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The Impact of Shyness on Oral Communication Skills among First-Year EFL Students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University

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أثر الخجل في مهارات التواصل الشفهي لدى طلبة السنة الأولى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية بكلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة مصراته

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Abstract
Shyness can significantly hinder and affect students' participation and confidence in English-speaking activities. This study investigates the impact of shyness on the oral communication performance among first-year English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University. A mixed methods approach was adopted, using a questionnaire completed by 34 students and interviews with six students. The findings indicate that shyness affects students' speaking confidence and classroom participation, with fear of making mistakes and lack of language skills appearing as main contributing factors. Moreover, students pointed at a need for greater institutional facilities and supports, including speaking workshops and regular practice opportunities. The study stresses the importance of supportive classroom environments, constructive feedback, and structured speaking activities in encouraging students to enhance confidence in oral communication. Given the small sample and reliance on self-reported data from a single faculty, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Keywords: shyness; oral communication; speaking skills; EFL learners; first-year students; Libya.

الملخص
يمكن أن يعيق الخجل مشاركة الطلبة وثقتهم بأنفسهم في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية ويؤثر فيهما تأثيراً كبيراً. تبحث هذه الدراسة في أثر الخجل في أداء التواصل الشفهي لدى طلبة السنة الأولى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية (EFL) بكلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة مصراته. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج المختلط،

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باستخدام استبانة أجاب عنها 34 طالباً، ومقابلات مع ستة طلاب. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الخجل يؤثر في ثقة الطلبة بأنفسهم عند التحدث وفي مشاركتهم الصفية، وأن الخوف من ارتكاب الأخطاء وضعف المهارات اللغوية يظهران بوصفهما أبرز العوامل المساهمة في ذلك. كما أشار الطلبة إلى الحاجة إلى مزيد من التسهيلات والدعم المؤسسي، ومنها ورش عمل للتحدث وفرص منتظمة للممارسة. وتؤكد الدراسة أهمية البيئات الصفية الداعمة، والتغذية الراجعة البنّاءة، وأنشطة التحدث المنظمة في تشجيع الطلبة على تعزيز ثقتهم بأنفسهم في التواصل الشفهي. ونظراً لصغر حجم العينة والاعتماد على بيانات ذاتية الإبلاغ من كلية واحدة، ينبغي تفسير النتائج بحذر.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الخجل؛ التواصل الشفهي؛ مهارات التحدث؛ متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية؛ طلبة السنة الأولى؛ ليبيا.

Introduction

Shyness is a personality trait that affects hundreds of students worldwide, particularly among undergraduates who may not have encountered this issue in earlier stages of their education. As Embardo (1977) noted, the lack of motivation to engage in classroom discussions can persist throughout the academic life of the students. This hesitance to participate can significantly impact performance in courses that require verbal communication such as debates and presentations.

Nguyen & Tran (2022) emphasize that students who struggle with shyness are likely to perform poorly in such courses, thereby adversely affecting their overall grades.

Effective communication is not only crucial for academic success but also for future career opportunities where the ability to clearly express yourself is highly valued. This research paper aims to explore the relationship between shyness and academic performance among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, during the academic year 2024/2025.

The study also examines how shyness influences the communication skills of students. The researcher seeks to analyse this issue and propose potential strategies for enhancing their academic performance.

The Background of the Study

In the academic fields, shy students often withdraw from discussions, public speaking, teamwork, and other group activities. It is well-established that such engagement is essential for success in undergraduate students. This paper seeks to shed light on the challenges faced by shy students and their implications for academic performance.

Shyness among the students has a negative impact on their performance particularly when learning a new language .How can students be fluent in the English if they are facing problems speaking it in front of their peers and teachers ? the issue is more complex than it may seems, as many students' experience significant challenges due to shyness. This research aims to addresses this particular problem

A recent study by Kucker and Melnick (2023) found that shy children performed similarly to their peers in low-social-demand tasks but struggled with tasks requiring verbal interaction, highlighting how shyness can hinder accurate assessments of language abilities. This emphasizes the importance of tailoring educational strategies to support shy students and ensure their potential is not underestimated. These students may experience severe stress and anxiety leading them to demotivation and inability to speak in front of their peers, ultimately affecting their academic success, and in some cases, their ability to pass the exams (Chen et al., 2020). As the demand for oral communication skills is continues to increase, imperative to

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address the issue of students' shyness and try to investigate strategies that could assist these students.

This study aims to explore the impact of shyness on oral communication skills among first-year undergraduate students at the among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, during the 2025-2026 academic year. The results of this research have the potential to provide some valuable insights for designing curriculum or teaching methods that would support shy students in enhancing their speaking abilities.

Problem statement

Shyness and the inability to effectively articulate the one's viewpoint represent significant challenges that hinder or diminish the academic progress of numerous students throughout their college experience. While Students often know the answers to questions posed by teachers ,but due to shyness and lack of confidence, frequently prevent them from expressing those answers. The main reason for shyness in college often originates in earlier years of education, where teachers may prioritize completing the curriculum over fostering students' confidence in communication. A study by Liu (2006) highlights that a lack of opportunities for active participation and encouragement during early education significantly contributes to the development of shyness, which later affects students' confidence and oral communication skills in higher education settings.

The ideal outcome is to help the students embrace their mistakes and increase their Student Talk Time (STT) during lectures. With sufficient engorgement and support, students may gradually become less shy and have the ability to communicate and present their views .With time and patience, these challenges can be affectively solved.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does shyness in a student affect first-year students 'ability learning English as a Foreign Language learners (EFL)to speak English in the classroom?
2. What are the main factors contributing to shyness among first-year EFL students during the classroom speaking activities?
3. What strategies can help EFL students overcome shyness and improve their oral communication skill?

The Research Objectives

The researchers aim to investigate the impact of shyness on oral communication skill among first-year EFL students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFLs) at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University.

The crucial objectives of this research are:

1. Examine the extent to which shyness affects students' ability to speak English in classroom settings.
2. Identify the main factors contributing to students' shyness during speaking activities.
3. Explore strategies that may help students overcome shyness and improve their oral communication skills.

Research Hypothesis

Prior to conducting this paper, the researcher has developed the following hypothesis:

1. Shyness negatively affects the oral communication skills of a considerable number of first-year EFL students.

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2. Fear of making mistakes and limited opportunities for speaking practice contribute to students' shyness during classroom activities.
3. A supportive classroom environment and regular speaking practice may help students overcome shyness and improve their oral communication skills.

Significance of the study

The results of this research should be important for the following:

The teachers : Faculty members will gain insights into the extent of the problem shyness in students during speaking is, but they can also use this research as a guideline to help their respected students.

The administrator :The authorities in the college can view the current curriculum and teaching methods used and can identify potential improvements. Students' speaking time can be given more importance and that can be a huge help in solving this problem.

