

Exploring The Impacts of Psychological Factors on Speaking Performance of Freshmen Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: November 1, 2023 Accepted: November 25, 2023 Volume: 4 Issue: 4	At the University of Labor and Social Affairs – HCM City Campus (ULSA2), most students struggle to speak English fluently and engage in classroom discussions due to the complex nature of speaking skills and key psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and motivation. This research aims to investigate how these factors impact first-year students in the English section, aiming to demonstrate their negative effects on academic achievement and propose remedies. A descriptive study used a questionnaire on a sample of 192 first-year students (N=192) to reveal the impact of these factors. Additionally, input from 4 students and 3 teachers assisted in providing suggestions to help students overcome these spoken language challenges. Results indicate that students' speaking struggles stem from psychological factors like anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and motivation, leading to issues like speech inhibition and fear of mistakes. The study suggests strategies to address these issues, along with pedagogical recommendations, including creating an encouraging classroom environment, building confidence through diverse speaking activities, and emphasizing English practice both in and out of class for enhanced fluency.
KEYWORDS Psychological Factors; English speaking Performance; ULSA2.	

1. Introduction

Recent research in foreign language pedagogy suggests that language instruction goes beyond the mere teaching of grammar and discourse structure, and should aim to equip learners with effective communication skills. The communicative approach, which prioritizes the development of learners' ability to use language to communicate, has been shown to improve English fluency and confidence among learners, including students at ULSA2. English is a critical language for international trade and technology, and language education is viewed as an effective means of overcoming psychological barriers to language acquisition, such as anxiety and lack of confidence, especially with regard to speaking. Speaking instruction is a crucial component of EFL classrooms, which may include discussion, role-play, and interviews, among other activities. This study focuses on non-EFL freshmen students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (HCM City Campus), who face a range of challenges in speaking English, including pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The study aims to identify these obstacles and recommend possible solutions, such as encouraging students to practice speaking English both in and out of the classroom and fostering a communicative environment to help them identify their linguistic weaknesses and develop autonomy in speaking English.

The main objectives of this current research are as follows:

- To recognize the primary psychological factors that impede students from speaking during the oral course.
- To ascertain the causes of these factors and suggest feasible solutions to overcome them.
- To aid students in recognizing their individual issues and requirements for achieving autonomous learning and speaking English fluently.

So, the purpose of this investigation is to respond to the subsequent questions:

- (1) What are the issues that learners face when doing speaking tasks?
- (2) What are the reasons for these difficulties?

(3) What are the principal psychological factors that have a detrimental effect on the students' speaking proficiency?

2. Literature Review

Numerous researches have been done up to this point on how psychological factors affect speaking abilities and can have a substantial impact on a person's communication skills. All of the earlier studies revealed that psychological factors, especially those that arise during oral performance, had a direct impact on students' psychological states. Low motivation, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence were revealed to be the most significant psychological factors, followed by low self-esteem and low self-confidence

Anxiety

According to Horwitz (1991), anxiety is an emotion that is connected to fear, unease, and shyness. According to Spielberg (1983), anxiety is a nervous system-related emotion of tension, unease, worry, and nervousness. According to Ohata (2005), anxiety is a psychological condition that is brought on by a variety of events. When required to speak in front of the entire class in English, the majority of pupils find it uncomfortable and typically feel burdened (Tanveer, 2007).

Studies have shown that the main impediment to the operation of productive variables is anxiety. Anxiety can occur anywhere, including at work, in school, and in any scenario in life. However, anxiety is particularly prevalent among EFL learners before exams, presentations, and public speaking (Gopang, Bughio, and Pathan, 2018). Azher, Anwar, and Naz (2010) looked at the primary causes of anxiety in Pakistani EFL learners and identified three causes: worry about communication, exam anxiety, and concern about how other students will see them.

Horwitz (1991) asserted that speaking anxiety can affect students' oral performance in a variety of settings. The amount of anxiety may also have an impact on the effectiveness and fluency of English language learners' speaking (Tiono and Sylvia, 2004). In addition to this, Sato (2003) asserts that teachers should focus on each student's specific limitations and strengths in order to reduce anxiety and establish a teaching strategy that may benefit all of the class members. Additionally, Tiono and Sylvia (2004) advise teachers to focus on creating a comfortable learning atmosphere in the classroom, which may help students acquire EFL and improve their speaking skills.

