



# The Relationship Between Shyness and Self-Perception in English Language Communication: Effects and Strategies

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**Abstract:** Shyness is a psychological factor that causes students to avoid communicative situations or stay silent. University students are expected to learn and communicate in English within classrooms and outside. Most of the students facing shyness are afraid to verbally communicate and participate. They may encounter doubt in ability or lack proficiency that leads to avoiding interactive situations. This study investigates learning about the shyness within communication that university students face and their self-view of their verbal language abilities. Moreover, its purpose was to identify shyness and self-perception's potential effects on communicating in English. Strategies available to overcome English-speaking apprehension were explored to aid in increasing confidence. A quantitative design was applied to amass responses from students. Tishk International University-Erbil, Catholic University in Erbil, and Cihan University were the settings used to obtain data from 185 students using a survey. The findings displayed that most of the surveyed students sometimes felt nervous and self-conscious when verbally interacting. Fascinatingly, many encountered the psychological factor of mistake making and overthinking. Practicing was the most helpful strategy chosen followed by listening to English media. Although some participants did feel shy speaking, the majority kept a neutral perspective towards their English communication. Regardless, this study has shown that participants were aware of their struggles, perceptions, and psychological factors that require further efforts and strategies to overcome.

**Keywords:** Shyness, Self-Perception, Students, English, Speaking

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Shyness is a significant feeling that can prompt and hinder an individual's ability to interact and express (Oflaz, 2019). This is frequently experienced by many individuals and prompts reactions of unease and comprehension while in unknown or social circumstances (Kiran, 2016).

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It leads to experiencing feelings of hesitation, awkwardness, a loss of thought, reduced confidence, and stress when attempting to communicate, especially in a foreign language. Within a university, students are thrust into various situations where they are expected to communicate; however, shyness when using a foreign language like English can be an obstacle (Amalou et al., 2021). Moreover, expecting university pupils to learn, communicate, and interact using English can be overwhelming and cause them to withdraw from even attempting when they do not feel properly supported or guided. Language usage requires university students to have confidence and positive self-perception to properly verbally express within and beyond classes (Done & Angus, 2024). Lack of confidence and low self-perception occurs within university students who are not aware of their capabilities or the need to practice improving their English.

Language usage and shyness are correlated because it requires learners to apply foreign sounds and rules when communicating. This can present anxiety towards verbal communication and prompt negative self-perception fueled by embarrassment of making mistakes. It will influence their ability to manage their bodily reactions and communicate while attending lectures, doing activities, and working on tasks or with peers. Hence, awareness of the impacts and knowledge of effective strategies to manage shyness can do wonders to improve learners' language usage. Additionally, ensuring students have adequate confidence in their language usage or attempts is necessary to ensure that they do not halt their efforts in communicating, especially in educational settings (Done & Angus, 2024). These efforts contribute towards identifying strategies that work to reduce shyness and increase self-confidence. It makes learners certain that mistakes when using a foreign language are a common part of the process and asking for support is acceptable.

Shyness is a common yet often overlooked factor that can significantly hinder higher education learners' ability to communicate effectively in academic settings. Communication skills are essential for class participation, group work, presentations, and overall academic success. Shy students may experience reduced engagement, lower confidence, and limited opportunities for learning and interaction. Despite its clear impact, the relationship between shyness and communication remains insufficiently explored, especially as universities increasingly rely on active, collaborative, and digital learning environments. This research seeks to better understand how shyness affects students' communicative behaviors and academic participation to provide greater insights to aid learners.

## **1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study is based on the idea that affective factors, such as shyness and self-perception, strongly influence second and foreign language learning. Shyness is understood as feeling tense, self-conscious, or inhibited in social situations, especially when speaking in front of others. Self-perception in English communication refers to how learners judge their own competence, confidence, and ability to use English. Frequent experiences of shyness may lead students to avoid speaking and to see themselves as “not good” at English, which can lower their self-perception.

In this study, shyness in English language communication is the independent variable, and self-perception in English language communication is the dependent variable. The basic assumption is that higher shyness is linked to more negative self-perception in English communication. Demographic factors such as gender,



year of study, and years of learning English are treated as background variables that may also influence these two constructs.

### **1.3 Purpose Statement**

The purpose focuses on expanding our comprehension of university learners' experience with shyness during the educational process and in social situations. It will examine how the students feel and interact in the lecture hall and outside. Also, the study aids in highlighting strategies to reduce shyness and increase confidence in using a foreign language. Previous studies have explored the causes of shyness and potential ways to manage it; however, the focus on higher education learners lacks adequate investigation. Further investigation into the effects on university learners and strategies to help improve their self-perceptions are needed. Moreover, Tishk International University-Erbil, Cihan University, and Catholic University in Erbil are the higher education institutions that educate using the English language. The participants were grades 1 to 4 from these universities. Furthermore, the quantitative method was applied, and the learners were provided with a survey to express their thoughts and experiences and the strategies they are aware of that aid them in progressing. Thus, insight into higher education shyness fueled communicative struggles can contribute toward deepening awareness of the effects and methods to assist in developing confidence. The research gap that this study is contributing towards is gaining greater insight on the communication and shyness of adult learners attending higher education institutions in a middle eastern country.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What perceptions do learners have regarding their experiences with shyness when speaking in English?
2. What are the psychological and emotional factors that prompt university students' shyness?
3. What strategies can be applied to combat the influence of shyness to support English language usage?

### **1.5 Aim**

The aim is to dive into learners' perspectives regarding their level of shyness and self-perception of their English verbal usage to understand the affects it has on their abilities. It will investigate the views learners have regarding their English communication in class and outside. It will take a look at the psychological and emotion feelings that learners encounter and must manage while trying to communicate. Additionally, this study explores different strategies that learners may apply to manage challenges brought on by verbal shyness.

