

Towards Enhancing Effective Participation of Reluctant EFL Students in Presentation Sessions at Qassim University

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Abstract

The current paper's objective is to determine why some EFL students at Qassim University, KSA, find it difficult to give their public presentations demanded by some departments' curricula as a college requirement. Recently, the author observed that some EFL students are very reluctant to participate in public speaking sessions until the allotted time expires although they know that they are going to lose grades at the end of the day for not participating. A quantitative research methodology is used to acquire the data. A questionnaire containing (17) items was designed and distributed to a sample of (52) EFL students representing the total number of students enrolled in two theoretical linguistic courses during the academic year (1443 -1444). After collecting and analysing the data, the study showed that some students feel shy and intentionally avoid public speech in EFL classes because they come with hardly negligible experiences in public speech when enrolled as tertiary-level students.

Keywords: public speech, shyness, grades, course assessment, teaching methods

1. Introduction

Recently the researcher has observed that the number of reluctant EFL students who find it difficult to give their public presentations in speaking sessions is gradually increasing. Teachers' and learners' personality traits, emotions, and other affective factors should be viewed as essential determinants of a successful teaching/learning experience given the communicative and collaborative nature of the teaching/learning process (Brown, 2007).

Bridges (1975) noted several student anxieties, including inhibition caused by the tutor's knowledge and worries that the tutor's inquiries were tests of their knowledge or that the tutor's inconsistencies were rejections of their theories. The vast literature review additionally shows that students descending from different personalities, such as uninspired, nervous, introverted, extroverted, and shy people participate in class because no two students in a classroom setting are the same. Thus, shyness itself is a social phenomenon as clearly stated by Pilkonis (1977) who believes that shyness is a tendency to avoid social interactions and to fail to participate adequately in social situations. And there seem to be different views of shyness in general, as pointed out by (Crozier, 2001) who claims that there are two perspectives on shyness. First of all, it is a condition that most people feel occasionally and that is most likely to occur in unfamiliar social situations and when we anticipate being assessed by others (Crozier, 2001).

The study questions

The main objective behind conducting this study is to better understand why some EFL students at Qassim University find it difficult to give their public presentations demanded by some departments' curricula as a college requirement. In other words, the study aims at finding answers to the following questions to accomplish the aforementioned goals:

- What connection exists between the EFL students' shyness and their reluctance in English-speaking sessions?
- Is there a larger correlation between shyness and the EFL students' lack of experiences at the public education stage?
- Do EFL learners' results in some theoretical linguistics courses have a larger correlation with shyness?

Statement of the problem

It seems problematic when having some reluctant and shy students who find it difficult to submit a requested project or find it challenging to speak in front of others as if they have a poor opinion of themselves. Shy EFL students enrolled in some theoretical linguistics courses at Qassim University frequently avoid public speech though they knew that providing it is a vital assessment tool according to the course specification. And then we can say that such reluctances require deep investigation to provide some solutions and suggestions on the phenomenon. The author has recently noticed that some EFL students are quite hesitant to participate in these sessions until the specified time has passed, even though they are aware that they would lose their grades at the end of the day. This phenomenon is certainly attributable to the adoption of some traditional teaching methods. For instance, familiarizing a teaching approach such as (Grammar Translation

Method) where teachers focus on teaching specific skills such as reading and writing, and ignoring the role of listening and speaking, adversely affects the students' level. As a consequence, they obtain bad grades in speaking classes. Therefore, the researcher thinks that unless we praise and encourage shy students in speaking sessions they may stop being interested in presentation giving, and as a result, they may progressively lose grades in some theoretical courses such as Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, as well as Semantics and Pragmatics where the overall assessment requires at least presenting one single seminar throughout the course.

