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The Effect of Psychological Factors on English Speaking Performance of Students Enrolled in Postgraduate English Language Teaching Programs in Pakistan

Abstract:

This research attempted to identify the psychological factors that affect the speaking performance of students enrolled in Postgraduate English Language Teaching programs in Pakistan. A quantitative approach was used to address the main aim of this study. The participants of the research were 100 postgraduate students enrolled in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs of public sector higher education institutions and universities in Pakistan. The findings revealed that many students in this study reported finding it difficult to speak in English in foreign language classrooms due to psychological factors like lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety and motivation mainly. The findings also revealed that almost all the psychological factors are interlinked with each other and have a direct effect on the speaking performance of the students in this study.

Key Words:

Psychological Factors, Oral Performance, Speaking Problems, ELT and TESOL, Pakistan

Introduction

English enjoys the status of the official language in Pakistan (Khushi and Talat, 2011). Rahman (2006) maintains that as a language of higher education, English is the preferred language of most of the professional degrees offered in the Pakistani universities and teacher education programs. Since the independence of the country in 1947, English has been taught as a foreign language at school, college and university level in Pakistan (Ingram and Sasaki, 2003). Although the students tend to pass the examination easily in general, they face difficulty speaking in English (Bilal et al., 2013) mainly due to insufficient participation opportunities created and provided to them for oral communication in English language classrooms. Even the students of English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs (offered at postgraduate level), who are future English language teachers, face reluctance, shyness, nervousness and anxiety to speak in English during different classroom activities (Hashemi, 2011). When students are asked to discuss something in pair and group activities, they usually shift to their mother tongue and code-switching and shy away from communicating their thoughts in the English language (Alam, 2012). According to Fauzan (2016), the most difficult elements in language learning are oral and written proficiency.

With the passage of time, language learning has undergone many changes. In the past, more focus was rendered to teaching strategies and teaching tasks, but now there has been a shift as more attention is paid to learners' language learning needs and psychological factors (Brown, 2001).

According to Haidara (2014), this issue has grabbed the attention of language researchers in order to understand the process of learning and teaching in a better way for greater teaching and learning achievements in foreign language classrooms. However, speaking problems prove to be a major obstacle in language learning regardless of the amount of knowledge the EFL learners have of the target

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language. It has been witnessed that most of the EFL students feel difficulty in speaking English because of psychological and cognitive factors. However, [Aouatef \(2015\)](#) notes that if the students manage to overcome a few of the main psychological factors, they can become effective English language speakers. These factors include shyness, fear of making mistakes, motivation, self-esteem, anxiety and lack of self-confidence ([Juhana, 2012](#)).

In order to make learners more efficient speakers, it is vital to find out the psychological factors that affect their oral performance. Therefore, there must be ways to overcome this difficulty and to improve the EFL students' oral performance. Moreover, teachers should also know the factors that are hampering the English speaking proficiency of their students so that they are able to find out different ways for helping students to overcome these problems ([Pinter, 2006](#)). This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the effect of psychological factors on the speaking performance of postgraduate ELT and TESOL students in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Psychological Factors

[Schwartz \(2005\)](#) posits that the psychological side of a learner has a major role in language learning along with the success and failure of this process. [Ayub and Lodhi \(2016\)](#) analyzed the impact of psychological factors on the oral performance of Pakistani undergraduate students to find the psychological barriers confronted by them in acquiring speaking competence. Their findings revealed that psychological factors have a direct connection with learners' psychological state, especially at the time of oral performance. Among all psychological factors like motivation, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of self-esteem, the most important were found to be lack of self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. [Ayub and Lodhi \(2016\)](#) further found that although the students were highly motivated to speak in English, they were unable to communicate in English due to the lack of self-esteem, which further resulted in anxiety amongst them.