Future researchers :This research is only the tip of the iceberg, and there are still many topics to be covered regarding the same topic. The students who are conducting their research in the upcoming semesters can use this paper as a related study and get benefit from it.

Scope of the Study

In order to choose the right topic for the research, we selected an approach that is personally relevant for our peers. This study was focuses on the issue of shyness as many students possess the ability to speak, but they are too shy to do so in front of an audience and it negatively affects their academic skills. Choosing such a topic and conducting research on it might bring out the solution that ends this issue.

Limitations of the study

The former topic of this research was a bit broad and general "Shyness among students", but that would raise many questions. Which students? Shyness in what? Therefore, after reading some academic articles, the topic was limited to one specific skill which is speaking. Participants in any research play a vital role and even though they might be selected using the data saturation method, it is always a good idea to further specify them.

Definition of Key Terms

Personality trait :A difference in each individual in terms of behaving in any specific situation.

Psychological . Having a mental rather than a physical cause to do something.

Shyness . The quality of being sheepishness and feeling awkward especially in front of a large number of people.

Strategy . The art of planning and managing certain operations and movements in a teaching method.

EFL: English foreign language.

Literature Review

According to Middleton & Frank (2009), shyness is a feeling of awkwardness that some people experience when surrounded or approached by others, particularly the ones they are not well familiar with. A specific circuit of neurons activate and it sends out a signal that leads the person to act in response of fear; this is the neurobiology of shyness. There are many reasons for a person to feel shy among others, but it is a fact that it is strongly affected by parenting style and life experiences.

What Causes Shyness?

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There are quite a few characteristics that trigger shyness including self-consciousness, negative self-preoccupation, low self-esteem and fear of judgment and rejection. Shy people tend to compare themselves with the individuals who like going out and experience fun social activities (or in other words extroverts"). The idea that they will never be as good as the extroverts in terms of dealing with people socially, they often give up and prevent themselves from any chances of becoming socially active. (Richard, 2006)

Shyness relates to the self-perception of the individual which typically develops around 18months of age. Thus individuals are not born shy; rather, shyness is largely shaped by the environment. While some children may exhibit high temperaments, this does not guarantee that they will remain shy in the future or be unable to change their behaviour. Therefore, people are not born shy but it is the result of the environment they are born in. Even though some children are born with a high temperament, but that does not guarantee that they will be shy in the future or not be able to change their behaviour.

Shyness as a Personality Trait

Shyness is a personality trait that is instilled in a person causing them to feel awkward during social events such as weddings, parties and even random gathering. (Henderson, et al., 2001). Since

shyness is a personality trait, it shapes an individual's belief system and when an individual becomes accustomed to spending time alone and avoid social interactions, intensify making or increasingly challenging. Studies have found that individuals with shy tendencies account for 48% of the total sample (Heiser et al., 2003). Lei and Zhang (2002) found that shyness was a substantial capricious in foreseeing bullying. Shy students tend to avoid social events and other students in general, which makes the others not to accept them and that ends up in them being bullied (Ren et al., 2018). At the same time, shy individuals may also show more aggression due to a hostile attribution tendency (Gao et al., 2016).

Shyness in Speaking Skills

Linguistics Factors

Linguistics factors are a combination of a large variety of language features such as grammar, pronunciation, word structure and even vocabulary. EFL learners tend to make mistakes while learning the language since it is not their native language, and that is completely acceptable. However, when a shy individual makes the same mistakes, it demotivates them to the extent that the person does not want to try harder and go further. Positive validation is the key to learn English as a foreign language when it comes to the shy learners. Pronunciation is one of the most important factors in learning a foreign language, and when s learner pronounces a word incorrectly, it does not only create misunderstanding among speakers but is the cause of discouragement for shy learners. (Larsen-Freeman, 2001) What is more, the English language is constantly changing; therefore, there are always a new set of vocabulary for the EFL learners to use and if their words are restricted, they face a lot of difficulties expressing themselves. And that is very big deal for shy individuals because their worst fear is negative reinforcement.

Affective Factors

Affective factors are those factors that are faced by the students such as anxiety, shyness, lack of self-esteem, lack of motivation and even hesitation while speaking in front of their peers. Anxiety is the core surface for all the other issues, it can be said that it is the source of all the other difficulties faced by the students when speaking in the classroom (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

Why is shyness such a significant obstacle for EFL learners especially within the speaking classroom? As Brown (2001) illustrated, it is the fear of being incorrect, not being precise, being laughed at for making a mistake and even worse, failing the class for not being

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good enough. It has a bad affect on the students' ability to communicate independently. A large number of the EFL learners face anxiety and shyness in the classroom (Liu, 2006), mainly when they are asked by the instructor to convey their ideas without given any previous notice for preparation. Shumin (2002) further sheds the light that when a student is feeling very nervous, it makes him/her feel as if its beyond their control to speak, as if their tongue is held tight. Such experience totally affects their success in the EFL classroom.

Shy students are too afraid of the outcome when they finally decide to speak in the classroom about any given topic; they are frightened by the idea of being judged or not being able to present their view as expected from them. Such thoughts lead them to either making a lot of mistakes or remain completely silent (Middleton, 2009). In such cases, the teacher's job is very important because they should encourage and motivate shy students to speak inside the classroom regardless of the number of mistakes they do, because it is a known fact that motivation is the key factor for any student's success (Arnold, 1999). As for Oxford. R. L. (1990), if the students do not have the will to learn, there is not a single teaching method or technique that would make them change their mind, although this argument is highly debatable. It is a totally human thing to make mistakes while learning, but for high school and college students, it might hurt their ego while being corrected by the teacher or worse being scolded by them. When the same thing happens to shy students, they give up easily and lose the interest to be competent in speaking when it comes to the target language.

Confidence Inadequacy and its Reasons

Lack of confidence is the key of psychological factor shy students face when they are asked to speak in the classroom instructed by the teacher and in presence of their classmates. In most cases, the shy individuals tend to remain silent while others speak and overcome their difficulty of speaking in public. According to Nunan (1999), it is the teacher's job to raise confidence in the students so they can easily communicate and be able to speak without having the feeling of being judged. Effective teaching requires not only simplifying complex topics but also addressing the unique challenges faced by individual students. Amerstorfer and Freiin von Münster-Kistner (2021) examined the impact of student-teacher relationships within a problem-based learning (PBL) environment and found that positive interpersonal connections significantly enhance students' engagement and enthusiasm for learning. Their research emphasized that supportive, student-centred teaching approaches foster sustainable learning success by creating an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their difficulties.

