

AUDIO RECORDINGS AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This study investigates how preparing individual audio recordings influences university students' speaking skills in German as a foreign language and their emotions associated with oral communication. The participants were Slovak undergraduates from various humanities disciplines enrolled in a German for Specific Purposes course at B1–C1 levels at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Bratislava. Students in their fourth semester attended a German course offered either as a compulsory or elective subject. The course focused on developing academic language skills, including defining concepts, describing graphs, and applying citation practices, while preparing students to deliver subject-specific presentations in German. The study group was the first cohort to return to fully in-person instruction after pandemic-related restrictions. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from an initial and a final online questionnaire combining Likert-scale items with open-ended questions, as well as from four learner-produced audio recordings per student. The study compares students' self-perceptions of speaking in their first foreign language, English, and their second foreign language, German, and examines changes in perceived effort, stress and communicative competence over one semester. The findings show that, although students became more aware of the effort and stress involved in spontaneous speaking in German, they reported clear gains in several areas of speaking competence. Audio recordings were perceived to improve fluency, speed of lexical retrieval, use of previously passive and newly learned vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and confidence in speaking. Students also highlighted the role of recordings in overcoming inner barriers to speaking and in fostering reflection on their own learning processes and communicative abilities.

Keywords: audio recordings, speaking skills, German as a foreign language, foreign language teaching, language anxiety, learner autonomy, university students, self-assessment, mixed-methods research

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Introduction

Speaking in a foreign language is considered by most learners to be the most important, yet at the same time the most difficult skill. On the one hand, learners

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complain about having too few opportunities to express their thoughts orally in the foreign language during lessons. On the other hand, many of them feel stressed when they have to respond spontaneously in the foreign language and therefore try to avoid such situations. Learners often find themselves in a vicious circle from which they see no way out (Nguyen, 2024).

The present study examines the impact that preparing audio recordings has both on speaking competence itself and on the emotional attitude towards speaking in the second foreign language – German – among students at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava. The students attend the courses in German for Humanities (levels B1–B2 according to the CEFR). At the beginning of the summer semester 2023/2024, an initial online questionnaire was administered to explore students' emotional attitudes towards oral tasks in German as a foreign language and the emotions associated with speaking. Since most of the students had learned German as their second foreign language, the study also focuses on how their attitudes differ when comparing their first and second foreign languages.

In this context, the study addresses two main research questions: (1) whether the production of audio recordings can help reduce speaking-related stress in a second foreign language, and (2) in which areas of language competence students perceive improvement as a result of preparing such recordings (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and the ability to paraphrase unknown words). The findings are based on students' self-assessment.

Although almost all participants had learned German for at least five years, their responses show that, in their own perception, they do not use German as frequently or as willingly as English, and many communicative situations in German are experienced as stressful. During the semester, various activities were implemented that were designed to foster speaking skills in a targeted way. In addition, each student prepared several individual audio recordings on different topics and received feedback from the teacher. At the end of the semester, the initial questionnaire was administered again in order to see whether and how the initial data had changed. The questionnaire combined Likert-scale items with open-ended questions.

Possible improvements in the use of grammatical structures and vocabulary were examined through the comparison of the submitted audio recordings. Students' personal attitudes toward speaking activities were further explored through a final online questionnaire conducted at the end of the semester.

Theoretical Background

Audio recordings have served as valuable input in foreign language teaching ever since the audiolingual method gained prominence. With the development of modern technologies, it has become increasingly common in language practice

that learners themselves create (video) audio recordings (Tukan, 2024; Idrovo Maldonado & Fajardo Dack, 2024; Maulana, Elmiati & Ikhsan, 2023) or use other technological devices (Trinh & Ho, 2022) for speaking tasks, thereby developing their speaking competence.

Several scholars point out that the development of speaking skills in foreign language instruction is often unsatisfactory. With regard to German lessons at the secondary level in Slovakia, Šajánková states that “after several years of learning German, pupils often still have great difficulties managing everyday communicative situations in the foreign language” (Šajánková, 2024, p. 143). Similarly, Dalimunte and Harap (2023) criticize the lack of action-oriented communication in English lessons. They identify as a major problem the tendency of teachers to underestimate speaking skills, which are frequently taught through rote memorisation or drill exercises.

