

# The Challenges of Verbal Skills among High School Students in Yazd Based on Grounded Theory

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## Abstract

**Aim:** Man is a social being who needs to communicate with others. In this regard, the present study investigated the challenges of verbal skills among high school students in Yazd. **Method:** The research approach was "qualitative", and the method was "Grounded theory". The target group in the study included the teachers of Persian language, literature, psychology and educational sciences in Yazd in the academic year of 2022- 2023, who were selected by theoretical sampling. The research instrument was a "semi-structured in-depth interview". Theoretical saturation was obtained, and the interviews were conducted on up to 12 cases. Data were analyzed by coding and categorization at three levels: open, axial, and selective coding. **Results:** The results showed that the "Core Category" included verbal skills. "Causal conditions" included practice and activity, enrichment of the environment and psychological characteristics of the students. "Strategies" included effective communication and prevention of misunderstandings and social activities. "Environmental conditions" included socio-cultural, economic, planning and policy and technology environment, and "context" including facilities, incentives, and dialect. Consequences included personal and academic success, social success, and student career success. **Discussion:** The results indicated that practice and activity, enrichment of the environment, and psychological characteristics of the students affect verbal skills. In the face of these conditions, students will have more effective communication and social activities and fewer misunderstandings. **Conclusion:** Based on the results of this study, it is possible to strengthen students' verbal skills by purposefully planning and providing the necessary mental climate and facilities in the school and carrying out school activities with the participation of all students. Also, we can expect consequences such as personal, academic, social and career success by overcoming the challenges of verbal skills.

**Keywords:** Verbal skills, verbal communication, grounded theory research method

## Introduction

Humans are social beings and must communicate with others to satisfy their requirements. If there is no communication, no social activity will be established between individuals (Mohammadi et al., 2018). The communicative role of language has perpetually been highlighted as its primary role. Language is also considered a means to enable us to understand the world. Moreover, a human is a social being required to communicate with others. Therefore, it is necessary to have the right speech to communicate (Labov et al., 2010). Language provides us with a limit. We have the potential of a solid force to become a person with an outstanding and worthy expression. Language is a wholly constructive medium in all its forms, including technical, mystical, ordinary, mathematical, etc. and provides the foundation to preserve, change, and create a society and culture concerning the people related to a nation (Schwartz, 2019).

Verbal skill is required to internalize individual actions (Houwen et al., 2019). Verbal communication is essentially a system to communicate and convey a message. Verbal communication is related to culture and society and differs from culture to other cultures. It is evident that verbal communication is expressed through language, and the speaker's language, meanings, concepts, intentions, and language are fundamental elements in this type of communication (Tajik, 2017). Verbal behaviour is a deliberate action. Speaking in one place is commonly known as verbal behaviour (Schwartz, 2019). The superiority of verbal mastery is considered a fundamental claim compared to nonverbal mastery in interpersonal communication (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2017). Conversational skills in any type of communication context, both verbal and non-verbal, as well as person-to-person or person-to-persons, have their value. These skills are required to succeed in professional, social, and personal relationships. More importantly, it is estimated that most people can communicate successfully except in particular states. People must learn proper verbal communication to interact with each other in society. The motivation of verbal communication enables them to search for the meanings of different words. Brown, Charles, and Van Riper stated the importance of verbal communication: Speech is the rarest and most common human function. However, since using it widely, naturally,

and quickly is possible, only a few of us understand its extraordinary power and learn to use this tool more than its primary applications (Zamanian, 2017).

Verbal communication is the knowledge people can learn primarily during life and use in sentences or words. Verbal information includes three subcategories: learning names or labels, learning facts, and learning organized verbal knowledge. Learning this ability requires cryptographic strategies and an existing set of organized knowledge (Kiamanesh & Farzad, 2011). Speaking is a productive skill in students observed directly and empirically, and students speak in the classroom to express their demands in the target language (mother tongue). In addition, they can express their requirements by using basic interactive skills at school, such as greeting, acknowledging, apologizing, and establishing proper verbal communication with their teacher and peers (Binnendyk, 2020). Many studies have explained that verbal abilities result in mathematical development and academic achievement (Kleemans et al., 2012; LeFevre et al., 2010; Purpura & Ganley, 2014; Toll & Van Luit, 2014).