In another research conducted by [Akram and Nosheen \(2013\)](#) at the undergraduate level in Pakistan, quite similar findings were revealed to those of [Ayub and Lodhi's \(2016\)](#) study. The findings indicated that the cause of students' lack of ability to speak in English was inadequate vocabulary and grammatical inaccuracy, and psychological factors like shyness and anxiety. In turn, the reasons for shyness and anxiety were the fear of making mistakes and the fear of receiving criticism from classmates. The majority of the participants in [Akram and Nosheen \(2013\)](#) study agreed that there must be more exposure to oral usage of the English language in the classroom in order to enhance students' oral competence.

Another case study carried out by [Juhana \(2012\)](#) in Indonesia studied the causes of psychological factors that hamper English as the second language (ESL) students' speaking performances and possible solutions for overcoming them. [Juhana's \(2012\)](#) findings indicated that "fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of motivation" was the core psychological factors that hindered the Indonesian ESL students' speaking performance (p. 125). Moreover, students' fear of making mistakes was mostly due to their fear of being laughed at by others, and shyness was due to the shy nature of the students. Furthermore, most of the students in [Juhana's \(2012\)](#) study suggested that motivation by the teachers and classroom environment has the most important role in overcoming the ESL students' speaking performance fears and enhancing their confidence.

[Abda \(2017\)](#) conducted similar research investigating the factors that impact teaching speaking skills at Robe Teachers College, Ethiopia. [Abda \(2017\)](#) concluded that students were unable to perform well in speaking performance because of their fear of making mistakes, lack of motivation, lack of exposure, lack of confidence, poor background knowledge and insufficient vocabulary knowledge. [Sato \(2003\)](#) examined the psychological factors and found that most of the Japanese students were not able to perform well in English because of their fear of mistakes. In line with this, [Moosa, Ajmal and Rahman \(2011\)](#) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and shyness of female students of 9th grade in Pakistani secondary schools and identified the

reasons for shyness and its relationship with self-esteem. [Moosa et al.'s \(2011\)](#) findings indicated that there existed a positive relationship between shyness and self-esteem, but there could be seen variation in the level of shyness amongst the students.

A review of the previous studies has revealed that EFL students find it difficult to speak in English due to psychological and cognitive factors ([Thornbury, 2005](#)). It has been evidenced that psychological factors affect EFL learners in both positive and negative manner because they can either enhance learners' performance or can present a hindrance in English language learning and speaking ([Bourezzane, 2014](#)). However, if the students have a good command of some of the main psychological factors, they can become effective speakers of the English language ([Aouatef, 2015](#)). [Thornbury \(2005\)](#) argues that most studies have been conducted to identify the effective variables in language learning, but these studies have observed only three categories of these factors that is motivation, anxiety and self-confidence. However, the affective/psychological factors can be further categorized into six factors that are discussed next.

Fear of Mistakes

Several researchers argue that the fear of making mistakes is among the main factors that can cause obstacles in English speaking ([Nunan, 1999](#); Robby, 2010; [Yi Htwe, 2007](#)). The main reason is that students are afraid of losing face and looking foolish before the whole class ([Farouqi, 2007](#)). [Ariyanti \(2016\)](#) and Zang (2006) maintain that many students think that they will receive negative criticism from their peers. Such fears are common among EFL students. Gardener (2014) states that the fear of making mistakes is linked with negative assessment and correction by teachers in most cases. Most students stop participating in classroom interactions due to the fear of being laughed at by others or receiving negative feedback from the teacher ([Ariyanti, 2016](#)). Therefore, it is important that teachers should make students understand that mistakes are a part of learning ([Zua, 2008](#)).

Shyness

The majority of EFL students suffer from shyness at some point in the EFL class when they come across the need to speak in English ([Nakhalah, 2016](#)). [Tanveer \(2007\)](#) states that speaking in public is the most common phobia that most people have and that it can cause blankness, which is the reason why many students are unable to perform well in speaking in English. When there is a time to give oral presentations in the class, shy students feel stressed and try to avoid presenting in front of their peers and teacher ([Tanveer, 2007](#)).