These findings may be surprising, especially at a time when intercultural competences are in high demand (Herzfeldt & Sackmann, 2019). Language forms the core of intercultural communicative competence: “More significantly, the term ‘intercultural communicative competence’ situates language at the heart of intercultural abilities, commonly left out of most models and unmentioned by most intercultural scholars” (Fantini, 2020, p. 53). Byrom (2009, p. 330) emphasizes that in recent decades, foreign language teaching has increasingly focused on communication. Initially, this referred mainly to the exchange of information; however, the speakers themselves – with their habits, cultures, and individual characteristics – cannot be ignored. This creates the need to teach intercultural competence in foreign languages.

However, it should not be overlooked that many foreign language learners also experience personal or psychological barriers when speaking in a foreign language. Juríková identified the main causes of speaking-related foreign language anxiety among adolescents, which include, on the one hand, “insufficient proficiency in the foreign language” and, on the other hand, “fear of communication in the target language” (Juríková, 2025, p. 151).

Sudarmo considers speaking in a foreign language to be demanding but essential: “So severe and essential is a speaking activity that humans forget how to speak well and interestingly and struggle to acquire these skills, which also involve elements and skills of linguistic competence and maturity.” (Sudarmo, 2021, p. 113)

On the one hand, (video-) recordings have become more accessible and widespread thanks to the availability of technological tools; on the other hand, teachers have recognized their pedagogical potential. (Video-) audio recordings give every learner the opportunity to speak and to talk about a variety of topics. The combination of recordings and feedback allows learners to develop their speak-

ing skills and boost their motivation to learn a foreign language such as English (Namaziandost et al., 2019).

The use of recordings in lessons also enables teachers to adhere simultaneously to several didactic and methodological principles (Zolcerová, 2022). Audio recordings provide the teacher with an opportunity to listen closely to learners' pronunciation and fluency, to give feedback, and to introduce useful phrases that can help learners gain time in conversations or monologues.

The popularity of this method is evident in the growing number of studies dealing with (video) audio recordings and their application in teaching. In the context of English as a foreign language, for example, Loor Bailón et al. (2025) examine the impact of audio recordings on improving pronunciation. McGregor and Surtees (2023) investigate the use of voice recorders as a tool for performing various communicative tasks. Stradiotová (2020) focuses on listening to podcasts in a foreign language. Listening to podcasts in the target language positively affected learners' performance in tasks aimed at extracting information from spoken texts and increased students' motivation to learn the language.

Marques-Schäfer et al. (2021) took this further by examining improvements in speaking after learners' interactions with the chatbot ChatClass. Wulandari, Harianto and Asnawi (2025) describe how to implement learner-produced recordings in English as a foreign language teaching. They demonstrate improvements in students' speaking and listening skills in English.

Motivation and Initial Context of the Study

The study was conducted in a heterogeneous learner group (B1–C1) in the course “German for Specific Purposes”. The students were attending German in their fourth semester, either as a compulsory elective or as a compulsory subject. Compared to the number of students who chose English as their compulsory elective (181 in the 4th semester; 215 in the 1st semester versus only 15 in German), the German group was very small, with only eight students enrolled. They came from different study programmes (archival science, journalism, psychology, archaeology).