Feeling shyness in expressing desires, fear of mistakes, and anxiety may be among the most significant reasons for students' lack of self-confidence and reticence in class (Krismanti & Siregar, 2017). Shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from when speaking in class, and it is possible to be a significant source of speech (Juhana, 2012). Students may experience various disturbing situations at school which cause them fear and anxiety, and such factors as verbal questioning and fear of talking in class are indices of anxiety in students and unwillingness to go to school (Vahedi & Mansouri, 2015). The fear of attending the public and talking to a group of people is one of the most prevalent anxieties, especially among adolescents. For such people, answering a question in class, lecturing, or even talking to friends produces a lot of stress and anxiety, which is extraordinarily disturbing. Consequently, shyness and isolationism produce other problems, such as a shortage of self-confidence, depression, anxiety, and irritability, and also the inability to express emotions, thoughts, and opinions, which

causes the individual to separate from group activities (Mohammadi & Jabari, 2020). Therefore, having high verbal skills is expected to interact and communicate appropriately in society, especially in educational places like schools (Mu & Yu, 2023).

The results achieved by Lepola et al. (2023) showed that the children's cognitive engagement and the amount of verbal participation mediated the development of individual differences in listening comprehension. Additionally, teachers' open-ended questions contributed indirectly to listening comprehension via children's verbal participation. The results achieved by Serena Pace et al. (2022) indicated that domestic adoption was the most critical predictor for higher insecurity, disorganized attachment representations and lower verbal skills. Lepola et al. (2022) showed how children's story comprehension was related to their participation in listening and verbal participation during shared reading, and Xu et al. (2022) showed the mediating role of these factors in developing narrative listening comprehension. Mohammadi and Jabari (2020) conducted research related to the subject of this study. They concluded that factors such as the influential role of parents and teachers, students' quietness, family economic status, family personality type, ethnic, racial, and linguistic dependencies, and the lack of a position for the individual in the family are significant in the social isolation in high school students, which is the reason for not explaining their problems in the classroom and feeling useless. The results achieved by Delaney et al. (2019) indicated that mathematics skills have a stronger relationship to university performance than verbal skills. While both are predictive of degree completion and class of degree obtained. The results achieved by Casey et al. (2015) indicated that basic verbal skills had no direct relationship with fifth-grade mathematical reasoning, although there is a relationship in an indirect way of connecting them through basic spatial skills.

Based on the contents mentioned above, the question is, "Why are verbal skills still a challenge in high school, and what are the problems in this area that prevent the development of verbal skills in students?" However, different studies have mentioned cultural factors, such as family, teachers, curricula, etc. Such factors are valid in research,

but it is required to consider a few points; first, each research has employed various methodologies. Second, the situations and targeted population of this research were different, and there is another point: the identified factors have been quite widespread and dependent on temporal, spatial, and situational requirements. Consequently, it is possible to explain that the validity of these factors has not been independent of context and indicates a significant gap in the literature. This issue causes problems in the applicability of research results in various situations studied. Accordingly, this study used the qualitative methodology of the grounded theory attempts to examine the problems of verbal skills related to high school students in Yazd in agreement with its situation and cultural context.

## Methods

The present study employed the qualitative method of "The Grounded Theory." A grounded theory research method develops a theory using a set of data. Thus, this theory explains a process, an action, or an interaction on a large scale. The theory resulting from implementing such a research method is a process theory (Bazargan, 2018).

The "target group" involved 12 psychology and educational sciences professors in Yazd who were selected based on the logic of repetition to create a theory purposefully called theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 2018).

The "semi-structured in-depth interview" was used as a study tool. The influential factors on the formation of high school students' verbal skills problems were designed to stop the bias of semi-constructive tools with five questions about the dimensions, features, and components of high school students' verbal skills problems, which extract the content, strategies, contextual and environmental conditions, as well as the consequences of the problems of verbal skills in high school students and the way to resolve them. The interviews lasted 75-120 minutes and were in person. The cases raised were recorded as audio and then implemented.

Collecting data was to gradually accumulate concepts and propositions to summarise the ninth interview, mine the propositions, and lead to the core category of "verbal skills (comprehension, expression, and vocabulary). Then, it was attempted to regulate and continue the following questions. The theoretical saturation of the data was moderately approved in the tenth interview. However, the interviews continued until the 12th interview to ensure saturation and fill in the conceptual gaps of the model. Accordingly, the researchers achieved full saturation and failed to observe the specific and new concept of interviews.

