

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

CHALLENGES FACED BY HIGH SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY, AND ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHILE SPEAKING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is generally considered an important indicator of foreign language proficiency, as it requires the ability to produce language in real-time and to communicate effectively with others. Being able to speak a language well means being able to use the appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to express oneself clearly, which is not an easy task, and students face many difficulties trying to develop this language skill. The current study aimed to explore the difficulties faced by high school, university, and adult language learners while speaking English. The study is an empirical qualitative study in which the researcher used a semi-structured interview to collect data from 15 participants, 5 from each of the above-mentioned groups. The findings were sorted and analyzed into three categories of difficulties faced by students while speaking in English. The findings revealed that some of the main problems language learners experience while speaking in English are nervousness, lack of confidence, anxiety, lack of vocabulary, fear of being criticized by peers, grammar, and lack of fluency and vocabulary. This study suggested that creating a positive and supportive learning environment, empowering learners to take control of their learning, and providing ample opportunities for practice and interaction are key strategies for improving language learning outcomes.

Keywords: speaking skills, writing skills, difficulties, causes, classroom

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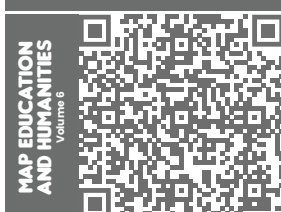
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Introduction

The English language in the 21st century has become an essential component of the educational curriculum in most countries where it is used as a second or foreign language according to Akbari (2015), as well as Richards and Renandya (2002). The authors suggest that the widespread use of English as a global language, advancements in technology, and the rise of the internet have led to a growing demand for English language education around the world. Thus, English has become the primary language used in international business, science, and diplomacy, so individuals who are proficient in English have an advantage in the global job market and have greater access to information and opportunities.

English language education in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be traced back to the early 20th century when Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. English was introduced as a foreign language in schools during this period, along with German and French. After World War II, English continued to be taught in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus on developing reading and writing skills. During the period of Yugoslavia, English language education was expanded, with English becoming a mandatory subject in secondary schools (Imamovic & Delibegovic Dzanic, 2016).

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War in the 1990s, there was a renewed emphasis on English language education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the country sought to rebuild its economy and integrate into the global community. Nowadays, English is typically introduced as a foreign language in primary school, which starts at the age of six (Imamovic & Delibegovic Dzanic, 2016). English language education is then continued in high school, where it is a mandatory subject and is typically taught for two to three hours per week (Ministry of Education, 2016). The focus is on developing the four language skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening – as well as grammar and vocabulary (Delić et al, 2024). At the university level, English is also an important language of instruction, particularly in programs related to international business, tourism, and other fields that require the knowledge of English. Many universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina offer English language courses for students who need to improve their language skills, as well as language certificate programs such as TOEFL and IELTS. It is often supplemented

by language schools and private tutoring, which provide additional opportunities for learners to practice and develop their language skills.

However, learning EFL can present a number of challenges for non-native speakers, acquiring fluency in speaking being one of them (Rahnama et al., 2016). Speaking is often considered the most important and difficult skill for EFL learners to develop because speaking requires learners to combine a range of skills, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, in real-time conversation with others (Celce-Murica, 2001). Some of the most common difficulties according to Dimayati and Mudjiono (2010) are a lack of confidence, hesitation to speak, teachers' attitudes, lack of concentration, and fear of making mistakes. Akbari (2016) addressed these problems mainly to the limited exposure to the language, inadequate language instruction, insufficient motivation, anxiety, lack of confidence, limited grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary knowledge. However, we still have no study which analyzed difficulties faced in particular by students in this part of Europe.

Taking into consideration the importance of English in Bosnia and Herzegovina, being able to speak fluently is one of the goals for many people, and researching potential difficulties therefore might lead to the improvement of teaching methods. The present study, thus, attempted to explore the difficulties faced by different age groups, namely high school, university, and adult language learners while speaking English using an empirical qualitative study in which the researcher used a semi-structured interview to collect data.

