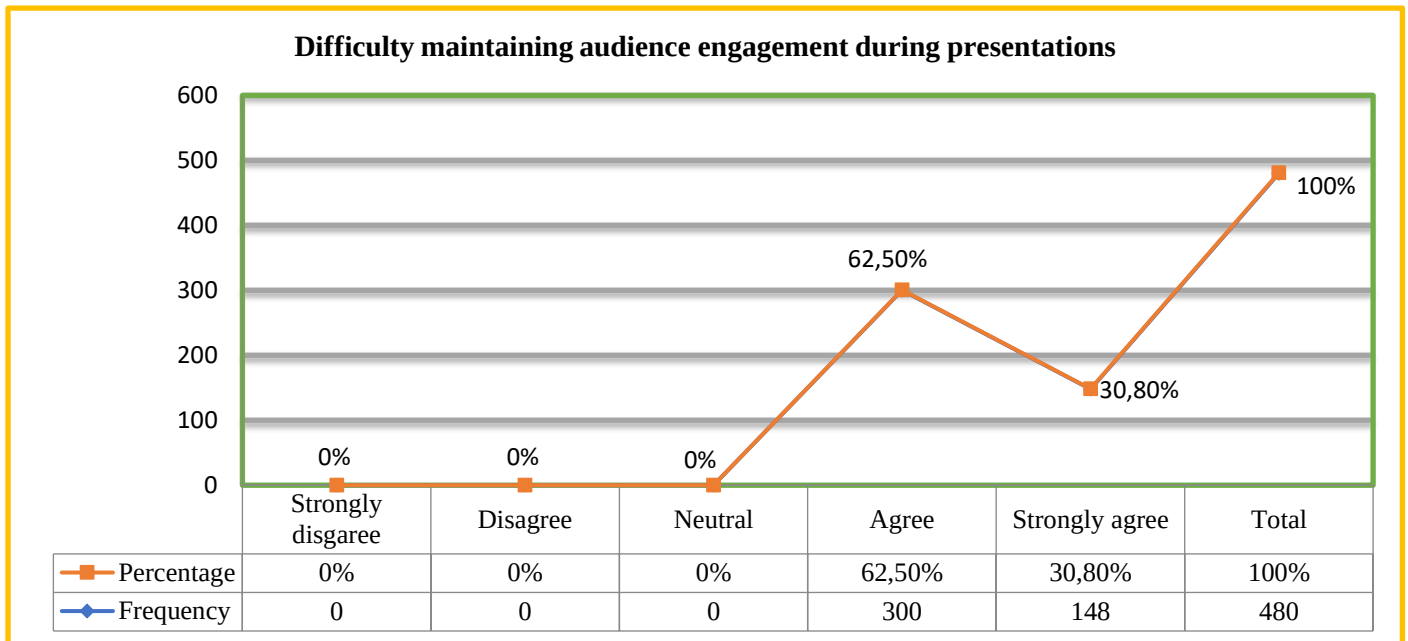


Figure 15. Difficulty maintaining audience engagement during presentations

communication skills through feedback. It's crucial because feedback helps them identify areas to improve and gain confidence in speaking effectively.

The analysis of students' attitudes towards speaking skills reveals compelling implications for educational strategies and student development. A consistent finding across multiple figures is the widespread recognition among students of the pivotal role that speaking skills play in both academic success and future career prospects. This recognition, reflected in high agreement percentages across various surveys, underlines the importance of integrating robust communication training into educational curricula. It suggests that institutions should

prioritize providing opportunities for students to develop and practice speaking skills effectively.