According to Bruch & Cheek (1999), the relationship between shyness and the outcomes it creates can be explained by a student's personal orientation. Interpersonal orientation here can be defined as the level of dependency in social events or interactions that often happens not only inside the classroom bit on the college grounds as well. When we look at shy-dependent personalities, we can observe that they tend to work very hard (despite of their shy nature) to be accepted by others; and they are vastly affected if they face any negative social interactions or if they are the victims of bullying. In contrast, shy-with-drawn individuals tend not to have or have very little contact with the outside world such as parties, graduations or café gatherings. Not only that, they are not bothered at all with negative social interactions; as long as they have their space, they feel comfortable. When the issue of shyness is discussed, most people do not realize that there are different levels and aspects of shyness and each individual behaves differently to it. Shyness, in general, depends on the students' interpersonal orientation, which may even function differently in each gender.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control your emotions in difficult times in order to achieve personal goals. For students who are dealing with shyness in speaking, self-regulation

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can be a very powerful tool that can be used to overcome their difficulty. First of all, they can identify the main cause of their shyness. If a person does not know the source of the issue, it cannot be solved. Self-regulation not only helps the student to identify the source of the problem, it also guides them to solve it. To start with, a student can start with small speaking task with fewer audience and then move on to bigger ones. Breathing techniques and positive self-talk are also one of the key roles teachers can use inside the speaking classroom. By applying these self-regulation strategies consistently, students can overcome shyness and improve the confidence to speak efficiently.

Related Studies

In a study entitled "Shyness and Public Speaking: A Study of the Relationship between Personality Traits and Communication Apprehension", conducted by McCroskey (1977), the researcher explores how shyness and communication apprehension can be controlled by one's behaviour and brain activity. It focuses more on how the brain works when it encounters difficulties while speaking, focusing on the underlying cause of shyness. The researcher insists that the key problem of shyness starts in the brain and it is the brain that needs to exercise in order to solve this problem. Therefore, he has chosen the cognitive strategies for the students to be used not only in their own time but also inside the classroom.

The mentioned research and the current one do have some similarities, given the fact that they both deal with the issue of shyness among public speaking. Not only that, both researches aim to solve this issue by providing multiple solutions that can help the students in overcoming their shyness difficulties. In addition, both researched used questionnaires as a main source of collecting data.

On the other hand, there are some obvious differences between the two researches. To start with, the current research focuses only on the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Languages, especially the students in the first semesters. Secondly, the current research does not propose the reason for shyness, it attempts to investigate it and then provide efficient solutions. Last but not least, the current research also uses interview as one of the data collection tools in order to make the research more valid and reliable.

Another study entitled "The Effect of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies on Reducing Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learners", presented by Zhang & Rahimi (2014), investigated how self-regulated learning strategies impact speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It focused on methods such as goal setting, self-monitoring and reflection to reduce anxiety and improving oral communication skills.

Even though there is a thin line between anxiety and shyness, and there is not a big difference between them, they are considered separate aspects. The above-mentioned research deals with anxiety and it only uses self-regulation tools to overcome this problem. In contrast, the current research deals with the issue of shyness among undergraduate students inside the speaking skills classroom. Instead of just focusing on the self-regulation tools, the current research is quite open at the beginning in order to look at any helpful method that can help the students overcome their shyness while speaking.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this research to investigate the challenges faced by shy first-year students in speaking. It describes the research design, participants, data collection methods, data saturation process, and the analysis techniques employed achieve the research objectives. The ethical considerations are also addressed.

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Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to investigate the phenomenon of the impact of shyness among first-year students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University. The quantitative approach involved a questionnaire designed to collect information about students' experiences of shyness, its perceived causes, its effects on classroom participation, and possible strategies for overcoming it. The qualitative approach involved individual interviews that provided further insight into students' experiences and perceptions of shyness during speaking activities.

Mixing these two approaches allowed the researchers to examine overall patterns in the questionnaire responses and obtain a deeper understanding of students' individual experiences through the interviews. The findings from both methods were counted together to provide a broader understanding of the challenges students face when speaking English.

A data saturation method was applied to ensure that no new insights emerged during the data collection process, making the findings comprehensive and reliable.

Participants

The participants of this study were first-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University during the 2025-2026 academic year who exhibited signs of shyness in speaking. The selection was based on purposive sampling, targeting students who self-identified as shy or were identified by their instructors. A preliminary questionnaire was used to confirm their level of shyness. The questionnaire was distributed to 35 students from the English department, of whom 34 valid responses were included in the analysis. Moreover, six students participated in individual interviews to provide additional information about their experiences of shyness during classroom speaking activities.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using the 34 valid responses, while the interview data were analyzed separately to identify recurring themes. The participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their experiences of speaking English in classroom settings.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using multiple quantitative techniques to gain as much data as needed to understand participants' experiences.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire was distributed in printed form to 35 students from the English and Translation departments. Of the 35 questionnaires collected, 34 were considered valid and included in the analysis. The questionnaire comprised questions about students' experiences of shyness when speaking English, the factors contributing to their shyness, its remarked effects on classroom participation and academic performance, and strategies for enhancing speaking skills.

Interviews

interviews were conducted on 6 Individual Interviews students to explore their feelings and experiences regarding speaking in public and classroom settings. Each interview lasted approximately 4–8 minutes. The interview questions focused on the factors that made students hesitant to speak, situations in which they experienced shyness during speaking activities, and strategies they believed could help reduce their shyness.

The researchers reviewed all six students' answers on each interview question. The researchers analysed their responses to identify common aspects and differences in their experiences. The interview findings were applied to complement the questionnaire results and provide further insight into the factors influencing students' oral communication. The questions are:

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a) "What makes you feel hesitant to speak in front of others?"
b) "Can you describe a situation where you felt shy during a speaking activity?"
c) "What support or strategies do you think would help reduce your shyness?"

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted manually mixed methods both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Percentages were calculated using the number of valid responses to each question as the denominator. For questions allowing multiple answers, percentages were calculated based on the total number of valid respondents, and the possibility of percentages exceeding 100% was acknowledged. For open-ended questions, responses were categorised into themes, and the frequencies and percentages were calculated according to the unit of analysis specified for each table. Interview data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to students' shyness and oral communication difficulties. Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel were used to organise and present the data. The researchers checked the consistency between the recorded frequencies, denominators, and reported percentages to improve the accuracy and transparency of the findings.

Data Saturation

The concept of data saturation was central to this study. Data collection continued until no new themes or categories emerged from the interviews, focus groups, or observations. This approach ensured that the data were exhaustive and reflective of participants' experiences. A detailed log was maintained to document the saturation point.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical standards of Faculty of Languages and Translation. The researchers considered ethical principles throughout the study. The following measures were implemented to ensure the ethical integrity of the research:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Written consent was obtained before participation.
- **Confidentiality:** Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all data were stored securely.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation was entirely voluntary, with no coercion or pressure applied.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaire:

Section 1: Awareness of Shyness While Speaking English

The questionnaire results are based on the 34 valid responses (N = 34). Unless stated otherwise, percentages are calculated from the 34 respondents and rounded to one decimal place. For items that allowed more than one answer, the percentages add up to more than 100%.