Some participants reviewed the final report of the first stage, the obtained analysis process or categories and declared their opinions. Several educational and psychology professors examined the findings and explained their opinions. Meanwhile, the participants were asked to help analyze and interpret the data. Based on the background of researchers in the field of educational sciences and psychology, it was attempted to continue research in the form of the systematic model of Strauss and Corbin to avoid biases as much as possible by relying on asking open-ended questions and coding with an open mind and considering the main issue. Also, the stages of grounded theory development, especially the collection and analysis of data, have been explained clearly and precisely in the discussion and conclusions. In this sense, the findings of this research are valid.

## Results

The concepts were regarded as a unit of analysis in the levels of the whole text of the interview, paragraphs, phrases, and sentences in the stepwise analysis of the findings using Strauss and Corbin analytical techniques. It was attempted to extract open codes by separating the interview text into elements with the message inside the lines or paragraphs. Several 693 concepts were obtained using open coding, in which 34 subcategories were created by classifying these concepts, and they were classified into 16 main categories in the axial coding stage. A summary of the extracted codes is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Examples of primary codes

Dimensions of the paradigmatic model	Categories	Examples of primary codes
Core Category	Verbal skills (comprehension, expression, and vocabulary)	Listening and learning unusual and new words in everyday conversations - Using crosswords or puzzle tables - Using new words in texts - Memorizing poetry- Avoiding repetitive words - Ability to interview - Ability to use words to convey a message- Increasing

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		vocabulary - Variety of words - Use of new and up-to-date words
Casual Conditions	. Practice and activity (providing responsibilities and mental and verbal tasks, reading, writing practice, utilizing other senses)	Retelling the story by students - Creating ambiguity and doubt in the statements - Inefficiency of reading and memorizing words like a parrot- Increasing book reading - Creating a culture of reading books - Reading newspapers - Encouraging reading- Paying attention to students' writing skills - Creating diversity in students' writing - Encouraging students to write- Becoming a skilled listener - Using sight and tracking new vocabulary
	Enrichment of the environment (family and childhood, media, school, and educational system, group of friends)	Learning words by dealing with new situations - Giving the child freedom of action - Paying attention to the sentences and expressions of others- Interaction and conversation of parents with the child - Talking during the fetal period - Exchanging information with the child- The role of radio and television - the use of mass media capacities - The impact of Roshd magazines - The targeting of the media- Activating school libraries - Participating in common school events - Using the capacity of literature lessons- Doing group work - Being influenced by the peer group
	Psychological features	Isolation and aloofness - Shyness - Internality of students- Courage and boldness in speaking - High desire to establish relationships

