

Teacher Speech Style and Student Engagement in ELT: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review investigated the influence of teacher speech style on student engagement in English language learning. It examined various speech elements, including intonation, speaking speed, use of body language, and teacher-student interaction, to explore how these factors impacted students' participation and motivation. By analyzing studies published between 2020 and 2024, the review highlighted that teachers who adapted their speech styles to students' social characteristics and linguistic abilities fostered a more engaging and interactive learning environment. Intonation variations, appropriate speaking speed, the strategic use of humor, and a democratic speaking style were found to have significantly increased student engagement. This research contributed to understanding how speech style could be used as a pedagogical tool to enhance language learning and suggested that teacher training programs should incorporate techniques to refine these aspects of teaching for greater student involvement.

Keywords: Teacher Speech Style; Student Engagement; English Learning

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, the ability to speak English is becoming increasingly crucial. English is no longer just a tool for international communication but also the key to accessing knowledge, technology, and career opportunities in various fields. Therefore, effective English teaching is essential to prepare young people to be able to compete on the global stage. Student involvement is one of the main elements determining the success of English instruction. In education, student engagement is the degree of active participation, curiosity, and drive of the students throughout the learning process. Students who actively participate often enhance their language abilities, grasp the material more quickly, and provide superior learning results (Manuputty et al., 2024).

One factor that can influence student engagement in English learning is the teacher's speaking style. The teacher's speaking style includes various aspects, such as intonation, speaking speed, use of body language, and how the teacher interacts with students. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the teacher's speaking style not only functions as a tool for conveying information but also as a tool for building social relationships and creating meaning in the classroom context. An effective teacher's speaking style can create a fun and interactive classroom atmosphere. Teachers who use varied intonation, speak clearly and enthusiastically, and use positive body language can attract students' attention and make them feel more comfortable participating in learning activities. In addition, teachers who are able to build good relationships with students, provide constructive feedback, and respect students' opinions can also increase student engagement in learning (Hilda, 2023).

Various studies have examined the relationship between teachers' speaking styles and student engagement in English language learning. Some studies show that teachers who use a democratic and participatory speaking style tend to have students who are more engaged in learning compared to teachers who use an authoritarian speaking style (Mumtaza et al., 2024). Other research has also found that teachers who use humor and stories in their speaking style can increase students' interest and motivation in learning English (Paramitaswari, 2022). In addition, research highlights the importance of using language that is appropriate to the student's ability level. Teachers who use language that is too difficult or too easy can make students feel frustrated or bored, which can ultimately reduce their engagement in learning (Lasut & Kanaka, 2024).

To understand comprehensively the role of teacher speaking style in student engagement in English language learning, a systematic review of previous research is needed. In this systematic review, a comprehensive literature search will be conducted from various sources, such as scientific journals, conference proceedings, and research databases. Articles that meet the inclusion criteria will be evaluated for methodological quality. Furthermore, the findings from quality research will be analyzed and synthesized to produce comprehensive conclusions about the

role of teachers' speaking styles in students' engagement in English language learning. Based on the above background, the problem statement in this research is: This research investigates how the teacher's speaking style influences student engagement in English language learning and explores the types of speaking styles that can enhance student interest and active participation in learning English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Recent research has highlighted the pivotal role of teachers' speech styles in fostering student engagement within EFL contexts. (Gan, 2021), demonstrated that responsive speech characterized by varied intonation and clear articulation significantly enhances student engagement by promoting active participation and relational closeness, which aligns with sociolinguistic perspectives on speech as a tool for social interaction. Similarly, (Munna & Kalam, 2021) emphasized the importance of active learning strategies, noting that understanding students' prior knowledge is essential for engagement and recommending gamification and collaborative methods to support cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement. Furthermore, (Jindapitak et al., 2022), underscored the pedagogical value of exposing learners to diverse English varieties. Their findings suggest that adaptive teacher speech incorporating varied accents and discourse patterns can better prepare students for real-world communication. These studies affirm that speech features such as intonation, clarity, inclusiveness, and adaptability are crucial for motivating learners, enhancing participation, and creating dynamic classroom environments. In various studies, teachers' speaking style has been shown to affect student engagement in English learning. This includes aspects such as intonation, speaking speed, use of body language, and how teachers interact with students. From a sociolinguistic perspective, speech style serves as a tool to convey information and as a means to build social relationships between teachers and students, which is important for creating an interactive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere (Zaematun, 2024).