Moreover, the data also highlights areas where educational interventions can be targeted. For instance, while the majority of students acknowledge the significance of speaking skills, minorities either express uncertainty or hold differing views. Addressing these gaps through tailored support and clearer communication about the benefits of communication proficiency could further enhance student engagement and readiness for academic and professional challenges. Overall, fostering a supportive environment that promotes the development of speaking skills alongside academic

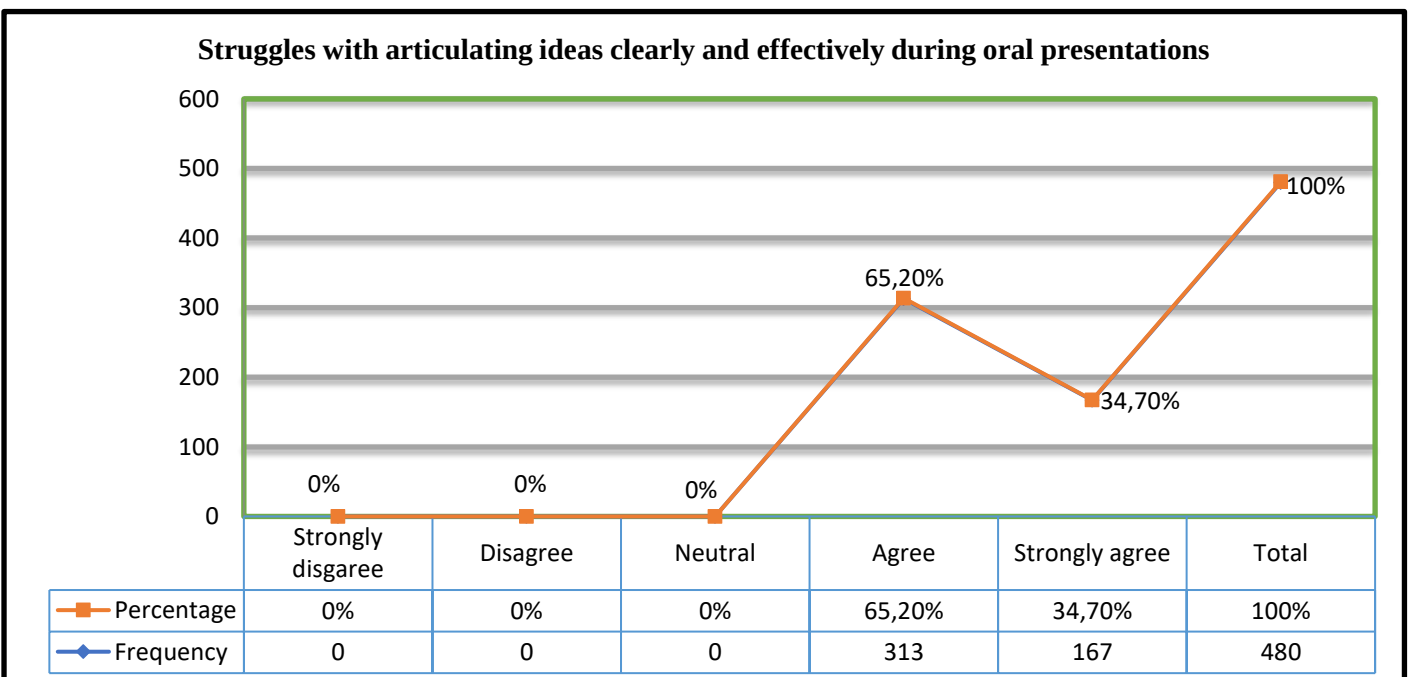


Figure 16. Struggles with articulating ideas clearly and effectively during oral presentations

