



## Psychological Factors that Affect the Improvement of Oral English Competence

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### Abstract

Psychological factors play a crucial role in the development of oral competence in English as a foreign language. This research examines the elements that affect the development of oral skills in english major students at the Technical University of Cotopaxi (UTC). Using a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative), a questionnaire was administered to 54 first-semester students and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three professors. The results reveal that fear of criticism is the most significant emotional barrier, followed by dependence on spanish when expressing oneself. The teacher's role emerges as a determining factor, especially in creating positive learning environments. Interviews with teachers confirm that anxiety and lack of confidence are major obstacles to oral participation. It is concluded that a holistic approach integrating emotional and pedagogical aspects is essential to improve oral competence in English, suggesting the implementation of specific strategies for anxiety management and the development of teacher training programs focused on psychological aspects of learning.

**Keywords:** linguistic competence; learning psychology; language teaching; anxiety; english as a foreign language.

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## Factores Psicológicos que Afectan el Mejoramiento de la Competencia Oral en Inglés

### Resumen

Los factores psicológicos juegan un papel crucial en el desarrollo de la competencia oral en inglés como lengua extranjera. Esta investigación examina los elementos que afectan el desarrollo de habilidades orales en estudiantes de la carrera de inglés de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi (UTC). Mediante un enfoque de métodos mixtos (cualitativo y cuantitativo), se aplicó un cuestionario a 54 estudiantes de primer semestre y entrevistas semiestructuradas a tres profesores. Los resultados revelan que el miedo a la crítica es la barrera emocional más significativa, seguido por la dependencia del español al expresarse. El rol del profesor emerge como factor determinante, especialmente en la creación de ambientes de aprendizaje positivos. Las entrevistas con docentes confirman que la ansiedad y la falta de confianza son obstáculos principales para la participación oral. Se concluye que un enfoque holístico que integre aspectos emocionales y pedagógicos es fundamental para mejorar la competencia oral en inglés, sugiriendo la implementación de estrategias específicas para el manejo de la ansiedad y el desarrollo de programas de capacitación docente enfocados en aspectos psicológicos del aprendizaje.

**Palabras clave:** competencia lingüística; psicología del aprendizaje; enseñanza de idiomas; ansiedad; inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Código de clasificación internacional:** 5701.11 - Enseñanza de lenguas.

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## 1. Introduction

Countries have integrated English into their curricula, recognizing it as a tool for global communication. With English dominant worldwide, its teaching has been incorporated into educational systems (Raja, Putrawan and Razali, 2022a). Mastering spoken English is vital for accessing global opportunities in education, business, and technology. Teachers must prioritize skills such as comprehension, composition, auditory processing, and especially verbal communication. However, many students face difficulties with oral English proficiency.

This research analyzes the factors affecting speaking proficiency in English students at the Technical University of Cotopaxi (UTC). Common problems include inadequate classroom management, anxiety, and limited vocabulary (Musabal and Abdalgane, 2023). Although some students memorize grammar and vocabulary, they find it difficult to speak spontaneously, complicating their oral communication. Psychological factors such as enthusiasm, nervousness, shyness, and perspectives on language learning significantly impact their willingness to participate and improve their oral skills (Le and Le, 2022a).

External factors such as ineffective teaching methods, first language dependence, limited access to technology, and overcrowded classrooms hinder speaking proficiency. Additionally, students often avoid practicing at home, which limits their ability to communicate in English and affects their academic performance. The lack of oral practice impedes language acquisition and success in English studies (Raja, Putrawan and Razali, 2022b).

This study is guided by two central research questions: What are the factors affecting the development of oral English skills in English major students at the Technical University of Cotopaxi?; What do teachers think about the elements that influence the teaching of English speaking skills for English major students at the Technical University of Cotopaxi?.



The objective of this study is to create a conceptual framework that identifies the factors influencing English speaking skills in environments where English is a second language. Given the scarcity of research in Ecuador's academic environment, this study has particular importance. It emphasizes the influence of emotional factors, instructional strategies, and learning environment in shaping students' ability to practice and improve their spoken English. The study also presents possible solutions proposed by educators to improve speaking proficiency, providing practical recommendations to enhance the educational experience of English major students.

