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The Effects of Shyness on Pre-service Teachers' Speaking Skills

Los efectos de la timidez en las habilidades orales de los docentes en formación

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the essential skills for the professional development of pre-service teachers, as oral communication is indispensable for teaching practice. However, emotional barriers such as shyness can hinder the development of these skills. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of shyness on the speaking skills of pre-service teachers. A qualitative study was conducted with 11 freshmen students in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program at a university in Ecuador. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns among the participants' answers. The results show that shyness negatively affects the participants' speaking performance by reducing their confidence, classroom participation, and interaction with their teachers. The participants also reported experiencing nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, and difficulty expressing their ideas during speaking activities. Similarly, they perceive that shyness also causes social anxiety and reduces their confidence when speaking. These results highlight the importance of addressing emotional barriers in the classroom (especially in education-related degree programs) and fostering classroom environments that build confidence and encourage active participation.

Keywords: shyness, pre-service teachers, speaking skills, classroom participation, oral performance

RESUMEN

El habla es una de las habilidades esenciales para el desarrollo profesional de los docentes en formación, pues la comunicación oral es indispensable para la práctica docente. Sin embargo,

barreras emocionales como la timidez pueden obstaculizar el desarrollo de estas habilidades. Por ello, este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar los efectos de la timidez en las habilidades de habla de los docentes en formación. Se condujo un estudio cualitativo con 11 estudiantes de primer año en la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros de una universidad en Ecuador. La información se recolectó mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, observaciones de clase y notas de campo. La información se analizó utilizando un análisis temático para identificar patrones recurrentes entre las respuestas de los participantes. Los resultados muestran que la timidez afecta negativamente el rendimiento oral de los participantes, reduciendo su confianza, participación en clase e interacción con los docentes. Los participantes también reportaron experimentar nerviosismo, miedo a la evaluación negativa y dificultad para expresar sus ideas durante las actividades de expresión oral. Así mismo, perciben que la timidez también les causa ansiedad social y reduce su confianza al hablar. Estos resultados dejan en evidencia la importancia de abordar las barreras emocionales en el aula (especialmente en carreras relacionadas con la educación) y promover ambientes de clase que aumenten la confianza e incentiven la participación activa.

Palabras clave: timidez, docentes en formación, habilidades orales, participación en clase, rendimiento oral

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INTRODUCTION

The production of spoken language is a fundamental part of communication, essential for effective communication and facilitating the learning process. However, it is also one of the most difficult skills for non-native speakers to master (Luoma, 2004). This is because the speaker must think about what to say and how to say it so that their listeners will understand. For some, this process can become an experience that triggers anxiety in the speaker (Goh and Liu, 2024).

Previous studies have shown that emotional factors such as shyness and anxiety can hinder the development of speaking skills (Özalp & Merç, 2022). These factors often hinder students' oral participation and willingness to communicate, thus reducing their opportunities to practice the language. According to Ahsan et al. (2020), in their research, they found a negative relationship between affective factors such as shyness, lack of confidence, and oral performance among university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Similarly, Kalantar (2024) found that many students experienced shyness along with a fear of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback, which negatively affected their classroom participation and speaking performance. These findings suggest that emotional barriers may play an important role in the development of students' oral communication skills.

Despite research on shyness and oral expression among foreign language learners, limited attention has been paid to the context of pre-service English teachers. In Ecuador, there is almost no studies related to the topic. This population is particularly important, as oral communication is essential in the field of education. It is expected that future English teachers possess strong oral communication skills to teach effectively (Jaca & Javines, 2020). For this reason, it is necessary to investigate the challenges faced by shy pre-service teachers when developing their oral skills.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the effects of shyness on the development of oral communication skills among freshmen pre-service English teachers. Using a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes, this study seeks to identify how shyness manifests itself in students' speaking performance, explore the challenges shy pre-service teachers face during classroom speaking activities, and examine their perceptions of how shyness influences their participation and speaking confidence.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does shyness influence the speaking performance of freshmen pre-service English teachers?
2. What specific challenges do shy freshmen encounter during classroom speaking tasks?
3. How do freshmen perceive the impact of shyness on their participation and speaking confidence?