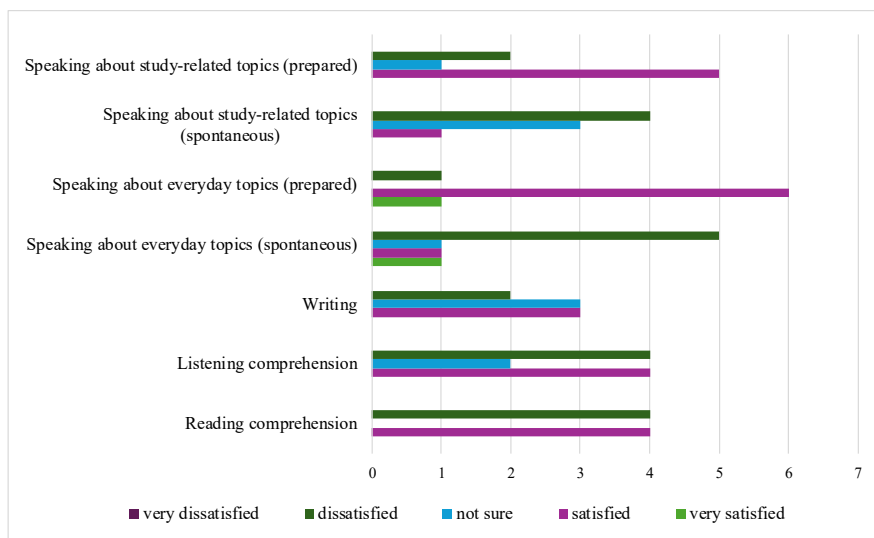
The course content still largely reflects the long-standing tradition of language instruction accompanying academic studies in Slovakia and is similar for both English and German: methodology in academic work, quoting and paraphrasing, describing graphs, and defining concepts in the foreign language. In a small group, texts from all participating study programmes are selected. The course prepares students to deliver a subject-specific presentation in German. In this context, lessons focus on defining concepts, describing graphs, and using correct citation techniques. The remaining class time is devoted to discussing academic articles and to practical issues such as how to write a motivation letter for a summer

language course, what should not be missing from a CV, or how to organize one’s study and free time.

The group selected for the study was the first cohort that was able to study fully on site again without pandemic-related restrictions.

All participants were Slovak native speakers enrolled in bachelor’s programmes, none of whom had spent a longer period in a German-speaking country. For 75% of the participants, German was their second foreign language. In many cases, these were experienced learners of German: seven out of eight students had been learning German for more than eight years. Five students also presented language certificates (two at level B1 and three at level C1).

The results of a survey conducted at the beginning of the second semester in a different context prompted me to focus more systematically on the development of language skills.



Source: Author’s own elaboration based on questionnaire survey.

Figure 1: Self-assessment of language skills

Figure 1 shows how satisfied or dissatisfied the students are with their competences in German. The focus here is on the productive skill of speaking, both with and without preparation. The results indicate that spontaneous speaking, whether about everyday topics or about their studies, remains challenging for students even after five years of learning German: 4 and 5 students respectively (out of 8) are dissatisfied with their speaking, while only one or two students are satisfied with their oral production. The possibility to prepare for an oral performance increases their satisfaction with their own language skills.

Methodology

The current study was conducted over the course of one academic semester to investigate how producing their own audio recordings on various topics can influence students' emotions associated with speaking in a foreign language – German – and certain competences related to speaking, such as vocabulary, fluency and perceived self-confidence when speaking in the foreign language.

A mixed-methods design was used. Data were collected from 5 students aged 20–25 by means of a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire complemented by open-ended questions, which allowed participants to comment on each item in their own words.