2. Literature Review

Brodt and Zimbardo (1981), who were pioneers in the field of psychology, claimed that certain people are psychologically impacted by what other people think of them and how they behave. As a result, these so-called shy persons avoid social situations where they might encounter critical remarks from others at all costs. Since English has been taught all over the world, it is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to be familiar with these psychological aspects of language learning so that EFL students can internalize their understanding of future implementation and get the most out of the materials (Al-Ahdal & Almarshedi, 2022; Ahmadi-Azad et al., 2020; Mohamadian, 2013; Noreen et al., 2019). The development of the Big Five personality model by Eysenck and Eysenck (1985) is regarded as a crucial effort to include personality factors of teachers and students into the learning process. In order to create a welcoming and encouraging learning environment for the students, surgency and immediacy are among the most effective affective elements teachers can use (Alzabidi & Al-Ahdal, 2022; Swenddal, 2011; Shabani & Ghasemian, 2017; Zuckerman, 2005).

The introversion/extraversion (also known as surgency) dimension, which should be interpreted as if individuals might be gifted with a degree of each side, was one of the main features of the model, according to MacIntyre et al. (2019). Extraversion in particular displays people's desire to fit in with the community. For instance, John et al. (2008) thought that being extroverted is linked to engaging in social situations, encouraging good feelings, and boosting confidence (Malki, 2020). Therefore, highly extroverted people are more likely to be perceived as enthusiastic, talkative, and amiable people (Deniz & Satici, 2017). The literature review conducted also shows that speaking abilities are inversely connected with shyness, 200 college and university students in South Punjab were studied by Ahsan et al. (2020) to observe the influence of shyness on EFL learners' speaking ability.

To gauge the level of shyness, they used a structured questionnaire created by the researcher. According to the study's findings, speaking ability and spoken language acquisition in EFL students are both correlated with shyness and lack of confidence. According to Tang and Schmidt (2017) and Rebecca Chu (2008), shyness is also seen as a barrier to forming connections and starting conversations.

In studying the relationship between shyness and its impact on language learning, Chien-Tzu Liao (2006) looked into the relationships between the English language acquisition of introverted college students in Taiwan. The study discovered that Taiwanese college students' ability to acquire English in the areas of speaking, listening, and reading is unaffected by their shyness. Shyness and Communication Apprehension (CA) are two different things, but based on how students behave, teachers can probably tell them apart.

In Taiwan, (23.5%) of sophomores have CA scores above average, and (69%) have CA scores in the median. The ancestry reveals the general situation that few volunteers answer questions in conversation classes and most of the students are hesitant to interact with peers in language classes (Chien-Tzu, 2006). Moreover, Keller et al. (2013) investigated whether shyness in preschool-aged immigrant children is a risk factor for second language learning. They chose to study (130) immigrant preschoolers longitudinally and (330) bilingual immigrant preschoolers cross-sectionally.

To determine whether a participant is shy or not, researchers observed them and questioned their parents about how they behaved. By taking into account these subtests—word comprehension, sentence comprehension, word production, and sentence production—they also evaluated their second language proficiency. The findings showed that shy immigrant children had lower second language proficiency and slower language development than their non-shy peers (Keller et al., 2013).

3. Methodology

A quantitative research methodology is used to acquire the data. A sample of (52), EFL students were given a questionnaire by the researcher that contained (17) items. The purpose of the questionnaire is to assess their opinions regarding how shyness is behind their unwillingness to give a public speech presentation as required among overall evaluation criteria for some theoretical linguistics courses. Thus, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to two different groups representing EFL students enrolled in two different theoretical linguistic courses. Both courses required presentation giving among their overall assessment tools during the academic year (1443 -1444). The researcher noted the reluctance of students to participate in public seminars despite their full knowledge of the student evaluation criterion in the courses concerned. Three experts assessed the questionnaire items and made minor structural adjustments before distributing them to the study participants. Each questionnaire item needed a response using a five-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, which was used to measure the participants' attitudes towards the items. To illustrate the findings, the researcher used several illustrative tables and a chart as shown below:

Table 1. shows the questionnaire items from (1-17)