Literature Review

Shyness

Shyness is considered a difficult and complex term to define, as each person experiences it differently. Based on an ancient Anglo-Saxon poem from around 1000 AD, Zimbardo (1977) defined “being shy” as “difficult to approach” due to timidity or distrust. This suggests that shy people find it harder to meet or talk to new people and sometimes may experience insecurity when interacting with unfamiliar faces. It refers to feeling uncomfortable or insecure in social situations. It is associated with excessive control of behavior and rehearsing possible expressions or responses to use in social situations. Shy people feel anxious and often appear anxious to others. Shyness manifests itself in hesitant, spontaneous expressions or a stronger fear of expressing opinions (Crozier, 2000). It causes people to feel uncomfortable with the idea of being noticed by others. Despite this, Hofmann and DiBartolo (2010) argue that shyness, although it contains these characteristics, does not necessarily mean avoidance or problematic emotion. He clarifies that shyness and social anxiety are related but distinct concepts. While shyness may include elements of social anxiety, social anxiety does not always result in shy behavior. This depends on external situations unrelated to shyness itself.

As a temperamental trait, shyness is characterized by an internal conflict between the desire to interact socially and, at the same time, the fear of doing so (Jurkowski & Hanze, 2015). In academic settings, these characteristics may negatively affect student performance. Since they hesitate to participate in class, teachers tend to underestimate their academic abilities (Coplan & Rudashill, 2016). Some research has been conducted on shyness and its effects on the language learning process. Ahsan et al. (2020) investigated the effects of shyness and lack of confidence as psychological barriers on the oral expression skills of students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at public universities. Their findings showed a significant negative relationship between shyness, lack of confidence, and oral expression performance. As shyness and lack of confidence increase, oral expression performance decreases; when these decrease, oral expression increases. Similarly, Kalantar (2024), using a standardized shyness scale (SS) and a questionnaire on the factors of shyness (SFQ), examined the factors that affect shyness in EFL classrooms among students specializing in teaching EFL. He found that 65% of participants suffer from shyness and experience unpleasant emotions such as anxiety or embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged. These reactions were intensified by certain experiences, such as teasing peers or critical attitudes experienced during their formative years. This supports the idea that shyness negatively affects students’ performance, as it hinders their abilities.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is a complex process in which a person must think about what they want to say and how to express it so that others can understand (Goh and Liu, 2024). For this reason, it is a difficult skill for people who are learning a new language. Even so, this skill is universally

recognized as essential for linguistic communication (Goh and Burns, 2012). Speaking involves “speech sound,” which includes individual sounds, pitch, volume, speed, pauses, accent, and intonation. Listeners automatically pay attention to the sound and form a preliminary opinion about the speaker’s personality and background (Luoma, 2004). Along with writing, it is considered one of the “productive skills,” as students produce language (Bailey, 2020). Beyond simply producing language, how well that language is produced also matters. Oral expression includes several secondary skills, such as accuracy and fluency. A person who is proficient in English is typically both accurate and fluent (Baker and Westrup, 2003). Baker and Westrup suggest that accurate speakers do not make grammatical, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors, while fluent speakers do not worry excessively about making mistakes. Fluency is closely related to the sound of speech, which includes speed and pauses (Luoma, 2004). Speaking a language requires more than just the necessary vocabulary and good pronunciation; oral communication involves a set of subskills that a learner must master to become proficient in this skill.

For students of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL), speaking can result as a challenging skill. For some second language (L2) learners, it can be a distressing experience (Goh & Liu, 2024). Mastering this skill requires more than just mastering its subskills; this process can also be affected by unpleasant emotions that hinder improvement in oral communication. Many ESL students experience anxiety and low self-esteem, which hinders their ability to speak fluently. This is often because of the fear of making mistakes and being judged by their peers (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019) (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022). According to Abrar et al. (2024), linguistic difficulties, such as problems with fluency and pronunciation when speaking, make it hard for students to communicate effectively with others. Furthermore, a lack of support from their peers and the absence of an appropriate learning environment can negatively affect their self-confidence as well as their oral skills. All these factors combined act as an obstacle to language learners' ability to improve their speaking skills.