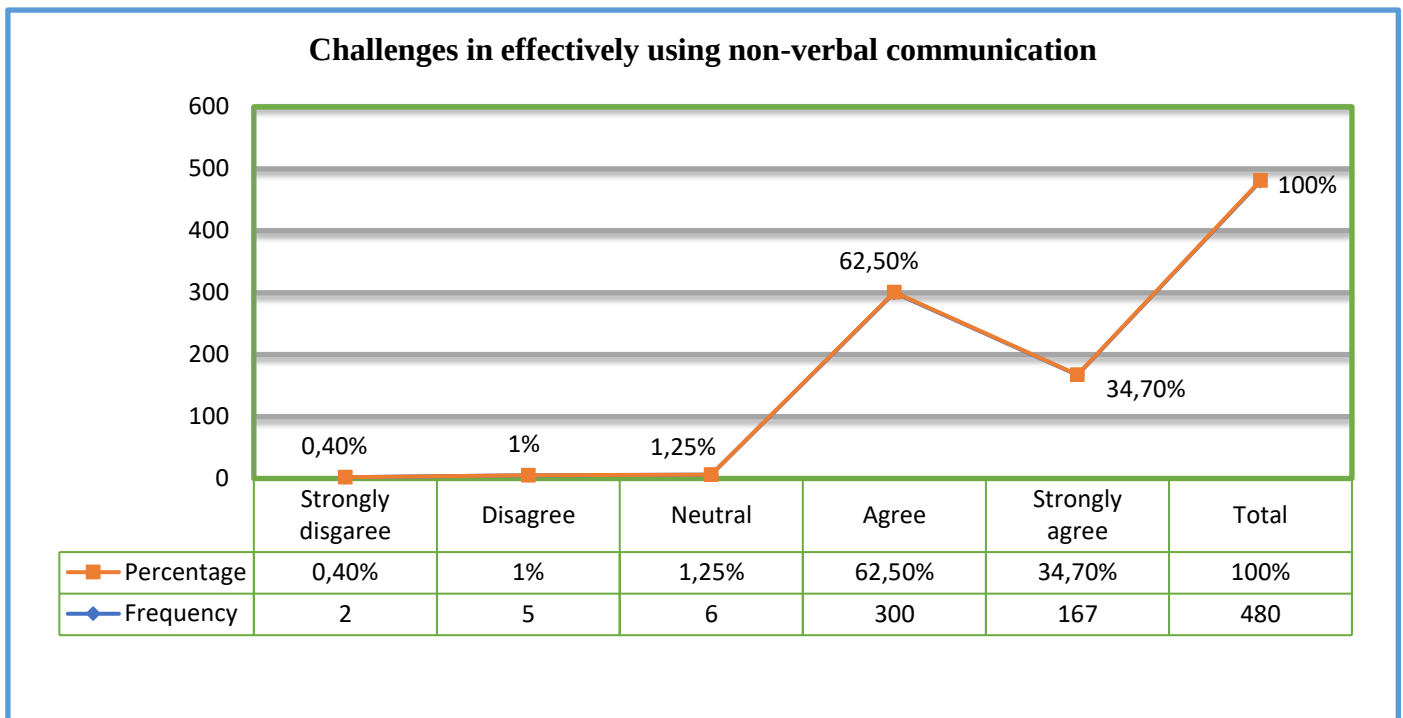


Figure 17. Challenges in effectively using non-verbal communication

achievements is crucial for preparing students comprehensively for their future endeavors.

Based on a detailed analysis of the data in Figure 10 regarding managing nervousness or anxiety when speaking in front of others, the findings highlight a significant consensus among respondents. Out of a total of 480 participants surveyed, the vast majority (99.9%) either agreed (41.6%) or strongly agreed (58.3%) that they find it challenging to manage nervousness or anxiety during public speaking engagements. Notably, no respondents selected options such as strongly disagree, disagree, or neutral, indicating unanimous acknowledgment of the prevalence and impact of these emotions in such situations. This unanimous recognition underlines the widespread nature of the challenges associated with public speaking anxiety. The high percentage of agree and strongly agree responses reflects a consistent perception among the majority of respondents, reinforcing the significant hurdle that nervousness or anxiety poses in professional communication contexts. Addressing these challenges effectively is crucial for individuals seeking to improve their presentation skills and enhance their confidence when speaking in front of audiences. Practical strategies such as relaxation techniques, systematic rehearsal, exposure therapy, and cognitive-behavioral interventions are recommended to help individuals manage and reduce these feelings of anxiety. By implementing targeted approaches, individuals can overcome these emotional barriers, ultimately leading to more effective and confident public speaking performances.

Based on a detailed analysis of the data in Figure 11, the findings provide a comprehensive insight into respondents' perceptions regarding time management as a challenge when preparing for presentations or speeches. Out of the 480

participants surveyed, a significant majority, totally (93.2%) (41.6% agreed and 51.6% strongly agreed), identified time management as a significant obstacle. This high percentage underscores a widespread recognition among respondents of the difficulties involved in effectively allocating and utilizing time during preparation for public speaking engagements.

