



## Investigating the Inhibitive Factors in the Speaking of Iranian EFL Learners

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### Abstract

Speaking is an essential language skill and children develop speaking before reading and writing. Survival in society without being able to speak properly is almost impossible. The current study was an attempt to identify the obstacles Iranian EFL learners experience when speaking English in foreign language classrooms and also to identify strategies teachers use to deal with such obstacles. The participants of the study were 60 language learners with equal English language proficiency and 20 EFL teachers. In order to identify the inhibition sources in speaking a questionnaire on inhibition was administered to the 60 selected learners and to elicit information about teachers' strategies to reduce the inhibitions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers. Based on the students' responses to the questionnaire, the most influential factor contributing to inhibition in speaking was negative evaluation followed by anxiety and confidence, linguistic and topical knowledge, classroom environment and instruction quality. On the other hand, teachers listed three types of strategies to reduce inhibition in speaking as strategies for creating anxiety-free and friendly environment, using popular topics for speaking, and using positive feedback. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that psychological factors are among the most influential factors contributing to inhibition in speaking among Iranian EFL learners. The results of the study could give sufficient insight to teachers regarding debilitating factors in speaking which can consequently could encourage teachers to provide learners with better speaking opportunities.

**Keywords:** foreign language speaking, inhibition, inhibition in speaking, speaking, strategies in reducing inhibition

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking is considered as the most significant skill among other language skills (Burns & Joyce, 1997). According to Burns and Joyce (1997), speaking is a cooperative process of making meaning that contains of creating, receiving and processing information. The form and meaning of language are determined by the situations in which it happens and include the participants themselves, their capabilities, the setting in which the interaction

is going on and the objectives of speaking. Some of the teaching approaches and techniques which are lately established in L2 instruction context reveal the affective variables in language learning. This research considers two problems.

First, in EFL contexts, speaking is a very challenging task for language learners. In order to be successful in language learning, learners as human beings need to be seen and noticed and they should be respected. Secondly, although some studies in both international (e.g., Zarfsaz & Takkac, 2014) and Iranian context of ELT (e.g., Soyoofoa & Jokar, 2014) have explored the notion of inhibition, there is a dearth of research investigating the inhibitive elements in the speaking of Iranian EFL learners, and the approaches used by Iranian EFL teachers in reducing the students' speaking inhibition.

Language teachers have observed that many students can learn language without difficulty and they speak without feeling apprehensive while others still have problems in speaking. Scholars are always looking for the reason. However, it is believed that there must be different variables, namely affective variables such as inhibition which has been at the center of attention over the last three decades. Inhibition is considered as a negative feeling which can reduce the presentation of a person in different situations. When an individual is inhibited, it means that he/she is worried and that he/she is cannot speak confidently. Overall, inhibition is a complicated idea, which depends both on people's feelings and on assessments in certain conditions.

In the L2 classrooms context, adult language learners experience various inhibitions because of the observed embarrassing nature of language learning (Brown, 2000). Teachers should help the adult students to solve their problems in learning speaking, and the factors influencing speaking skill need to be determined. There are some factors, which affect the learners' speaking presentation: (a) the settings under which one is able to speak such as settings time constraints, (b) the quality of planning, (c) the standard of performance and the level of support and affective factors e.g. motivation, observation, confidence and esteem along with inhibition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is defined as a vehicle that allow the students to take part in class activities, giving a chance of communicating about themselves and their beliefs (Chastain, 1988). Moreover, he states that speaking promotes learning. During listening and reading activities, the chance to speak, encourages students to learn new language basics that it is essential in the future to communicate. In addition, he defines speaking as "the presentation of the speakers' competence, speaking requires language learners to activate their knowledge to create a message" (p. 272). Farooq (2015) and Yu (2009) state that the main emphasis of language teaching is to provide learners with opportunities to communicate in the foreign language. In addition to writing, speaking is also an important aspect of EFL learning as it lets the learners produce the language, which is necessary for communicative objectives.