Pre-service English Teachers

Pre-service teachers are those who are still in training and have not yet entered the profession, typically enrolled in teacher education programs (Richards & Farrell, 2005). During this stage, future teachers are expected to acquire pedagogical knowledge that will assist them in their future professional careers and strengthen their English language communication skills. Speaking skill development plays a crucial role in teacher education, as English teachers are required to use the language as the primary medium of instruction, classroom interaction, and professional communication. Research on teaching oral expression emphasizes that, to effectively develop this skill, it is necessary to establish meaningful communication in authentic contexts. Zhang (2025) explains that communicative approaches to oral expression prioritize fluency, interaction, and the use of language in real life, rather than focusing excessively on grammatical accuracy. Through activities such as debates, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks, students are

encouraged to express their ideas freely, which helps them gain confidence and reduces their fear of making mistakes. Similarly, Suranto et al. (2020) argue that oral expression teaching should integrate interactive strategies that promote student participation and reduce affective barriers. Their study highlights the importance of affective and social strategies, which reinforce students' confidence and emotional comfort when speaking. These strategies are essential for developing oral expression skills, especially for teachers in training, who must learn to communicate effectively while managing anxiety and shyness in the classroom context.

Relationship Between Shyness and Speaking Skills in ESL Contexts

Research has shown that factors such as shyness and anxiety when speaking negatively influence students' oral performance in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Maher & King, 2022). These authors point out that these emotional factors generate certain types of “silence” that affect students' self-perception and trigger further anxiety, creating a cycle in which both aspects reinforce each other, thereby making oral participation even more challenging. Other research shows that a significant number of students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when asked to speak in English, especially during classroom activities that involve public performance or evaluation (Ofiaz, 2019). These emotional barriers often cause students to feel tense, insecure, and reluctant to participate in oral communication, limiting opportunities to practice and develop speaking skills. Özalp and Merç (2022) also investigated speaking anxiety. They linked it to the willingness to communicate (WTC) among pre-service teachers. They found that speaking anxiety has a significant impact on the willingness to communicate, and conversely, the willingness to communicate can influence speaking anxiety.

Similarly, Ölmez and Genç İlter (2025) explain that speaking is often perceived as the most challenging skill, as it requires students to process incoming information and produce language spontaneously, which increases anxiety levels. Students who experience high levels of anxiety when speaking tend to fear negative evaluations, feel incompetent, and avoid opportunities to speak. As a result, their participation in class decreases, which negatively affects language development and oral competence. This finding suggests that shy or anxious learners may possess adequate linguistic knowledge but struggle to demonstrate it orally due to emotional barriers. The authors emphasize that anxiety-related behaviors, such as hesitation and avoidance, limit learners' opportunities to practice speaking, reinforcing the negative cycle between shyness and low oral performance.

Besides Kalantar's research, the study by Höl and Küçük (2023) also presents good results on this topic. They explored how the shyness levels of pre-service English teachers influence their choice of classroom management strategies, which are closely related to oral interaction and speaking opportunities in class. Their findings suggest that teachers with higher levels of shyness tend to avoid applying high-impact strategies, which can limit oral practice opportunities for both

themselves and their students. This highlights the importance of addressing teacher shyness to facilitate more effective oral interactions in ESL settings, as teacher comfort and strategies directly affect student oral development.

Figure 1

Related studies on Shyness in speaking across South America



METHODOLOGY

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore how shyness influences the oral skills development of fresh-men pre-service English teachers. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions, experiences, and emotional factors related to oral communication in the classroom.

Context and Participants

This study was conducted at a public university in the province of Los Ríos, Ecuador. 11 participants (8 females and 3 males, aged 18 to 25 years old) were selected using purposive sampling. At the time of data collection, all participants were enrolled in the first semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program.

This sampling method allows for the selection of participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study. Before starting the data collection, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to freshmen pre-service teachers. Students who self-identify as shy and were willing to share their perceptions and experiences were invited to participate voluntarily.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Participant's nickname	Age	English level
Agatha	19	A1+
Nadia	22	A1
Camil	25	A1
Dalila	21	A1+
Maddy	18	A2
Fatima	18	A1
Natanael	20	A1
María	20	A1
Ingrid	19	A1
Jeronimo	19	A1
Kevin	20	A1

Note. English level based on the CEFR

Data Collection Instruments

First, Semi-structured individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (11 interviews in total) to explore their perceptions and experiences regarding shyness and their oral participation. Each interview lasted approximately 5 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Spanish so participants could express themselves more comfortably. They were subsequently translated by the researcher.