### **1.6 Hypothesis**

Shyness harmfully impacts university students' English language verbal usage during and beyond lectures.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Shyness

Shyness in language is a psychological hindrance that causes individuals to experience apprehension and insecurity, which negatively influences communicative aptitude in another language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Jones, Cheek, and Briggs (2013) shared that nearly all beings within their lives have encountered, understand, experienced shyness or related it to the actions of other beings. This presents that shyness is a relatable and common aspect of life that all individuals can recall or have observed at some point. Shyness can lead to verbal avoidance and decrease in communicative ability in individuals because they dread being judged or making mistakes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). It presents apprehensive behaviors and uneasiness within social exchanges due to being viewed negatively or embarrassed (Crozier, 2004). This prompts avoidance and halts language usage especially in educational settings. Additionally, shyness intensifies speaking anxiety, and this can develop by making it even more challenging to prompt individuals to verbally communicate (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Social encounters and situations are avoided by individuals dealing with shyness due to their fears (Pilkonis, 1977). This stems from wanting to avoid making mistakes and attracting negative perceptions from others based on their language usage. Also, shyness is encountered by all people, and it leads to being uncomfortable and feeling discontent. This shifts into a problem if a person cannot handle or control their shyness and it impacts on their private, social, and occupational interactions. Shy people may have a hard time going to celebrations, visiting people, meeting new individuals, and having unhindered communication, which impacts their social experiences (Shah & us Samad, 2025).

According to Norman (2012), those pupils experiencing shyness when verbally communicating likely display an unwillingness to join discussions or contribute regardless of knowing the proper answer, which occurs because of self-consciousness and wanting to limit attention. Shyness can prompt these individuals to apply passive methods that involve limited speaking and dependence on written replies. This reduces their chances of practicing and developing proficiency and aptitude in language (Ely, 1986). In the view of Aron et al. (2005), shyness is influenced by disposition and surroundings. This contributes to the idea that certain settings can deepen shyness, especially when a lot of attention is involved. Based on Cheek and Bus (1981), shyness is a possible personal response towards an unfamiliar person or an environment. This may lead to visible signs of tense stature, limited eye contact, or awkwardness. Also, university learners can experience common bodily reactions due to shyness or socially stressful events including quick heartbeats, trembling, bodily temperature shifting, and involuntary muscle movements (Beidel, Turner, & Dancu, 1981). Crozier (2004) described shyness as a sensation of vulnerability and nervousness regarding community engagement. People react differently to community engagement because of the attention and pressure that comes with interactions. That means that the pressure could provoke shyness and make people want to avoid involvement in social life. Regarding education and public, shyness likely affects the class and interactive atmosphere in a variety of ways; hence, this includes conversational partners, the educator, the pupils, and their interactive experiences.



## 2.2 Self-perception

Self-perception centers on the development of comprehending oneself by observing and interpreting encounters and behaviors. This greatly correlates with self-concept because it focuses on how individuals perceive their complete identity, aptitudes, and attributes (Harter, 2013). People begin becoming conscious of feelings, behavior, and internal workings through observing and perceiving their patterns of behavior and the situations causing these actions (Bem, 1972). Based on Leary and MacDonald (2003), inner and outer elements contribute to the formation of self-perception. Inner elements consist of feelings and ideas while outer involves expectations and reactions from people. Individuals or learners that are aware of their capabilities have strong self-esteem and work through obstacles and risks and participate in active educational methods (Habrat, 2018). Correspondingly, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) shared those experiences construct perceptions, which guide actions and shapes the self-view individuals have. Meaning that experience encountered can guide the views and behaviors of people. According to Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller, and Baumert (2005), pupils with effective self-assessment are effective at managing time properly and have successful academic performance. Self-perception guides how people address foreign language attainment and communication. Within language usage, language skills, social setting, and anxiety are aspects that affect self-perception. For instance, pupils who perceive their verbal language ability to be high often encounter less anxiety and this contributes to proper communication (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020). Similarly, those that self-perceive their proficiency insufficiently commonly encounter anxiety and this prompts hesitation towards joining communicative tasks specifically in public (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Thus, self-perception considerably influences a language user's view of their aptitude and inclination to communicate in another language.

## 2.3 Factors Prompting Shyness

Most pupils within educational systems globally are confronted with obstacles regarding utilizing speech. It impedes their development and slowly omits these pupils from the educational process because of the hardship of reaching fundamental communicating standards within English class (Al-Saadi, Tonawanik, & Harthy, 2013). During a course, foreign language pupils might encounter shyness or anxiousness. These negative emotions can be deepened when having to manage challenging and interactive tasks within lessons (Liu & Jackson, 2008). A factor that prompts shyness is the responses or reactions that peers or educators show the speaker. According to Zakaria, Masduki, and Ismail (2018), fear of underestimation or mockery causes pupils not to inquire about topics or ask for clarification, which stumps their communication development. It prompts avoidance in knowing or learning more by question because shyness holds them back. Within social environments, shy pupils communicate slightly less and are not as inclined to begin new subjects to talk about. They avoid gazes, do not present many expressions, and display nervousness (Leary & Kowalski, 1997). Ahsan, Asgher, and Hussain (2020) stated there are numerous socio-psychological factors that impede pupils' proficiency in English verbal communication. When using another language, learners encounter multiple challenges in finding proper words that suit a particular context or circumstance especially if they have inadequate vocabulary. Moreover, affective factors that influence verbal skills consist of psychological aspects like unconfidence, shyness, fears, apprehension, and anxiety. Learners with low confidence forestall the enhancement of oral fluency and eventually become uninterested and stop attempting to be proficient in communication especially towards



topics that they have insufficient word knowledge for (Chami & Boumediene, 2022). Absence of self-confidence leads to pupils being unable to gather bravery to willingly verbally express their thoughts within or outside of classes. Chen (2010) presented that the main cause of confidence deficiency in individuals is feeling unsure about their ability and strategies in oral English. This is a frequent feeling among English speakers because of the demand and expectation to communicate perfectly and with elevated confidence within social settings.