The Effect of Intonation and Speaking Speed on Student Engagement

Research shows that intonation and speaking speed variations can increase student engagement in the classroom. Varied intonation can attract students' attention and make them more interested in participating in learning (Sari, 2023). In addition, speaking speed adjusted to students' level of understanding also plays an important role in preventing boredom and frustration that can reduce student engagement. These adjustments allow students to understand the material better and encourage them to participate actively in class discussions (Li & Xue, 2023).

The Role of Humor in Increasing Student Engagement

Using humor in the teacher's speaking style in English language learning has increased student motivation and participation. Humor tailored to students' ability levels can create a more relaxed atmosphere and reduce students' anxiety (Paramitaswari, 2022). From a sociolinguistic point of view, humor also reduces the social distance between teachers and students, thus creating closer relationships and supporting more active interaction in learning.

Democratic and Participatory Speaking Styles in Enhancing Student Engagement

Several studies have shown that democratic and participatory speaking styles, which provide opportunities for students to speak up and actively participate in learning, are positively associated with levels of student engagement. This style of speech prioritizes students' voices, creates more equal interactions in the classroom, and encourages students to be more active in discussions (Ramli & Jihad, 2021). From a sociolinguistic perspective, this democratic speaking style builds mutual respect between teachers and students, increasing student participation in learning activities.

Adjustment of Speech Style to Students' Language Ability

Adjusting the speaking style to the student's language ability level is important in maintaining student engagement. A speaking style that is too difficult or too easy can make students feel frustrated or bored, potentially reducing their engagement in learning. Conversely, a speech style adapted to students' level of understanding can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, where students feel more comfortable participating (Zahra & Bahfeni, 2024). Linguistics further reveals that using language that matches students' language ability allows them to understand the material better and increases their engagement in the learning process (Dorgham, 2024).

Linking Theory to Research Objectives

The sociolinguistics and advanced linguistics theories are highly relevant to this study, which aims to investigate how teachers' speaking styles affect students' engagement in English language learning. From a sociolinguistic perspective, responsive and expressive speaking styles build positive social relationships between teachers and students and create an interactive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, advanced linguistics emphasizes the importance of adapting speech styles to students' language proficiency levels to prevent boredom and frustration and to increase students' comprehension and participation. By linking these theories, this research seeks to answer the main questions of how teachers' speech styles can increase students' engagement in English language

learning and how adjusting speech styles to students' language proficiency can create a more effective and inclusive learning environment.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This research used a systematic review approach to identify, assess, and synthesize relevant literature on teacher speech style and student engagement in English language learning. The research included in this review was obtained from several reputable academic databases, such as ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), JSTOR, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Google Scholar, with keywords such as "teacher speech style," "student engagement," and "sociolinguistics in ELT." The selected articles had to meet specific inclusion criteria, i.e., published between 2020 and 2024 and using relevant methodologies (qualitative or quantitative).

Instruments and Procedures

The instrument used in this review was a systematic literature search conducted through electronic and manual databases. The article selection procedure included three stages:

1. Identification of articles using defined keywords.
2. Articles are screened based on the relevance of the topic and the methodology used, ignoring irrelevant articles or those that do not fit the established methodological criteria.
3. Evaluation of article quality: Each article that meets the inclusion criteria will be assessed based on the validity and reliability developed in this research.