Classroom observations

Four observation sessions were held over two weeks, each lasting 1 hour and a half, to examine how shyness manifests in the participants' behavior during classroom speaking activities.

Field notes

They were recorded during each observation session to document the participants' behavior during oral expression activities, their reactions, and the researcher's reflections.

Data Analysis

Initially, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy; they were then transcribed to conduct a thematic analysis aimed at identifying patterns in the participants' responses. Next, the observations and field notes were reviewed to determine the relationship between the experiences and perceptions shared by the participants during the interviews and their behavior during the oral expression activities.

The study adhered to ethical considerations throughout the research process. Participants signed an informed consent form indicating that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Participants' personal information was kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities throughout the study. The author used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The thematic analysis of the data revealed seven main themes:

RQ1. In what ways does shyness influence the speaking performance of freshmen pre-service English teachers?

Lack of confidence

The results obtained through interviews, classroom observations, and field notes showed that one of the ways in which shyness influences the performance of freshman pre-service teachers is the lack of confidence when participating in class or expressing their opinions in front of their peers.

Some of the participants expressed that they have the willingness and desire to share their ideas when asked, but that, due to shyness, they prefer not to do so and wait for another classmate to respond.

“When I want to speak up, my shyness kind of tells me not to do so; it’s like something is holding me back, and I get nervous—I can’t express myself well” (Participant Camil, interview).

This response suggests that shyness negatively affects the performance of pre-service teachers who experience it. They do not feel confident expressing their ideas in front of their classmates. Although they have a clear idea, because of their shyness, they prefer to remain silent. The responses received during the interviews also indicated that language is a factor in this lack of confidence. As they are just starting the program, their level of English is sometimes insufficient to express certain types of ideas that may require more complex vocabulary or the use of words they are unsure how to pronounce. This was evident during classroom observations. When participants encountered a word whose pronunciation they did not know, they would lower their voice or pause briefly before saying it; when they did say it, their voice took on a hesitant tone.

This finding is consistent with the explanation offered by Ölmez and Genç İlter (2025), who note that this emotion can intensify when students try to express themselves in a foreign language, since they must process the information they are receiving while simultaneously producing language spontaneously. If shyness alone can already make a person feel unsure of what they want to say, doing so in another language increases that insecurity. For students who are expected to have a strong command of the language for their future teaching careers, building their confidence when expressing themselves is of the utmost importance. If they fail to do so, this insecurity could follow them into their professional careers, which may result in them passing that same insecurity on to their future students.

Low Participation

Another pattern observed during classroom observations was low student participation. The observations revealed that when teachers asked questions for the class, students avoided

participating by not answering them. This pattern was echoed in the responses given during the interviews, where many participants stated that shyness leads them to avoid answering the teachers' questions.

“Even if I know the answer, I usually prefer to listen to what others have to say and hear what the teacher has to say before I say anything” (Participant Maddy, interview)

“Yes, I do stay quiet. Even if I know the answer, I feel embarrassed” (Participant María, interview)

These findings indicate that participants are aware of their low level of participation and want to change it, but shyness gets the better of them. They would rather have someone else answer for them than do so themselves. Observations revealed that the times when participants were most willing to speak up in response to a question were when everyone answered in unison. When the question was first asked, only the voices of the most active students could be heard; however, once the teacher confirmed that the answer was correct and asked them to repeat it, everyone's voices could be heard.

This may indicate that low participation does not always reflect a lack of knowledge on the part of students; sometimes it is simply that expressing their ideas or answers aloud is not an easy task for those who are shy. As evidenced by the observations and interviews, participants prefer to avoid the discomfort of giving an incorrect answer and simply remain silent until the teacher confirms that their answers were correct. This has been demonstrated in previous research, such as that by Oflaz (2019), who noted that students experience certain levels of anxiety when asked to participate in speaking activities in front of an audience. This suggests that participating may be perceived as a major challenge for shy students; however, if they do so in a group setting and after they know their answer is correct, they can participate without experiencing such emotions.

As future teachers, participants will eventually be responsible for helping other students succeed at tasks that they themselves currently find challenging— answering without expecting others to do it for them. Therefore, helping them feel comfortable expressing themselves and accepting the possibility that they won't always get the answers right will contribute to their professional development. In this way, they will be able to convey that same sense of confidence in their future classrooms.