Also, the factor of anxiety is an obstacle that pupils most conquer to reach adequate verbal fluency. Pupils who encounter extreme anxiety or have low ability are likely to avoid even trying verbal communication entirely (Al-Saadi et al., 2013). According to Brown and Arnold (1999), anxiety is the most impactful and emotional factor that consistently makes learning a second language challenging. It prompts strong feelings that override individuals' determination and ability to apply language because of the intense worries that hold them back. Gebhard (2000) recognizes that a mental aspect that many second language learners encounter at some point is shyness especially while communicating in English within educational environments. It displays that shyness may be a source affecting learning and success in another language, specifically when participating in communication tasks. Inner thoughts regarding making mistakes or people's perception are factors that speakers are mentally confronted with. It may cause individuals to hesitate or reject verbal expression because it makes them unconfident and they want to avoid their thoughts becoming reality. Saurik (2011) indicates that pupils experience English communicational shyness due to thoughts about making significant mistakes or getting laughed at while conversing with educators and peers regarding instructional or educational tasks. Thus, a rise in unconfidence and shyness causes verbal communication success to lessen; however, as unconfidence and shyness decrease it causes a rise in verbal success (Ahsan et al. 2020).

#### **2.4 Psychological and Behavioral Influence on Language**

Shyness triggered by real world situations is a kind of apprehension that is often sparked by a social situation (Saunders, 2012). These situations can shape individuals' psychological and behavioral status that can influence language use, especially verbally. Language usage can be a daunting action that prompts fears and obstacles that individuals must push through and provide strong communication regardless of mistakes or proficiency. Moreover, Schumann (1998) stated that emotions are essential for learning languages. According to Henderson (2002), self-aware emotions of humiliation, blame, and discomfort make a shy pupil focus on themselves and mistakes occurring cause them to encounter shame centered feelings. Those feelings are linked to how shy pupils negatively think about themselves and reduce their communication. Shy people usually have bad self-reflection and self-doubt about their interpersonal habits, this leads them to keep away from social events, and isolation will increase (Zhao et al., 2012). Shy university pupils exhibit reduced oral conversation, leadership ability, and insufficient vocal creativity (Cheek & Stahl, 1986). Thus, it limits their chances of using language and communicating, which harms their development, creativity, and linguistic comfort. According to Shumin (1997), disinclination to orally converse in another language may occur from worries of doing things incorrectly, fear of disrespect, and possible other's negative perceptions. This leads to fear that happens while performing language, which is language anxiety, and this affects their achievements in communication and comprehension (Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013). Namaghi, Safaei, and Sobhanifar (2015) noted that shyness negatively impacts



scholarly performance and English-speaking aptitudes due to its ability to generate anxiety in communicating and refraining from deepening their learning. Shy pupils were seen to receive lower achievement on standard language examinations than their other classmates. The individuals that are hesitant to social achievement have presented lower achievements especially regarding verbal expressiveness (Evans, 1993; Gewirtz, 1948).

A psychological element that is often associated with language usage is lack of confidence. It often occurs due to pupils believing that the individual(s) they are communicating with did not understand the point being verbalized. Therefore, this would prompt silence within that speaker while the conversation is being continued, which signals unconfidence in verbalizing (Ahsan et al., 2020). Chu (2008) discovered that non-shy pupils are better at strategies of language learning than shy pupils because they have reduced their apprehension towards language usage. This can be attributed towards having strong psychological and emotional confidence in their knowledge and capabilities in language usage. Moreover, the emotional impact of shyness is due to being nervous or low confidence hampers skill growth specifically regarding verbal expression and fluency (Malik, Qin, & Oteir, 2021). Shyness may prompt people to present extensive anxiety regarding their language aptitudes and this likely leads to communicative unease and disinclination to converse (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). This verbal avoidance stems from fears of judgement or mistakes, which can be seen even within users of high proficiency (Samatovich & Ruzigul, 2023). Shy individuals share their experience significant communicative anxiety levels, irritation, guilt, and mortification, with greatly elevated ranges of anger and shame that predict passive aggression (Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998). These feelings arise in shy speakers because of the pressure, outer reactions, and unhelpful thoughts that hamper their language usage. Furthermore, Brown and Arnold (1999) contend that psychological aspects like anxiety and shyness may obstruct language development. Second language students decide to stay unspoken in the teaching room so that other students do not judge them, also thinking others feel they are dumb and concerned about errors. These pupils may choose not to verbally communicate within an educational setting due to concerns regarding mistakes and being viewed as distracted or dumb. Hence, providing psychological and emotional support to language users is essential for confidence and building a healthy environment for communication.

## **2.5 Shyness Strategies**

Shyness can be a struggle to manage and overcome; however, there are strategies that can be implemented to reduce its influence. Gradual exposure is beneficial in slowly having the individual interact with the language and conversational situations. This is an effective strategy to treat speaking anxiety because it supports a person to address their worries within a controlled pace (Hofmann et al., 2004). Moreover, visualization is another strategy that has been beneficial in lessening anxiety. It helps learners imagine a conversation where they are verbally communicating successfully. According to Hopf and Ayres (1992), visualization supported learners in lessening discouraging thoughts and anxiousness, which contributed to better and more relaxed speech encounters. According to Carducci (2009), forced extraversion is a strategy where shy people occasionally put themselves in the company of others. People shared that they visited public places, attended gatherings, clubs, shopping centers, and joined classes to form interactions with others and take action regarding their shyness. Moreover, mental self-reassurance is helpful through shy people using positive thinking to lessen their anxieties towards socializing. It prompts these people to



contemplate their shyness and worries regarding other people. Social fitness helps to manage feelings, interactions, and the vitality of active behavior to handle challenges through everyday communication practice and interactions with a variety of circumstances (Henderson, Gilbert, and Zimbardo, 2014). This supports learners to try using language in many situations and move forward with their verbal proficiency through practicing. Another helpful strategy shared in Carducci (2009) research was educational extraversion, which is where the people learn and research about their shyness. This can support them in overcoming shyness by making them informed and aware through reading helpful texts, joining workshops, or training to expand coping skills. Lastly, visiting professionals is a strategy where people seek guidance and support from specialists conducting various programs to improve shyness including therapy, workshops, training, and medications (Carducci, 2009).