The distributions across agree and strongly agree a category illustrates a consistent perception across the majority of the sample, highlighting the prevalence of this issue. In contrast, only a small minority expressed disagreement or neutrality toward the statement, with 4.5% (2% disagree and 2.5% strongly disagreed) and (2%) neutral responses respectively. These findings suggest that while some individuals may not perceive time management as a major challenge, they represent a relatively small segment of the overall respondent group. The implications of these findings are significant for individuals seeking to improve their preparation processes for presentations or speeches. Effective time management strategies, such as setting clear priorities, using time-blocking techniques, and leveraging productivity tools, could help mitigate the challenges identified in this study.

Based on Figure 12, the data provides a detailed perspective on the challenges individuals face in finding appropriate opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills. Out of the 480 respondents surveyed, a substantial majority, totally (94.7%) (62.5% agreed and 32.2% strongly agreed), identified this issue as a significant obstacle. This indicates a widespread recognition among participants of the difficulties in accessing suitable platforms or scenarios for honing their speaking abilities. The distribution of responses reveals a strong consensus across the majority of the sample, with only a minority expressing disagreement or neutrality. Specifically,

(5%) of respondents indicated strongly disagreed or disagreed, while (2%) were neutral. These contrasting viewpoints underscore the varied perspectives among respondents, but the overwhelming majority's agreement highlights the prevalent need for accessible avenues to practice and enhance speaking skills. To address this challenge effectively, individuals could consider joining public speaking clubs, participating in workshops, utilizing online resources, or seeking mentorship opportunities. These proactive measures can provide structured environments for practice, feedback, and skill development. By actively engaging in such initiatives, individuals can overcome barriers, improve their confidence, and ultimately excel in their speaking engagements.

The data in Figure 13 provides valuable insights into how feedback affects individuals' perceptions of their ability to assess and improve their speaking skills. Among the 480 respondents surveyed, a significant majority (72.8%) believe that a lack of feedback from peers or instructors does not hinder their progress in improving speaking proficiency. Specifically, (31.2%) strongly disagreed and (41.6%) disagreed with the notion that they need extensive external feedback to develop their speaking skills. Conversely, (26.4%) of respondents (10.4% agreed and 16% strongly agreed) feel that inadequate feedback does present a challenge to their skill development. This group emphasizes the need for more structured feedback to effectively refine their speaking abilities. The presence of a small neutral category (0.6%) indicates minimal uncertainty among respondents regarding the impact of feedback on their speaking skills. These findings emphasize the importance of implementing clear and effective feedback mechanisms in educational and professional settings. Providing constructive critique, peer evaluations, and instructor assessments can significantly enhance individuals' confidence and proficiency in public speaking and overall communication effectiveness. This approach supports diverse learning preferences and ensures that individuals have the resources needed to continuously improve their speaking abilities.

Figure 14 illustrates the varying perspectives among respondents regarding the challenges they face in adapting their speaking style to different audiences or contexts. The data highlights that a significant majority, comprising (86.3%) of participants (44.7% strongly disagreed and 41.6% disagreed), do not perceive this adaptation as a major obstacle. This majority suggests a prevailing confidence among respondents in their ability to adjust their communication approach effectively based on audience situational contexts. However, a notable minority of 13.4% (10.4% agreed and 1% strongly agreed) indicated facing challenges in this area. This minority viewpoint highlights the recognized difficulty some individuals experience in adapting their speaking style, possibly due to varying audience demographics, cultural differences, or unfamiliar contexts.

The presence of a small neutral response category (2%) indicates minimal uncertainty among respondents regarding this issue. Overall, while the majority feel competent in adjusting their speaking style, the findings emphasize the

importance of recognizing and addressing the needs of those who find this adaptation challenging. To support individuals in improving their adaptability in communication, targeted training programs, cross-cultural communication workshops, and opportunities for diverse speaking engagements could prove beneficial.