Low Interaction

Low teacher-student interaction was another pattern observed during classroom observations. During class activities, when the teacher asked questions to encourage class participation, the participants' interaction with the teacher was minimal. Instead of raising their hands and answering aloud, the participants responded in a low voice or whispered their answers to their nearest classmates. This pattern occurred frequently.

In their interview responses, participants sometimes expressed a preference for teachers to call them by name so they could participate; otherwise, they remained silent. The observations reinforced this behavior, as most of the times students answered questions posed by teachers, it was because the teachers specifically asked them to participate. These results tie in with the previous point: participants feel embarrassed to speak up when they are unsure whether their answers will be correct; as a result, they either say nothing or speak only with their closest classmates. This suggests that, for them, interacting with their close classmates feels less daunting than doing so in front of the entire class.

This can be a problem because, as Coplan and Rudashill (2016) note, teachers can gauge their students' academic level through participation, and if students refuse to participate, teachers may tend to underestimate their students' abilities. According to the interview participants, they prefer that teachers call on them to participate, as this makes it feel more like an obligation they can no longer refuse and spares them the conflict of deciding whether to participate. However, when this does not happen, they avoid interaction, making it less likely that teachers will ask for their participation in the future and causing interaction to decline further. Remaining silent can also be counterproductive for students, as Maher and King (2022) note, since it can affect students' self-perception and simultaneously generate anxiety. This pattern was also observed in the participants' responses during the interviews, where some of them mentioned not feeling entirely confident expressing themselves in English due to their level of proficiency in the language. While they remain silent, simply listening to their classmates, they may begin to question their own abilities, which may reduce their desire to participate next time, reinforcing the silence that caused the doubt initially.

This not only affects them as individuals or students but also impacts their professional development. A student who will one day become a teacher and who does not practice their oral skills may struggle with certain tasks in their future classes, such as giving clear instructions or keeping engaging, dynamic English lessons. If teachers, unintentionally, only encourage participation from the most active students, those who are shy and do not participate as much miss out on opportunities to practice their oral skills. Since communication is a central part of the teaching profession, future teachers need to have and make the most opportunities to put those skills into practice.

RQ2. What specific challenges do shy freshmen encounter during classroom speaking tasks?

Nervousness

Nervousness was one of the challenges participants reported experiencing during their speaking tasks in class. For a shy person, public speaking can be quite an ordeal, and doing so in another language can make it even more difficult. Many participants said that, even when they

were prepared for the activity, their nerves got the better of them the moment they stepped to the front to give their presentation.

“When I already have a speech prepared, my nerves get the best of me and my mind goes blank” (Participant Agatha, Interview)

“I get nervous, and I can memorize it, but when I get up front and everyone is looking at me, I forget it” (Participant Fatima, Interview)

This suggests how shy students perform when presenting their work is not always related to their level of preparation but rather to their nerves at the moment. Observations revealed that even in situations where they simply had to read their work aloud to their classmates, they became nervous. It was noted that while they were reading, their hands would shake or their voices would drop in pitch when they encountered a word they didn't know how to pronounce.

Preparing responses in advance is a characteristic of shyness. This is associated with excessive control over behavior and the formulation of possible expressions or responses that the individual might use in social situations (Zimbardo, 1977). This pattern was observed among the participants. To feel more confident, they prepare responses in advance or overthink scenarios they might encounter in class so as not to fail. However, even with prior preparation, when the moment comes to speaking, nerves cause their minds to blank out the information they already had. This may stem from the nerves themselves caused by speaking in front of the class while being evaluated at the same time. The physical reactions observed suggest that the problem is not only that they forget the information, but also the physical stress caused by public speaking and being evaluated. Together, these factors may increase this emotion, causing them to block out the information they already had in their minds and draw a blank.

Overlooking this challenge can influence the classroom strategies that future teachers implement in their classes. Because they feel more comfortable with activities that do not require speaking in front of a group of people, when choosing which strategies to use, they may opt for those that do not have a significant impact, thereby limiting their students' opportunities for oral practice (Höl & Küçük, 2023). This highlights how important it is for a future teacher to overcome any nervousness caused by public speaking, since a teacher not only teaches the subject matter but is also seen as a role model by their students.

Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is another challenge participants encounter during classroom speaking tasks. Many participants agreed that one of the reasons they do not express their ideas is the fear that their classmates will make fun of them or that the teacher will correct them in a negative way.

“(...) fear of making a mistake or of what the teacher or others might say” (Participant Ingrid, interview)

“I’m afraid of making a mistake or of being teased, or of being corrected” (Participant Nadia, interview)

However, classroom observations revealed that the classroom environment is respectful. Classmates do not make fun of one another when someone makes a mistake, and teachers provide positive feedback without belittling students for any errors they may make. Even so, this challenge persists. This may be due to the internal conflict that shy individuals face when participating. In their minds, a battle rages between two opposing forces: one represents the desire to interact socially, while the other is the fear of doing so, as described by Jurkowski and Hanze (2015). In their interview responses, participants expressed a desire to speak up or answer the teacher’s questions in class; however, their fear of making a mistake in what they say, or mispronouncing words is stronger than their desire to speak.

For students who are learning the language (whether as a second language or a foreign language) the process of speaking may be accompanied by feelings of anxiety, due to the fact that they are doing so in a language that is not their native tongue and because of their fear of how their listeners might react. This finding aligns with what Adickalam and Yunus (2022) noted. For people who experience shyness, worrying about how others will perceive their ideas can be a very stressful process, as they want to make a good impression. This self-imposed pressure causes them to focus primarily on that concern while expressing their ideas, which can affect their fluency.

As future teachers who will not only model and teach the language but also shape human beings, overcoming these kinds of challenges is essential. As future English teachers, they should encourage students not to be afraid of making mistakes while learning the language, because it is an important part of the process. However, if the teacher feels the same way, it will be difficult to encourage this mindset. That is why these types of situations must be addressed from the earliest stages of teacher training programs.

Difficulty Expressing Ideas

Expressing their ideas clearly was identified as another challenge faced by the participants. Shyness increases the nervousness associated with public speaking, making it harder than it might otherwise be to articulate their opinions. Between the shyness of speaking in public and the effort of thinking about what to say, the process can be disrupted, making it difficult to find the right words to express what they want to say.

“Sometimes I get tongue-tied and can’t express myself well” (Participant Jeronimo, Interview)

“Because of my shyness, I can get tongue-tied; I can’t get my point across” (Participant Natanael, Interview)

As a result, their participation may be affected, because even though they want to voice their opinions, they have a hard time finding the right words to do so. Classroom observations

also highlighted this challenge. When participants struggled to find a way to express their ideas in class, they responded in a low voice or simply avoided answering. This aligns with what Goh and Liu (2024) noted in their book: speaking is not a simple process; for students who speak English as a foreign language or even as a second language, it can be a complex process. It requires the speaker not only to think about what they want to say but also how to say it clearly to the listener. Shyness can make this process even more complex, because even if participants know what they want to say, shyness interferes with their ability to express it clearly.

They worry so much about whether their idea is clear and well-expressed that their speech can be affected by these thoughts. Even if they already have a fully structured idea of what they want to say, when it comes time to step forward or stand up to deliver it, they have trouble organizing their thoughts. The stress caused by not being able to find a way to express themselves at a moment when they have to do so quickly causes their ideas to “get tangled up,” and they end up stumbling over their words, producing the opposite effect of what they intended.

For those who experience this anxiety when speaking in public, this process can be frustrating because they have an idea in their heads of what they want to say but can’t figure out how to express it clearly. As Suranto et al. (2020) note, teachers can address this challenge through interactive speaking activities where students can interact with their peers in low-stress environments without time pressure; this can help reduce such emotional barriers and thereby improve their fluency and speaking skills. This approach can help reduce or eliminate this challenge, which a future teacher must overcome. Otherwise, such difficulties can affect their teaching role, as they will struggle to give instructions in class. For a teacher, everything in the classroom is spontaneous; nothing can be fully planned. When explaining a topic, students may raise all sorts of unexpected questions for which they will need answers. That is why a teacher must be able to express themselves spontaneously in response to any question that arises in class and even adapt their explanation so that it is understandable to their students. Without this ability, they will give rigid or memorized explanations that are unlikely to resolve their students’ doubts.

RQ3. How do freshmen perceive the impact of shyness on their participation and speaking confidence?