Shyness

The majority of EFL students experience timidity when they must speak in English at some point throughout the EFL lesson (Nakhalah, 2016). According to Tanveer (2007), the most prevalent phobia that most people have is public speaking. This phobia can make a person feel blank, which is why many students struggle to speak English well. Shy pupils experience anxiety and want to avoid giving oral presentations in front of their classmates and teacher (Tanveer, 2007).

According to research by Chinmoy (2007), students' perceptions of their English language proficiency are influenced by their shyness. According to Bashir, Azeem, and Dogar (2011), the teacher should make the students understand that both success and failure are a part of learning a foreign language in order to help them overcome their feelings of shyness. As a result, improving students' speaking performance in EFL classes needs to be the main focus of this element of perception regarding the capacity to talk in English (Gebhard, 2000).

According to Nakhalah (2016), some students are naturally shy and lack confidence since they are unable to talk in front of or in the presence of their classmates and teachers. Therefore, shyness is a significant factor that has an impact on how well pupils speak English orally.

Lack of Self Confidence

When students are unable to converse in English and comprehend what others are saying, Naunan (1999) claims that they lose confidence. This circumstance is really discouraging. Tsui (1999) responds that less self-assured students typically have performance concerns. According to Al-Hebaish (2012), the main cause of performance problems is a poor degree of proficiency in oral English performance. According to Al-Hebaish (2012), many students believe that their English is poor and that they are unable to converse in English.

The absence of encouragement or positive feedback from the teacher, which most teachers do not think is required, is another major factor in low self-esteem. As a result, students find learning EFL to be demotivating rather than encouraging (Fallah, 2014). This demonstrates that encouraging feedback from teachers is the most crucial element in helping EFL students develop confidence

Lack of Motivation

Since many years ago, motivation has been the main focus of EFL teaching and learning since it is crucial to the process of language acquisition. According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2009), a person's inspiration comes from within. According to Harmer (2007), the desire to accomplish a certain goal serves as the primary driver behind motivation and pushes people to take specific actions or make particular decisions. Harmer (2007) adds that the essential element of the language acquisition process and the key to learning a foreign language is motivation. According to Liu and Huang (2011), a student with ordinary intelligence who is more motivated can achieve greater success than a student with greater intelligence but is less motivated.

According to Wong (2009), motivated students who possess good interpersonal and social interaction skills can foster a productive learning environment. Speaking tasks cannot be completed successfully in the absence of motivation or with a low level of motivation, according to Madonna and Philpot (2013). According to Pinter (2006), it is the role of the teacher to assist pupils and keep them on the right path

3. Methodology

In order to determine the main psychological factors that negatively impact non-English major students' speaking abilities and the issues those factors were causing among ULSA2 learners, The descriptive method was employed to analyse the factors and problems that affect students' speaking abilities. To ensure a representative sample, a random selection of 192 freshmen was taken from preparation course, who were administered a structured questionnaire. To gather data, a questionnaire created especially for this study was used. The SPSS 2.0 was employed to analyse the data collected from the participants.

Section A included the participants' background information in terms of gender and major. Section B consisted of a total of 24 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; and Strongly Agree = 5). Section B items were aimed at collecting information to know whether the study respondents thought their psychological state affects their oral performance or not. The rest of Section B was further divided into 4 sub-sections based on psychological factors of motivation (5 items); Self-confidence (six items); Anxiety (eight items); and Shyness (5 items).

Additionally, a follow-up interview was conducted with 10 teachers to give solutions to address the psychological challenges of English speaking.

The study took place at ULSA2, which is located in District 12, HCM City. It took place between October and December, 2022. The research tools utilized for data collection were a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was used to gather information on the main psychological factors that hinder students from speaking, while the interview was conducted with a group of 3 teachers and 4 students to gain further insights into the causes and possible solutions to overcome these factors.