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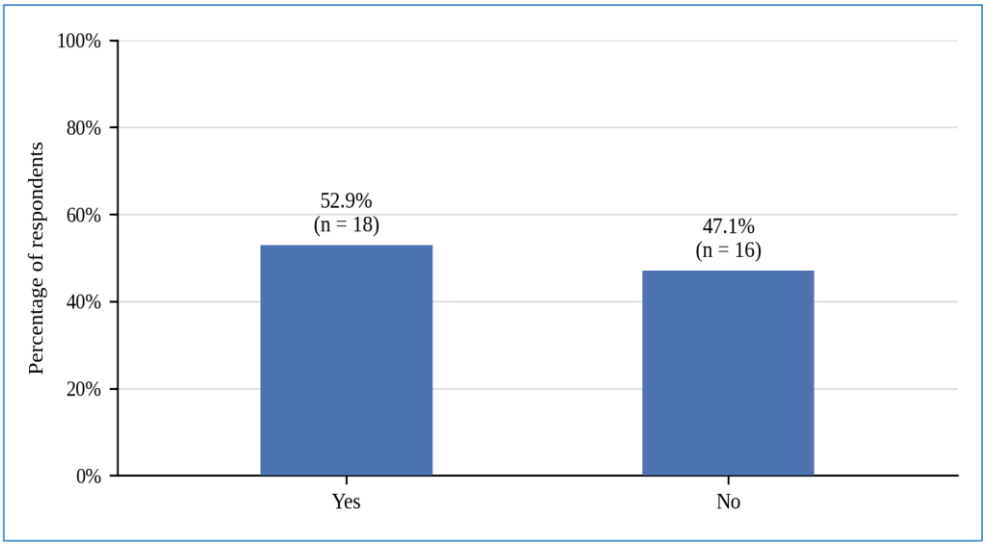


Figure 1. Students who reported feeling shy when speaking in class (N = 34).

Results

Figure 1 shows that 18 of the 34 respondents (52.9%) feel shy when speaking in class, while 16 (47.1%) reported no such issue. Just over half of the sample therefore reported shyness in class, which may affect their ability to engage confidently in discussions or presentations.

Discussion:

These findings are significant as classroom participation is often linked to academic success and skill development. Students who feel shy may avoid contributing to discussions, which could hinder their learning process. On the other hand, the 47.10% who do not feel shy may represent those with stronger social confidence or coping mechanisms. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing strategies to foster a more inclusive classroom environment. The data underscores the importance of addressing shyness as a barrier to participation for many students.

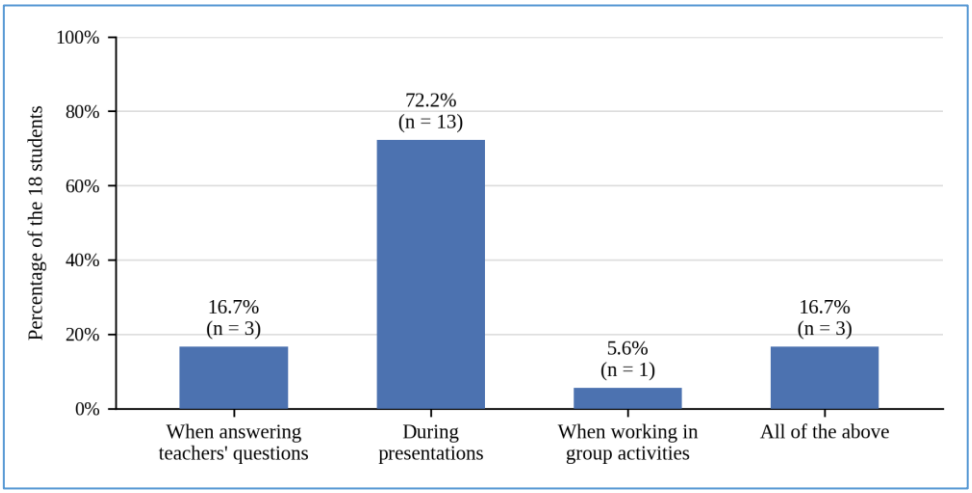


Figure 2. Situations in which shy students feel most shy (n = 18 students who answered "Yes" in Figure 1; more than one answer allowed).

Results

Figure 2 shows when the 18 students who reported feeling shy said they feel shyest; more than one situation could be selected. Presentations were the most frequent answer (13

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students, 72.2%), followed by answering teachers' questions (3 students, 16.7%) and "all of the above" (3 students, 16.7%). One student (5.6%) named group activities.

Discussion

Shyness appears to be strongest in situations where the student alone is the focus of attention and has to speak for an extended period. This is consistent with the interview data, in which one student described the first presentation as a moment of shyness. Group activities were rarely selected, which suggests that pair and small-group tasks may offer a lower-pressure way for shy students to practise speaking. Because "all of the above" overlaps with the other options, each percentage should be read as the share of the 18 students who selected that option.

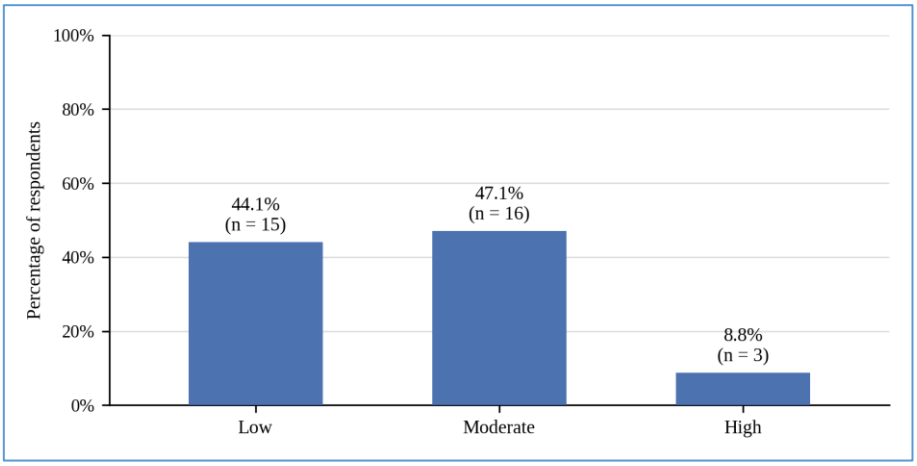


Figure 3. Students' self-rated level of shyness when speaking English (N = 34).