It has been found that students' shyness is embedded in their perception of their ability to speak the English language ([Chinmoy, 2007](#)). In order to resolve this issue, [Bashir, Azeem and Dogar \(2011\)](#) suggested that the teacher should guide the students that the feeling of shyness can be overcome and help them to understand that success and failure both are a part of learning a foreign language. Therefore, this aspect of perception about the ability to speak in English needs to be focused on enhancing students' speaking performance in EFL classrooms ([Gebhard, 2000](#)). [Nakhalah \(2016\)](#) reports that some learners are shy by nature and less confident because they are unable to speak in English in front of or in the presence of their class fellows and teachers. Therefore, shyness plays a crucial role in and affects students' oral performance in the English language.

Anxiety

Anxiety can be defined as a feeling related to fear, uneasiness and shyness ([Horwitz, 1991](#)). [Spielberger \(1983\)](#) refers to anxiety as a feeling of tension, uneasiness, worry, and nervousness linked with the nervous system. [Ohata \(2005\)](#) states that anxiety is a psychological feeling and is caused by many factors. Most students find it stressful when they need to speak in English in front of the whole class, and they usually feel burdened ([Tanveer, 2007](#)). Anxiety has been observed in studies to be the crucial blocking factor among effective

variables. People can experience anxiety anywhere, such as at work, in education, and in any life situation, but specifically, anxiety is very common amongst EFL learners at the time of examination, presentations and public speaking ([Gopang, Bughio, and Pathan, 2018](#)). [Azher, Anwar and Naz \(2010\)](#) investigated the main reasons for anxiety amongst Pakistani EFL learners and presented three reasons for students' anxiety: the fear of negative evaluation by other students, exam anxiety, and communication anxiety.

According to [Horwitz \(1991\)](#), anxiety during speaking can influence students' oral performance in various contexts. The quality and fluency of learners' speaking in the English language may also be affected because of anxiety level ([Tiono and Sylvia, 2004](#)). Furthermore, in line with this, [Sato \(2003\)](#) states that teachers should also work on individual students' weaknesses and strengths to ease the level of anxiety and to find out a teaching methodology that can work for all of the students in the class. Additionally, [Tiono and Sylvia \(2004\)](#) suggest that teachers should work on making the class environment comfortable, which may further aid learning of EFL and development of oral skill.

Lack of Confidence

According to Naunan (1999), students feel a lack of confidence when they are unable to communicate in English and to understand what others are speaking about. This situation proves to be very discouraging. In response to this, Tsui (1999) argues that less confident students usually have performance issues. [Al-Hebaish \(2012\)](#) gives the main reason for performance issues as the low level of ability in oral performance in the English language. [Al-Hebaish \(2012\)](#) further states that many learners regard their own English as bad and think that they are not able to communicate in English. Another main reason for lack of self-confidence is the absence of encouragement or positive feedback from the teacher as most of the teachers do not consider it necessary, so as a result, students find learning EFL demotivating rather than motivating (Fallah, 2014). This shows that teachers' positive feedback is the most important factor to build confidence amongst EFL students.

Lack of Self-Esteem

Rubio (2014) reports that self-esteem is an abstract feeling and personal judgment of worthiness that a person has in their attitude. It is a feeling which can only be felt and cannot be seen and is a kind of feeling related to one's self as to who one are. Personal opinions are the spirit of self-esteem. Lathifah (2015) defines self-esteem as individuals' beliefs about themselves which keep on changing throughout their life as a result of experiences. Similarly, the high and low self-esteem of students may affect their opinions and beliefs. Students with a low level of self-esteem are not able to analyze their performance, while students with a high level of self-esteem know about their weaknesses and strengths ([Braine, 2012](#)).