4. Results and Discussion

Main psychological factors affecting speaking performance

Table 1. Main psychological factors affecting speaking performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shyness	192	1.40	5.00	3.4063	.79076
Lack of Motivation	192	2.00	5.00	3.2677	.62913
Lack of Confidence	192	2.00	4.50	3.2675	.55303
Anxiety	192	1.88	4.50	3.3578	.52407

Table 1 displays the study participants' assessments of how their psychological condition affects their speaking abilities in English class. The main psychological factors of anxiety, shyness, low self-esteem, and lack of desire have all affected how well they speak. A significant number of respondents (M=3.4, SD=0.7907) in particular claimed that shyness is the biggest issue affecting their English-speaking abilities. The second-placed component is anxiety. Anxiety was listed as one of the key barriers to participants' ability to speak English by the majority of them (M= 3.3, SD= 0.5240). Additionally, students' participation in speaking activities has been hampered by a lack of drive and confidence.

Shyness

Table 2. The effect of shyness on English speaking performance

Items	N	Percent	Frequency
I think that shyness is the main reason for reluctance in communicating in English	192	77.10%	148/192
Shyness affects my ability to express myself confidently in English conversations	192	65.60%	126/192
I feel more comfortable speaking English when interacting with familiar individuals or in smaller groups	192	52%	90/192
I have phobia of speaking in English in front of the people	192	56.10%	104/192
When participating in any speaking activities, I get lost for words.	192	57.30%	110/192

As displayed in Table 2, the effect of psychological factors of shyness on English Speaking Performance that are rated from high to low by students are: (1) shyness is the main reason for reluctance in communicating in English (n=148; 77.1%); (2) Shyness affects my ability to express myself confidently in English conversations (n=126; 65.6%); (3) get lost for words (n=110; 57.3%); (4) phobia of speaking in English in front of the people (n=104; 56.1%); and (5) feel more at ease using English while conversing with familiar people or in smaller groups (n=90; 52%).

Motivation

TABLE 3. The effect of motivation on English speaking performance

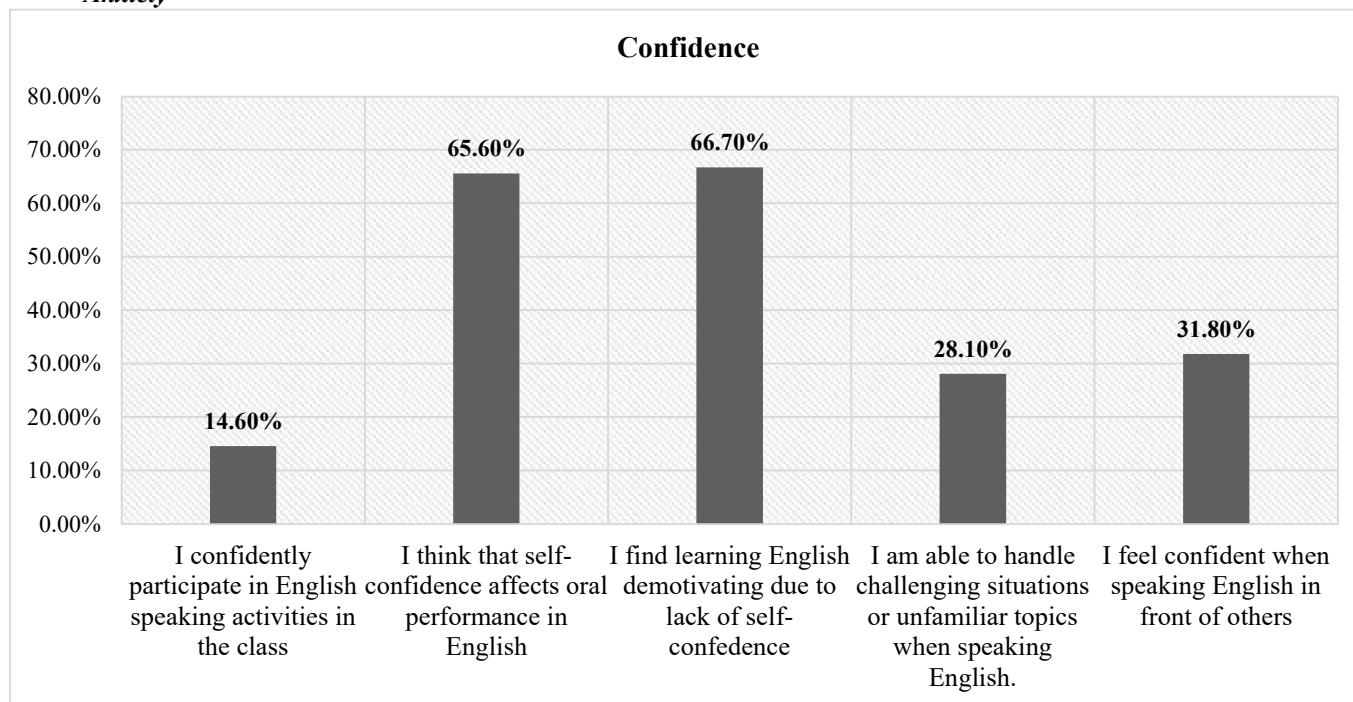
Items	N	Mean	SD
I am motivated to engage in regular English conversation practice to enhance your speaking skills?	192	2.61	.9073
I am demotivated because of my previous English-speaking results	192	2.73	.9906
I feel motivated because I receive the support and encouragement from others, such as teachers, peers, or language partners	192	3.64	.7586
I lose motivation to learn English since I don't create clear goals for myself.	192	3.59	.7523
Motivation enables me to overcome obstacles such as fear of making mistakes or facing difficulties in expressing themselves effectively	192	2.89	1.012