Results

Figure 3 shows how students rated their level of shyness when speaking English. Fifteen students (44.1%) rated it low, 16 (47.1%) moderate and 3 (8.8%) high. More than half of the respondents (19 of 34, 55.9%) therefore described their shyness as moderate or high.

Discussion

These self-assessments show that, although many students experience only mild shyness, a majority consider it to be at least moderate. Students with moderate or high shyness may need additional support, while those with low shyness are likely to feel more at ease communicating in English. Because the ratings are self-reported, they reflect students' own perceptions rather than an independent measure of shyness.

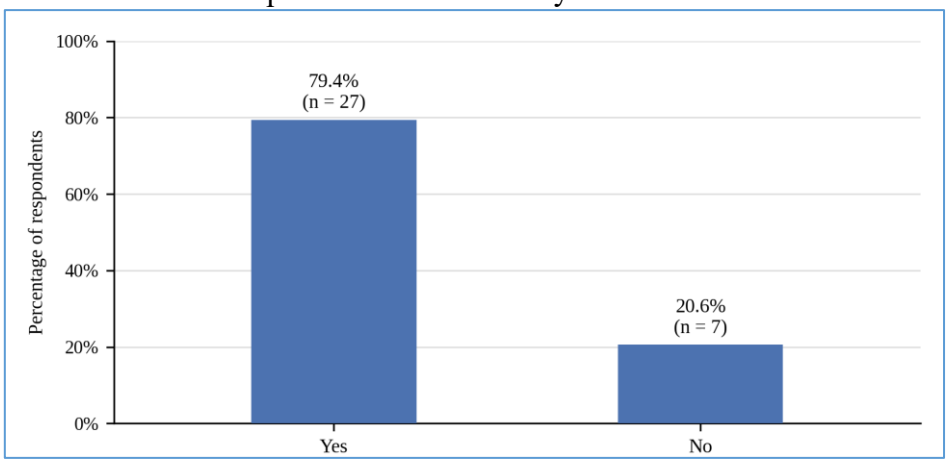


Figure 4. Students who feel that shyness affects their ability to speak confidently in front of others (N = 34).

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Results

Figure 4 shows that 27 of the 34 respondents (79.4%) feel that shyness affects their ability to speak confidently in front of others, while 7 (20.6%) do not.

Discussion

This high percentage demonstrates a significant barrier for students in developing public speaking skills, which are often essential for academic and career advancement. Shyness may manifest as hesitation, nervousness, or fear of judgment, all of which can limit students' participation in presentations or group discussions. Those who do not perceive an impact from shyness may have developed strategies to manage it effectively. These findings highlight the need for targeted programs to build confidence in public speaking, such as workshops or one-on-one coaching. Such interventions can empower students to overcome their shyness and express themselves more effectively in front of others.

Section 2: Reasons for Shyness

1. **What are the main reasons you feel shy? (You can choose more than one).**

Table 1. Main Reasons for Students' Shyness When Speaking English

Reason	Number of Responses	% of students (N = 34)
Lack of confidence	3	8.8%
Fear of making mistakes	21	61.8%
Weak language skills	15	44.1%
Fear of negative judgment from classmates	3	8.8%
Other (please specify)	1	2.9%

Results

Because respondents could choose more than one reason, the percentages are based on the 34 respondents and add up to more than 100%. The most common reason was fear of making mistakes, selected by 21 students (61.8%), followed by weak language skills (15 students, 44.1%). Lack of confidence and fear of negative judgment from classmates were each selected by 3 students (8.8%), and one student (2.9%) gave another reason.

Discussion

These findings highlight that performance-related anxieties and linguistic challenges are the primary drivers of shyness. Fear of mistakes suggests a need for a more supportive learning environment that reframes errors as learning opportunities. Weak language skills emphasize the importance of targeted practice to build confidence. While less common, lack of confidence and fear of peer judgment indicate the need for strategies that promote self-assurance and peer support. Addressing these issues can help create a more encouraging and inclusive atmosphere for students.

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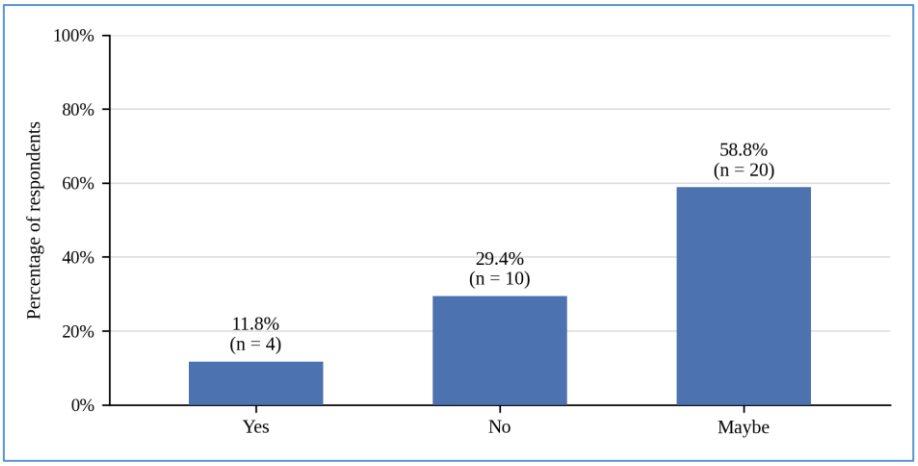


Figure 5. Students' views on whether shyness when speaking English is related to culture or traditions (N = 34).

Discussion:

Figure 5 shows that 20 students (58.8%) were unsure ("Maybe") whether culture or traditions are related to their shyness when speaking English, 10 (29.4%) said no and 4 (11.8%) said yes. The large uncertain group suggests that cultural influences may be present but are not easily recognised by students, whereas those who answered "No" may see their shyness as personal or situational. The 11.8% who agreed point to cultural expectations, such as modesty or fear of judgment, as a factor for a minority. Overall, the influence of culture appears to vary widely between individuals.