Literature review

The analysis of speaking skill development has been extensively explored in various contexts, including language learning, education, communication studies, psychology, and linguistics. Speaking is one of the four major language skills, along with listening, reading, and writing, and its development is considered crucial for effective communication (Lonkar, 2017).

In language learning, speaking skills are often a central focus, as learners need to be able to communicate effectively in the target language. Speaking skills have been extensively explored in second language acquisition research, with a particular emphasis on the role of factors such as proficiency level, language input, motivation, and anxiety (Ghafar & Raad, 2023).

In educational contexts, speaking skills are often assessed through oral presentations, debates, and other forms of spoken communication. The development of speaking skills is considered important for academic success, as well as for career readiness.

It is important to mention that speaking challenges are faced at different educational levels, such as with primary school students, secondary school students, university level students as well as adults. The challenges will further be addressed by mentioning different studies that were done so far.

Speaking Difficulties Faced by High School Learners

To start with, as previously introduced, the speaking challenges are faced at different levels, but this study deals with three groups, namely, high school, university and adult language learners, and therefore only these groups will be taken into consideration. When it comes to the first group, high school students, there are several scholars (Al-Jarf, 2010; Riza, & Nasir, 2012; Wang, 2014; Shi & Liu, 2015) who have explored the difficulties faced by them. They have identified several key challenges that high school students face when speaking English. These challenges include difficulty with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, as well as anxiety or nervousness. These challenges are understandable, if we take into consideration their age, and it feels natural to have such feelings. Studies supporting these claims are briefly represented in the further paragraphs.

Riza and Nasir (2012) conducted a study involving 60 high school students in Pakistani classrooms and found that students face challenges in speaking English due to factors such as a lack of exposure to English outside of the classroom, limited speaking opportunities, and a lack of interest in the language. Similar to this Makewa et al. (2013) carried out a study in secondary schools located in Dodoma, Tanzania, involving 300 students (131 female and 169 male) to examine their self-assessed proficiency in English. The research focused on various factors that might influence students' speaking skills, including access to learning resources, classroom practices, anxiety levels, learner attitudes, and motivation. Findings indicated that students rated their English-speaking abilities as moderate. Additionally, the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between these influencing factors and students'

perceived language competence, with attitude, classroom engagement, and motivation emerging as the most impactful.

Furthermore, Chua and Chong (2016) conducted a case study involving 60 high school students and found that speaking anxiety is a common problem among students in the Malaysian school, and that factors such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, and inadequate preparation are the main causes of speaking anxiety.

Speaking Difficulties Faced by University-level Learners

However, it seems that not only high school students have these problems, and speaking difficulties were also found among university-level students. Scholars (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Chand, 2021; Faiz & Salehi, 2012; Hsu & Wang, 2015; Zhang & Zhang, 2016) who have explored the difficulties faced by university-level students have revealed that this group usually faces with problems such as language proficiency, anxiety, self-confidence, phrasal verbs, and other aspects of native-like proficiency in their speaking skills. If these problems were compared with the previous group, we can conclude that anxiety, fluency, and vocabulary are common among two groups.

When it comes to this group, Bahadur Chand (2021) researched the challenges faced by university-level learners while speaking English and came to the conclusion that students faced difficulties such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar patterns, anxiety. These challenges were due to the fear of making mistakes which led to hesitation to speak. Also, some of the other reasons were mother tongue, teaching methods, and classroom interaction.

Additionally, Alam and Ashrafuzzaman (2018a) conducted a study with undergraduate students to explore the challenges of developing speaking skills through classroom interaction among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The study aimed to identify the various challenges that EFL learners face when trying to develop their speaking skills in the classroom, with a particular focus on classroom interaction. The study found that EFL learners face a range of challenges when it comes to developing their speaking skills through classroom interaction. Some of the main challenges identified include a lack of confidence, limited

vocabulary, difficulty understanding and using grammar correctly, and anxiety about making mistakes. Learners also reported feeling inhibited in the classroom, particularly if they were not given enough opportunities to speak or if they felt self-conscious about their language abilities.