Based on Figure 15, it is evident that a significant majority of respondents face challenges in maintaining audience engagement during presentations or speeches. Out of the 480 participants surveyed, 93.3% (62.5% agreed and 30.8% strongly agreed) indicated that they find it difficult to sustain audience interest throughout their speaking engagements. The absence of responses in the Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or Neutral categories underscores a unanimous consensus among respondents regarding the prevalence of this challenge. This indicates that maintaining audience engagement is a common difficulty experienced by speakers across various contexts.

To address this issue effectively, speakers can employ several strategies. These include incorporating interactive elements, such as questions or activities, using compelling storytelling techniques, utilizing visual aids effectively, and actively engaging with the audience through discussions or polls. Additionally, practicing delivery techniques such as varying tone, adjusting pacing, and maintaining eye contact can also contribute to keeping the audience engaged and attentive. By adopting these strategies, speakers can enhance their ability to captivate and maintain audience interest, thereby delivering more impactful and successful presentations or speeches. This recognition emphasizes the importance of developing strong communication skills to effectively engage listeners in professional and public speaking settings.

The data from Figure 16 reveals that a significant majority of respondents, totally (99.9%), face challenges in articulating their ideas clearly and effectively during oral presentations. Specifically, 65.2% of respondents agreed, while 34.7% strongly agreed with this statement. The absence of responses in the strongly disagreed, disagreed, or neutral categories indicates a unanimous consensus among participants regarding this difficulty. This highlights widespread acknowledgment of the challenges individuals encounter when communicating ideas verbally in a coherent and impactful manner. To address this challenge, individuals can benefit from practicing structured communication techniques, such as organizing ideas logically, using clear language, and emphasizing key points effectively. Additionally, seeking feedback from peers or instructors, rehearsing presentations, and utilizing visual aids can enhance clarity and audience comprehension. By actively improving these skills, individuals can enhance their ability to articulate ideas with confidence and effectiveness during oral presentations, thereby achieving more impactful communication outcomes. This understanding emphasizes the importance of continual practice and skill development in professional and educational settings to excel in verbal communication.

The data from Figure 17 illustrates that a majority of respondents, totally 97.2%, encounter difficulties in effectively using non-verbal communication such as body language and eye contact. Specifically, 62.5% of respondents agreed, while an additional 34.7% strongly agreed with this statement. In contrast, only a small percentage of respondents expressed disagreement or neutrality. This includes 1.4% who either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 1.25% who were neutral on the issue. These findings highlight a widespread recognition among participants regarding the challenges associated with utilizing non-verbal communication effectively. Non-verbal cues play a crucial role in communication, influencing how messages are perceived and understood by others. Addressing these challenges may involve training and practice in techniques that enhance body language and eye contact, thereby improving overall communication effectiveness in various professional and personal contexts.

Analysis of teachers' interview

During interviews with seven EFL instructors (T1 to T7), insights into students' awareness, challenges, teaching methods, and successful activities emerged, providing a comprehensive analysis of the landscape of speaking skills education. Firstly, instructors uniformly acknowledged a positive level of awareness among students regarding the importance of speaking skills for their academic and future career success. Students generally recognize the pivotal role communication plays in professional advancement and personal development. This awareness is often reflected in their eagerness to participate in speaking activities and their understanding of how effective communication can impact their prospects. However, despite this recognition, instructors noted a significant gap between awareness and practical proficiency. Many students struggle with anxiety, lack of confidence, and difficulty adapting their speaking styles to different contexts, which impedes their ability to effectively communicate their ideas.

Secondly, instructors identified common challenges that students face when practicing and improving their speaking skills. Anxiety and nervousness emerged as predominant barriers, affecting students' ability to speak fluently and confidently. Additionally, students often lack structured opportunities for practice both inside and outside the classroom. This gap underscores the need for educators to create supportive environments where students can engage in meaningful speaking activities, receive constructive feedback, and gradually build their confidence over time. In addressing these challenges, instructors detailed various strategies they employ to encourage and facilitate speaking practice. Inside the classroom, activities such as debates, role-plays, simulations, and group discussions are commonly used to simulate real-world speaking scenarios. These activities not only provide practical experience but also promote critical thinking, collaboration, and effective communication skills. Outside the classroom, instructors advocate for language exchange programs, public speaking clubs, and online platforms where

students can continue to hone their speaking abilities in diverse contexts.