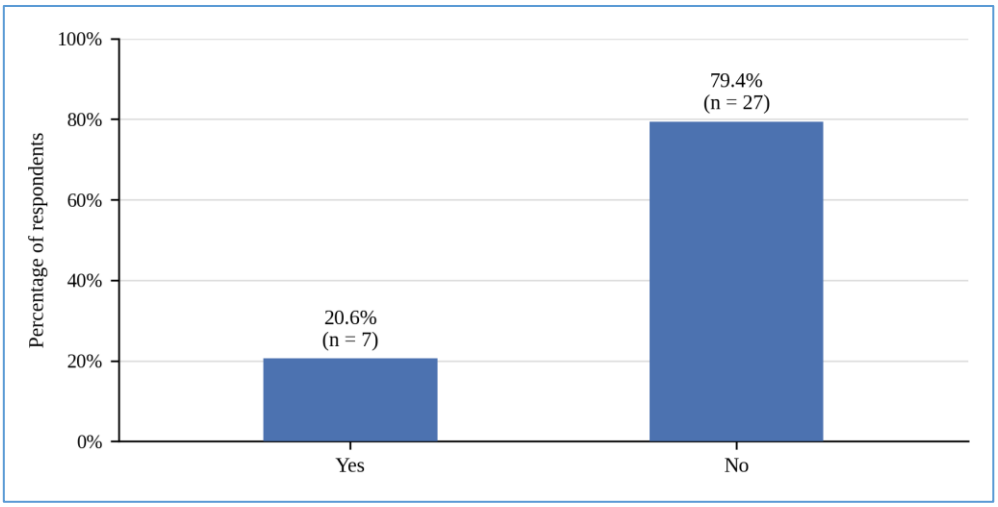


Figure 6. Students who reported specific cultural or social factors that discourage them from speaking freely in English (N = 34).

Figure 6 shows that 7 of the 34 respondents (20.6%) reported specific cultural or social factors that discourage them from speaking freely in English, while 27 (79.4%) did not. The reasons given by those who answered yes are listed below.

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Table 2. Cultural and Social Factors Discouraging Students from Speaking English Freely.

Reason	Number of Responses
Shyness	4
Fear of making mistakes	2
Nervousness	1
Fear of negative judgment from classmates	1

Discussion:

The seven students who answered yes gave eight reasons: shyness (4), fear of making mistakes (2), nervousness (1) and fear of negative judgment from classmates (1). Shyness itself was the most common answer, which suggests that students found it hard to separate cultural or social factors from their own feelings. Because only about a fifth of the sample reported such factors, they do not appear to be the main barrier in this group, although peer perception and fear of criticism were mentioned. Positive reinforcement, peer support and a non-judgmental classroom environment may reduce their effect.

Section 3: **Impact of Shyness on Academic Performance**

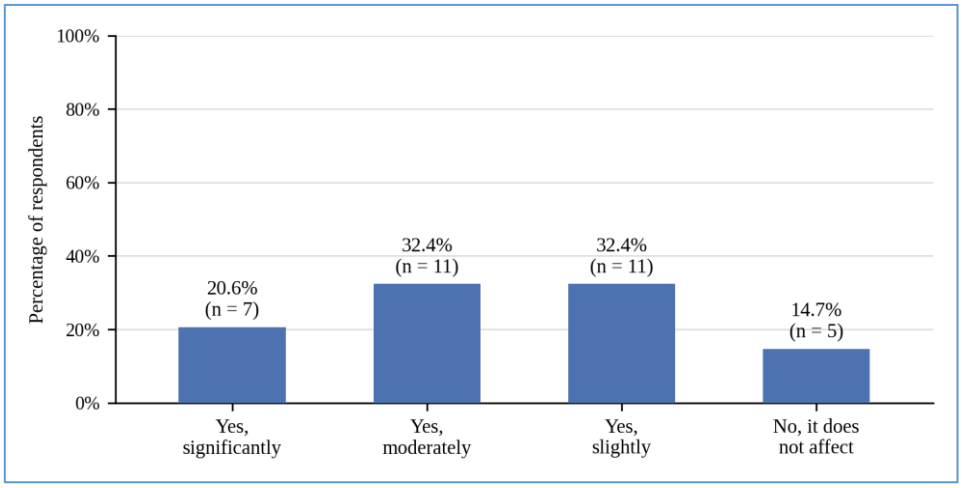


Figure 7. Perceived effect of shyness on academic performance (N = 34).

Results

Figure 7 shows how students perceive the effect of shyness on their academic performance. Seven students (20.6%) reported a significant effect, 11 (32.4%) a moderate effect and 11 (32.4%) a slight effect, while 5 (14.7%) reported no effect. In total, 29 of the 34 respondents (85.3%) believed that shyness affects their academic performance to some degree.

Discussion

Most students see shyness as having at least some effect on their academic performance, although the size of the effect varies. For the 18 students (52.9%) who reported a significant or moderate effect, shyness may hinder active engagement in class or asking instructors for clarification. Students who perceive no effect (14.7%) may have coping strategies or stronger confidence. These are self-reported perceptions: academic performance was not measured directly, for example through grades.

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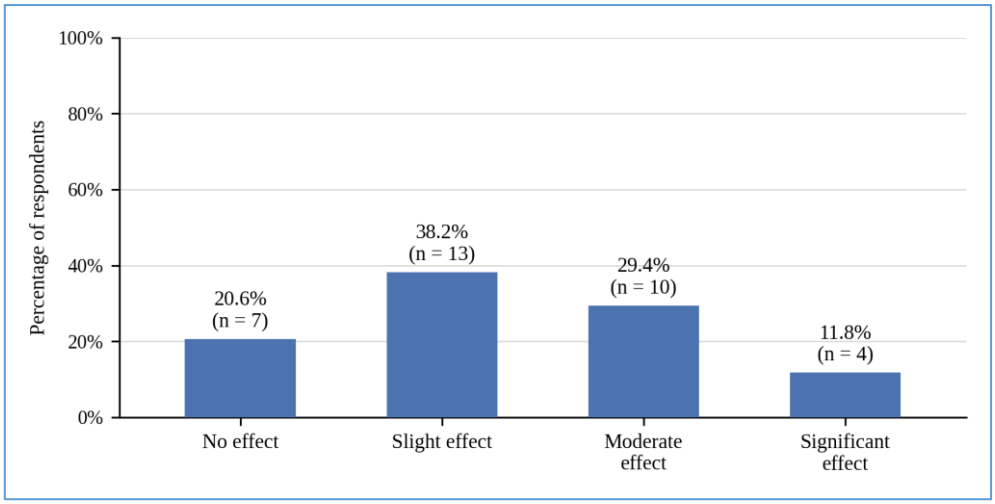


Figure 8. Perceived effect of shyness on participation in classroom discussions (N = 34).

Results

Figure 8 shows the reported effect of shyness on participation in classroom discussions. Seven students (20.6%) reported no effect, 13 (38.2%) a slight effect, 10 (29.4%) a moderate effect and 4 (11.8%) a significant effect. Thus 27 students (79.4%) reported at least a slight effect on their participation, and 14 (41.2%) reported a moderate or significant effect.

Discussion

This variation suggests that shyness affects students differently, with some feeling comfortable participating, while others face challenges that limit their engagement. For those reporting significant or moderate effects, shyness may prevent them from expressing their ideas or contributing to group discussions, which can hinder collaborative learning. On the other hand, students reporting no effect might feel more confident or adaptable in social settings. These findings emphasise the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that encourage participation from all students, regardless of their levels of shyness.