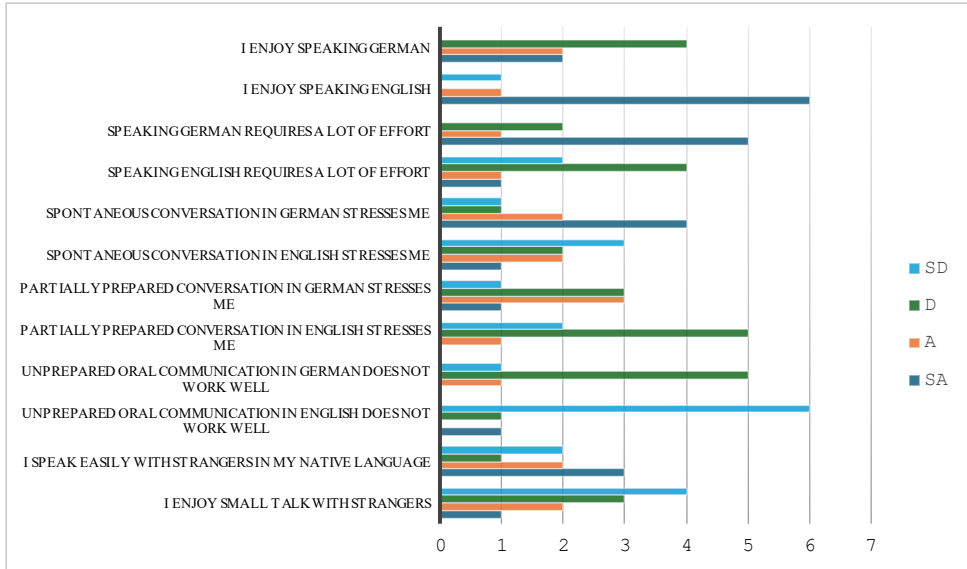
Unfortunately, not all students who participated in the initial survey completed the audio recordings during the semester or took part in the follow-up data collection. The number of participants in the second questionnaire decreased to five, which may have affected the reported results. Notably, the follow-up data did not include one of the more linguistically proficient students, nor a student who had previously shown little anxiety when speaking German and tended to be communicative. This may partly explain the observed increase in reported speaking-related stress.

Results

Comparison of the First and Second Foreign Languages: English and German

First, I wanted to determine how stressful or effortful students perceived speaking in German compared to speaking in English. Figure 3 presents a comparison between the first foreign language (English) and the second foreign language (German). Seven participants stated that they like speaking English, and four indicated that they also like speaking German. Six participants considered speaking German effortful, whereas only two described a conversation in English in this way. Spontaneous speaking in German was reported as stressful by six students, while spontaneous speaking in English was stressful for only three.

Positively, students in both foreign languages largely rejected the notion that communication would necessarily fail without using a translation programme (7 participants disagreed for both English and German). Six students stated that they do not belong to the type of people who enjoy engaging in small talk with strangers. The group described themselves as either clearly introverted (3 students) or as having characteristics of both extraversion and introversion (4 students).



Source: Author's own elaboration based on questionnaire survey.

Figure 2: Students' attitudes toward speaking in English and German, Abbreviations used: SA – Strongly agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly disagree

During the semester, I introduced various activities that were intended either to develop speaking skills directly or to practise strategies that might help students feel more secure in spontaneous conversations. Changes after these activities and the audio recordings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' attitudes toward speaking in German before and after the intervention, Abbreviations used: SA – Strongly agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly disagree

Statements	Speaking German requires a lot of effort	Spontaneous conversation in German stresses me	Partially prepared conversation in German stresses me	Oral communication without a translation tool is not possible.	I feel a positive change when expressing my thoughts in German
1	2	3	4	5	6
Pre-test (n=8) SA	62,5%	50%	12,5%	0%	-

Continued

1	2	3	4	5	6
Post-test (n=5) SA	20%	20%	0%	0%	60%
Pre-test (n=8) A	12,5%	25%	37,5%	25%	-
Post-test (n=5) A	60%	60%	60%	20%	40%
Pre-test (n=8) D	25%	12,5%	37,5%	62,5%	-
Post-test (n=5) D	20%	20%	20%	40%	0
Pre-test (n=8) SD	0%	12,5%	12,5%	12,5%	-
Post-test (n=5) SD	0%	0%	20%	40%	0

Source: Author's own elaboration based on questionnaire survey.

Interestingly, the results in Table 1 suggest that after the activities were implemented, students actually felt more stressed in oral communication. Only five students participated in the second questionnaire, so percentages were used to make the results comparable to those of the first questionnaire. The table shows that spontaneous conversation in German still stresses the students: 20% of the students now completely agreed with this statement, compared to 50% at the beginning of the semester. A slight change can be seen in the perceived possibility of communication without translation tools: before the semester, 12.5% of students completely disagreed with the idea that communication would fail without a translation programme; after the semester, this proportion increased to 40%.

Overall, however, it seems that students' stress levels related to oral communication even increased over the course of the study. At the same time, students reported that they had more opportunities to communicate in German during this semester. The results suggest that the activities implemented did not enable students to speak more freely and with less stress; rather, they became more aware of the effort and stress involved in oral communication in German.