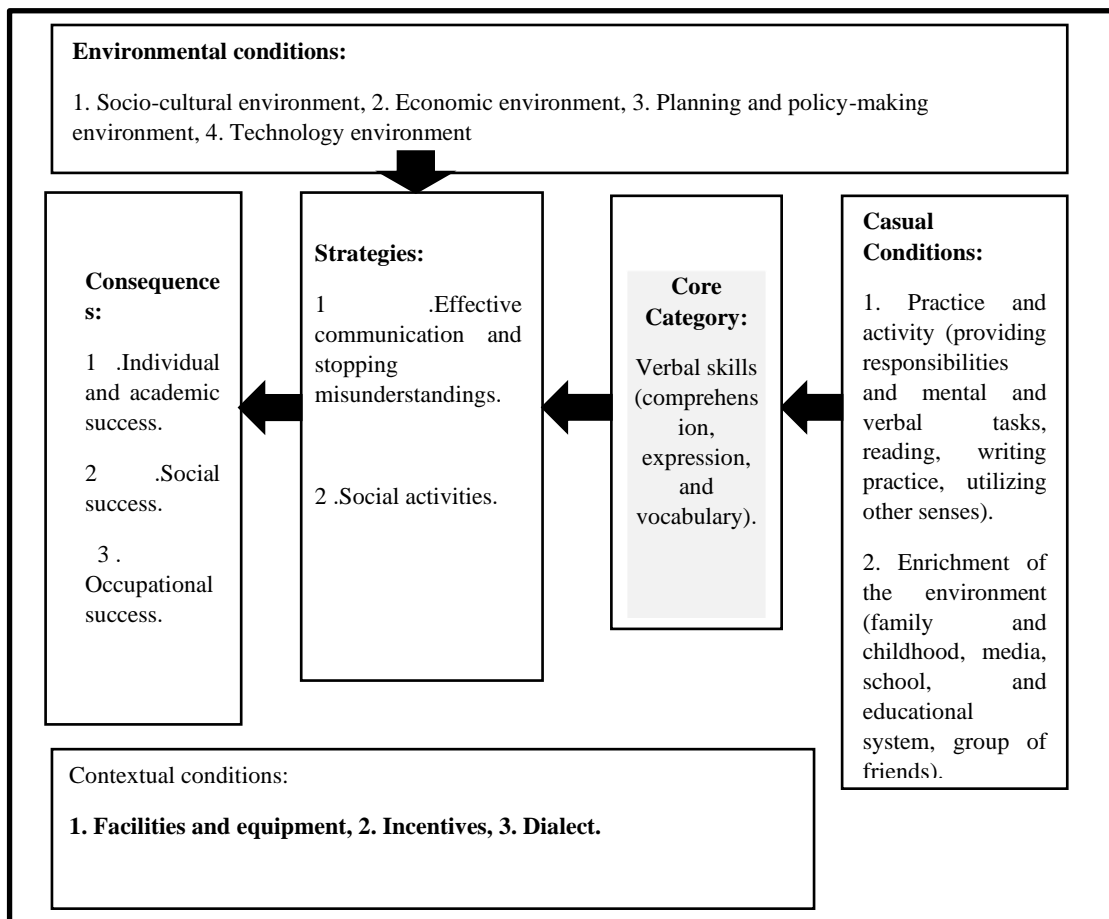
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Strategies	Effective communication and stopping misunderstandings	Bringing together the minds and hearts of the audience - Appropriate communication between the teacher and classmates - Effective communication with the spouse in the future- Avoiding misunderstandings - Avoiding annoyances and conflicts between people
	Social activities	Praying loudly- Reading the Quran in the mosque- Participating in religious lectures- Attending the community - Attending parties - Attending school teams
Contextual conditions	Incentives	Incentive actions - Giving books as gifts - Happy program on library day
	Facilities and equipment	Lack of enough space to store books - Construction of low-cost cultural departments - Renovation of school libraries
	Dialect	The effect of accent on people's speaking - The effect of dialect on the pronunciation of words - Being multilingual in big cities.
Environmental conditions	Socio-cultural environment	The role of mosques - The role of the culture of the place of residence - The difference between generations
	Economic environment	Unsettled economic conditions - High cost of books
Environmental conditions	Planning and policy-making environment	Improper planning - Lack of work by the country's cultural officials - Managerial weakness of the officials
	Technology environment	Displacing the role of books and virtual space - The effect of technology on the reduction of student writing - The inappropriateness of audio and software content.



Consequences	Individual and academic success	Progress in life - Increasing the level of understanding and understanding- Increasing bargaining power- Getting high marks in language tests
	Social success	Economic success - Social status
	Occupational success	Advancement of the career path - Taking over lucrative jobs - Successful marketing - Better shopping

The text of the conducted interviews was examined several times during the selective coding process and the integration process to integrate and refine the theory. In addition, the expressions and ideas that indicated the relationship between the main and subcategories were considered after identifying the axial category and using it to relate the categories. Accordingly, the relationships between the main categories and the paradigm model of verbal skills were formed in junior high school. Ultimately, the categories exhibited in the form of the six dimensions of the paradigm model with the relationships between them were included as causal conditions (three categories), the core category (verbal skills of "comprehension, expression, and vocabulary"), strategy (two categories), environmental intervening conditions (four categories), contextual conditions (three categories) and consequences (three categories) (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Paradigm model of verbal skills challenges for first-grade high school students in Yazd

## Discussion

The verbal skill of "comprehension, expression, and vocabulary" is a category in this study that all factors and influences move to describe it. It is possible to refer to the way to explore the main category from several quotes from the interviewees. One of the interviewees explains this concept in this way: "Verbal mastery is unquestionably one of the most important ones. Words are the most prominent tool for negotiators, whether they

apply them in a face-to-face meeting or utilize this skill to meet their objectives before or after the meeting, during negotiations, and lobbying with others. "Whether they write a letter and try to convince the other party of their demands, or whether they want to send a message or text message and express their satisfaction or regret on the event that happened or did not happen."

Causal conditions include the factors that directly result in the core category of verbal skills (comprehension, expression, and vocabulary). The causal conditions of three main categories include: 1. Practice and activity (providing responsibilities and mental and verbal tasks, reading, writing practice, utilizing other senses); 2. Enrichment of the environment (family and childhood, media, school, educational system, group of friends); and 3. Psychological features.