According to Kondo and Yang (2003) preparation involves providing sufficient time for pupils to prepare for verbal exercise, which helps learners know what they want to express and how to express it. This time enables learners to organize ideas, words, and meanings, which contributes to lessening pressure and fear of mistakes. Moreover, relaxation is a strategy that aids many nervous ESL pupils because interacting in a safe atmosphere prompts speakers to be collected and active. When speakers are relaxed, they are more willing to communicate and display fewer verbal mistakes and hesitation. According to Pabro-Maquidato (2021), participants experience less anxiety through using the strategy of reading dictionaries and books to enhance their language aptitude. These resources provide speakers with better knowledge of the language and raise confidence. The beneficial aspect of using books and dictionaries to expand knowledge of language has led learners to practicing English verbal communication within educational interactions. Furthermore, the strategy of writing provides a chance to acknowledge the concept they possess in their thoughts based on the reading materials encountered. The learners focus and identify the information obtained through written communication, which supports managing second language struggles because their knowledge of words and meanings has grown. Hence, learners employing strategies to alleviate verbal communication shyness and anxiety is essential in overcoming obstacles and aiding verbal proficiency.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Design of Study**

This study focuses on the causes of university students' shyness and the effects it has on their spoken communication in the classroom that prompt anxieties and avoidance. The quantitative design was implemented to collect numerical information from university learners concerning shyness. A questionnaire was formed to receive responses from the university students, which presented statistical information. Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with 10 students similar to the target group who were not included in the final sample. The pilot was used to check the clarity of the instructions and items and the time needed to complete the survey. Based on their feedback, minor wording changes were made before administering the final version to the 185 participants. The questionnaire approach was utilized to acquire data from a multitude of contributors attending different universities. No formal sample size calculation was conducted. All eligible students who were present and agreed to participate during the data collection period were included, resulting in a final sample of 185 participants.



This research underwent a proposal process and review by the research committee of the education faculty of Tishk International University.

### **3.2 Setting and Participants**

The contributors were learners from three universities located within Erbil. These learners were attending the 2024 to 2025 academic year at Tishk International University in Erbil, Catholic University in Erbil, and Cihan University. Data was obtained from 185 contributors who were in grade 1 to 4 within their program. Female (126) participation was significantly higher than male (59). Most of the respondents (85%) were around the age of 17 to 23 while the remaining 15% were around 24 to 30 years old. Moreover, responses from Tishk International University- Erbil were 82 learners, from Catholic University in Erbil it was 76 learners, and from Cihan University it was 27 learners. English Language Teaching, Computer Education, Nursing, Pharmacy, Medical Laboratory Sciences, Biology Education, Translation, and Business Administration were the departments that contributed. Pupils voluntarily provided responses, which were kept anonymous and random to ensure privacy and reliability. Furthermore, shyness may be prevalent or experienced in these universities due to the language of instruction and communication being English. The pupils are required to use the English language within and beyond the lecture hall, which could prompt experiences of shyness and anxieties towards English communicative ability.

### **3.3 Instrument**

A questionnaire was made using Google Forms because of its ability to reach many departments within the three chosen universities easily. The questions centered on shyness encountered by university learners when verbally communicating in English, the effects they experience, and potential helpful strategies. This instrument contained questions that emphasized the impact of shyness when students verbally communicate to learn about their perspectives, nervousness, discomfort, self-esteem, and reactions when speaking. Moreover, the data was obtained from voluntary contributors anonymously. Question styles were multiple choice, checkboxes, linear scale, and multiple-choice grid. The questionnaire had 13 questions; however, question 7 was a grid that contained 14 sub-questions obtained from McCroskey and Richmond's (1982) Shyness Scale, a widely used instrument with well-documented validity and reliability in communication research.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

After completion of the surveys, the responses were organized through Google forms and underwent descriptive analysis. The responders' answers, including percentages and frequencies, were summarized and developed into graphs and charts to illustrate common themes and results. The main point of the data analysis was to find variations and recurring responses. Various published sources were reviewed to form and select questions that properly inquire about university learners' self-perception and shyness regarding English verbal communication to ensure the results are valid and reliable.



#### 4. Result

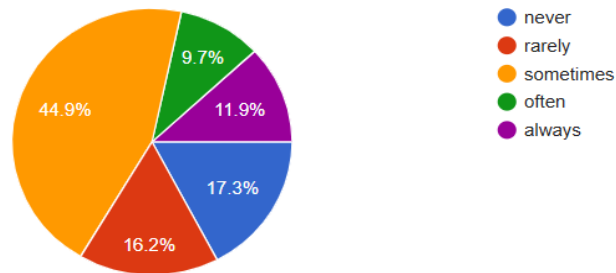


Figure 1: Do you feel nervous when verbally communicating in English during lessons and in public?

The participants were asked the frequency of feeling nervous when verbally communicating in English in lessons and in public. The choices listed to be chosen were never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. Sometimes received the highest percentage of 44.9%. The second highest was Never with 17.3% followed by Rarely with 16.2%. The two options with the lowest percentages from the students were Always with 11.9% and Often with 9.7%. The highest chosen option shows that many of the participants do encounter shyness when verbally communicating sometimes, which means that it is a feeling that may occur throughout conversations or participating.