Many scholars (e.g., Jindathai, 2015; Mazouzi, 2013; Saidi, 2014) consider speaking as a means in which EFL learners can interact with each other to achieve their goals, express their beliefs, objectives, and points of views. In order to communicate in any language, one needs to be familiar with how to speak in that language. Speaking is considered as one of the most significant language skills and its significance in EFL contexts can easily be perceived based on several studies which have quite recently been conducted in this domain (e.g., Alidoost, Mirchenari & Hosseini Mehr, 2013; Azizifar, Faryadian & Gowhary, 2014). These days in new syllabuses, due to the importance of improving the students' language, oral proficiency has been highlighted. Moreover, since learners' communication capabilities depend on their oral language, the significance of spoken proficiency in real life situations is more important than in the classroom. Besides, according to Denscombe (2004), more topics used in the media, for example, the new steering papers create more appropriate and attractive by society

For all those learners who decide to learn a second language in a non-native atmosphere, speaking is one of the most stimulating skills. However, accomplishing this objective seems to be problematic and somehow impossible for them. In fact, speaking is believed to be the most important of the four skills. Definitely, one of the main problems mentioned by learners is that although they have spent years studying English, still they are not able to speak it. Through speaking, one "expresses emotions, reacts to other persons and circumstances, and influences other human being" (Riverse, 1968, p. 223).

To discuss inhibition, first a definition of self-esteem should be in order. Self-esteem is defined by (Coopersmith, 1967) as cited in Brown (200, p.145) as:

The evaluation which individuals make and customarily maintain with regard to themselves; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which individuals believe themselves to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that individuals hold towards themselves. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior.

For Brown (2000) "closely related to and in some cases subsumed under the notion of self-esteem is the concept of inhibition" (p. 147). In Brown's (2000) words, "all human beings, in their understanding of themselves, build sets of defenses to protect their ego" (p. 147). Inhibition is a "nervous feeling that prevents you from expressing your thoughts, emotions, or desires" (Merriam Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (2000, p. 249).

The concept of inhibition has been researched by many scholars in the field of EFL (e.g., Soyoofo, Jokar, 2014; Zarfsaz & Takkac, 2014). Based on the previous studies multiple reasons can be identified for the learners' avoidance to take part in class activities. Consequently, a majority of these students keep their ideas to themselves and become reticent. Ur (1999) maintains that Students in L2 classes usually experience inhibition when they have to say something. This affective handicap emanates from their worry

regarding making possible mistakes, being afraid of criticism or losing face, or being shy due to the attention their speaking in the class may attract.

The concept of inhibition and how it can possibly be reduced was investigated in a study by Soyoofoa et al. (2014). In their study Soyoofoa et al., sought to uncover whether videogame makes any contribution to a decrease in the EFL learners' inhibition with respect to language learning. The study examined the impact of video game on learners' language ego. The researchers conducted interviews with 10 participants to know whether or not there are any differences between language achievement within classrooms or videogames. Five participants had learned language through video games, while the other five were learning second language by attending classroom only. The findings showed that the participants could suppress their inhibitions by using video games which resulted in the facilitation of learning.

In another study by Darcy et al. (2014) the contribution of attention control and inhibition to second language learners' phonological processing was explored. The sample of the study consisted of sixteen L1-Spanish/L2-English students along with eighteen L1-English/L2-Spanish learners. The attention and inhibition were measured, using a new attention-switching program as well as a retrieval-induced inhibition activity. Second language phonology (perception and production) was ascertained, using a speeded ABX categorization activity and a delayed sentence repetition activity. A measure of L2 vocabulary size was used to find second language proficiency impact. The findings showed a relationship between a more efficient attention control and effective performance in ABX (for the L2-English learners). Moreover, a relationship was observed between higher inhibitory skill and higher ABX accuracy in all participants. No relationship was found with the production scores. These findings reveal that a more effective attention control as well as inhibitory skill promotes the phonological processing in the second language input, resulting in more accurate L2 speech perception and production.

Jindathai (2015) investigated the impact of some factors on engineering students' oral performance. The participants were 154 first-year and second-year engineering students who were asked to fill in self-compiled questionnaires. The obtained results revealed that management in teaching and learning English, exposure to English and personality were considered as three main barriers in speaking development. On the other hand, motivational and attitude factors did not have a significant effect on students' speaking performance. Given the importance of speaking and inhibition and in line with the objectives of the present study, this study aimed at answering the following research questions:

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the importance of speaking and inhibition and in line with the objectives of the present study, this study aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the inhibitive factors influencing the speaking of Iranian EFL learners?