### 1.1. Literature Review

Psychological, social, and educational factors are crucial in the process of acquiring a second or additional language. For example, personalized approaches are necessary to meet students' individual needs, which research links to success in language learning, especially in speaking (Wahyuningsih and Afandi, 2020). Achieving English proficiency is crucial for accessing global opportunities (De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans, 2020).

Anxiety and hesitation in speaking are significant challenges that impact students' learning outcomes. In this regard, Le and Le (2022b): found that internal and external factors, such as motivation and learning environment, influence students' perspectives on learning English. Positive attitudes and effective teaching strategies help improve language acquisition, especially in regions where English is not the primary language.

Individual Differences (IDs) and attitudes are vital for language learning. The student's attitude toward the language they are learning is a crucial element that shapes their behavior during the learning process, significantly determining their academic success (Getie, 2020a). Positive attitudes promote better learning outcomes. Emotional aspects, including anxiety, introversion, and lack of motivation, frequently impede speaking proficiency (Tagne, 2018a);



(Sampelolo, Tandikombong, Pasoloran and Lura, 2021a).

According to Kashinathan and Aziz (2021); anxiety is associated with discomfort or lack of security in language learning environments, while Naser and Nijr (2019a); introduced the concept of language-related anxiety to capture its detrimental effects on oral performance. Fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere can help reduce anxiety and promote greater participation.

Fear of judgment from peers and teachers often limits participation. Authors such as Naser and Nijr (2019b); Kashmiri (2019); and Seven (2020); observed that students fear criticism, which affects their linguistic development. In this aspect, Gardner (2006); and Ausubel (1937); emphasize the importance of motivation in the language acquisition process.

An effective way to increase motivation is to design engaging and enjoyable activities that allow students to practice English in a relaxed, low-pressure environment. Psychological barriers, such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and lack of security, can hinder speaking proficiency (Sampelolo, Tandikombong, Pasoloran and Lura, 2021b).

In this regard, Amoah and Yeboah (2021): found that insecurity and fear of mistakes negatively affect students' speaking skills. Shy students experience fewer practice opportunities, hindering their progress. Moreover, Wulandari, Amalia and Ramdhani (2022): also identified fear of mistakes as a barrier. These findings underscore the need for teachers to address psychological obstacles in language teaching. In response, Anggarista and Wahyudin (2022a): suggest adapting teaching methodologies to students' interests and learning styles to improve speaking skills.

According to Orosz, Monzón and Velasco (2021): they observed that many high school graduates lack sufficient English skills, often due to ineffective teaching methods. Similarly, Islam, Ahmad and Islam (2022): noted that students struggle with oral skills in practical settings, affecting their confidence. In Ecuador, research on the impact of psychological factors in



language learning is limited, highlighting the need for more studies (Ortega-Aquilla, Hidalgo-Camacho, Sigüenza-Garzón and Cherres-Fajardo, 2020).

## 2. Methodology

This research adopts a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to investigate factors influencing English speaking skills among English major students at a public university, following Denzin and Lincoln (2005), framework: the qualitative part explores educators' views on oral competency barriers, while the quantitative component analyzes first-semester student survey responses. Subsequently, Creswell (2008): supports the use of diverse data collection methods for comprehensive understanding.

Using Nassaji (2020a): descriptive method, the study examines affective and cognitive influences on oral skills. A non-probability sample of 54 students (30 females, 24 males) aged 18-24 was selected, and interviews were conducted with three English teachers. Tagne (2018b): survey, adapted to a Google form, evaluated emotional factors, teacher roles, and environmental aspects, while a semi-structured interview gathered teachers' perspectives on challenges and solutions. Data analysis employed triangulation, comparing student surveys with teacher interviews, as recommended by Dzwigol (2022): to identify key barriers and suggest improvements.

### 2.1. Data Analysis and Procedures

Excel was used for statistical analysis, and the average was calculated by dividing the sum of responses by the number of participants, according to responses per question. The standard deviation was obtained by squaring the differences with the mean, adding them, and dividing by 49 students. A small standard deviation indicates little variability; a large one indicates greater dispersion. This allows evaluation of variability in survey results. Each table shows averages and standard deviations to analyze factors influencing English

speaking skills. The study follows Yassen (2018), formula, cited by Maji (2023), for interpreting questionnaire results, described below:

$$\text{Length of period: } x = \frac{(\text{high value} - \text{low value})}{\text{no period pf}} \quad \text{pf} = \frac{(5 - 1)}{3}$$

High = 3,78  
 Categorization levels: Moderate = 2,34 / 3,67  
 Low = 1,00 / 2,33

### 3. Results and Discussion

The findings highlight three categories of emotional variables: teacher influence and learning environment as factors that enhance speaking skills, according to the questionnaire. Some questions indicated connections between students and teachers, as well as environmental aspects that affect students. To evaluate student behaviors during English speaking activities in the classroom, the data was categorized into three domains to facilitate discussion and analysis.