Item no.	The questionnaire items
Q1	EFL students feel reluctant to give their requested presentations ().
Q2	EFL students find it difficult to participate in a public speech ().
Q3	EFL students come to colleges with little experience in a public speech ().
Q4	Teachers endeavour to reduce EFL students' anxiety levels in class ().
Q5	Teachers regularly attempt to create a friendly and collaborative learning environment in EFL classes ().
Q6	Some EFL students find it difficult to state their ideas clearly in English ().
Q7	Teachers use gentle or non-threatening error correction methods to encourage shy EFL students ().
Q8	They make judicious use of purposeful group work with collaborative activities ().
Q9	They use interesting topics that are relevant to the course for EFL class discussions and exercises ().
Q10	They consider decreasing the amount of syllabus that is supposed to be covered during a given semester ().
Q11	Teachers reinforce EFL students to choose diverse topics when giving their presentations ().
Q12	They give individual feedback for homework assignments ().
Q13	They speak more slowly and consider using English to clarify some key points when teaching EFL students ().
Q14	They encourage EFL students to use different learning strategies ().
Q15	They carefully listen to and encourage EFL students to speak in public before evaluating them ().
Q16	Teachers let EFL students introduce themselves in English to determine the most anxious ones ().
Q17	They allow EFL students to display their presentations in class ().

Table 2. shows the percentages of the study subjects' responses to the entire questionnaire items (1-17) in conjunction with (Mean) approaching figure (2) which suggests that the participants' overall responses on the entire items are very close to the first two points of the five-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree and agree)

Item no.	Percentage					Mean
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q1	30,8	51,9	11,5	5,8	0	1,92
Q2	34,6	21,2	28,8	8,3	11,5	2,37
Q3	67,3	15,4	3,8	5,8	7,7	1,71
Q4	23,1	30,8	36,5	9,6	0	2,33
Q5	40,4	23,1	11,5	25,0	0	2,21
Q6	26,9	26,9	25,0	17,3	3,8	2,44
Q7	32,7	30,8	23,1	9,6	3,8	2,21
Q8	28,8	30,8	21,2	11,5	7,7	2,38
Q9	25,0	21,2	25,0	26,6	1,9	2,60
Q10	48,1	21,2	25,0	3,8	1,9	1,90
Q11	28,8	28,8	26,9	5,8	9,6	2,38
Q12	30,8	31,2	23,1	15,4	9,6	2,52
Q13	26,9	28,8	15,4	15,4	13,5	2,60
Q14	53,8	19,2	15,4	9,6	1,9	1,87
Q15	34,6	26,9	25,0	7,7	5,8	2,23
Q16	36,5	15,4	21,2	15,4	11,5	2,90
Q17	51,9	13,5	26,9	3,8	3,8	1,91

Table 3. displays the frequencies of the study subjects' responses to the entire questionnaire items (1-17), and as clearly shown in the table the heights frequencies of the participants' responses centered on the first two points of the five-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree and agree)

Item no.	Frequencies				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q1	16	27	6	3	0
Q2	18	11	15	2	6
Q3	35	8	2	3	4
Q4	12	16	19	5	0
Q5	21	12	6	13	0
Q6	14	14	13	9	2
Q7	17	16	12	5	2
Q8	15	16	11	6	4
Q9	13	11	13	14	1
Q10	25	11	13	2	1
Q11	15	15	14	3	5
Q12	16	11	12	8	5
Q13	14	15	8	8	7
Q14	28	10	8	5	1
Q15	18	14	13	4	3
Q16	19	8	11	8	6
Q17	27	14	7	2	2