In addition, Heriansyah (2012) made research to identify the main problems faced by Indonesian EFL learners from various backgrounds, including university students and professionals when developing their speaking skills. The study found that two of the main problems faced by Indonesian EFL learners when developing their speaking skills were a lack of vocabulary and a fear of making mistakes. The learners often struggled to find the right words to express their ideas, and this led to a lack of fluency and coherence in their speaking. Additionally, many learners reported feeling self-conscious about their language abilities and were afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of others.

Similarly, Anandari (2015) did a research study on the anxiety experienced by Indonesian EFL students in speech production. The study aimed to investigate the level of anxiety experienced by Indonesian EFL students during oral presentations and to identify the sources of anxiety that contributed to their level of anxiety. A total of 60 participants were recruited from an EFL class at an Indonesian university. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of participants experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety during oral presentations. The sources of anxiety identified by the participants included fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence in English proficiency, and lack of preparation time.

Lastly, Nakhalah (2016) conducted a study to explore the speaking difficulties experienced by (EFL) learners and the underlying causes of these difficulties. A total of 120 EFL learners from a university in Jordan participated in the study. The findings of the study indicated that the most common speaking difficulties experienced by EFL learners were pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and grammar. The study also found that anxiety and lack of confidence were significant factors that contributed to these difficulties. Furthermore, the study identified other factors that may contribute to speaking difficulties, such as limited exposure to English outside the classroom, inadequate teaching methods, and lack of motivation.

Speaking Difficulties Faced by Adult Learners

The last group taken into consideration was the adult language learners. What is interesting is that the final group shares similar challenges as previous groups. Adult language learners face certain difficulties speaking in English, such as anxiety, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency and similar (Arda, 2013; Kucuk & Sesen, 2018; Liu & Brantmeier, 2016; Nguyen, 2021).

It can be seen that high school, university and adult language learners face problems in speaking English such as anxiety, pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary.

When it comes to adult language learners, Arda (2013) conducted a study on EFL learners' difficulties in speaking English involving 120 Turkish EFL adult learners and found that Turkish EFL learners face difficulties in speaking English due to factors such as a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and a fear of making mistakes.

Similarly, Kucuk and Sesen (2018) conducted a study on difficulties encountered by adult EFL learners in speaking English involving 150 adult EFL learners and found that the main difficulties faced by adult EFL learners in speaking English include a lack of vocabulary, anxiety, pronunciation errors, and difficulty in constructing sentences.

Lastly, Nguyen (2021) conducted a study on speaking difficulties faced by Vietnamese adult learners of English involving 50 Vietnamese adult learners of English. The author found that the main difficulties faced by Vietnamese adult learners of English in speaking include a lack of vocabulary, grammar errors, and pronunciation problems. Additionally, the author found that the learners face challenges in speaking fluently and accurately due to the influence of their native language and lack of exposure to English-speaking environments.

To our knowledge, no similar research was conducted in the Bosnian EFL context. As for the process of learning English and factors influencing students' proficiency, some studies were done (Bećirović et al., 2017; Brdarević-Čeljo & Asotić, 2017; Delić et al., 2018; Habibić & Dubravac, 2016).

Taking all of these into consideration and due to a lack of research on speaking difficulties in English in the Bosnian context, the current study attempts to fill a gap in the current literature. Thus,

its goal is to investigate the speaking difficulties faced by 15 Bosnian learners of English.

Methodology

Aim of the research and research questions

The current study aimed to explore the difficulties faced by high school, university, and adult language learners while speaking English. The study is an empirical qualitative study in which the researcher used a semi-structured interview to collect data from 15 participants, 5 from each of the above-mentioned groups.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are speaking difficulties faced by Bosnian high school students?
2. What are speaking difficulties faced by Bosnian university level students?
3. What are speaking difficulties faced by Bosnian adult language learners?

Participants

This study was conducted among high school students, university students, and adult language learners from Sarajevo Canton, using a qualitative research design. All of the participants study/work, and live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and all of them are of Bosnian nationality. All of the participants were able to speak English. High school students and university students were chosen from high schools and universities in Sarajevo Canton, while adult language learners were chosen from the Cultural Centre King Fahd.