When evaluating the effectiveness of current teaching methods and resources, instructors offered diverse perspectives based on their experiences. Some highlighted the success of interactive technologies, peer feedback mechanisms, and task-based learning approaches in fostering speaking skills. Others emphasized the need for more personalized coaching, integration of authentic speaking tasks, and innovative use of multimedia resources to engage students effectively. There was a consensus on the importance of continuous adaptation and improvement in teaching practices to meet the evolving needs of students and enhance learning outcomes.

Finally, instructors shared examples of successful classroom activities or projects that promoted the development of speaking skills among students. These included presentations, debates, speech competitions, and collaborative projects requiring oral communication. Positive outcomes observed included improved fluency, enhanced articulation of ideas, increased confidence, and better engagement among students. These activities not only helped students apply theoretical knowledge but also provided opportunities for self-reflection and growth. Thus, the insights gathered from the interviews underscore the multifaceted nature of teaching speaking skills. Effective instruction requires addressing both the theoretical understanding and practical application of communication principles. By implementing diverse teaching strategies, fostering supportive learning environments, and continually refining their approaches, instructors aim to equip students with the essential speaking competencies needed to succeed academically and professionally in an increasingly interconnected world.

Classroom observation analysis result

Classroom observation was conducted to gain firsthand insights into the actual practices and challenges associated with speaking skills in undergraduate English language classes. A total of 14 observation sessions, each lasting one hour, were carried out for seven instructors who were also interviewed. Each instructor was observed twice using a structured checklist designed to assess student engagement, teaching strategies, interaction patterns, and the overall classroom environment related to speaking skill development. The observations provided a more objective perspective on the extent to which speaking activities were integrated into lessons and how students responded to various instructional approaches.

The findings from the classroom observations revealed a noticeable discrepancy between the instructors' stated beliefs in the interviews and their actual classroom practices. While the instructors generally acknowledged the importance of enhancing students' speaking skills, many lessons were still dominated by teacher-centered approaches, with limited opportunities for students to actively participate in speaking tasks. In several observed sessions, instructors primarily used lecture-based methods, relying heavily on grammar

explanations and textbook exercises rather than interactive discussions or communicative activities. Although some instructors incorporated speaking exercises, these were often brief and lacked structured feedback to help students improve their proficiency. Furthermore, students exhibited signs of speaking anxiety, hesitancy, and a tendency to remain silent, particularly when asked to express opinions or participate in discussions. Classroom dynamics also showed that only a small number of students actively engaged in speaking activities, while the majority remained passive listeners. The lack of structured and sustained speaking opportunities, combined with minimal corrective feedback from instructors, contributed to the ongoing challenges students face in developing their oral communication skills. These observations highlight the need for a more student-centered approach that prioritizes active speaking practice, confidence-building techniques, and more interactive teaching methodologies.

DISCUSSION

Based on a detailed analysis of the survey data from 480 undergraduate students, several key findings emerged regarding the importance of speaking skills for academic and professional success. This discussion synthesizes these findings and contextualizes them within existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding. The survey results indicate a strong consensus among students regarding the critical role of speaking skills in their academic and future professional endeavors. Specifically, 94.3% of respondents (230 strongly agreed and 222 agreed) acknowledged the importance of speaking skills for career prospects. This highlights a widespread understanding among students that effective communication is pivotal for success in both educational and professional contexts. These findings align with scholarly perspectives that emphasize the significance of communication skills in academic achievement and career advancement (Zare & Othman, 2015). Previous studies have consistently highlighted how proficiency in speaking enhances students' ability to articulate ideas clearly, engage actively in discussions, and excel in presentations.