2. What strategies do Iranian EFL teachers employ to reduce students' speaking inhibition?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Setting**

In the present study a descriptive and exploratory design was adopted to address the research problem. It is descriptive because, only the current status of affairs is described and no intervention is done to change the quality of a variable. It is exploratory because, the problem has not clearly defined and it intends to tackle the problem with little or no previous knowledge (Brown, 2006). The main instrument to collect information in exploratory research is interviews (Brown, 2006).

The current study was carried out in one of the branches of Gooyesh Language Institute in Isfahan, 2016. The institute was chosen after we talked with the managers of different language schools in the city. Therefore, the choice of this institute was because of manageability and availability reasons. Note should be taken that, other language Institutes were also contacted, but refrained to cooperate in the current study and thus the study was carried out with participants from Gooyesh language Institute only. The study was conducted in November 2016. The language school was contacted and the researcher attended the language institute for 15 days during three hour visits to collect the required data.

### **Participants**

The population of the present study were the teachers and students at Gooyesh language in Isfahan. The total number of teachers at this institute was 323. To select the teachers, 53 male and female teachers were briefed on the purposes of the study and finally 20 teachers consisting of 12 female and 8 male teachers consented to take part in this study. The participating students consisted of a total number of 60 Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level. To select the students, first a list of intermediate classes was obtained and then 90 learners were chosen as the initial participants of the study to take part in PET test. The students were from both genders within the age range of 18 to 32 and the final group were 32 female and 28 male students. The teachers were also from both genders within the age range of 26 to 45 and had varying teaching experiences ranging from 6 to 15 years. A convenient non-random sampling was used to select the participants both the teachers and learners due to availability and accessibility reasons.

To select the 60 learners at the intermediate level, a Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to 90 participants and only those whose scores fell within the range of  $\pm 1$  standard deviation was selected. Based on this procedure, it was possible to choose 60 learners at the intermediate level. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the participants.

**Table 1.** The Demographic Background of the Participants

	Teachers	Learners
Male	8	28
Female	12	32
Age Range	26-45	18-32
Teaching experience	6-15	-
Total	20	60
NL	Persian	Persian
TL	English	English

### Instrumentations

A number of instruments were used in the current study, a description of which are as follows:

#### *Preliminary English Test (PET)*

PET consists of 67 items including three sections of reading (35 items), writing (7 items), and listening (25 items). The allotted time for this test is an hour and thirty minutes. The total score of the test is 100 and each of the skills has 25 of the total score. PET is considered as the second level of Cambridge ESOL exam covering four language skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) and is a valuable qualification if you want to work or study abroad or to develop a career in international business.

PET consists of the three sections of reading and writing, listening, and speaking. The first section (reading and writing) takes one hour and 30 minutes. The reading part consists of five parts (35 questions) which test different reading skills with a variety of texts, ranging from very short notices to longer continuous texts. The test's focus in this part is the assessment of candidate's ability to understand the meaning of written English at word, phrase, sentence paragraph, and whole text level. Each of the questions in the reading part carries one mark so that this section comprises 25% of the total mark for the whole examination.

The writing part comprises three parts, which test a range of writing skills. The test's focus here is on the assessment of candidates' ability to produce straightforward written English, ranging from producing variations on simple sentences to pieces of continuous text. The section consists of eight questions. Questions 1-5 carry one mark each. Question 6 is marked out of five; and 7 and 8 are marked out of 15. This gives a total of 25 which represents 25% of the total mark for the whole examination.

Section 2 (listening) allows 30 minutes. This part consists of four parts ranging from short exchanges to longer dialogues and monologues which are heard by students twice. The test focus in this section is on the assessment of candidates' ability to understand dialogues and monologues in both informal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics. This part has 25 questions. Each item carries one mark. This gives a total of 25 marks, which represents 25% of the total mark for the whole examination.

The last section, which is speaking, lasts for 10-12 minutes per pair of candidates. It has four parts. In parts one and two the candidates interact with an examiner. In parts three and four, they interact with another candidate and in part three; they have an extended individual long turn. The test focus on the speaking part is assessment of candidates' ability to express themselves in order to carry out the functions as the threshold level, to ask and to understand questions, to make appropriate responses, and to talk freely on matters of personal interest. Students are assessed on their performance throughout the test. There is a total of 25 marks in this section, making 25% of the total score for the whole examination.