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety was identified by participants as one of the ways in which shyness affects their participation and confidence when speaking. Along with low participation, social anxiety also plays an important role in the classroom performance of shy pre-service teachers. It can increase the complexity of any activity for those who experience it and work against them even if they have prepared in advance.

“Simple words that I knew and was going to say—I was completely confident I could say them—but then I stepped up to the front and just forgot everything” (Participant Agatha, Interview)

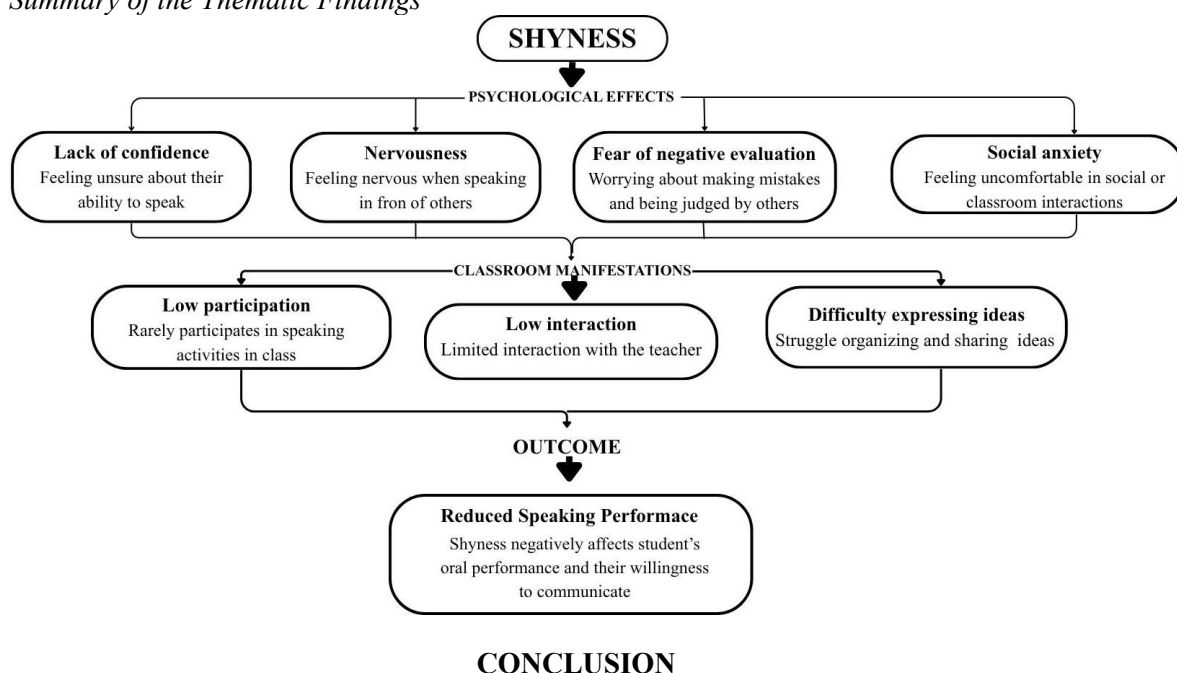
What participant Agatha mentioned shows that even with the knowledge and confidence to participate, if one experiences this type of emotional barrier when standing in front of a group of people, an individual may lose their train of thought and forget what they wanted to say due to social anxiety. The responses given in the interviews by other participants show that direct eye contact from classmates or even the teacher when asked to participate in class prevents them from participating because of the emotions this triggers in them. These types of reactions related to social anxiety can easily be confused with shyness; however, they are distinct concepts. As Hofmann and DiBartolo (2010) argue, shyness and social anxiety are different but related emotions; therefore, shyness may include elements of social anxiety. A person may experience social anxiety, but someone with social anxiety is not always shy. This is one of the reasons why participants report forgetting what they previously studied when giving a presentation or even forgetting simple concepts they have mastered. Having an audience watching them directly causes them anxiety, which makes them forget what they want to say. These reactions may stem from a fear of how others will react during their presentation or from previous negative experiences.

These findings are similar to those of Kalantar (2024), who found that his participants, students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), experienced unpleasant emotions such as anxiety when engaging in speaking activities in the classroom, and that these emotions were intensified by negative past experiences, such as being teased by their classmates. These findings suggest that experiences such as these can have a lasting impact on students and may deter them from voluntarily participating again in the future out of fear of how their participation will be received.