**Table 1.** Analysis of Factors Affecting Oral Communication Skills.

Domains	Average	Standard Deviation	Degree	Range
Factors associated with the teacher's role in promoting oral skills.	3,71	0,85	moderate	1
Emotional factors affecting students' verbal communication.	2,94	0,98	moderate	2
Elements influencing students' speaking skills related to the teaching environment.	2,64	1,02	moderate	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,10</b>	<b>0,95</b>	<b>moderate</b>	

\*. Standard Deviation (SD).

**Source:** The Authors (2024).

In table 1, the research identifies teacher influence as the most significant factor impacting oral communication skills in English among first-semester students, with an average score of 3,71 (SD = 0,85). The teacher's role is fundamental in fostering active and creative students, as well as increasing confidence in their communication abilities.

Emotional factors ranked second (average = 2,94, SD = 0,98), with moderate importance. Regarding this, Bao and Liu (2021): suggest that teachers should improve both pedagogical and psychological skills to support students' self-esteem and reduce anxiety.

Educational environment factors ranked third (average = 2,64, SD = 1,02), reflecting moderate importance. According to Nassaji (2020b): speaking challenges are linked to the quality of instruction and classroom resources. Overall, the study's mean score across all domains was 3,10 (SD = 0,95), indicating moderate importance and general agreement, although with some variability in perceptions.

**Table 2.** Examination of Emotional Factors in Oral Communication Skills.

Item No.	Questionnaire Elements	Average	Standard Deviation	Degree	Range
3	I'm afraid of receiving criticism when speaking.	4,00	0,80	high	1
6	I switch to Spanish when I have difficulties expressing myself in English.	3,59	0,83	moderate	2
12	I struggle to form sentences, even though I understand grammar.	3,51	0,97	moderate	3
9	I believe my listening skills are good.	3,37	0,89	moderate	4
7	I research the topic and plan oral practice in advance, preparing ideas ahead of time.	3,35	0,84	moderate	5
11	My family provides encouragement and support for speaking English.	3,27	1,22	moderate	6
2	I feel enthusiastic and confident when participating in English class discussions.	3,25	1,07	moderate	7
10	I experience feelings of shyness and doubt when using English during class.	3,12	1,09	moderate	8
5	I have difficulty finding appropriate vocabulary; I want to speak English, but I struggle to find the right words for certain topics.	3,08	1,02	moderate	9
13	I feel insecure and pressured by teachers and classmates.	3,08	1,00	moderate	10
1	I like talking about events and situations with my teacher and classmates during English classes.	2,80	1,10	moderate	11





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8	I enjoy watching television programs in English.	2,49	0,99	moderate	12
4	I feel anxious speaking English and pressured by my teachers and classmates.	2,33	0,97	moderate	13

**Source:** The Authors (2024).

Table 2 reveals that the key issue was “concern about being judged by others when speaking”, with a mean score of 4,00 (SD = 0,80), indicating strong consistency in responses. This anxiety is linked to a lack of confidence, as students with lower self-esteem fear criticism (Agata, Wardhani, Putri and Drajadi, 2019).

The second highest score (3,59, SD = 0,83) was for “resorting to Spanish when I cannot express myself in English”. The lowest score (2,80, SD = 1,10) was for “Participating in discussions with my teacher and peers about topics during English class”, highlighting the importance of classroom interaction in skill development. Other factors ranged from 3,08 to 3,51, with standard deviations between 0,80 and 1,22. Overall, fear of criticism is the most significant emotional barrier to improving speaking skills.