High school students have English as a regular subject in schools. A similar situation is for university students who usually have some English lessons in certain semesters. When it comes to adult learners, they learn English in English language courses provided at Cultural Centre King Fahd. Fifteen participants, five from each group were sampled using purposive sampling procedures, who were fluent and successful in English language learning but also those who were not successful and fluent in English language learning. Their success in language learning was evaluated based on their grades and test results when it comes to adult learners.

It is important to mention that all of them at some point in their lives were attendees of language courses which are provided by Cultural Center King Fahd, where the researcher had the opportunity to observe their presentation skills and spoken fluency many times.

Table 1:
Information about participants

Participants	Age group	Gender	Level of knowledge
Participant 1	High school	Female	Intermediate
Participant 2	High school	Male	Pre-intermediate
Participant 3	High school	Male	Pre-intermediate
Participant 4	High school	Male	Elementary
Participant 5	High school	Female	Elementary
Participant 6	University	Female	Pre-intermediate
Participant 7	University	Female	Intermediate
Participant 8	University	Female	Intermediate
Participant 9	University	Male	Pre-intermediate
Participant 10	University	Female	Pre-intermediate
Participant 11	Adult	Female	Intermediate
Participant 12	Adult	Female	Pre-intermediate
Participant 13	Adult	Male	Pre-intermediate
Participant 14	Adult	Female	Intermediate
Participant 15	Adult	Male	Pre-intermediate

Instrument

To collect the data, this study used semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interview consisted of twenty-three questions in total, with many sub-questions for each of these. The questions used in the interviews focused on the problems students face while they speak English. The researcher focused on problems such as personal problems, social problems, and linguistic problems. Interview questions were developed using sections: Speaking difficulties faced by the students and possible causes of difficulties. Researcher adopted a semi-structured interview from Chand's (2021) study. The questions included participants' gender, age, place of living, and level of education for the general questions part. When it comes to other parts of questions, they were about difficulties they face in speaking English, their feelings while speaking, fear of being criticized, fear of making mistakes, acquisition of new words, the influence of

native language, and the use of English language in classroom but also outside the classroom.

Data collection

Students were interviewed based on semi-structured interview protocols. The interview was conducted online using Google Meets, as well as face-to-face in the objects of the Cultural Centre King Fahd. With the participants' permission, the interview was audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in the Bosnian language so that the participants would feel more comfortable, and they did not have to focus their attention on grammar and pronunciation, as well as to get the accurate data as much as possible. Each interview took from twenty to thirty minutes depending on the participants' answers.

Later on, the interviews were transcribed and translated into English to form themes from their answers. Based on that, data were categorized into difficulties faced by high school students, university students, and adult language learners while speaking in English.

Data analysis

The data collected for this study from conducted interviews can be further categorized into three main categories, and they are Speaking Difficulties faced by high school students, Speaking Difficulties faced by university students, and Speaking Difficulties faced by adult language learners. The representation of these categories is analyzed and displayed in the following lines.

Speaking Difficulties faced by high school students

Out of 5 participants, the most common personal problems were hesitation to speak and anxiety. One of them reported *"Yes, of course, I feel nervous when talking to someone, and it depends on the situation"* [P1]. Similarly, the other one added *"Sometimes I can't even remember some words, I start describing and suddenly I need some words. Then I become nervous"* [P4]. One of them even mentioned, *"I speak English only when I have to"* [P3].

When it comes to social problems, some of the most common among all participants were fear of being criticized by peers, fear of making mistakes, and pronunciation. Seems that high school students are not afraid of being criticized by teachers as

much as they fear being criticized by peers. Also, fear of making mistakes and pronunciation often prevents them from speaking and writing.

In addition, when it comes to linguistic problems, as it is displayed in the table below, some of the problems are fluency, the influence of native language, grammar, and spelling. One of the participants reported, *"sometimes I think a little more about grammar"* [P2], and similarly with another participant *"Before, there were a lot of problems with grammar, but now is better"* [P1]. When it comes to writing, spelling seems to be the major problem among this group of participants.