[Brown \(2007\)](#) postulates that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors have their roles in the success of foreign language learning, and self-esteem is among intrinsic factors. Furthermore, [Mruk \(2006\)](#) points out that lack of self-esteem is often the reason for many mental disorders, such as anxiety, difficulty in learning activities, lack of self-confidence and depression. It has been observed that the success of any cognitive and effective activity depends on the degree of self-esteem. Students with high global self-esteem are good learners of language compared to students with low self-esteem (Lathifah, 2015). Furthermore, Dembo (2004) states that support from one's loved ones and teachers can be very helpful to raise the level of self-efficacy.

Lack of Motivation

Motivation plays a significant role in the process of language learning, and it has remained the main concern in EFL teaching and learning for the past many years. As suggested by [Dornyei and Ushioda \(2009\)](#), motivation is an inner force in an individual. [Harmer \(2007\)](#) asserts that the basic element of motivation is the desire to achieve some specific goal which further motivates an individual to go on a certain act or decision. [Harmer](#)

(2007) further states that motivation is the main key to learn a foreign language and the main factor of the language acquisition process. [Liu and Huang \(2011\)](#) opine that a student who is average by intelligence but more motivated can be more successful than a less motivated student with more intelligence.

According to [Liu \(2010\)](#), motivation has been explained from different points of views in terms of choice, relevance, outcome, engagement, expectancy and persistence by interest. [Liu \(2010\)](#) further emphasizes that social interaction between teachers and learners are the main factors in the motivation process. [Wong \(2009\)](#) asserts that motivated students can create an effective learning environment with their strong interpersonal and social interaction skills. Madonna and Philpot (2013) note that speaking activities cannot be carried out effectively in the absence of motivation or with a lower motivation level. It is the teacher's responsibility in [Pinter's \(2006\)](#) viewpoint to support students and keep them on the right track. Furthermore, each student is a different individual, so every student must have opportunities to grow and learn the way they want. Teachers should be establishing efforts to cater to the needs of different personality types in order to make every student of their class equally motivated ([Pinter, 2006](#)). [Baig 2014](#) asserts that students' motivation can be enhanced by engaging them through ICT/multimedia.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach to identify the major psychological factors that affect students' speaking performance and to know what problems those factors were creating among EFL learners. A close-ended questionnaire was specifically designed for this research to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of two sections and a total of 44 items. Section A consisted of eight items developed to collect information regarding the study respondents' background. Section A items one and two collected information on the study respondents' age and the study program they were enrolled in, and item three to eight collected data to identify the most common problems faced by the ELT and TESOL learners while speaking in English. Section B consisted of a total of 36 items rated on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Agree = 3, and Strongly Agree = 4). 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 six sub-sections based on psychological factors of motivation (five items); Self-confidence (five items); Self-esteem (six items); Anxiety (seven items); Shyness (six items); and Fear of mistakes (six items).

The data was analyzed through the statistical package of SPSS (v. 25). An analysis of the percentages of each of the close-ended questionnaire responses was done for finding out the percentage of the study respondents' speaking performance in English being affected by psychological factors. The data was displayed in separate tables for each psychological factor. In conjunction with the data in lieu of all the four Likert scale points, the researcher also analyzed the dichotomous percentages for the two agreement points (Combined agreement) and two disagreement points (Combined disagreement) for all the items in the six sub-sections of Section B. The results and findings concentrated chiefly on the combined dichotomous percentages for comparing the difference between the distributions of responses in each psychological factor (sub-sections).

The population of the study comprised all postgraduate students enrolled in MA, MS/MPhil and a postgraduate diploma in ELT and TESOL study programs in the city of Lahore in Pakistan. There are only two higher education institutions (HEIs) which are offering MA and MS in TESOL in Lahore, and five HEIs are offering MA and MPhil and a postgraduate diploma in ELT. The sample for this study was selected by employing the convenience sampling technique. The sample consisted of 100 students enrolled in ELT and TESOL postgraduate programs in the HEIs.

