

## The Effect of Shyness on English Speaking Scores of Iranian EFL learners

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### Abstract

Many students receive low marks in EFL speaking classes. Teachers wrongly suppose that they are not competent enough, and teachers ignore shyness as an affective factor. This study aims to explore the relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian students in EFL classes. 165 Iranian students at grade 8 of junior secondary school in Mayamey, semnan province, were selected by cluster sampling. Persian translation of Stanford shyness scale was administered, the data were collected and shyness degrees were correlated with English speaking scores and there was a moderate negative correlation between them ( $r = -0.4$ ). Also there was a stronger negative correlation coefficient between variables in female subgroup ( $r = -0.57$ ) than male subgroup ( $r = -0.29$ ). Speaking scores were correlated by scores given by teachers for finding its reliability ( $r = 0.94$ ). Shyness test reliability was 0.75 by split half test of spearman. And the finding shows that English speaking scores of student is dependent to their degree of shyness. It can be concluded it is important to consider shyness as an affective factor in EFL classes, and teachers should never underestimate shy students in their EFL classes.

### Introduction

#### *Statement of the problem*

Learners in classroom situation are not the same, and different personality types such as unmotivated, anxious, introverted, extroverted, and shy persons participate in the class. In an EFL classroom based on communication purposes in which students need to use English language as a tool for communication, shy students are at a great disadvantage. Speaking in front of others is a difficult task for them. They have a negative picture about themselves that will affect on their motivation to speak. The same situation happens when they want to speak a foreign language or asked to answer a question in foreign language. Shy person may hesitate, make a lot of pause, or even escape from the situation. As a result, they receive low marks in speaking classes because there is a wrong supposition from the teachers' side that they are not competent enough in speaking skill and teachers give shy students low marks, but the problem is the ignorance of shyness as an affective factor in EFL classes.

It seems to be important to find if there is a relation between shyness and speaking skill, and aware teachers to notice shyness as an affective factor in their classes. So after that teachers will not deprive shy learners from receiving a high mark only just by judging them as incompetent in speaking skill.

### Review of Related Literature

#### *Theoretical perspectives*

Pilkonis (1977) states "shyness is a tendency to avoid social interactions and to fail participating appropriately in social situations" (p.596). Zimbardo defined shyness as "a heightened state of individuation characterized by excessive egocentric pre-occupation and over concerned with social evaluation, with the consequence that shy person inhibits, withdraws, avoids and escapes" (Zimbardo, 1982 pp.467-468). Henderson defined chronic shyness "a fear of negative evaluation that was sufficient to inhibit participation in desired activities and that significantly interfered with the pursuit of personal or professional goals" (Henderson, 1992).

Cheek & Melchior mentioned "shyness is the ordinary language term most often used to label felling of anxiety and inhibition in social situations. It is remarkably common experience" (Cheek, J.M. & Melchior, L.A. 1990)

#### *Empirical findings*

Rastegar and Pazouki conducted a study to investigate the relation between two personality factor extroversion-introversion and shyness with language proficiency. They found that there is no correlation between shyness and EFL proficiency (reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary). They also found that there is a negative correlation between shyness and extroversion (Rastegar and Pazouki 2009).

Chien-Tzu Liao (2006) investigated the correlations between shy college EFL students in Taiwan and their English learning. The study found that shyness does not impede Taiwanese college students' English learning in the aspects of speaking, listening, and reading. Shyness is different from Communication Apprehension (CA), but they are likely identical to instructors from students' behavior. 23.5% of Taiwanese sophomores have higher levels of CA and 69% of them are in the middle range of CA. The parentages reflect the

general situation that few volunteers answer questions in conversation classes and most of students are hesitant to interact with peers in language classes (Chien-Tzu Liao 2006).