Producing Audio Recordings in German

Despite this, the activities were evaluated positively in students' written comments. In particular, I focus here on the four audio recordings that students were asked to produce over the course of one month. They were given 11 thematic areas and asked to choose freely within these areas. Many of the topics concerned their student life, their everyday life in Slovakia, or aspects of history. The task required them to speak freely for at least 90 seconds on the chosen topic. Each topic was accompanied by optional guiding points that could serve as inspiration for how to approach the theme, but they were not obligatory.

For all activities, I was interested in whether students perceived any changes in their own speaking after producing the recordings. The criteria they were asked to consider were: fluency, reduction of negative emotions, willingness to communicate in German, speed of speaking, integration of previously passive vocabulary, use of newly learned vocabulary, confidence while speaking, ability to explain their own ideas, and ability to conduct a conversation (see Table 2).

Table 2: Students' Self-Assessment of German Speaking Skills Post-Intervention

	No impact	Low	Cannot assess	Moderate impact	High impact
Improved fluency in speaking German	0	0	0	2	3
Increased confidence when speaking German	0	0	1	3	1
Motivation to communicate in German	0	0	2	2	1
Speed of vocabulary retrieval	0	0	0	3	2
Use of previously known but passive vocabulary	0	0	1	2	2
Use of newly learned vocabulary	0	0	1	2	2
Greater confidence when speaking	0	0	1	1	3
Improvement in the ability to conduct a conversation in German	0	0	2	1	2
Ability to formulate one's own ideas grammatically correctly	0	0	1	3	1

Source: Author's own elaboration based on questionnaire survey.

The table shows how many students reported an influence in each of these areas. Interestingly, none of the students chose the options “no influence” or “only a slight influence.” In the items concerning their willingness to communicate in German and their ability to conduct a conversation in German, two students indicated that they could not judge the impact of the recordings.

Overall, the students felt that preparing audio recordings had an impact on several of the investigated aspects. The option “I cannot judge this” was chosen by at most two students, and this was precisely for items related to interactive communication (e.g. willingness to communicate in German or ability to conduct a conversation in German).

Students unanimously agreed that audio recordings had an influence or a strong influence on their fluency and on the speed with which they could find or describe a word (this result may also have been supported by a specific activity introduced in class that practised describing words). Students also reported a positive effect on the reduction of negative emotions, on the use of previously passive vocabulary, and especially on their confidence when speaking. Furthermore, they felt that their ability to formulate their own ideas grammatically correctly had improved.

Students were given the opportunity to comment on the activity in their own words. Two of them used this option. One student described the greatest challenge as formulating grammatically correct sentences and particularly appreciated the wide range of proposed topics. Another student wrote that she had not liked similar activities at secondary school and therefore had not been looking forward to this task in the seminar. However, when she started making the recordings, she realized that she enjoyed working on the content of her recordings.

Students were also asked what exactly they had learned while preparing the recordings. Vocabulary work was mentioned three times, and fluency was mentioned twice:

“When it is a topic that interests me, I can speak about it quite well in German too.”

“It helped me to ‘immerse’ myself in the recordings. I produced them all in one day, and it became increasingly easy to think and speak in German. I also think that if I were surrounded by German more regularly, it would greatly help my speaking skills.”

One student wrote that the recordings had helped him/her understand grammar better.

All participating students stated that they would recommend this method to others. For one student, working with vocabulary was particularly important; for another, it was the experience of overcoming the inner barrier to speaking in a foreign language. Students also pointed out that this is a very time-consuming activity, which should not be underestimated.

Students were encouraged to analyse their own errors in the recordings. Here, their uncertainty was evident: their answers were rather evasive. Only one response indirectly denied making mistakes (“I don’t know”). Most students mentioned noticing stylistic issues or pronunciation that did not sound “German” enough, as well as occasional use of English words. One student said that he/she noticed some recurring errors but could not be sure that they would not reappear in future recordings.