These findings are linked to the previous topics, as the anxiety experienced by the participants affects their participation; they draw a blank when they feel their classmates' gaze. Similarly, their interaction with teachers decreases because, to avoid this unpleasant situation, they prefer to remain silent and not participate. This shows that these are not isolated issues and that each is interconnected.

To help students feel more comfortable participating in class and reduce their anxiety, it is necessary to create safe spaces in the classroom. These spaces will help students, especially those in the early stages of teacher training programs, feel secure when participating in class. Creating this type of environment will make students feel more willing to participate and, as a result, practice their speaking skills. In this way, they will be able to provide the same kind of safe space for their future students once they begin their careers.

Figure 2
Summary of the Thematic Findings



This study explored the effects of shyness on the development of speaking skills among pre-service English teachers. Using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes, the study examined how shyness manifests in speaking performance, the challenges participants face during speaking activities in the classroom, and their perceptions of the impact of shyness on their speaking performance and oral confidence.

The results showed that shyness has a negative impact on oral performance, causing students to have little confidence in their abilities and to participate less in class, including in teacher-student interactions. It was also observed that among the challenges shy students face when engaging in speaking activities in the classroom are nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, and difficulties expressing their ideas clearly. Likewise, they acknowledged that the impact shyness has on their speaking performance and oral confidence is reflected in emotional barriers such as social anxiety. The participants described the negative experiences they face because of shyness and how it affects their performance in the classroom, limiting their ability to practice the language or perform well in activities, as well as hindering their overall development.

These results highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing these emotional barriers from the early stages of teacher training programs, as they negatively influence the development of their oral communication skills, which are essential in this field. These students are not merely language learners; they are training to teach the language in the future. Therefore, if these types of difficulties are not addressed, they may carry them over into their professional lives. A teacher who fears making mistakes will not be able to encourage students to see that mistakes are part of the learning process; instead, they may end up conveying this fear through their teaching, perhaps without even realizing it. If they fear public evaluation and struggle to

articulate their opinions or ideas, they will not be prepared for the spontaneous questions that may arise in class and that they must address. A teacher who does not feel that the classroom is a safe space due to social anxiety will not be able to create such safe spaces for their students.

Given that pre-service teachers are expected to communicate effectively when teaching their classes, addressing shyness in the classroom can help boost their confidence, increase their participation in class, and prepare them for their professional lives. Therefore, as some participants suggested, teachers can help students overcome shyness in several ways. First, encouraging group participation in unison to assist those who find it difficult to participate individually. Second, calling on students who are not very active, since they often prefer to feel “obligated” to participate rather than being volunteers. Third, providing constructive feedback to students after their participation to motivate them and normalize mistakes from the start, making them part of the process.

Shyness is not an emotion that is easy to control, nor can it be reduced simply by telling the person experiencing it, “Don’t be shy”; it is an emotion that requires effort to reduce or manage. The fact that a shy person chooses a profession that requires constant communication with others does not mean that their shyness will immediately disappear; therefore, addressing it along the way can be very beneficial. A shy person may feel that way their entire life, as part of who they are and how they live, but that does not mean they will necessarily be ineffective teachers. Therefore, addressing this challenge will help future teachers provide quality instruction to their students, regardless of whether they experience shyness themselves. Studying this phenomenon can ensure a higher quality of language instruction. Shyness is not a flaw that needs to be eliminated; it is a personality trait that can be addressed to help a person reach their full potential.

Limitations and recommendations

One of the limitations of this study was the short observation period. Due to the researcher’s time constraints and the number of English subjects the participants receive during the first semester, four observation sessions were conducted over a two-week period to observe the participants’ behavior in classes where they were required to speak English. As a result, it was not possible to observe the students’ behavior in activities such as presentations where they were responsible for presenting a topic. Although observation period was short, all research questions were effectively addressed through observations, field notes, and interviews.

Future research could examine the effects of shyness in speaking through observations of more individual activities where students must produce language for longer periods of time, such as presentations, debates, or role-plays. It could also explore and compare whether this shyness decreases as the semesters progress or whether a specific technique can help reduce shyness when speaking in class activities and boost confidence. These approaches could serve as a guide for

teachers on how to address these issues in the classroom and, likewise, help students who experience shyness to reduce it somewhat.

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