Data Analysis

The collected data were then analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. The selected articles were analyzed thematically to determine the influence of intonation, speaking rate, use of humor, and democratic speaking style on student engagement. Articles of high methodological quality were analyzed in more depth to ensure consistency of findings and relevance to the research objectives. The validity of the articles was assessed based on the topic's appropriateness to the research objectives and the quality of the methodology used in the study. To assess reliability, articles were only selected from peer-reviewed indexed journals.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This systematic review synthesized the impact of various teacher speech styles on student engagement in English language learning. Based on the studies reviewed, the researchers identified four key themes: intonation, speaking speed, humor, and democratic speech style. These speech style elements were significantly associated

with the level of student engagement. The following sections discuss these findings, their contributions to the existing body of knowledge, and their implications for teaching practice.

The following matrix summarizes the relationship between teacher speech styles and their effects on student engagement. Each speech style was associated with its effect on engagement, and relevant studies were referenced to support the findings.

Table 1. Synthesis of Teacher Speech Styles and Their Effects on Student Engagement

Teacher Speech Style	Effect on Student Engagement	Supporting Studies
Intonation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Captures attention - Encourages active participation - Prevents monotony, especially in complex discussions 	Zaematun (2024), Sari (2023), Gan, (2021), Augustine, (2021)
Speaking Speed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improves comprehension - Reduces frustration - Builds confidence by aligning with students' proficiency 	Jian Li & Eryong Xue (2023), Huang & Lian (2024), Evers & Chen (2021)
Humor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduces anxiety - Enhances participation and comfort - Builds rapport, though excessive use may reduce focus 	Paramitaswari (2022), Zaematun (2024), Munna & Kalam (2021), Cheng (2021)
Democratic Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes inclusivity - Boosts confidence - Increases classroom interaction and collaborative learning - Impact varies across cultural contexts 	Ramli & Jihad (2021), Zahra & Bahfeni (2024), Jindapitak et al. (2022), Gan (2021), Dorgham (2024)

1. Intonation

The use of varied intonation played a critical role in engaging students. Studies such as (Zaematun, 2024) and (Sari, 2023) highlighted that variations in tone and pitch helped maintain student attention and encouraged participation. The findings supported this, showing that students were more likely to engage when the teacher's voice varied in tone, which captured their attention and helped prevent monotony in lessons. Teachers who consciously adjusted their intonation based on the emotional content of the lesson or the students' responses created an interactive environment that promoted higher levels of engagement.

Notably, varied intonation is crucial in capturing and maintaining students' involvement throughout the lesson. Beyond capturing attention, it enhances emotional connection and signals the importance of certain content. (Gan, 2021) emphasizes that a teacher's responsive and attentive speaking style fosters a constructive teacher-student relationship, a foundation for student participation. This supports the idea that intonation variation is not merely technical but deeply social in its effect.

(Agustine et al., 2021) demonstrate that teachers' intonation and code-switching practices in multilingual classrooms were key to engaging students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Such speech strategies helped maintain inclusivity and promoted understanding. The results aligned with those of (Zaematun, 2024) but extended the understanding of intonation by emphasizing its role in creating a dynamic learning atmosphere. Previous studies tended to focus on how intonation grabbed attention, but our findings showed how it sustained engagement over more extended periods, particularly during complex tasks or discussions.

2. Speaking Speed

The speed of speech was another important factor affecting student engagement; according to (Li & Xue, 2023), speaking appropriately allowed students to follow the lesson more easily and feel more confident in their understanding. The findings confirmed that students were more engaged when the teacher spoke at a moderate speed, notably when the complexity of the content increased. Teachers who adjusted their speed according to students' proficiency levels, slowing down for complex concepts and speeding up during familiar topics, created a supportive learning environment. In line with this, speaking speed is integral to comprehension and focus. (Huang & Lian, 2024) showed that teachers are increasingly aware of the need to adapt their communication by balancing question types and feedback, which indirectly involves managing speech pace. Such flexibility fosters students' innovative thinking and active involvement.