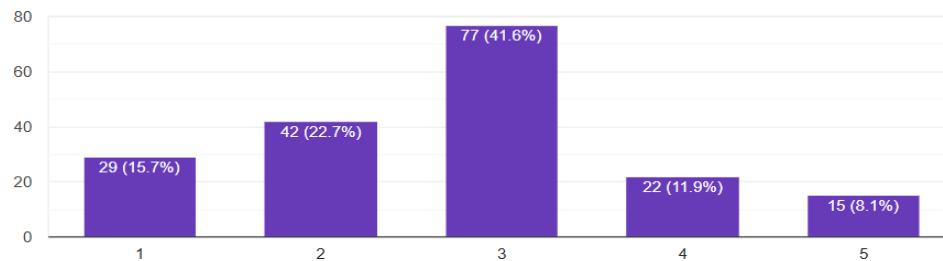


Figure 2: How would you rate the degree of shyness you experience? 1-Low to 5- High

The intensity of participants' shyness was inspected using a scale that employs a degree system from 1 to 5. 1 represented the positive outcome (low) and 5 indicated a negative outcome (high). 1 was selected by 29 students (15.7%), which indicated low shyness. 42 students (22.7%) chose 2 on the scale showing a relatively low degree of shyness. Degree 3 was the most frequently selected by the participants with 77 learners (41.6%), which indicated that participants' shyness was at a neutral degree. 22 learners (11.9%) picked 4 showing slightly high levels of shyness. The final degree of 5 was picked by 15 students (8.1%) implying that they encountered high levels of shyness. These findings presented that a majority experience shyness at a moderate degree meaning that that shyness is experienced by these individuals but not at high or low intensities.

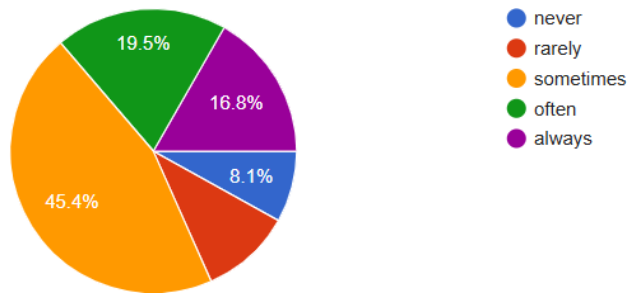


Figure 3: Do you feel self-conscious when speaking in English?

The occurrence of self-consciousness in pupils when speaking was inquired to determine frequency. The top two answers selected were sometimes and often. 45.4% selected sometimes while 19.5% picked often. Always received 16.8% and 8.1% chose never. The least chosen option was rarely with 10.3%.



Figure 4: Generally, what kind of self-perception do you have towards your communication in English?

Pupils were questioned regarding self-perception of their English communication. The options provided were positive, neutral, negative, and a mix of positive and negative. The positive perception was chosen by 37.3%. Neutral was selected by 33% and a mix of positive and negative got 24.9%. Finally, negative (4.9%) had the lowest selection. The findings for this question show that student perceive their communication mostly in positive or neutral views. This indicates that self-perception toward communication was not negatively affected by feelings like shyness.

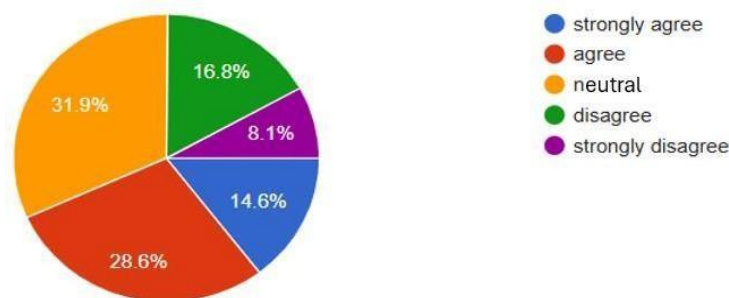


Figure 5: Do you think shyness reduces your self-esteem in English class?



The perspective of participants regarding shyness reducing self-esteem in the English classroom was inspected. Neutral (31.9%) was chosen the most by pupils regarding shyness lessened their self-esteem. Moreover, 28.6% agreed and 14.6% strongly agreed. Finally, 16.8% disagreed and 8.1% of pupils strongly disagreed.

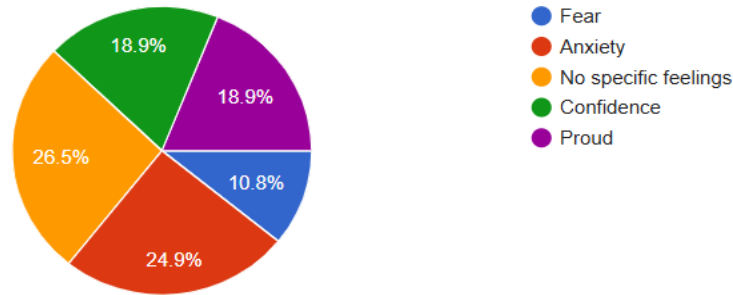


Figure 6: What feeling do you experience the most when verbally communicating in English?

Pupils were asked about the prominent feelings they experience while communicating in English. The commonly chosen options were no specific feelings and anxiety. No specific feelings was the highest with 26.5% followed by anxiety with 24.9%. The options of feeling confidence and proud were chosen by 18.9% of participants. Fear (10.8%) was the feeling least picked.