Findings

The demographic data revealed that 58.0% of the respondents belonged to the age group 20-24 years, 22.0% of

the sample was 29 years and above, and 20.0% belonged to the age bracket of 24-28 years. As far as the study program the respondents were enrolled in is concerned, the data showed that 44.0% of the respondents were enrolled in MA degree program in both TESOL and ELT, 45.0% were pursuing MS/MPhil in ELT and TESOL, and 11.0% were enrolled in a postgraduate diploma in ELT. Table 1 presents the findings on the rest of the six-sections A items of the questionnaire that gauged information on the speaking problems encountered by the study respondents.

Table 1. Speaking Problems

No.	Items	Yes	No
1	I am worried about making mistakes in speaking in English	75.0	25.0
2	I am fearful of receiving criticism or losing face if I am unable to speak correctly in English	65.0	35.0
3	I cannot think of anything to say if I am required to speak English	68.0	32.0
4	I am motivated to express myself in spoken English	74.0	26.0
5	If I am required to speak in English, I speak very little or not at all	63.0	37.0
6	I feel shy to speak in English	63.0	37.0

The findings regarding speaking problems show that the most common speaking problem was fear of making mistakes (75.0%). And the second most prevalent speaking problem, according to the respondents, was “I cannot think of anything to say if I am required to speak in English” (68.0%). The third problem was fear to lose face and receive criticism (65.0%). The fourth problem was “If I am required to speak in English, I speak very little or not at all” (63.0%). And the second last was shyness, reported by 63.0% of the respondents to be another common speaking issue. While 26.0% of the respondents reported that they are not motivated to express themselves in spoken English.

Table 2 presents data regarding whether the study respondents thought their psychological state affects their oral performance or not.

Table 2. Effect of Psychological State

Item	SDA	DA	A	CA	CDA	CA
2.1 I think that my psychological state affects my oral performance in the class	3.0	19.0	48.0	30.0	22.0	78.0

The data for the first item of Section B shows that the majority of the respondents (78.0%) agreed to and 22.0% disagreed with the notion.

Table 3 presents the results for the first sub-section of Section B regarding the psychological factor of motivation.

Table 3. Motivation

Items	SDA	DA	A	SA	CDA	CA
3.1 I like to speak in English in the class	0.0	6.0	46.0	48.0	6.0	94.0
3.2 My teachers' praise motivates me to participate in classroom activities	0.0	4.0	26.0	70.0	4.0	96.0
3.3 I am motivated to gain mastery over English speaking skill because it is necessary for my future job	0.0	2.0	22.0	76.0	2.0	98.0
3.4 I think that the classroom environment motivates me to speak in English.	1.0	10.0	48.0	41.0	11.0	89.0

3.5 I am motivated to speak in English outside the classroom	9.0	27.0	31.0	33.0	36.0	64.0
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Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3), and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The findings reveal that the majority of the respondents responded in agreement (ranging between 89.0% to 98.0%) to all of the items in relation to motivation in the classroom and future job. However, a noticeable proportion of the respondents (36.0%) disagreed with the notion that “I am motivated to speak in English outside the classroom” (item 3.5), which suggests less motivation received for speaking in English outside the classroom and the classroom environment to be more motivating. The findings affirm that the majority of the study respondents are motivated to speak in English in the classroom and that motivation plays a positive role in encouraging them to speak in English. On the contrary, the environment outside the classroom is less motivating to speak in English in view of the respondents.

Table 4 presents the results for the psychological factor of self-confidence.

Table 4. Self-Confidence

Items	SDA	DA	A	SA	CDA	CA
4.1 I confidently participate in English speaking activities in the classroom	0.0	20.0	45.0	35.0	20.0	80.0
4.2 I think that self-confidence affects oral performance in English	0.0	1.0	32.0	67.0	1.0	99.0
4.3 I find learning English demotivating due to lack of self-confidence	5.0	17.0	52.0	26.0	22.0	78.0
4.4 I think that maximising the exposure to spoken English is a good way to build self-confidence in students	0.0	4.0	40.0	56.0	4.0	96.0
4.5 I think that encouragement has an important role in building self-confidence to speak in English	0.0	1.0	28.0	71.0	1.0	99.0

Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3); and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The results for the notion of the psychological factor of self-confidence show that the majority of the study respondents (80.0%) agreed that they confidently participate in English speaking activities in the classroom (item 4.1); 99.0 percent perceive that self-confidence affects oral performance in English (item 4.2); 96.0 percent opine that maximizing the exposure to spoken English is a good way to build self-confidence in students (item 4.4), and 99.0 percent agreed that encouragement has an important role in building self-confidence to speak in English (item). The findings also show that a large fraction of the study respondents (78.0%) affirmed that they find learning English demotivating due to lack of self-confidence (item 4.3). Overall findings for the effect of the psychological factor of self-confidence reveal that the respondents perceive that self-confidence plays a positive role in encouragement and has a positive role in enhancing speaking performance in English. The findings also suggest that building EFL students’ self-confidence through motivation, exposure to spoken English, and encouragement to speak in English leads to speaking English confidently.

Table 5 presents data on the psychological factor of Self-esteem.

Table 5. Self-Esteem

Items	SDA	DA	A	SA	CDA	CA
5.1 I think that students with high self-esteem are better at speaking in English	1.0	10.0	34.0	55.0	11.0	89.0

5.2 Lack of self-esteem is closely related to students' anxiety level when required to speak in English	0.0	7.0	59.0	34.0	7.0	93.0
5.3 I feel others are better than me in speaking in English	2.0	22.0	43.0	33.0	24.0	76.0
5.4 I get worried before speaking in English	12.0	33.0	28.0	27.0	45.0	55.0
5.5 I feel my fluency in speaking in English is good	1.0	27.0	55.0	17.0	28.0	72.0
5.6 I think that self-esteem affects my oral performance in English	2.0	12.0	54.0	32.0	14.0	86.0

Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3); and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The results suggest that the majority of the respondents (89.0%) agree that students with high self-esteem are better at speaking in English (item 5.1). Further results reveal that the majority of the respondents (93.0%) feel that lack of self-esteem is closely related to students' anxiety level when they are required to speak in English (item 5.2). Pertaining to the effect of the psychological factor of self-esteem on respondents' oral performance in English, the results exhibit that the majority of the students (76.0%) in this study feel that others are better than them in speaking in English (item 5.3); and 86.0 percent feel that self-esteem affects their oral performance in English (item 5.6). Although a large percentage of the respondents (72.0%) reported that they feel that their fluency in speaking in English is good (item 5.5), 55.0% of the respondents reported that they get worried before speaking in English (item 5.4). The overall findings in this section unfold that the study respondents perceive that self-esteem has a positive effect on oral performance in English.

Table 6 presents the results for the psychological factor of anxiety.

Table 6. Anxiety

Items	SDA	DA	A	S	CDA	CA
6.1 I feel more stressed when required to speak in English rather than reading and writing	10.0	28.0	29.0	33.0	38.0	62.0
6.2 I feel anxious in the classroom	12.0	42.0	28.0	18.0	54.0	46.0
6.3 Comparisons with others makes me nervous, which increases my anxiety	7.0	26.0	39.0	28.0	33.0	67.0
6.4 I feel nervous due to anxiety when asked to present in English in front of the class	14.0	29.0	30.0	27.0	43.0	57.0
6.5 I think that anxiety is one of the main blocking factors in effective speaking of the English language	1.0	12.0	46.0	41.0	13.0	87.0
6.6 I think that I cannot speak English fluently due to anxiety	4.0	26.0	45.0	25.0	30.0	70.0
6.7 I think that more focus should be given to students' participation in oral activities in English to help them overcome anxiety	2.0	5.0	35.0	58.0	7.0	93.0

Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3); and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The overall findings on the psychological factor of anxiety indicate that the majority (87.0% and 93.0%, respectively) of the respondents felt that anxiety is one of the main blocking factors in effective speaking of the English language (item 6.5) and that more focus should be given to students' participation in oral activities in English to help them overcome anxiety (item 6.7). Similarly, a large percentage of the respondents (70.0%) responded that they think that they cannot speak English fluently due to anxiety (item 6.6). There were mixed findings on the items regarding various feelings associated with speaking in English resulting from anxiety. Where a large percentage of the respondents (62.0%) responded that they feel more stressed when required to speak in English rather than reading and writing (item 6.1); 67.0 percent reported that comparisons

with others make them nervous, which increases their anxiety (item 6.3), and 57.0 percent agreed that they feel nervous due to anxiety when asked to present in English in front of the class. However, 54.0 percent of the respondents disagreed with the idea that they feel anxious in the classroom, which indicated that the students' anxiety level increases when they have to speak in English in the classroom.

Table 7 presents results of the psychological factor of shyness.

Table 7. Shyness

Items	SDA	DA	A	SA	CDA	CA
7.1 I think that shyness is the main reason for reluctance in asking questions in English	7.0	27.0	37.0	29.0	34.0	66.0
7.2 I feel shy to speak in English if everyone in classroom is looking at me	13.0	42.0	20.0	25.0	55.0	45.0
7.3 I am too shy to participate in speaking activities in English even if I know the answer	14.0	41.0	23.0	22.0	55.0	45.0
7.4 I have phobia of speaking in English in front of the people	17.0	41.0	25.0	17.0	58.0	42.0
7.5 I go blank and forget what to say during any oral activities in English	14.0	39.0	24.0	23.0	53.0	47.0
7.6 I am unable to show my ability to show ability to speak in English at my best	5.0	39.0	26.0	30.0	44.0	56.0

Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3); and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The data for the psychological factor of shyness reveals that a large segment of the study respondents (66.0%) agreed that shyness is the main reason for reluctance in asking questions in English (item 6.1). Although more than half of the respondents (56.0%) responded in affirmation to item No. 7.6 (*I am unable to show my ability to show the ability to speak in English at my best*); however, more than half of the study respondents showed disagreement with the rest of the statements. The findings show that 55.0 percent each of the respondents disagreed with the statement that *I feel shy to speak in English if everyone in the classroom is looking at me* (item 7.2), and *I am too shy to participate in speaking activities in English even if I know the answer* (item 7.3). Similarly, 58.0 percent of the respondents disagreed that they have a phobia of speaking in English in front of people (item 7.4); and 53.0 percent responded that they do not go blank and forget what to say during any oral activities in English (item 7.5). However, it cannot be ignored that a consistently noticeable proportion of respondents indicated facing challenges associated with shyness when they are required to speak in English.

Table 8 presents results for the psychological factor of fear of making mistakes.

Table 8. Fear of making mistakes

Items	SDA	DA	A	SA	CDA	CA
8.1 My teachers correct my mistakes when I am performing an oral task in English, which makes me feel ashamed in front of my peers	3.0	37.0	41.0	19.0	40.0	60.0
8.2 Fear of being laughed at by others makes me nervous about speaking in English	4.0	43.0	29.0	24.0	47.0	53.0
8.3 Fear of being criticized by others makes me reluctant to speak in English	6.0	32.0	37.0	25.0	38.0	62.0
8.4 My fear of making mistakes inhibits the process of speaking in English	4.0	32.0	47.0	17.0	36.0	64.0

8.5 I have a certain comfort level with my teachers that helps me in overcoming my fear of making mistakes while speaking in English	2.0	12.0	47.0	39.0	14.0	86.0
8.6 I have a supporting class atmosphere which helps me in overcoming my fear of making mistakes in English	1.0	12.0	50.0	37.0	13.0	87.0

Note. SDA= Strongly Disagree (1); D= Disagree (2); A= Agree (3); and SA= Strongly Agree (4)