**Table 3.** Investigation of Teachers' Impact on Students' Speaking Ability.

Item No.	Questionnaire Elements	Average	Standard Deviation	Degree	Range
3	The instructor combines both English and Spanish in class.	4,08	0,89	high	1
9	The teacher constantly corrects my errors while I speak.	3,94	0,93	high	2
4	The teacher provides enough time for us to prepare for oral activities.	3,90	0,92	high	3
7	The instructor presents the main idea of the lesson and provides sufficient vocabulary for our speaking exercises.	3,80	1,00	high	4
2	The teacher encourages me to speak English in class.	3,80	1,13	high	5
5	The teacher inspires us to practice English through interactive activities, teamwork, and speech presentation.	3,73	0,80	high	6
10	The teacher gives me time to finish	3,73	0,80	high	7

	speaking before providing corrections.				
8	The teacher avoids pressuring me while I participate in speaking activities.	3,65	0,89	moderate	8
1	The teacher exclusively uses English during class.	3,35	0,89	moderate	9
6	The teacher allows me to use Spanish when I'm unsure of the English words.	3,08	1,04	moderate	10

**Source:** The Authors (2024).

Table 3 highlights key factors, including “the teacher alternates between English and Spanish during lessons” (4,08) and “the teacher regularly corrects my mistakes while speaking” (3,94). From the exposed casuistry, Arini and Wahyudin (2022a): recommend methods such as role-playing, group work, and project-based learning to reduce student shyness and increase speaking confidence. The lowest-scoring factors were “The teacher communicates only in English” (3,35) and “The teacher allows Spanish when I have difficulties with English” (3,08).

According to Lee, Ahn and Lee (2022): they found that weak vocabulary can hinder student motivation and participation. Other factors scored between 3,90 and 3,65, with standard deviations between 0,92 and 0,89. In relation to this, Arini and Wahyudin (2022b): emphasize the importance of encouraging English use outside the classroom. Students favored bilingual approaches, indicating that exclusive English use was less favorable. The study concludes that corrective feedback and bilingual support improve oral fluency.

**Table 4.** Research Exploring the Impact of Learning Environment on Students' Oral Fluency.

Item No.	Questionnaire Elements	Average	Standard Deviation	Degree	Range
2	We listen to an audio recording before participating in oral activities.	3,76	0,93	high	1
5	Classes take place in a comfortable environment that	3,12	1,18	moderate	2

	promotes effective learning.				
7	Students have the opportunity to choose learning activities and games that motivate us.	2,71	1,05	moderate	3
1	There are more than 30 students in my class.	2,37	1,15	moderate	4
6	The classroom has an interactive whiteboard where we watch videos and participate in games related to our lessons.	2,29	0,88	low	5
3	The noise level in the classroom is high.	2,14	0,96	low	6
4	My classmates do not offer help when I speak English.	2,10	0,98	low	7

**Source:** The Authors (2024).

Table 4 shows that the statement with the highest score was “We listen to an audio recording before starting the oral activity” (3,76, SD = 0,93). Similarly, Alrasheedi (2020): suggests that teachers reconsider their roles to address student needs. The lowest scoring items were “There is an interactive whiteboard available” (2,29, SD = 0,88), “The class is too noisy” (2,14, SD = 0,96), and “My classmates do not offer support” (2,10, SD = 0,98). Other factors had moderate scores (SD = 1,18 to 1,15).

In summary, listening to an audio recording before oral activities improves speaking skills. In this line of thought, Anggarista and Wahyudin (2022b): note that limited resources and poor planning can reduce student performance. A positive environment and activity selection moderately affect speaking, while factors such as interactive whiteboards, noise, and lack of peer support have minimal impact.

Crucial elements affecting speaking proficiency include teacher influence, students' self-image, and fear of judgment. A supportive teacher fosters confidence, as fear of judgment causes anxiety and reluctance to speak. Practices such as mixing English and Spanish and correcting errors support skill development, as supported by (Sadoughi and Hejazi, 2023).



### 3.1. Results of Semi-structured Interviews with English Teachers

#### 3.1.1. Teacher - (T1)

T1, an English teacher with 22 years of experience and a doctorate in Languages and Cultures teaches first-semester students. When asked about factors hindering improvement in oral communication and possible solutions, they responded:

Anxiety and lack of security limit student participation due to fear of making mistakes. An encouraging environment allows them to feel comfortable with their errors, improving their confidence and oral English skills (T1, Personal Communication, 2024).

T1 recognizes that anxiety and lack of security are significant barriers, with many students fearful of making mistakes. He emphasizes that a supportive and motivating environment can greatly increase students' confidence in speaking English.