Table 2:

Difficulties of Speaking faced by high school students

Personal problems	Hesitation to speak
	Anxiety
Social problems	Fear of being criticized by peers
	Fear of making mistakes
	Pronunciation
Linguistic problems	Fluency
	Native language
	Grammar
	Spelling

Speaking Difficulties faced by university students

The second group of participants used for interviews was university students. The results are similar to those of high school students, but in addition, it seems that university students face more additional problems. The most common personal problems were nervousness when speaking to other people/can't remember words, lack of confidence, hesitation to speak when being around a big group of people, shyness, and dissatisfaction with current knowledge.

Regarding dissatisfaction with current knowledge one of the participants said *"I find a difficulty in speaking English, it is because I'm not satisfied with my skills to communicate exactly the way I want to"* [P6]. Nervousness, one of the participants added *"Sometimes I feel nervous when I have to speak with other people. I'm not sure if I*

know all the reasons" [P8]. Lack of confidence also plays a huge role in preventing university students to speak *"I don't feel confident while I'm speaking English, it's because I am always around people who know English better than me. I feel like they will judge me"* [P7]. In addition to these, hesitation also prevents students from speaking *"Even I would rather write in English than speak"* [P9].

When it comes to social problems, some of the most common among all participants were fear of being criticized, fear of being judged by other classmates, and pronunciation. Similar to high school students, university students also fear that someone from their peers will judge them, *"My fear comes from other people, they judged others because of not knowing English very well"* [P7]. The fear of being criticized by the teacher is not as big as that of being criticized by students *"Well I appreciate when my teacher corrects me, but when someone else criticizes me it's pretty uncomfortable"* [P10].

Lastly, when it comes to linguistic problems, as it is displayed in the table below, some of the problems are fluency, lack of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and prepositions. Some of the students believe that they can't be as fluent as native speakers, and one of them answered that he/she faces problems with fluency *"Actually I do, we can't be that fluent in English, but I'm working on it"* [P7].

Table 3:
Difficulties of Speaking faced by university students

Personal Problems	Nervousness when speaking to other people/can't remember words
	Lack of confidence
	Hesitation to speak when being around a big group of people
	Shyness
	Dissatisfaction with current knowledge
Social Problems	Fear of being criticized
	Fear of being judged by other classmates
	Pronunciation
Linguistic Problems	Fluency
	Lack of vocabulary
	Grammar
	Spelling
	Prepositions

Speaking Difficulties faced by adult language learners

The third and last group of participants used for this study were adult language learners. Their difficulties were similar and almost the same as those of high school students and university students, but in comparison, the number of their problems was much higher. The most common personal problems were communication with other people, insecurity, nervousness, fast communication, lack of confidence, hesitation to communicate, lack of knowledge, and shyness. They seem to struggle with fear of speaking as one of the participants said *"Yes. Fear blocks me. I speak quietly so they don't hear me"* [P11]. Also, fast communication makes them uncomfortable, *"Speed is a problem for me, I need more time to concentrate. By relaxing and concentrating, I mostly solve the problem"* [P13]. In addition, shyness is also one of the problems *"I'm always ashamed"* [P12].

Table 4:
Difficulties of Speaking and Writing faced by adult language learners

Personal Problems	Communication with other people
	Insecurity
	Nervousness
	Fast communication
	Lack of confidence
	Hesitation to communicate
	Lack of knowledge
	Shyness
Social Problems	Fear of being criticized by peers
	Pronunciation
Linguistic Problems	Lack of vocabulary
	Fluency
	Grammar
	Native language
	Accuracy
	Spelling

When it comes to social problems, some of the most common among all participants were fear of being criticized by peers and pronunciation.

Similar to high school and university students, adult language learners feel fear of being criticized by peers rather than teachers *"I am more afraid of the environment than the teacher"* [P12]. They tend to avoid using new words if they are not sure how to pronounce them *"I avoid words I don't know how to say because others won't understand me"* [P14].

Lastly, when it comes to linguistic problems, they are a lack of vocabulary, fluency, grammar, native language, accuracy, and spelling. Most of the participants reported problems with spelling, and one of them said *"I write poorly because I don't know how to spell correctly"* [P15].

Discussion

This study explored the difficulties faced by high school students, university students, and adult language learners while speaking in English. Some of the difficulties discussed in the study were anxiety, nervousness, hesitation to speak, lack of confidence, fear of being criticized, lack of vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and similar.