### ***Speaking Rating Scale of PET***

The rating scale used to rate the speaking section was taken from university of Cambridge ESOL Examinations paper under the name of assessing Speaking Performance-Level B1 as the speaking part of PET is considered of level B1 speaking test. The reason behind the selection of this scale was that according to the booklet, it is a comprehensive rating scale which has yielded inter-rater reliabilities of above .81 in its different administrations in various assessment contexts. The rating scale included four parts namely, grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication and each section. The range of scores is between 0-15. Each band had a complete description of the type of performance the learners manifested. To assure the consistency of the scores inter-rater reliability was established based on Pearson coefficient correlation formula. The inter-rater reliability gained was 0.83 which is considered quite satisfactory (Brown, 2007).

### ***Interview***

Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers. A set of five semi-structured interview questions regarding the strategies that teachers used to reduce the speaking inhibition for EFL learners was developed and addressed to the interviewees. In order to report the results of the interviews, content analysis approach recommended by Auerback and Silverstein (2003) used and each interview lasted 15 minutes.

### ***Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors of Speaking***

The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on Dorneyei (2003). Dorneyei (2003) maintains that borrowing questions from established questionnaires is one of the sources based on which researchers can choose the items intended for their studies. He believes that questions that have been used previously have most probably been piloted and the chances are that they possess the required quality. Along the same lines, the items included in the questionnaire of this study were borrowed from previously-constructed, valid and reliable questionnaires and instruments (Harmer, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Krannich, 2004) measuring factors related to causing inhibition in for EFL learners in speaking.

After borrowing items, drawing on the previously used questionnaires and developing the first draft of the questionnaires, in order to assure their appropriacy in the current

research context, the questionnaire was piloted twice. The first draft was once piloted on five students with characteristics the same as participants of the study to gain insights in terms of the choice of vocabulary items and grammar used in the questionnaire and a second time to run Chronbach's Alpha for the purpose of establishing the required internal consistency. After the first piloting phase of the study, the filled out questionnaires were collected and scored. Two days after that, 20 minute meetings were held with each one of the participants to gather their viewpoints in terms of the items.

Each meeting unfolded following these steps:

The respondents were given the questionnaires and asked to respond to the items again. The questionnaires filled out in this session were compared with the previously filled out questionnaires and any differences were spotted. The learners were asked to answer why there was a change in the answers provided. The findings were used to make revisions to the questionnaires. In this regard, learners' suggestions concerning vocabulary and grammar were taken into account. The questionnaire was then piloted a second time on 20 participants having similar characteristics to the participants of this study. The data gathered in this pilot study underwent Cronbach's Alpha to assure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared based on the feedbacks from the pilot study and was made ready for data collection and analysis in the main study.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Initially, based on convenient non-random sampling, 60 intermediate EFL learners and 20 EFL teachers were chosen from different language classes in an English institute. PET was first administered to 90 participants. The results of which were used to choose a homogeneous pool of participants whose scores lie between +/- one standard deviation. To gather the required data, two instruments including a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed. The questionnaire was used to discover the factors which inhibit EFL learners when speaking in English in classroom contexts. This questionnaire was developed based on the guidelines given by Dorneyei (2003).

A set of semi-structured interview was also developed and addressed to the teachers to identify the strategies that they employed to reduce the speaking inhibition in EFL classrooms. To do so, the teachers were invited to a room and the questions were addressed to them. The interviewees' responses to the questions were recorded for analyses. In order to analyze the data both quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out. The scores obtained from the participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire were reported through using descriptive statistics and content analysis was used to examine the interview contents.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Descriptive statistics such as standard deviation, percentages, frequencies and means were used to analyze the scores of the questionnaire. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha was also used to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. To report the results of the



interviews the content analysis approach recommended by Auerback and Silverstein (2003) was used. According to them, content analysis is the most common form of analysis when dealing with qualitative data. They further enumerate six stages which the analyzer needs to go through to come up with established and meaningful patterns. These phases are namely: getting familiar with data, coming up with initial codes, looking for themes among codes, reviewing the themes, defining and labeling the themes, and producing the final report. The six stages proposed above were taken into consideration to report the interview contents.

## RESULTS

### Results of Reliability of the Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors of Speaking

One of the concerns of the study was obtaining reliable data which was largely dependent on the reliability of the data collection instrument. The main instrument of the study was the Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors for Speaking, the reliability of which was estimated through Cronbach' Alpha internal consistency measure on a pilot sample of 20 students before starting the main study. Table 2 shows the results of Cronbach's Alpha analysis on the related scores of the pilot study.