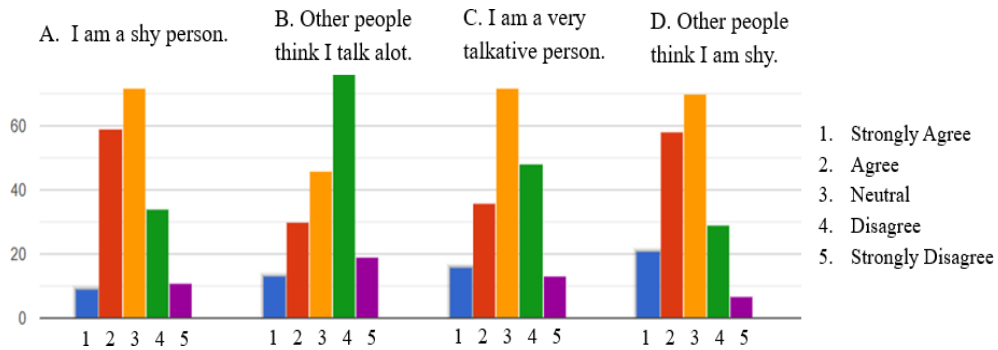


Figure 7: McCroskey Shyness Scale 1

The McCroskey Shyness Scale was incorporated into this survey. The item stating I am a shy person (A) received the most selections in neutral (72 pupils), agree (59 pupils), disagree (34 pupils), strongly disagree (11 pupils), and strongly agree (9 pupils). Statement B focused on if people see them as talkative to which 77 pupils disagreed, 46 pupils were neutral, 30 pupils agreed, 19 pupils strongly disagreed and 13 pupils strongly agreed. Moreover, contributors responded regarding if they perceived themselves as talkative (C). Neutral gained the most selection by 72 pupils followed by 48 for disagree and 36 for agree. 13 pupils strongly disagree that other people think I'm a very talkative person while 13 pupils strongly agree. Regarding if others view them as shy (D), 70 pupils selected neutral, 58 agreed, 29 disagreed. Finally, 7 pupils strongly disagree that other people think I am a shy person and 21 pupils strongly agree.

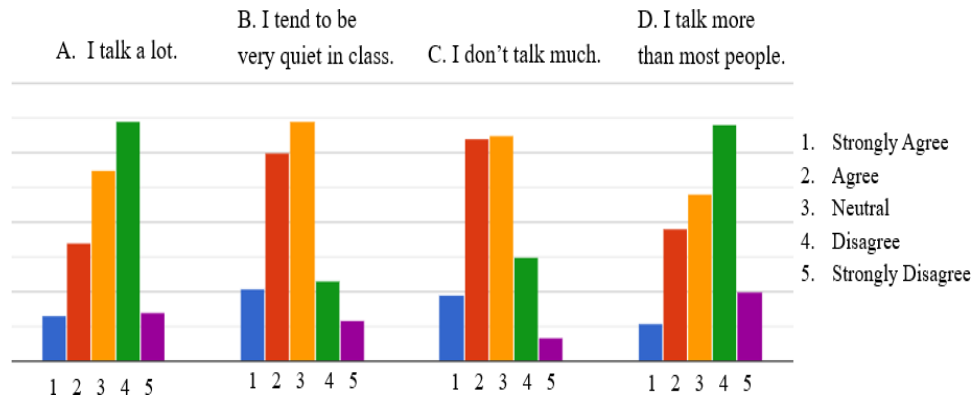


Figure 8: McCroskey Shyness Scale 2

Moreover, the McCroskey shyness scale question regarding I talk a lot (A) had the highest pick being disagree (69 pupils), followed by neutral (55 pupils), then agree (34 pupils), strongly disagree (14 pupils), and strongly agree (13 pupils). It was inquired if participants tend to be very quiet in class (B). 69 pupils were neutral, 60 agreed, and 23 disagreed, 12 strongly disagreed, 21 pupils strongly agreed that usually they are quiet. Participants responded if they did not talk too much (C). Neutral was the highest pick (65 pupils) and the second was agree (64 pupils) then disagree (30), 7 pupils picked strongly disagree, and 19 strongly agreed. The next question about if the respondent talked more than most (D) saw disagree as the highest pick (68 pupils) then neutral with 48 and 38 for agreed. The remaining choices received 20 pupils for strongly disagree and 11 for strongly agree.

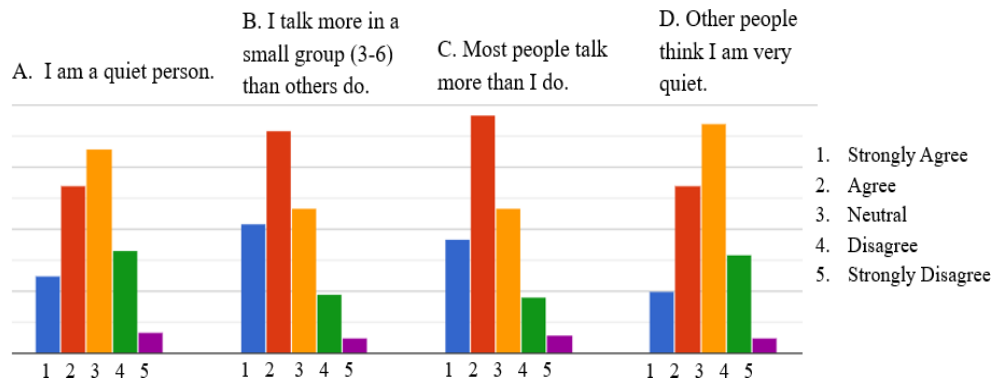


Figure 9: McCroskey Shyness Scale 3

Question A about I am a quiet person had 66 contributors choosing neutral while 54 picked agreed. 33 learners disagreed, 7 strongly disagreed, and 25 strongly agreed that they are quiet. For question B, it focuses on talking more in small groups. 72 learners agreed while 47 were neutral. 42 strongly agreed, 19 disagreed, and 5 strongly disagreed. Question C inquired about if most people talk more than the respondent. 77 respondents agreed that others do talk more while 47 were neutral and 37 strongly agreed. 18 pupils disagreed and 6 pupils strongly disagreed. Finally, for question D, respondents answered if others



think of them as very quiet. The results displayed showed that 74 learners were neutral, 54 agreed, and 32 disagreed. Lastly, 20 pupils strongly agree that other people think I am quiet, and 5 pupils strongly disagreed.