#### 3.1.2. Teacher - (T2)

The next interview was conducted with T2, an English instructor with 32 years of teaching experience. She supervises first-semester English students, and when asked about the main obstacles to teaching oral skills and possible solutions in the institution, she responded as follows:

Limited cultural knowledge impacts student learning. Although teaching focuses on other cultures, technology facilitates expression. Family abandonment also affects them; promoting practical skills in grammar and vocabulary is a solution (T2, Personal Communication, 2024).

T2 indicates that cultural barriers significantly contribute to the challenges faced when learning English as a second language. She also mentions teachers' role in supporting this process and underlines the need to integrate digital tools to improve students' language proficiency within the learning environment.



### 3.1.3. Teacher - (T3)

The third interview was conducted with T3, an English instructor with two decades of experience in charge of teaching the language to first-semester students. When inquiring about the main obstacles preventing advancement in oral communication skills among these students in the institution, as well as potential strategies to address such problems, she provided the following feedback:

Focusing on vocabulary is important for students to improve speaking and listening skills. Lack of vocabulary or disinterest makes comprehension difficult. Using games to teach vocabulary can help with memorization, sentence formation, and ease in dialogue reproduction (T3, Personal Communication, 2024).

T3 indicates that students should focus on building vocabulary to improve their speaking skills. She mentions that lack of interest in English is common, highlighting teachers' importance in learning. Using engaging activities to teach vocabulary is crucial for improving oral skills.

Limited vocabulary and basic knowledge that students bring to university make it difficult for them to use English effectively, affecting their class participation. Mental disposition toward a foreign language influences their participation and commitment to learning (Getie, 2020b). A supportive environment between teachers and students can reduce anxiety and encourage students to speak English confidently.

Interviews with three teachers and a student survey show patterns of anxiety when speaking English. The first teacher mentions that low self-confidence and fear of mistakes limit participation. The second highlights insufficient cultural knowledge and family problems, suggesting improving grammar and vocabulary. The third teacher focuses on vocabulary acquisition to improve listening and speaking, recommending games for memorization and sentence formation.



These findings align with López-Pérez, de la Maya and Rabazo (2023): who point out that anxiety can lead students to avoid speaking, limiting participation and learning. Consequently, Ölmezer-Öztürk and Öztürk (2021): further suggest that scaffolded feedback and oral presentations can alleviate speaking anxiety, echoing T3 focus on vocabulary to improve speaking skills.

#### 4. Conclusions

This research reveals significant findings about factors influencing the development of oral English competence in the Ecuadorian university context. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data allows us to establish relevant conclusions that respond to the main objective of creating a conceptual framework that identifies factors influencing English speaking skills in environments where English is a second language.

The results demonstrate that psychological factors, particularly anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, constitute the most significant barriers to oral competence development. This finding is especially relevant as it suggests that the emotional aspect has a greater impact on learning than technical or methodological limitations. The research reveals that fear of receiving criticism when speaking is the most significant emotional factor (with a mean of 4,00 on a scale of 5), which has direct implications for teaching practice.

The teacher is key to a good learning environment. The data shows that gradual bilingual strategies and constructive feedback increase student confidence and participation. This finding differs from previous studies that focused on teaching methods.

A novel aspect identified in this study is the correlation between strategic use of Spanish (L1) and the development of oral competence in English. The results suggest that, contrary to traditional practices advocating total English immersion, judicious use of Spanish as pedagogical support can facilitate the transition toward greater oral competence in English.



Study limitations include sample size, restricted to a single university institution, and the relatively short observation period. Future studies could benefit from a broader sample including different educational institutions and training levels.

The findings of this research have significant practical implications for teaching English in university contexts. It is recommended to: 1). Implement specific strategies for managing anxiety in the English classroom; 2). Develop teacher training programs focused on the psychological aspect of language learning; and 3). Design institutional policies that promote a more inclusive and less threatening learning environment.

Future lines of research could explore the long-term impact of anxiety reduction strategies on oral competence development, the effectiveness of different corrective feedback models in the Ecuadorian context, and the influence of emerging technologies in reducing psychological barriers to English learning.

This research contributes to the field of teaching English as a foreign language, showing the importance of psychological factors in oral competence. The results indicate that a holistic approach including emotional and pedagogical aspects is key to improving English teaching in Ecuadorian universities.

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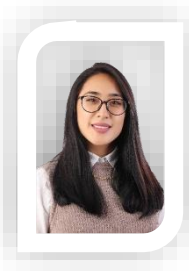


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