**Table 2.** Results of Cronbach's Alpha analysis of Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors for Speaking Piloted on 20 Students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Alpha	N of Items
Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factor	20	68.00	99.00	89.4500	6.99981	0.841	22
Valid N (listwise)	20						

As seen in the Table 2 the mean score of the pilot sample is 89.45 (SD=6.99) for Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors for Speaking. Alpha value for Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors was found 0.84 which is an acceptable index of reliability.

### Results of Language Proficiency of the Participants

In the first step of the study, language learners with homogeneous English language proficiency were selected. To this end, a pool of 90 intermediate language learners was selected based on convenience sampling method and their PET scores were considered as way to single out those with similar language proficiency scores. Table 3 shows the PET score statistics of the 90 language learners.

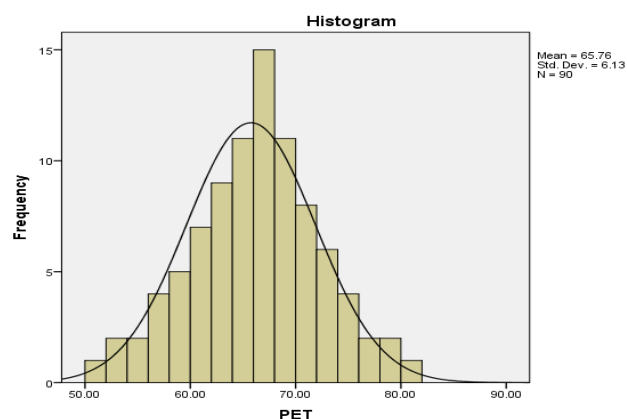
**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of the 90 Language Learners

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	90	51.00	80.00	65.7556	6.13025
Valid N (listwise)	90				

Table 3 shows that the students had a mean score of 65.75 (SD=6.13) on PET. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of PET scores of the students.

As seen in Figure 1, the distribution of PET scores is similar to normal distribution which means that mean score can be good indicator of central point of distribution.

To choose those students with homogenized language proficiency, those students whose PET scores were within the range of mean score  $\pm 1$  SD were extracted from the pool of 90 language learners. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of those students with scores between mean score  $\pm 1$  SD.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of PET Scores among the Learners

According to Table 4, the mean score of the 60 selected students after discarding 30 participants is 66.25 (SD=3.03). Mean score of the students did not change a lot from that of initial pool of students but SD reduced from 6.13 to 3.3 which is an indication of more homogenized language proficiency scores among the language learners.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics of Students Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET Homogenized	60	61.00	72.00	66.2500	3.03441
Valid N (list wise)	60				

## Results of the Questionnaire

The inhibitive factors in speaking were identified using a questionnaire on inhibitive factors for speaking. The students' responses to each item of the questionnaire were turned into percentages to better capture students' perception of the inhibitive factors in speaking. Table 5 displays the student's responses to items of the questionnaire on inhibitive factors.

**Table 5.** Percentages of Student's Responses of the Questionnaire on Inhibitive Factors for Speaking

	SA FR	SA PER	A FR	A PER	NEUT FR	NEUT PER	DIS FRE	DIS PER	SD FR	SD PER
I don't have enough confidence to start a conversation.	7	12	19	32	12	20	17	28	5	8

I am afraid of making mistakes and this keeps me away from speaking.	40	68	15	24	1	2	3	4	1	2
I feel embarrassed about my pronunciation and accent.	30	50	15	26	6	10	6	10	3	4
I don't like to be laughed at when speaking in classroom.	6	10	17	26	25	42	3	4	11	18
I don't know what to talk about.	7	12	15	24	24	40	0	0	14	24
I can only answer questions rather being able to talk freely.	1	2	27	44	25	42	6	10	1	2
I lose concentration when I start talking because of too many things needed to be focused on.	4	6	20	34	15	24	14	24	7	12
I am always anxious while in the classroom.	1	2	21	34	15	26	12	20	11	18
Generally I am a nervous person and this effects of my participation in classroom too.1	1	2	11	18	7	12	28	46	13	22
When I hear others talking English well I lose my confidence.	3	4	21	34	14	24	16	28	6	10
English grammar rules make me overwhelmed.	4	6	7	12	15	24	32	54	3	4
I don't have enough vocabulary knowledge to express myself.	12	20	15	24	12	22	15	26	5	8
I expect too much of myself which keeps me away from speaking.	9	14	17	28	6	10	18	30	11	18
I am not knowledgeable enough so that I could talk freely.	13	22	13	22	6	10	18	30	10	16
I don't like to be negatively evaluated by the instructor and that is why I try to avoid speaking.	16	28	17	28	15	26	9	14	3	4
I am a shy person and I usually talk little either in Farsi or English.	4	6	13	22	23	38	11	20	9	14
I don't like it when teacher corrects my mistakes.	6	10	13	22	15	24	13	22	13	22
I am not satisfied with institutes I study in and this demotivates me.	9	14	20	34	9	14	15	26	7	12
The quality of instruction is low in my class.	12	20	5	8	9	14	33	56	1	2
I am not happy with my teacher and classmates.	5	8	15	26	6	10	25	42	9	14
I don't like the teaching method and it demotivates me.	1	2	7	12	1	2	23	38	28	46
My institute has poor facilities and its building is old and badly decorated.	3	4	0	0	1	2	28	46	21	48