The study showed that the difficulties faced by high school students, university students, and adult language learners are similar, and as the group is older the number of these difficulties increases. For example, all of them had problems with anxiety, hesitation to speak, nervousness and similar which were part of personal problems. Moving on to the social problems, common for all 3 groups is that they are afraid of being criticized by peers. When it comes to linguistic problems, some common for all of them were fluency, lack of vocabulary and grammar.

When it comes to high school students, this study is in line with Chua and Chong's (2016) case study with 60 high school students that found speaking anxiety a common problem among students in the Malaysian school, and that factors such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, and inadequate preparation are the main causes of speaking anxiety.

As for the university students, the study is in line with Alam and Ashrafuzzaman's (2018a) study of challenges of developing speaking skills through classroom interaction among EFL learners. The study confirmed that EFL learners face a range of challenges when it comes to developing their speaking skills through classroom interaction. Some of the main challenges identified include

a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding and using grammar correctly, and anxiety about making mistakes.

The data confirmed Heriansyah's (2012) study with Indonesian EFL learners. Similarly, the study found that some of the problems faced by EFL learners when developing their speaking skills were a lack of vocabulary and a fear of making mistakes. Also, the learners often struggle to find the right words to express their ideas, and this leads to a lack of fluency and coherence in their speaking. Additionally, many learners were afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of others.

Anandari's (2015) research study on the anxiety experienced by Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is also in line with this study. Similarly, the sources of anxiety identified by the participants included fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence in English proficiency.

In addition, Nakhalah's (2016) study of speaking difficulties experienced by (EFL) learners, was confirmed. The findings of the study indicated that the most common speaking difficulties experienced by EFL learners were pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and grammar, which was the case for this study as well. The study also found that anxiety and lack of confidence were significant factors that contributed to these difficulties, which is confirmed in this study as well.

Although Bahadur Chand (2021) found that teacher, and classroom environment, such as the use of methods, and books are the causes for difficulties that students experience while speaking English, this was not the case for the current study due to the fact that none of the participants reported dissatisfaction with neither language teachers nor methods or books used.

When it comes to adult learners, the study confirmed Arda's (2013) study on EFL adult learners' difficulties in speaking English as it found that adult learners face difficulties in speaking English due to factors such as a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and a fear of making mistakes.

It is also in line with Kucuk and Sesen's (2018) study on difficulties encountered by adult EFL learners in speaking English as the data revealed that the main difficulties faced by adult EFL learners in speaking English include a lack of vocabulary,

anxiety, pronunciation errors, and difficulty in constructing sentences.

Lastly, it found out the same outcomes as Nguyen's (2021) study on speaking difficulties faced by Vietnamese adult learners of English as the author found that the main difficulties faced by Bosnian adult learners of English in speaking include a lack of vocabulary, grammar errors, and pronunciation problems.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the difficulties faced by high school, university, and adult language learners while speaking English using an empirical qualitative study in which the researcher used a semi-structured interview to collect data. Due to the fact that a lot of data was gathered, unfortunately it was impossible to incorporate all of them into this paper.

Speaking is usually regarded as one of the most difficult skills to acquire by EFL learners, and that was the case for language learners in Sarajevo Canton as well. According to the research data, learners got three major speaking difficulties such as personal problems, linguistic problems, and social problems. Hesitation to speak, anxiety, fear of being criticized by peers, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge, pronunciation, grammar, and lack of vocabulary, were just some of them.

Taking into consideration the importance of English language in the world and in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, being able to speak fluently is one of the goals for many people, and researching these difficulties therefore will lead to the improvement of teaching methods.

This study suggested that creating a positive and supportive learning environment, empowering learners to take control of their learning, and providing ample opportunities for practice and interaction are key to improving language learning outcomes. Practical implications of this study include informing curriculum designers and language instructors about the specific challenges learners face at various educational levels, allowing for targeted pedagogical strategies. One limitation of this study is the small sample size and its restriction to Sarajevo Canton, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Future research could expand to other regions or employ a mixed-methods approach.

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