Furthermore, to enhance this adaptive approach, (Evers & Chen, 2021) found that integrating technology (like Automatic Speech Recognition tools) helped teachers adjust speech delivery in real-time, benefiting students with varying learning styles. This suggests that moderating speaking speed is also about acknowledging and adapting to cognitive diversity in classrooms. Teachers should be trained to monitor and adapt their speaking speed according to their student's needs, as this directly affects engagement. For example, using slower speech during instructions and faster speech during review sessions helped optimize student participation and focus.

3. Humor

Humor significantly reduced student anxiety and facilitated a comfortable classroom environment. Studies, including (Paramitaswari, 2022) and (Zaematun,

2024), demonstrated that humor relaxed students and built a stronger teacher-student rapport, encouraging greater participation. The findings reinforced these studies by showing that students felt more at ease when teachers used humor appropriately and were more likely to contribute to discussions. Humor created a favorable classroom climate where students felt supported and less intimidated by potential mistakes. Moreover, humor has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase student comfort, leading to greater classroom participation. (Munna & Kalam, 2021) advocate for active learning strategies like gamification and collaborative methods, which, though not strictly humor, promote a similar light and engaging environment. This supports the finding that humor can improve emotional and cognitive engagement when embedded in teaching approaches.

In addition, (Cheng, 2021) stresses that teachers' emotional expression, including the use of lighthearted language or jokes, shapes their professional identity and student relationships. Humor can be seen as part of this emotional register that humanizes the teacher and enhances student rapport. Interestingly, this review also suggested that excessive humor could sometimes detract from student engagement, particularly if used too frequently or inappropriately. This finding contrasted with earlier studies that focused solely on the benefits of humor in the classroom. This discrepancy suggested further research on the optimal use of humor to ensure enhanced learning without overwhelming students.

4. Democratic Speech Style

A democratic speech style where students were encouraged to participate, voice their opinions, and collaborate was strongly linked to higher levels of student engagement. Studies such as (Ramli and Jihad, 2021), emphasized the importance of a participatory approach, which fostered a more egalitarian classroom atmosphere. These findings confirmed that a democratic style promoted active student involvement, especially when teachers created opportunities for student-led discussions and collaborative activities. This type of interaction engaged students and helped them feel valued and respected in the classroom.

(Jindapitak et al., 2022) argue that teachers who expose students to diverse forms of English and encourage reflection support global awareness and student voice, key principles in democratic classrooms. Gan (2021) also reiterates that teacher-student relatedness and engagement are interconnected when students feel respected and recognized, as in democratic speech interactions, their willingness to participate increases significantly. Furthermore, Dorgham (2024) points out that sociolinguistic competence strategies, which often include participatory and inclusive discourse, lead to better engagement and comprehension. This aligns with the idea that democratic speech is both a pedagogical and social tool.

While democratic speech styles were positively associated with engagement, variations across different cultural contexts existed. In some cases, students in more hierarchical educational settings were less inclined to engage with democratic

styles, suggesting that cultural norms might have influenced the effectiveness of this approach. This finding warranted further exploration to understand how cultural differences impacted the reception of participatory teaching methods.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this review can be concluded to emphasize the significant role of teacher speech style in enhancing student engagement in English language learning. Specifically, varied intonation, adjusted speaking speed, humor, and a democratic speech style were all found to contribute to creating an engaging classroom environment. These results align with previous studies while contributing new insights, particularly regarding the combination of speech styles and their collective impact on engagement. In addition to reinforcing existing research, these findings may inform curriculum developers to embed communicative and adaptive speech elements in teacher training modules and ELT course design. Besides, practical implications, teachers should be mindful of their speech style, incorporate intonation variations, maintain an appropriate speaking pace, use humor strategically, and foster a democratic classroom atmosphere. Professional development programs for teachers could include training on effectively combining these speech elements to maximize student engagement. While this review offers important insights, it is limited by the number of studies included and the predominance of qualitative research. Future research could investigate the quantitative effects on student involvement across various educational environments and disciplines of instructor speech patterns. Moreover, research could investigate the impact of cultural contexts on the effectiveness of different speech styles in promoting engagement.

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