Brown, R. B. (2006). *Doing your dissertation in business and management: the reality of researching and writing*. Sage.

Based on the students' responses to the items of the questionnaire and identifying the clusters of percentages, following factors were found the most influential factors inhibiting speaking among Iranian EFL learners.

To be negatively evaluated by teacher and classmates was the most influential factor inhibiting speaking among Iranian EFL learners. The items covering this factor are items 2, 3, 4, 15, and 17. For instance about 70 percent of the students strongly agreed and about one fourth of the students agreed with the item 2 'I am afraid of making mistakes and this keeps me away from speaking'. Similarly, half of the students strongly agreed and about one fourth agreed with the item 3 'I feel embarrassed about my pronunciation and accent'.

Anxiety among Iranian EFL learners was the next most influential factor contributing to inhibition in speaking. The items corresponding to anxiety and confidence were 1, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16. For instance, in response to item 1, 12 percent strongly agreed and 32 percent agreed that they don't have enough confidence to start a conversation. In the same vein, 38% of students totally agreed that they lose their confidence when they hear others talking English well.

The factor of linguistic and topical knowledge, was the third influential factor contributing to inhibition in speaking. The items measuring linguistic and topical knowledge were items, 6, 7, 11, 12, and 14. For instance, item 14 "I am not knowledgeable enough so that I could talk freely", was related to topical knowledge. Or, item 12, "I don't have enough vocabulary knowledge to express myself," was related to vocabulary knowledge.

The respondents' answers to items related to classroom environment and instruction qualities indicated that this factor i.e. classroom environment and instruction qualities was the least influential factor in inhibiting speaker among the EFL students. The items number 18\_22 were related to classroom environment and instruction qualities. For instance, in response to item 22 'My institute has poor facilities and its building is old and badly decorated' about half of the students strongly disagreed and 44 percent disagreed that their institute had poor facilities. As another example, in response to item 19, altogether 28 percent of the students agreed while more than half disagreed that the quality of instruction was low in their class.

## **Results of Interview with the Teachers**

In order to find out about teachers' strategies, their responses to the interview questions covering the main components of inhibition in speaking were analyzed. Based on the content analysis of the teachers' responses, three main themes emerged covering the strategies used by teachers. These themes were (a) creating anxiety free and friendly environment, (b) use of popular topics for speaking, and (c) use of positive feedback.

With regard to actual strategies, teachers listed some strategies to deal with the inhibitive factors affecting students' performance on speaking including lack of confidence and anxiety and also inhibitive factors of instruction methods. These strategies as teachers commented were (a) establishing good relationship with students, (b) allowing students to get to know each other, (c) stating the objectives of each class, (d) allowing students' choices about the learning process, creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom,

teaching self-motivating strategies, drawing students' attention to their strengths and abilities, creating a supportive classroom environment so the students feel encouraged to take risks and showing enthusiasm for teaching.

With regard to actual strategies to deal with inhibitive factor related to popular topics for speaking following strategies were identified (a) involving students in setting speaking goals, (b) relating the topics to the students' everyday experiences, (c) allowing students choices about the discussion topics, displaying the opinions during discussions in a wall chart and review them at times.