Recordings were also mentioned in the final open question, in which students were asked which speaking activities they would like to continue using in the future and what changes they had observed in themselves. One student summarized her experience as follows:

“I think the recordings really have potential because they reduce my insecurity when speaking. I feel that I am the one who judges myself the most harshly for how I speak German. The recordings could help me feel more comfortable when speaking German in front of myself, which could then help me when speaking in public. I don’t know whether I will be disciplined enough to do this on my own, but I can try to think about it.”

Discussion

According to the students, producing audio recordings had a positive impact on their confidence when speaking German, on deeper work with vocabulary, and on the fluency of their oral production. Our study is based solely on students’ self-perceptions and therefore cannot arrive at the same type of measurable results as, for example, Wulandari, Harianto and Asnawi (2025), who demonstrated improvements in students’ listening and speaking abilities. Maulana, Elmiati and Ikhsan (2023) showed that video recordings can enhance students’ confidence in their language abilities and improve their pronunciation. Similarly, Idrovo Maldonado and Fajardo Dack (2024) demonstrated that recordings are a practical and effective tool for developing speaking skills.

Our research indicates that, despite increased experience with oral production in German over the semester, students did not lose their fear of spontaneous speaking. Although they reported feeling more confident in expressing themselves and in paraphrasing or describing words they did not know, spontaneous speaking in German remained stressful. The impact of recordings on vocabulary, the grammatical structures used and fluency in speaking – effects that were confirmed in our study – at least partially corresponds with the findings of Maulana, Elmiati and Ikhsan (2023) and Wulandari, Harianto and Asnawi (2025).

Unlike the study by Looor Bailón et al. (2025), our students did not report noticeable improvements in pronunciation directly as a result of producing audio recordings, despite the increased amount of time spent speaking German.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single group of advanced learners of German, with the number of participants decreasing from eight to five over the course of the semester. The small sample size and lack of replication limit the generalizability of the findings, which should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. Another limitation lies in the reliance on students' self-assessment. While self-assessment can enhance learners' responsibility for their own learning, it may also be influenced by individual personality traits, such as self-criticism or goal orientation. As these factors were not controlled for, their potential impact on the findings cannot be determined. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insight into the use of audio recordings in foreign language teaching from the students' perspective and offer a basis for future research. Further studies with larger and comparable groups are needed to validate the results and to better support students in those stages of recording preparation that they perceive as most challenging.

Conclusion

Despite many years of learning German, many students struggle with using German as a language of communication. They are unsure of their abilities and do not enjoy speaking German, for which they also have significantly fewer everyday opportunities compared to English. One of the key findings of this study is that, over the course of a semester focused on improving their speaking skills in German, most students became more aware that communicating in German requires effort and is associated with stress. At the same time, they reported partial improvements in their use of vocabulary, fluency, confidence in speaking, use of grammatical structures, speed of speaking, integration of previously passive and newly learned vocabulary, ability to explain their own ideas, and ability to conduct a conversation.

In their comments, students repeatedly emphasized the influence of recordings on vocabulary use, grammar, and overcoming their own fear or reluctance to speak German. Producing recordings and listening to them afterwards led students to reflect on their own abilities. Although they tended to evaluate themselves critically, they nonetheless recognized progress in their language competences.

Our study did not focus on pronunciation improvement; rather, the aim was to provide students with positive experiences of speaking in their second foreign language and to encourage them to observe and evaluate their own oral recordings. Reflection on the recordings, which took place through the questionnaire, has the potential to foster students' assumption of responsibility for their own learning process.

Through the task of producing recordings, students came to understand that they were capable of talking about a variety of topics in German. Some of

them realized that German is above all a tool for expressing their own attitudes, opinions and values, and not merely a set of grammatical rules. Viewing language as a medium for conveying meaning may help reduce fear of speaking that is not grammatically perfect.

German will probably never play as central a role in students' lives as English. Nevertheless, we believe that despite the fears and anxieties students experience before speaking and acting in this foreign language, they will ultimately realize that German as a second foreign language also offers opportunities that they would never gain with only one foreign language.

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