Section 4: Strategies for Overcoming Shyness Table: Strategies

1. **What strategies have you tried to overcome shyness while speaking?**

Table 3. Strategies Students Have Tried to Overcome Shyness While Speaking

Strategy	Number of Responses	% of students (N = 34)
Practicing in front of a mirror	14	41.2%
Joining discussion groups	4	11.8%
Asking for help from teachers	10	29.4%
Using relaxation techniques	9	26.5%
I haven't tried any strategies	5	14.7%

Results

Respondents could choose more than one strategy, so the percentages are based on the 34 respondents. Practising in front of a mirror was the most common strategy (14 students, 41.2%), followed by asking teachers for help (10 students, 29.4%) and using relaxation techniques such as deep breathing (9 students, 26.5%). Joining discussion groups was the least used strategy (4 students, 11.8%), and 5 students (14.7%) had not tried any strategy.

Discussion

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These results suggest that while many students are proactive in overcoming shyness, there is a need for increased guidance and encouragement for those who have not yet attempted any strategies.

2. What do you think is the most effective way to overcome shyness?

Table 4. Students' Perceptions of the Most Effective Ways to Overcome Shyness

Option	Number of Responses	% of responses (N = 42)
Practicing speaking daily	20	47.6%
Receiving support from teachers/classmates	4	9.5%
Attending workshops to develop speaking skills	13	31.0%
Improving grammar and vocabulary	4	9.5%
Other (please specify)	1	2.4%

Results

The percentages for this item are based on the 42 responses recorded. Practising speaking daily was the most frequently chosen option (20 responses, 47.6%), followed by attending workshops to develop speaking skills (13 responses, 31.0%). Receiving support from teachers or classmates and improving grammar and vocabulary were each chosen four times (9.5%), and one response (2.4%) suggested another method.

Discussion

These results indicate that regular speaking practice is viewed as the most impactful solution, emphasizing the importance of consistent, real-life application to build confidence. Workshops also play a significant role, providing structured opportunities to enhance speaking skills in a supportive setting.

The lower percentages for support and language improvement suggest these strategies may be seen as supplementary but still valuable for addressing shyness effectively.

Section 5: College Support

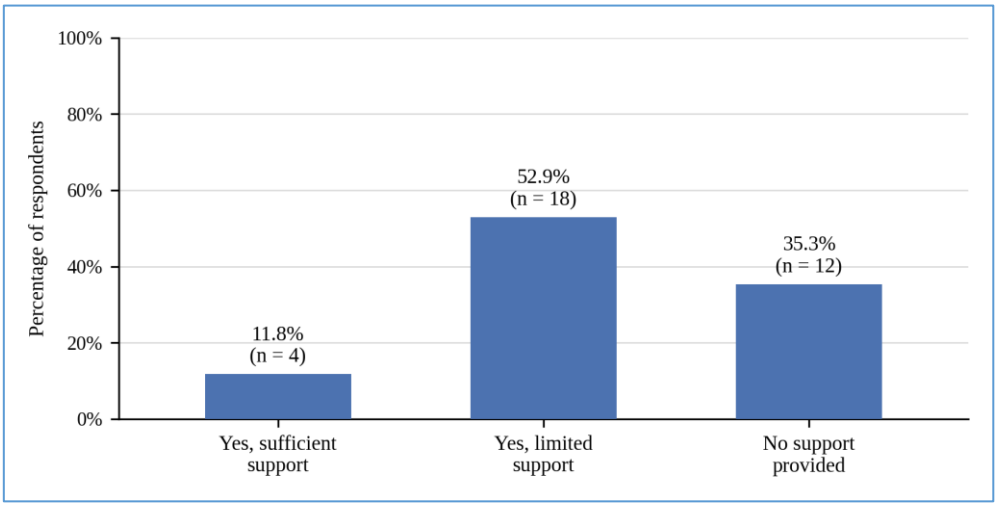


Figure 9. Students' views on whether the college provides support to improve speaking skills in English (N = 34).

Results

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Figure 9 shows students' perceptions of the support the college provides to improve speaking skills in English. Four students (11.8%) felt that the support was sufficient, 18 (52.9%) described it as limited and 12 (35.3%) said that no support was provided.

Discussion

Most students (30 of 34, 88.2%) consider the college's support to be either limited or absent. Sufficient support is important for helping students overcome barriers such as shyness and develop communication skills. The perception of limited or no support suggests that current initiatives may not be reaching all students or meeting their needs. Improving the accessibility and quality of these programmes could benefit students who struggle with speaking, and tailored resources such as workshops or individual coaching may help to address these gaps.

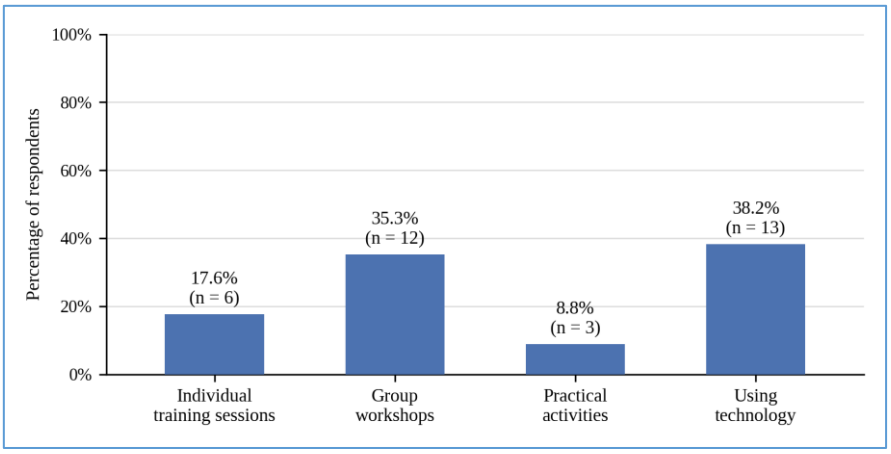


Figure 10. Type of support students would prefer if support were available (N = 34).

Results

Figure 10 shows the type of support students would prefer if support were available. Using technology was the most frequently chosen option (13 students, 38.2%), followed by group workshops (12 students, 35.3%) and individual training sessions (6 students, 17.6%). Three students (8.8%) preferred practical activities.

Discussion

These preferences suggest that students favour technology-supported practice and group formats over individual sessions. Technology-based activities may offer a low-pressure way to practise speaking, and group workshops allow collaboration and peer learning. Individual training provides personalised attention but was chosen by fewer students. Because preferences are spread across all four options, no single approach is likely to suit every student, and colleges may do best to offer a combination of formats.