**Practice and activity:** Practice and activity are two of the most significant categories that directly lead to verbal skills, and ignoring this category makes it impossible to accomplish the objective of succeeding in the problems of verbal skills. This category includes four subcategories: providing responsibility and mental and verbal tasks, studying, practicing writing, and using other senses. Key informants commented: "Take a notebook and write down words which come to your mind in the morning as soon as you wake up without talking to anyone. This will draw the words we have in mind, but never in our conversations, out of the corners of our minds and apply them every day." Another key informant noted: "School library officials must bring students together during unemployment times, and every student will select and read a book he or she would like to read."

**Environmental richness:** This category includes four subcategories: family and childhood, media, school, education system, and a group of friends. Key informants stated that "verbal skills are more due to environmental issues, which means that the environment in which most people grow up may affect a child's vocabulary". "If the family fails to support the person to speak or value the person, and also continually commands and forbids him/her in his/her work, it will influence the student's speech and conversation later." Another critical informant stated: "Regrettably, books are presently being replaced by mobile phones, and students are using mobile phones and cyberspace instead of spending most of their time with books, consequence, they will have literacy that is cellphone literacy." Furthermore, another critical informant stated: "Our education system directs our children to retain and get good grades, which has resulted in weaknesses and problems in our education system". Further, another critical informant stated: "The role of a group of friends at school is pretty significant," "Because the students are together for about 6 hours at school, this makes them more affected by the peer group, particularly at older ages."

**Psychological features:** They are among the most influential psychological factors in the lack of verbal skills, shyness, and low self-esteem. To this end, shyness and low self-concept are among the personality traits greatly influenced by human relationships with society and others (Beigi Rad, 2018). Critical informants stated in this field: "When two friends discuss an issue with each other, the less informed person feels frustrated and inexperienced. This person feels that he/she is considered shy and dull according to his/her friend's perspective. A student who does not study and just sits in the classroom and looks at the teacher is just a listener; hence, the teacher thinks this student cannot understand the material. This issue gradually influences the student's mood and makes him/her disappointed in the school, study and lessons, which is called learned helplessness."

Regarding Strauss and Corbin, strategies, interactions, and actions are applied in normal practice and how people manage situations facing problems. These are behaviours that people, organizations, and communities either do or speak about. In the present study, two basic strategies involving 1. effective communication and the prevention of misunderstandings, and 2. social activities were determined for the intervention.

**Effective communication and the prevention of misunderstandings:** This result is in line with the findings by Zerai (2017). Key informants said, "People with excellent expression have a dynamic and full of ideas. Besides, they know the requirements of their brains and can apply their bodies to communicate effectively by continuously expanding their vocabulary." Another critical informant put it this way: "Our mastery of words and verbal intelligence is the most important skill we must develop. People who describe themselves better and clearer seem smarter and more respectful. As a result, these people gain more respect."

**Social activities:** This result aligns with the findings by Khan et al. (2017). Key informants stated: "We require to bring students into school education problems, such as attending morning ceremonies and preparing a hadith, prayer or scientific discussions, and reading for students so that the student starts to talk."

The verbal proficiency of high school students is affected by the contexts in which strategies for overcoming problems are formed, and finally, its effects will appear in strategies and consequences. In this study, the contextual conditions were determined in three categories: 1. Facilities and equipment, 2. Incentives, and 3. Dialect.

**Facilities and Equipment:** This result is in line with the findings of Casey, Pezaris et al. (2015). Key informants said: "School books have become unused today, which can be re-given by allocating cultural funding for schools. Furthermore, we can help develop verbal fluency by providing proper books to study students in every course of study."

**Incentive:** However, the role of schools as an effective society among students to promote books and reading should not be ignored. Key informants said: "One of the things that schools can do is for educators to hold reading competitions to create an incentive for students to study and promote the culture of reading".

**Dialect:** This result aligns with the findings by Mohammadi et al. (2020). Key informants noted: "Dialects are strongly affected by cultural customs and regional code of conduct. Differences in socioeconomic classes, literacy and education, the field of expertise, familiarity of people with other languages, age and generational differences, the amount of imitation of religions and several other factors also influence the emergence of different dialects and, more than ever, make differences in speaking people belonging to the same dialect."

The analysis of interviews indicated that in addition to the conditions that directly influence the learning of verbal proficiency in secondary school, some factors are related to these conditions and cause its continuity or the lack of continuity, regarding these conditions as environmental conditions. The causal conditions of verbal skills (comprehension, expression and vocabulary) are formed not in a vacuum but in environmental conditions. Thus, describing the process of verbal skills learning in secondary school requires understanding environmental conditions. This study's environmental conditions form four main categories: 1. Socio-cultural environment, 2. Economic Environment, 3. Planning and Policy Making Environment, 4. The technology environment was composed.