Keller, Troesch, Grob conducted a research to examine whether shyness is a risk factor for second language acquisition in immigrant preschoolers. They selected a sample of 330 immigrants (bilingual) preschoolers cross-sectionally and with 130 immigrant preschoolers longitudinally. Researchers observed the subject and asked their parents about their behavior to find out if they are shy or non-shy. They also examined their second language ability by considering these subtests: word comprehension, sentence comprehension, word production, and sentence production. The analyses revealed lower second language competence as well as slower language development in shy immigrant children compared to their non-shy counterparts (Keller, Troesch 2013)

Farooqui interviewed five English teachers in private universities, and he collected their perceptions of student's problem in speaking and the reasons for the problem. Three of them said that students do better in reading and writing, but they do poorly in speaking. They feel shy and do not want to speak in front of the classroom (Farooqui 2007).

William Urritia Leon and Esperanza Vega Cely conducted an action research by 33 participants and the aim of the study was encouraging teenagers to improve speaking skills through games in a Colombian public high schools. 12 students mentioned overcoming shyness as a role of games in the classroom. In this research 27 students chose speaking as the most difficult skill, and 9 student shyness as an answer to the question " what factors interfered in your speaking skill or made it difficult to speak during the English class?" (Leon and Cely 2010)

Tannaz Mohammadian conducted her study with 60 EFL learners who were taking English courses at a private English institute in Shiraz. They were asked to fill out self-report questionnaires about their shyness, motivations in their English studies, and their willingness to communicate. Results indicated that Non-shy students reported having more intrinsic motivation to accomplish than shy students. In the sample under study there was not a significant difference between shy and non-shy learners level of willingness to communicate. There is no relationship between language learning motivation of Iranian EFL learners and their willingness to communicate (mohamadian2013).

Rahimi and Safarpour conducted an experimental research to find the effect of role-play on developing speaking ability. As a result they found that role-play affect on developing speaking ability. The authors mention students are not motivated to take part, and they are too shy and afraid of speaking in the classroom so role-play helps them to participate in the classroom (Rahimi and safarpour 2012).

Hyesook Park & Adam R. Lee (2004) conducted a research to examine the relationship between L2 learner anxiety, self confidence and oral performance the participants were 132 Korean college students who enrolled English conversation classes. The result of study showed that there was a significant effect of anxiety and self-confidence on oral performance of student: the higher anxiety about speaking English, the lower scores they gained on their oral performance (negative correlation) and the higher self-esteem, the higher score on their oral performance they gained. (Park & Lee 2004).

Lori M. Karakashian, Mark I. Walter, Andrew N. Christopher, & Todd Lucas conducted a correlational research to find the relation between shyness and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) on helping behavior. During the experiment, participants had the opportunity to help a female confederate in either a social or non-social situation. An interaction of FNE and condition was found to be marginally significant. In the social helping condition, participants who helped showed no difference in FNE scores versus those who did not help. However, in the non-social condition participants who helped had lower FNE scores than those who did not help (karakashian, Walter, Christopher, and Lucas 2006)

Butt, Moosa, Ajmal and Rahman conducted a study to find the relation between shyness and self esteem of 9th grade female students. The objectives of the research were to identify the symptoms of shyness, to explore the causes of shyness, to find out the relationship of shyness with the self esteem and to examine the effects of shyness on the self esteem of 9th grade female students it was found that weak positive relationship existed between shyness and self esteem. The results indicated that shyness affects the self esteem of 9th grade female students. A variation in the level of shyness was also found among students. It was explored that some students suffered from occasional shyness while, other experienced acute shyness, which obstructed the development of students (Butt, Moosa, Ajmal and Rahman 2011).