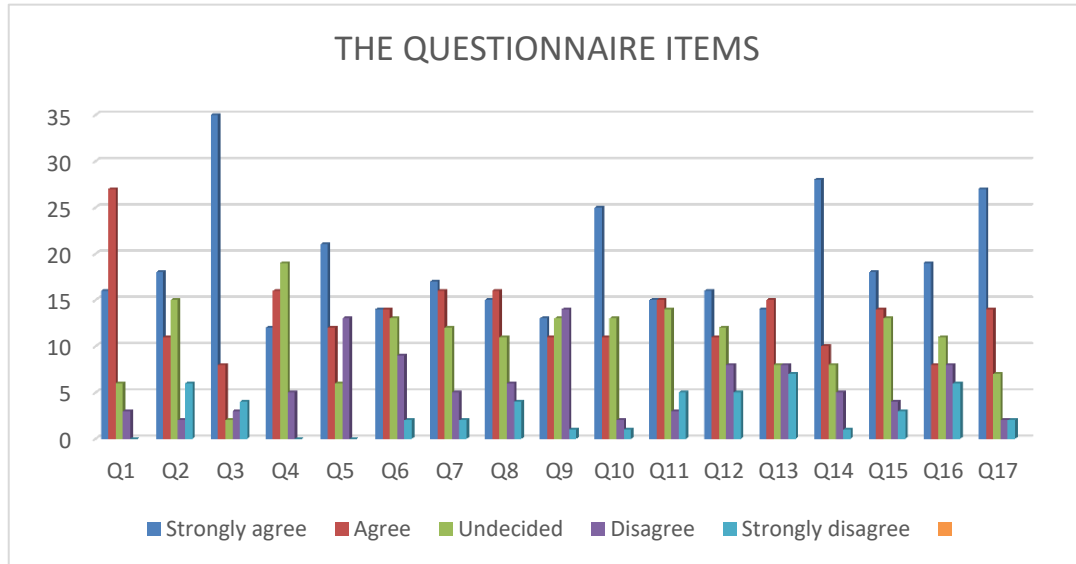


Chart 1. The attached chart summarizes the most important findings based on the study subjects’ responses on the entire questionnaire items (1-17) concerning the five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree

4. Results and Discussion

Regarding the main objective, the present study aims at identifying how shyness affects EFL students’ performance in speaking sessions to the point of deciding not to participate even in oral presentations though they know the assessment criteria concerning some theoretical linguistics courses. In one of the courses, (33) EFL students were enrolled at the beginning of the term, and as the presentation should be given throughout the term, at least one presentation. However, when calculating the grades by the end of the semester an estimated percentage of (24%) of students from the total number failed to give even a single presentation deciding to lose the dedicated marks instead of facing their classmates. Additionally, in another course, (7) out of (19) students representing an estimated percentage of (36%) also show their lack of seriousness in participating by requesting a repeated postponement of the presentation date. As clearly stated by the percentage and frequencies tables as well as the chart, we can summarize the most important findings in the following points:

When responding to the first item” EFL students feel reluctant to give their requested presentations”, nearly (82%) of the study subjects think that EFL students consistently feel reluctant during oral presentation classes and that is why some fail to give their presentations although they know that they are going to lose the presentation grades in case of non-participation. The importance of studying this problem in depth is associated with many factors among which is that students as human beings have different personalities according to the vast literature review conducted. For instance, studies show that students descending from different personalities, such as uninspired, nervous, introverted, extroverted, and shy people participate in class because no two students in a classroom setting are the same. So, we think that the teachers’ role lies in considering the diverse personalities to address students’ weaknesses and encourage them to participate in speaking sessions.

Regarding the second questionnaire item” EFL students find it difficult to participate in public speaking “the tables show that almost (60%) of the subjects tended towards agreeing with the questionnaire item, in contrast, (35 %) of panelists were either undecided about the item or disagree with its approval.

Concerning the third study item “EFL students come to colleges with little experience in public speaking” a large number of participants surpassing (81%) confirmed that students join colleges with a lack of experience in public speaking, and that is why they find it difficult to learn it at this stage. Therefore, it is extremely important to refer to the teacher’s role, especially in supporting and encouraging shy students during speaking sessions. This can be done step by step, for example, they can learn first to speak in small groups before asking them to participate in larger ones.

This phenomenon is frequent during each semester in some theoretical courses such as Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, as well as Semantics and Pragmatics where the overall assessment requires at least presenting one single seminar throughout the course. Thus, the study also aims at investigating challenges encounter with public presentations particularly when students are aware of its importance in increasing and decreasing their grades when being evaluated at the end of the semester. It seems as if they are afraid to speak in public, and we can say that such a kind of shyness is not a fledgling stage, but is tied to the student's background at preceding stages.