Table 3 reveals that of 192 students of ULSA2 responded to the questionnaires regarding the effect of psychological factor of motivation on English-speaking performance, the majority of participants (M=3.64; SD = 0.7586) agreed that encouragement and support from others, such as teachers, peers, or language partners, motivates them to participate in English-speaking activities. The absence of a defined objective for studying a foreign language also discourages students from improving their speaking skills (M=3.59, S. D= 0.7523). In addition, the majority of them disagreed with the idea that speaking English regularly will help them develop their communication skills (M=2.61) and previous English-speaking results do not influence their motivation.

Confidence

Figure 1 below illustrates how ULSA2 students' lack of confidence causes them to have difficulty speaking in English. Only 14.6% of students claim to participate confidently in speaking exercises. Additionally, they lack confidence when speaking in front of others (31.8%). Nearly 70% of participants also concur that they feel demotivated to study English and that their lack of confidence affects how well they perform in spoken tasks. In addition, they acknowledge that speaking English puts them in difficult situations or with topics that are unfamiliar.

FIGURE 1. The effect of confidence on English-speaking performance

Anxiety**TABLE 4.** The effect of anxiety on English speaking performance

Items	N	Min	Max	M	SD
I feel more stressed when required to speak in English rather than reading and writing	192	2.00	5.00	3.5990	.75238
I feel nervous due to anxiety when asked to present in English in front of the class	192	2.00	5.00	3.6458	.76547
I think that anxiety is one of the main blocking factors in effective speaking of the English language	192	2.00	5.00	3.5417	.75774
I think that I cannot speak English fluently due to anxiety	192	1.00	4.00	2.2760	.59830
My fear of being laughed at by others makes me nervous about speaking in English	192	2.00	5.00	3.6302	.77509
Fear of being criticized by others makes me reluctant to speak in English	192	2.00	5.00	2.9219	1.00738
My fear of making mistakes inhibits the process of speaking in English	192	2.00	5.00	3.7760	.72851

Based on the findings presented in the above table, the results relating to the psychological aspect of anxiety indicate that a significant proportion of students expressed feelings of anxiety when engaging in speaking activities. The majority of respondents rated items associated with anxiety during English speaking activities as having an exceptionally high level of intensity. The major barrier preventing students from participating in English-speaking events is fear (fear of mistake, fear of being laughed) with the means are 3.7 and 3.6, respectively. Furthermore, ULSA2 students reported feeling anxious when giving presentations in front of the class ($M=3.6$). Speaking is still the part of learning English that stresses people out the most compared to other skills ($M=3.5$). However, the participants disagree that anxiety has an influence on their fluency in English speaking skill with a mean score of 2.2. Additionally, the fear of criticism from others has little effect on how well they speak English ($M=2.9$).