**Socio-cultural environment:** This result aligns with the findings by Mohammadi et al. (2020). Key informers in this regard stated: "The more culturally educated the student in the family, the higher the verbal skills of the individual. In schools, our city students are much higher due to literary and speaking power than Yazdi students, and they have a lot of verbal skills, which is a show of the cultural and social environment in which they have grown."

**Economic environment:** The relationship between education and economics is a two-way relationship, which means that just as effective education results in economic growth, improving and solving educational problems needs a proper economic situation to obtain financial resources to solve its problems and issues. This finding aligns with the findings by Mohammadi et al. (2020). Critical scholars stated: "The high cost of books has taken the study from people, and if someone buys a book expensively, this person will read the whole book after a while and no longer need it, which is not only not affordable for today's life but also difficult to maintain, which is a show of poor economic conditions."

**Planning and policy environment:** Educational policymaking is one of the first policymaking activities in the field of public affairs administration by governments because of the origin of socialization and the stimulation of people in society toward other policies, even cultural policies that are the central factor of development, is the starting point of educational policies because culturalization starts with education (Niaz Azari et al., 2011). Key informants put it this way: "School administrators and officials in the country rarely required to devise a targeted and long-term plan to discuss verbal fluency. With poor one-year planning in schools, nothing can be done. Moreover, one-dimensional education of the educational system and inappropriate macro planning have caused many problems."

**Technology environment:** Key informants stated: "Unfortunately, in today's world, the book has replaced mobile phones, and the student applies mobile and cyberspace instead of spending most of his time with books, and the advancement of technology has had an impact on decreasing students' writing."

## Conclusion

Regarding Strauss and Corby's paradigm model, no action of certain interaction in response to existing problems or for conducting or maintaining a situation by an individual or persons was selected; the consequences of intended or unintendedness rose. The consequences in this study involved three major categories: 1. Individual and academic success, 2. Social success, and 3. Job success.

**Individual and academic success:** This point of view in Europe is called the ability to apply and connect the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and standards, which are very complex (Ghavami et al., 2017). Key informants stated: "People with excellent verbal fluency have a dynamic and are full of ideas while they know the requirements of their brains and can apply their bodies to establish effective interpersonal communication by continuously expanding their vocabulary. These people have a high power of speech in understanding the subjects, and with the power and eloquence of their expression, they carry the minds and hearts of their audiences."

**Social success:** Psychologists have proposed that there is a direct relationship between the way words are applied and the scope of people's vocabulary with their success. This result is in line with Zerai's (2017) findings. Therefore, words play a decisive role in people's social success. Key informants noted: "Many of us talk, speak, negotiate, ask, answer, and bargain during the day. If we don't have good verbal fluency in this lifetime, then we have issues, and on the contrary, if we have good verbal skills, everyone enjoys talking to us and in this regard, we can achieve our purposes and achieve success."

**Job success:** A person with high verbal proficiency can achieve a lot of job success by relying on appropriate vocabulary in his/her field of work. This result is in line with Juhana's findings (2012). Key informants noted it: "In business, each professional has his vocabulary and terminology that if they know those words, so good speakers, in their jobs, are also more successful in discussing transactions between two people who have higher verbal fluency and have high reading and general information and are assorted. That is, a person with verbal fluency can profit more from the transaction."

This study encountered limitations involving the lack of benefits from the opinions of students, parents, teachers and policymakers. Regarding the significance of their role, the presence of their opinions may create other models and inferences. The lack of conditions to conduct mass interviews as focus groups for more accurate data collection was another limitation of this study. Based on the results of this study, some suggestions are presented to improve verbal skills in high school students:

- To improve communication skills, students should be taught verbal and non-verbal skills together.
- Students should be involved in school and class activities.
- Encourage reading more general information sources such as newspapers, magazines, novels, and stories that can help improve vocabulary, reading comprehension, and general language skills.
- Arranging public lectures and scientific, cultural and social debates and involving teenagers in these debates along with family members, friends and peers.
- Practicing active listening and developing the capacity to pay attention, ask questions and respond.
- Essay writing and writing practice in the form of membership in the editorial board of children's and teenagers' publications and essay writing competitions.
- The game can be applied as an educational tool to learn vocabulary.
- Teaching how to use online resources to improve language and verbal skills and promote digital, media and information literacy.
- Not limiting students by family and creating confidence in them to express words more easily.

## Disclosure Statements

This paper was extracted from the first author's M.A. thesis at Yazd University, and its results do not conflict with the interests of any organization.

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