The findings in relation to the psychological factor of fear of mistakes show that 60.0 percent of the respondents agreed to the notion that their teachers tend to correct the mistakes committed by them while speaking in English and that this practice on the part of the teachers makes these students feel ashamed in front of their peers due to being unable to speak in English (item 8.1). Further findings revealed a mixed response where a little more than half (53.0%) of the study respondents responded in agreement, and a little less than half (47.0%) of them showed disagreement with the statement that fear of being laughed at by others makes them nervous about speaking in English (item 8.2). Similarly, a large number of the study respondents (62.0% and 64.0%, respectively) responded in agreement that fear of being criticized by others makes them reluctant to speak in English (item 8.3) and that their fear of making mistakes inhibits the process of speaking in English (item 8.4). Whereas a noticeable percentage of the respondents reported disagreement with the aforementioned feelings (item 8.3 and item 8.4). Further findings for this section show that the majority of the respondents (86.0% and 87.0%, respectively) agreed to have a certain comfort level with their teachers that helps them in overcoming their fear of making mistakes while speaking in English (item 8.5) and a supporting classroom atmosphere which helps them in overcoming their fear of making mistakes in English (item 8.6).

Discussion

The oral performance of ESL/EFL students can be affected by a number of factors that may be either internal or external. Many researches have studied this issue, but their findings vary depending upon the research

participants, research contexts and time when the studies were carried out. The findings of this study show that there is a direct relationship between students' oral performance and psychological factors. Based on the findings, there are a few main psychological factors that have been found to affect students' oral performance. These factors are lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, anxiety, shyness and fear of making mistakes. These factors affect not only the one who is presenting in the class but also the ones who are sitting as the audience. A similar study was carried out by [Sato \(2003\)](#) to explore the role of psychological factors on speaking skills. His results revealed that psychological factors are connected with learners' inner state, especially at the time of oral performance, and the most common reasons hindering oral performance are lack of self-confidence and lack of self-esteem. [Sato \(2003\)](#) further stated that students are highly interested in learning a new language, but these psychological factors create obstacles in their learning process. In another study conducted by [Abda \(2017\)](#), the findings indicated that many students agreed that they are unable to practice English mostly because of the factors of fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence and lack of motivation.

The findings of the present study further show that the psychological factors are interlinked; for example, lack of confidence can be the result of shy nature or lack of motivation or self-esteem. This aspect has also been proved by prior literature. For example, [Moosa et al. \(2011\)](#) studied 9th-grade female students in Pakistan and found that there lies a positive relationship between self-esteem and shyness, and shyness may be the reason for the lack of self-esteem in students, but the level of shyness may vary in different students. Similarly, [Park and Lee \(2005\)](#) contended that students' oral performance is negatively connected with the level of anxiety and learners' oral performance is highly dependent on their perception of ability to speak and self-confidence. The more the learners are stressed, the more it will affect their oral performance ([Park & Lee, 2005](#)).

In the present study, most of the respondents agreed that the fear of making mistakes is the most common fear among all fears, and anxiety and lack of self-confidence are directly linked with the fear of mistakes. The causes of fear of mistakes include fear of being laughed at by others and negative evaluation by teachers, and sometimes the fear of criticism by others. Similar findings were reported by [Ayub and Lodhi \(2016\)](#), who evidenced that the causes of anxiety can be shy nature or fear of making mistakes. [Juhana \(2012\)](#) also shared the same findings that most ESL students are having a fear of making mistakes because either they are having a low level of English language background or they are afraid of being laughed at by their peers.

Conclusion

Referring to the aim of the study, it is concluded that psychological factors like fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation are responsible for affecting oral English language skills of ELT and TESOL postgraduate students. Fear of mistakes can be due to fear of being laughed at by others and fear of criticism. Shyness is the result of the reserved nature of students. Whereas anxiety can be the reason for lack of self-confidence and lack of self-esteem. The findings show that motivated students are more successful language learners. Therefore, attention should be paid to reduce the effects of these aforementioned factors, and possible solutions should be deduced.

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