The high level of agreement among students (94.3%) regarding the importance of speaking skills underscores its profound impact on their employability and career readiness. This recognition is crucial as it emphasizes the need for educational institutions to prioritize communication skill development to better prepare students for the demands of the job market (Maharani et al., 2024). Despite the overwhelming agreement on the importance of speaking skills, a minority of students (3.8%) expressed neutral views. These perspectives highlight potential areas where educational interventions could focus to enhance awareness and emphasize the benefits of effective communication. Future research could explore effective strategies to address the concerns of students who perceive speaking skills as less critical. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of enhanced speaking proficiency on career trajectories and professional success. Thus, the survey data from surveyed students underline the critical role of speaking skills in shaping students' academic

achievements and career prospects. The overwhelming majority of students recognize the importance of effective communication, aligning with scholarly consensus on the topic. Enhancing speaking skills through targeted educational initiatives is crucial for equipping students with the necessary competencies to succeed in diverse professional environments.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive analysis of survey data from 480 undergraduate students, it is clear that while there is a high level of awareness regarding the importance of speaking skills for academic and professional success, there exists a notable discrepancy between this awareness and actual practice. The survey findings highlight that 94.3% of respondents recognize the critical role of speaking proficiency in career prospects, reflecting a widespread understanding among students. However, despite this awareness, the data also reveal significant challenges that hinder students from effectively practicing and honing their speaking skills. A substantial majority of students (62.5%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with actively seeking opportunities outside regular coursework to improve their speaking abilities. This disparity underscores the gap between recognizing the importance of speaking skills and taking proactive steps to develop them.

Various challenges contribute to this mismatch between awareness and practice. These challenges may include limited access to structured opportunities for practice, lack of confidence due to public speaking anxiety, and inadequate support from educational institutions in providing resources for skill enhancement. To bridge the gap between awareness and practice of speaking skills, educational institutions can integrate comprehensive communication training into their curricula. Embedding speaking exercises, presentations, and debates across disciplines offers practical opportunities for students to refine their communication abilities in real-world contexts. Additionally, regular workshops focused on public speaking, incorporating hands-on practice and feedback, are essential for fostering confidence and competence in diverse speaking situations. Creating supportive environments through peer mentoring programs and virtual platforms for simulated presentations further enhances skill development and prepares students for future professional demands.

Suggestions for improvement

To enhance speaking skills among undergraduate students, several targeted strategies can be implemented. First, integrating a dedicated speaking module into the university curriculum across disciplines would provide consistent and structured opportunities for practice. Workshops and training sessions focused on public speaking and effective communication should be regularly offered to build confidence and competence. Leveraging technology for simulated presentations and debates could also prepare students for diverse communication scenarios in the digital age. Establishing supportive environments such as peer mentoring programs and speaking clubs would foster a culture of

continuous improvement and risk-taking. Lastly, ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms, coupled with awareness campaigns about the benefits of strong speaking skills, would ensure students are motivated and aware of their progress and potential.

Limitations

The study is limited by several factors that may impact the generalizability of findings. Firstly, it focused exclusively on undergraduate students from a single university, potentially limiting its applicability to diverse student populations across various institutions and disciplines. Secondly, its cross-sectional design provides a portrait of students' awareness and practices at a specific moment, restricting the ability to infer long-term trends or changes over time. Future research could overcome these limitations by employing longitudinal studies, larger and more diverse samples, and triangulation of methods to enhance understanding of speaking skill development among university students.

Recommendations for future research

The study suggests that educational institutions should prioritize integrating structured speaking practice into their curricula across disciplines to enhance students' communication skills consistently. This can be achieved through dedicated speaking modules, interactive workshops, and ongoing assessments to monitor progress effectively. Additionally, future research should explore the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies, including blended learning approaches, in improving speaking proficiency among university students. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track the development of speaking skills over time and assess the impact of interventions on students' academic and professional success. Moreover, investigating cultural and contextual factors influencing speaking proficiency can provide insights into tailoring educational strategies to diverse student populations.

Ethical approval: The study entitled "Assessing Awareness and Practice of Speaking Skills among Undergraduate Students," conducted by Tamirat Taye and Gemechis Teshome was reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Committee of Mizan-Tepi University and was approved by the Institutional Review Board (Referral number: MTU/IRB/141/2024). Participants were informed about the study's purpose, and verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Consent to participate: The participants were informed the process of research report.

Availability of data: The data will be made available upon request from the corresponding author.

Competing interests: The author declares that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the work reported in this paper.

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