Figure 10: McCroskey Shyness Scale 4

Question A focused on whether the participants talk in class more than other people. 54 participants selected disagree followed by 49 for neutral and 42 for agree. 35 participants chosen strongly disagree and 14 participants selected strongly agree. Question B had students reply about most people being shyer than them. 65 participants' picked agree, 57 for neutral, and 30 for disagree, 22 picked strongly agree, and 10 chose strongly disagree.

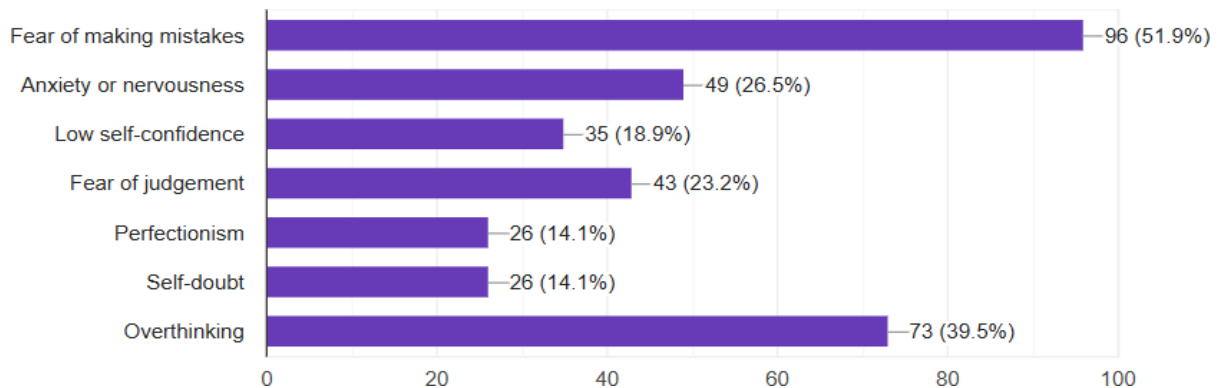


Figure 11: What psychological factors because of shyness do you experience when communicating in English?

This question explores the viewpoint of participants concerning the psychological factors that they experience while communicating in English that may hinder their efforts. Making mistakes was the most frequently experienced factor with 51.9% of participants. Then, it was overthinking with 39.5% followed by anxiety or nervousness with 26.5%. Fear of judgement was chosen by 23.2% while low confidence was 18.9%. The options of perfectionism and self-doubt both had 14.1%. This data shows that self-perception



students have regarding making mistakes and overthinking really prompts shyness and halts communication progress.

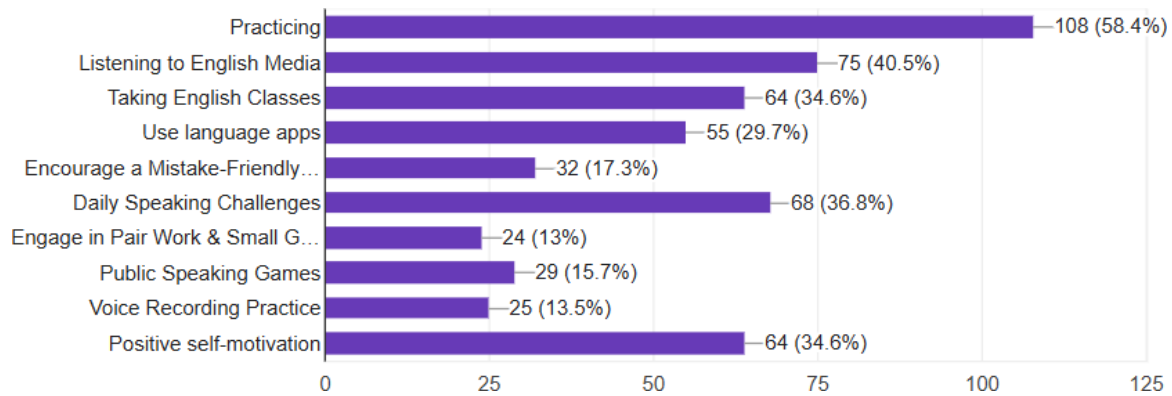


Figure 12: What strategies do you use to overcome shyness when communicating in English?

Strategies that participants use to overcome shyness when communicating in English were inquired to identify the most popular and frequently used. The most common strategy was practicing, which was chosen by 108 participants. This was followed by Listening to English Media (75 students) and daily speaking challenges (68 students). Also, 64 pupils picked the two options of taking English classes and positive self-motivation. 55 learners shared they used the strategy using language apps. Moreover, encouraging a mistake-friendly mindset was selected by 32 participants while the strategy public speaking games had 29 participants. Lastly, voice recording practice has 25 participants and 24 had chosen engaged in pair work and small groups. The top 3 chosen options presented that repeated action and efforts were favored by participants to develop their communication skills because it enabled them to put the knowledge they acquired into use.

## 5. Discussion

Shyness and language usage are factors that are often seen to be connected especially for verbal communication. It is a feeling that many university pupils experience when attempting to speak in and outside of the classroom, especially using a foreign language. This hinders their ability or willingness to join discussions or even start different conversational subjects. Typical reasons behind shyness are low confidence, fear of judgment, self-doubt, anxiety, and language level. This reduced learners' participation and efforts while increasing their struggles while verbally communicating. Thus, this study inspected university students' shyness and self-perceptions to comprehend its influences on their verbal English communication within and outside of lectures.