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Section 6: Open-Ended Questions (For Qualitative Analysis)

1. In your opinion, what are the main reasons students feel shy when speaking English?

Table 5. Main Reasons for Students' Shyness: Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Answers	Number of Responses	% of responses (N = 43)
Fear of making linguistic mistakes	17	39.5%
Fear of being judged by the others	6	14.0%
Lack of vocabulary	10	23.3%
Lack of confidence	6	14.0%
nervousness	2	4.7%
Lack of practice	2	4.7%

Results

The open-ended answers were coded into categories, giving 43 coded responses; the percentages are shares of these coded responses. Fear of making linguistic mistakes was the most common reason students gave for feeling shy when speaking English (17 responses, 39.5%), followed by lack of vocabulary (10 responses, 23.3%). Fear of being judged by others and lack of confidence were each mentioned six times (14.0%), and nervousness and lack of practice twice each (4.7%).

Discussion

These findings suggest that linguistic insecurities, particularly fears about mistakes and limited vocabulary, are central to students' shyness. Addressing these concerns through targeted language support and creating a judgment-free learning environment could significantly reduce anxiety. Meanwhile, strategies to boost confidence and encourage consistent practice may help alleviate secondary factors such as nervousness and self-doubt.

3. What are your suggestions for improving speaking skills and reducing shyness in the college?

Table 6. Students' Suggestions for Improving Speaking Skills and Reducing Shyness in College

Answers	Number of Responses	% of responses (N = 47)
Content Practice	6	12.8%
Listening and speaking more	5	10.6%
building vocabulary	2	4.3%
Using technology	2	4.3%
Doing presentations	1	2.1%
workshops	14	29.8%
Working on syntax	1	2.1%
Reading books	1	2.1%
Watching movies	1	2.1%
Speaking in lectures	7	14.9%
Classroom activities	4	8.5%
Providing qualified teachers	1	2.1%
Separating male and female students	1	2.1%
More listening and speaking lectures	1	2.1%

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Results

The percentages are shares of the 47 coded suggestions. Workshops were the most frequent suggestion (14 responses, 29.8%), followed by speaking in lectures (7 responses, 14.9%) and content practice (6 responses, 12.8%). Other suggestions included listening and speaking more (5 responses, 10.6%), classroom activities (4 responses, 8.5%), and building vocabulary and using technology (2 responses each, 4.3%). Seven further suggestions were each mentioned once (2.1%): doing presentations, working on syntax, reading books, watching movies, providing qualified teachers, holding more listening and speaking lectures, and separating male and female students.

Discussion

The strong preference for workshops underscores their perceived effectiveness in providing structured, interactive opportunities for skill development. Encouraging active participation in lectures and incorporating content practice further supports confidence-building. While less common, the remaining suggestions highlight diverse strategies to enhance speaking abilities, such as integrating technology and fostering more engaging classroom environments. These findings emphasize the need for varied, inclusive approaches tailored to address the multiple dimensions of shyness and language learning.

Analysis of the Interviews:

Six students were interviewed. Their answers to each question were grouped into categories, and each interviewee was counted once per category. Because of the small number of interviewees, the percentages are given for description only and should be interpreted with caution. The findings are presented by interview question.

Question 1: What makes you feel hesitant to speak in front of others?

Table 7. Factors Causing Students' Hesitation to Speak in Front of Others: Interview Findings

responses	Number of responses	Percent (n = 6)
Fearing of making mistakes	2	%33.3
Poor language	2	%33.3
Lack of confidence	1	%16.7
Poor vocabulary	1	%16.7

Results:

Four factors were mentioned. Fear of making mistakes and poor language skills were each mentioned by two of the six interviewees, while lack of confidence and poor vocabulary were each mentioned by one. These responses suggest that students' reluctance to speak is associated with both linguistic difficulties and psychological barriers.

Question 2: Can you describe a situation where you felt shy during a speaking activity?

Table 8. Situations in Which Students Experienced Shyness During Speaking Activities: Interview Findings.

responses	Number of responses	Percent (n = 6)
During first presentation	1	%50.0
Out of fear I was not able to understand the question	1	%50.0

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Results

Two situations were recorded: one student described their first presentation, and another reported being unable to understand a question because of fear.

Question 3: What support or strategies do you think would help reduce your shyness?

Table 9. Suggested Support and Strategies for Reducing Shyness: Interview Findings**.**

responses	Number of responses	Percent (n = 6)
Reading and speaking daily	1	%16.7
Watching movies	1	%16.7
Support from teachers	2	%33.3
Practicing to gain confidence	2	%33.3

Results

Teacher support and practising to gain confidence were each mentioned by two of the six interviewees; reading and speaking daily and watching movies were each mentioned by one.

Discussion:

The responses showed the importance of external support and personal efforts in overcoming shyness. Teacher support, through encouragement and constructive feedback, is perceived as crucial for creating a safe learning environment. Practicing speaking regularly, whether in class or informal settings, helps build confidence and reduce anxiety over time. Activities like reading and watching movies can improve vocabulary and language fluency, indirectly boosting confidence. A combination of teacher-facilitated interventions and self-directed strategies is likely the most effective approach to addressing shyness in oral communication.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has explored the impact of shyness on the oral communication skills of first-year EFL students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University. The findings reveal that shyness may affect students' confidence, participation in classroom discussions, and ability to deliver presentations. These challenges may also have implications for academic performance and the improvement of communication competencies needed for future career opportunities.

The findings high spot the importance of creating a supportive learning environment in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of making mistakes or being judged by their classmates and teachers. Fear of making mistakes and limited language skills appeared as significant factors contributing to students' shyness when speaking English. These findings suggest that students need more opportunities to practise speaking in an encouraging and supportive classroom environment.

The study also draws attention to the potential value of practical strategies for helping students overcome shyness and improve their oral communication skills. These strategies comprise regular speaking practice, communication workshops, individual training sessions, constructive feedback from teachers, and classroom activities that encourage participation. Such approaches may help students gradually increase confidence and become more comfortable expressing their ideas in English.

Based on these findings, the researchers recommend that teachers encourage students to participate actively in classroom discussions and presentations while considering mistakes

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as a natural part of language learning. The Faculty of Languages and Translation should also consider providing additional opportunities for students to practise speaking English through workshops, group discussions, presentations, and individual training sessions. Furthermore, teachers should provide positive feedback and make sure that classroom activities encourage confidence, participation, and mutual respect among students.

Future research could investigate the relationship between shyness and oral communication skills among students at different academic levels and in other educational institutions. Further studies could also examine how cultural, psychological, linguistic, and institutional factors contribute to students' shyness. In addition, future researchers could investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as communication workshops and regular speaking practice, in reducing shyness and improving oral communication skills.

In conclusion, addressing shyness is important for supporting students' development as confident and effective English speakers. By providing appropriate guidance, regular speaking opportunities, and a supportive learning environment, educators can help students overcome barriers to oral communication and improve their participation in academic activities. These efforts may also contribute to students' academic development and prepare them for future professional communication.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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