With regard to actual strategies to deal with inhibitive factors related to (a) positive feedbacks, (b) following strategies were stated by the teachers: celebrating students' success, recognizing students' effort and achievement, providing students with positive feedback, paying attention and listen to each student, being careful to avoid embarrassing the students when giving feedback and making clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first research question was: what are the inhibitive factors in the speaking of Iranian EFL learners? After analyzing data for answering the first research question, it was found that the most influential factor contributing to inhibition in speaking was 'Negative Evaluation' followed by 'Anxiety and Confidence', 'Linguistic and Topical Knowledge', and 'Classroom environment and Instruction Quality'. The results of current study are in line with studies by Dil (2009), Al-Lawati (1995), Ambu and Saidi (1997), Schliesman and Sonandre (1998), Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), Park and Lee (2005), and MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998). For instance, Dil (2009) conducted a study to examine the obstacles Turkish EFL learners face during their communication in L2 classrooms.

The study reported anxiety and lack of desire during speaking activities as the main two serious challenges. These two affective constraints emanate from the learners' tendency to predict being negatively evaluated at the time of making mistakes, particularly before their friends. Al-Lawati (1995) reported that the linguistic aspect (lexical items, grammatical structures, pronunciation, and discourse) make up the most problematic for Omani EFL learners. This was mainly due to the learners' lack of adequately developed basic abilities of the L2. Park and Lee (2005) demonstrated that there was a negative correlation between learners' anxiety level and their scores on oral performance. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three causes of language anxiety, that is, communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Consequently, language deficiency when speaking in foreign language makes the learners more vulnerable to anxiety because of fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation can occur in any social situation which has an evaluative component and is particularly important in the language class where students may feel as if they are constantly being evaluated by their instructor and peers.

Lack of confidence was another source of speaking inhibition among Iranian EFL learners which is perfectly in line with Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Çetinkaya (2007). They maintain that self-esteem is the first and main factor in speaking performance. However, they surprisingly observed that self-esteem is not enough for students to deliver satisfactory lectures. Cases with high self-esteem were observed to have problems such as pausing, hemming, panicking, and mumbling while giving their lectures. This may indicate that several factors holistically contribute to the ease of speaking in foreign language classroom. In other words, it may be that mere confidence is not enough and students may need adequate vocabulary and grammar too.

The second research question dealt with strategies to reduce inhibition in speaking. The question was: what strategies do Iranian EFL teachers use to assist EFL learners in reducing their speaking inhibition? Qualitative analysis of teachers' statements led to the identification of such strategies like creating anxiety free and friendly environment, use of popular topics for speaking, and use of positive feedback.

The strategies used by teachers to reduce inhibition in speaking also indicated that teachers mainly targeted the same speaking inhibition experienced by EFL learners. As reported in results section of the current study, it was stated that strategies were related to creating anxiety free and friendly environment', 'using of popular topics for speaking', and 'using of positive feedback'. All these types of strategies targeted anxiety and confidence, linguistic and topical inadequacy and negative evaluation which were the main sources of inhibition among Iranian EFL learners. This shows that teacher is well aware of the speaking obstacles EFL learners experience in speaking English in classroom.

Based on results of the study it can be concluded that psychological factors are among the most influential factors contributing to inhibition in speaking in Iranian EFL learners. The most influential factors were found self-confidence and anxiety. The general impression is that insufficient language knowledge is the main obstacle to speaking in foreign language classes but this study placed language and topical knowledge in the third place contributing to inhibition in speaking. According to results, the least inhibition is caused by institutes' facilities which cannot be an absolute finding. It is because, findings of empirical studies vary with changes in the contexts of studies. What is found in this particular study may not be readily generalizable to other contexts of studies.

The findings of the present study have several implications. For instance, the results of the study give sufficient insight to teachers regarding inhibiting factors in speaking which consequently encourage teachers to provide learners with better learning opportunities. The learning opportunities can be provided by carefully examining the inhibitive factors and searching for best strategies to alleviate them.

Teachers pointed out various strategies to solve inhibition in speaking among Iranian EFL learners. These strategies were in line with learners' perception of inhibiting factors and have the potentials to be used in classrooms to help learners to better cope with inhibiting factors. In addition, teacher educators may use the results of the current study to help

teachers develop a better understanding of how to keep their class healthy and free from demotivation for more efficient and effective learning. Moreover, material developers can design materials in which the perceptions of learners and teachers in terms of inhibiting factors in speaking are taken into account to the extent possible. However, the findings of the present study are not enough to be generalized to all populations of EFL learners and teachers and thus more studies are required to cross-validate the results in different settings.

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