The survey outcomes presented that psychologically pupils experienced fear of mistakes the most while verbally interacting in English. Similarly, a study by Surji and Surji (2024) found that making errors and being corrected was a fear that abundantly evoked anxiety while speaking. This research's survey presented that fear of judgment was the third highest psychological factor influencing English speaking, likewise, research by Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) found that fear of being evaluated by learners and



lecturer is the most essential root cause of nervousness in pupils speaking English. These findings showed that judgment and evaluation prompted worry within learners because of possible negative outcomes, which makes them hesitant to speak in English. Anxiety was one of the psychological factors impacting English speaking capacity and willingness based on participants' responses. Findings by Alifia (2020) shared similar outcomes of the participants facing obstacles of anxiousness and are concerned about what they want to communicate in English with their limited capacity. Moreover, overthinking was the second highest psychological factor encountered while communicating in English for this study's participants. Discoveries from Valderrama (2023) pointed out a participant shared being nervous led to doubting abilities and overthinking about topics to be discussed and if proper and clear replies are being communicated. Overthinking becomes an obstacle that leads to great hesitation in verbally contributing or engaging. These findings show that overthinking can contribute towards reducing confidence, doubting spoken ability, and stopping language progress.

According to Alifia (2020), learners who have limited English capability may feel unconfident regarding interacting in English in the presence of classmates. However, low self-confidence was the fifth most common psychological response that this study's participants encountered when engaging in English interactions. These discoveries reveal that being unconfident and shy can cause fear of speaking and participating in the classroom. According to Marhamah's (2016) study, 40% of participants showed they are shy while speaking English. However, this current research's participants answered a scale inquiring about their extent of shyness and rank 3 was the highest selection, which was neutral. This indicates that the extent of learners' shyness was not too high or too low but their self-perception does sometimes make them self-conscious when speaking in English. Meaning that students do encounter hesitation because of their self-perception regarding communicative ability. Presently, the findings displayed that practicing and listening to English media were the primary strategies to cope with English conversing shyness. On the other hand, Mandal (2008) shared that pushing through activities regardless of shyness and self-convincing oneself that no reason exists to feel shy were common coping strategies. Moreover, Carducci (2009) explained that shy people forcing or entering themselves into social environments to have more possibilities to socialize was a major strategy found. These show that practice, socializing, or using determination to continue through communicative situations were common methods used to overcome shyness found in this current and previous studies.

## 5.2 Limitations

The setting was limited to 3 private universities and only in Erbil. Data cannot be generalized because of small sample size. The cultural and university aspects were not investigated in depth. The data collected was self-reported responses and might not completely display the complexities of shyness and learners' perception regarding English communication. Moreover, the collected data may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' subjective interpretations of the items. Direct observation was not conducted regarding interactions, language level, and classroom dynamics, which may limit the extent of the analysis. Each learner may have different experiences and knowledge that could influence their experience with shyness and view of their skills in communicating, which was not specified through data collection. Additionally, cultural norms specific to the Middle Eastern context may affect how shyness and communication are expressed, meaning that the results may not fully apply to learners in different



cultural or educational environments. Future exploration should work to obtain greater familiarity with these aspects by using interviews, experimental methods, and observations.

## 6. Conclusion

Shyness occurs within individuals when they are placed within new, stressful, or uncomfortable settings. It is a feeling that university students may struggle with while communicating in English due to surrounding social pressures. Within education, it is vital to gain an understanding and help them to overcome their shyness for better communication, improve self-confidence, and overcome fear of judgement. Communication shyness can trigger a variety of psychological responses that need strategies to handle and overcome. Accordingly, this research observed students' shyness experiences from 3 different universities in Iraq using a survey. This questionnaire worked to gather information about their English communication and the strategies used to overcome any shyness. Moreover, the most effective strategy that pupils use to overcome shyness while speaking English was practicing and listening to English media. These two strategies are constructive ways to be more confident and conquer speaking apprehension. The highest psychological factor that pupils experienced while speaking English was fear of mistakes and the second was overthinking. These psychological factors make pupils feel low in confidence while speaking English. Knowledge of these factors can help increase awareness, and aid in improving shortcomings being encountered with speaking proficiency.

Awareness is essential to view and select proper strategies and manage psychological barriers so speaking obstacles can be conquered. Within the 3 universities surveyed in Erbil, shyness was present in their pupils that caused some challenging reactions but was not severe enough to lead to academic failure. Many learners presented positive and neutral mindsets that showed their efforts to communicate regardless of feeling shy. Overall, this study indicated most university students did experience shyness when speaking English, which caused them to feel self-conscious, low confidence, and anxiety. However, it was found that their shyness was not so extreme that it totally hindered pupils' English-speaking capacity within education settings or beyond. This means that students can experience shyness while communicating, but does not necessarily ensure that they will be totally overwhelmed by it to block their communicative interactions and ability. Based on the findings, most pupils viewed themselves as able to push beyond shy feelings and communicate in English. Hence, neutrality was greatly found among most of the students regarding their self-perception of their shyness and its effects. It did not cause significant issues for their efforts in learning or attempting to communicate in English. This study adds to understanding communication shyness in EFL contexts by showing how commonly students experience shyness when speaking English and how this is linked to more negative self-perceptions of their communicative ability. These findings highlight the need for EFL classrooms to address affective factors alongside language skills.

## Recommendations:

- Investigate shyness of university students through observations and prolonged study to observe learners overcoming challenges of emotional and psychological language obstacles.
- Compare the self-perception of students based on their location and exposure to English language.



- Explore learners' psychological status over a period to gauge the development of learners speaking to propel past different stages of shyness.

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