The study also shows that (46%) of the participants stand against the approval of the following questionnaire item “Teachers endeavour to reduce EFL students’ anxiety levels in class”. While (50%) of them confirmed that teachers regularly attempt to reduce their anxiety level throughout the oral presentation sessions. Furthermore, the fifth item illustrates a considerable number of the panelists almost (53%) agreeing that the environment in EFL classes is to some extent friendly and it prevails a kind of cooperative learning. The data demonstrate

an average percentage of the participants nearly (56%) support the concept of questionnaire item no (7) “Some EFL students find it difficult to state their ideas clearly in English “

Meanwhile, the panelists did not support an important note with reflection to the succeeding item “They make judicious use of purposeful group work with collaborative activities” as they clearly state that group work is rarely organized in EFL classes. This point is affirmed by (46%) of the study subjects. And so, we can say that these data reflect one reality, the reality of the traditional teaching environment where the learning process is mainly focused on the teachers’ instructions including the arrangement of classes in a way where it is difficult for students to sit in small groups. Moreover, factors such as the large class settings should also be considered as we have been witnessing a huge enrolment of students.

The study subjects also support the concept of decreasing the amount of syllabus that is supposed to be covered during a given semester. The table indicated a percentage of (70%) who reinforced the reality of the previous questionnaire item.

The most important findings also indicated that there is a percentage of (55%) who supported the realism of the following questionnaire item” Teachers reinforce EFL students to choose diverse topics when giving their presentations”.

Reflecting on the author’s experience with teaching some linguistics courses, this means that students have the flexibility of choosing their topics to give the required presentations, however, the chosen topic must be relevant to the course. The study also shows that almost (25%) of the participants disagree with the reality of the immediate individual feedback following the students’ presentations, the point which is clearly stated when responding to questionnaire item no. (25) “They give individual feedback for homework assignments”.

This percentage illustrates that by ignoring individual feedback, teachers may unconsciously reduce the face – to face – level of interaction, and the opportunity of establishing strong rapport when teaching speaking, however, their intervention benefits shy students and encourages them to break the fear barrier which is necessary for learning speaking.

Furthermore, when the study subjects were asked if teachers regularly clarify the main points when teaching speaking, a percentage of participants exceeding (55%) reflected on showing their viewpoint on the questionnaire item “They speak more slowly and consider using English to clarify some key points when teaching EFL students”.

The data conducted also show that (30%) of the participants don’t support the fact that they had enough encouragement to speak in public before being evaluated when reflecting on the next item “They carefully listen to and encourage EFL students to speak in public before evaluating them”. These findings are interpreted as if teachers sometimes ask students to participate during such speaking sessions aiming at monitoring their errors for the overall evaluation. This assumption makes the shy student a shyer individual who may not effectively participate in public speaking sessions.

Likewise, a percentage similar to the forgoing one, the study subjects did not support the concept of displaying their presentation topics on the board when reflecting on the following questionnaire item “They allow EFL students to display their presentations in class”.

And thus, we can say that the low ratio of the participants’ disagreement with the above-mentioned item indicates the reality of our traditional teaching methods which are still dominant in speaking classes. We have built this hypothesis accordingly because the subjects already know that the word “display” used in the questionnaire item refers to the opportunity of using modern smartphone and computer applications such as PowerPoint to display their work instead of presenting it in a traditional way that does not exceed the student’s standing in front of others to introduce the requested seminar.

5. Conclusion

Although they were aware that giving public speeches is a crucial assessment method in accordance with the course requirements, shy EFL students enrolled in several theoretical linguistics courses at Qassim University generally avoid doing so. And thus, it seems as if they have a low impression of themselves, it seems problematic to have some reserved and shy students who find it difficult to turn in a required assignment or find it difficult to talk in front of others. This will affect how motivated they are to communicate in EFL sessions. We might then conclude that in order to offer some answers and suggestions regarding the phenomena, such reluctances necessitate a thorough examination.

6. Recommendations

The study accordingly recommends the following:

1. Shy EFL students should be divided into small groups to reduce anxiety levels during presentation sessions.
2. Teachers should avoid providing individual feedback to shy EFL students in front of their classmates.

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Appendixes

Item no.	The questionnaire items
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Q2	EFL students find it difficult to participate in a public speech ().
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Q15	They carefully listen to and encourage EFL students to speak in public before evaluating them ().
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Q17	They allow EFL students to display their presentations in class ().

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