Analysis of the Interview Results

In December 2022, teachers and students participated in interviews. First, the author chose two guys and two girls at random from 192 pupils to participate in an interview. The next step was to interview three teachers. Twenty minutes were spent

speaking to each interviewee in Vietnamese. The author explained the objective and secrecy of the interview before it began, and with their permission, she recorded the entire conversation using a recording pen.

There were 3 questions posed in these interviews: *What difficulties do you perceive with speaking English, first? What do you believe to be the root reasons of these impediments?* And last, *"Do you have any suggestions for improving students' spoken English?"*

To students, they thought that there were subjective and objective causes for the impediments to appear, but they were more strongly impacted by the subjective ones. These included the students' poor language skills, their lack of interest in learning spoken English, their lack of drive to do so, negative psychological obstacles (such as anxiety, shyness, and inferiority), and their ignorance of the cultures of English-speaking nations. There were numerous pupils in each class, little opportunities for speaking English in class, a lack of knowledge of Western cultural background, a lack of activities offered by the school to practice speaking English, and the teachers' traditional teaching methods, among other objective factors. According to the students, learning English did not depend on their first language. In order to reward students who take part in the comprehensive exam, they hoped that the school will introduce more initiatives like English Corner and English Square.

The three instructors agreed that the spoken English hurdles among college students with non-English majors were mostly seen in two areas: vocabulary and psychology. On the one hand, the students were the ones who created the difficulties because they didn't understand the value of spoken English, didn't pay attention to vocabulary building, showed little passion in class, were reluctant to speak English in front of others, and were fearful of speaking wrong. On the other hand, due to limited teaching assignments, listening and speaking classes gave students fewer opportunities to practice speaking English, and class numbers were too big, which made it difficult for the teachers to teach spoken English. Finally, the three educators offered the following sincere advice: First, each class should have fewer students, ideally no more than 30, according to the school. The second option is for the school to host an English salon where students may discuss cross-cultural issues, which will increase their interest in spoken English. Third, teachers should incorporate spoken English into their regular lessons to assist students understand its significance. Finally, students should take the initiative to identify ways to improve their spoken English if they are sincere about doing so or if they rely on their own efforts.

Discussion

Several factors, both internal and external, may have an impact on how well ULSA2 students perform orally. This topic has been the subject of numerous studies, although the results differ based on the research subjects, study settings, and time period. The results of this study demonstrate a direct correlation between psychological variables and students' speech performance. According to the results, a few key psychological variables have been discovered to have an impact on pupils' oral performance.

These factors are lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, shyness. These elements have an impact on both the student giving the presentation in front of the class and the students sitting in the audience. Sato (2003) conducted a similar study to investigate the impact of psychological factors on speaking abilities. His findings showed that psychological elements are related to learners' internal states, particularly at the moment of oral performance, and that the most prevalent issues impeding oral performance are low self-esteem and self-confidence. Students are very motivated to learn a new language, according to Sato (2003), but these psychological variables make it difficult for them to do so. Another study by Abda (2017) found that many students concur that their inability to practice their English is primarily caused by their fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of drive.

The majority of respondents in the current survey concurred that the fear of making mistakes is the most prevalent worry among all worries, and that this fear is closely related to anxiety and low self-confidence. Fear of being laughed at by others and receiving a poor grade from teachers are two factors that contribute to fear of making mistakes. Similar findings were published by Ayub and Lodhi (2016), who showed that shyness or fear of making mistakes can be sources of anxiety. Juhana (2012) also reported the similar findings, according to which the majority of ESL students dread making mistakes because they either have a limited foundation in the English language or they are worried about being teased by their peers.

5. Conclusion

According to the study's objective it is concluded that psychological elements like motivation, shyness, anxiety, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes are to blame for hurting ULSA2 students' oral English language proficiency. Fear of making mistakes might be brought on by anxiety over ridicule and criticism. The reserved attitude of students leads to shyness. In contrast, anxiety may be the cause of low self-esteem and confidence. The results demonstrate that pupils who are driven are more successful language learners. Therefore, it is important to focus on minimizing the consequences of the aforementioned variables and come up with potential remedies.

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