W. Ray Crozier (1995) investigated the relationship between shyness and self-esteem for two samples of children aged 9 to 12 years. Shyness was measured by a new self-report questionnaire based on an elicitation of children's conceptions of shyness. Shyness was significantly correlated with measures of global self-esteem, with external locus of control and with perceived competence across different domains of the self. The relationships among variables were similar to those reported for adolescent and adults. Girls were shyer than boys, and there was a suggestion that 11-year-old children were shyer in secondary than in primary school (Crozier, 1995)

Fariadian, Azizifar, Gowhary conducted a correlational study to investigate the relationship between anxiety and English speaking skill among Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this aim 80 of EFL learners who learn English in language learning institutions in Ilam province were investigated. The results show that English learning anxiety has a significant moderate negative correlation with the English speaking scores of students (Fariadian, Azizifar, Gowhary 2014)

In summary, shyness is an avoidant social tendency and fear of negative evaluation that prevent the shy person from interaction. Many investigations have been done on shyness and speaking skill separately, but a little research finding is available on the relation between shyness and speaking skill together. Rastegar and Pazouki found no correlation between shyness and language proficiency consist of reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. Chien-Tzu Liao found that shyness does not impede Taiwanese college students' English learning in the aspects of speaking, listening, and reading. Leon and Cely found that Shyness has a significant effect on second language acquisition of pre-school immigrants. In some qualitative studies, teachers and student had mentioned shyness as an affective factor on speaking skill. No researcher has worked on *the effect of shyness on speaking scores of students in EFL classrooms*, and those who have worked they worked on general language ability and shyness, not specifically on speaking skill. The other researches just have collected data by interviews and not by collecting data from shyness questionnaire and correlating it with students' speaking scores. So this is a gap in the body of knowledge that this study will investigate it.

### **Purpose of the study**

This correlational research is conducted to find the relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners. The **research questions** are:

- 1- "**what is the relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners?**"
- 2- **Is there a stronger relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners in male subgroups?**
- 3- **Is there a stronger relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners in female subgroups?**

It had been hypothesized that:

- 1- **there is a negative correlation between shyness and English speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners.**
- 2- **there is a stronger negative correlation between shyness and speaking scores of Iranian male EFL learners than female learners.**
- 3- **there is a stronger negative correlation between shyness and speaking scores of Iranian female EFL learners than male learners.**

In this research English speaking scores is a dependant variable and shyness is the independent variable.

### **Research context**

This research took place in Mayamey a small county in Semnan province, Iran, Mayamey has about 350 eighth grade students, some of them in city center and the others in different villages. Most of the participants are from medium social class families. They take English 2 hours a week as a foreign language in junior secondary schools in the morning. Just about 5 percent of them enrolled in private language institute program.

### **Methodology**

#### *Participant and sampling procedure*

The subjects of this study were 165 (86 male and 79 female) students at grade 8<sup>th</sup>, and at the age of 14. They were studying English as a foreign language, two hours a week, for the second year in junior secondary schools. They are from medium social class, and most of them have no background of English language.

The subjects were selected by cluster sampling. 24 classes in accessible population were listed and 8 classes were selected randomly. Except the students who were absent, the other students participated in this study.

#### *Instruments*

##### *Shyness*

In this study revised and Persian translation of *Stanford shyness scale* designed by Zimbardo (1997) was administered as a tool for identifying degree of shyness. It contains 40 items, and for each of these items there are four choices. One of them is the most representative of shyness, and receives 4 points. The other three choices will receive 3, 2, and the least representative of shyness will receive 1 point. The highest degree in this scale is 160 and the lowest degree can be 40. In this research the reliability of the scale by spearman split half method was 0.75.

### Speaking

For determining English speaking scores of student they were asked to communicate with one of the researchers at the same level of conversation used in their books. Scores of this test was correlated (Pearson product) with the scores that they received from their teachers ( $r=0.94$ ).

### Procedure of the study

This research is done in 8 classes of Mayamey County. First of all the researchers get the permission from the manager, then the speaking test was administered by one of the researchers. After the speaking test, the speaking scores that they received from their teachers were written in front of the scores they received from the researchers. Each participant was named by a number that was the same with the written number on the questionnaire that they received next week. Shyness questionnaire was administered in each of these classes, and they were introduced how to answer the questions. Writing their names was not necessary so they were free to choose their real option, and no fear of being known by their names.

### Operational definitions

*Shyness*: in this study by shyness we mean the degree of shyness that a participant receives from Stanford shyness scale (1997).

*English speaking score*: is the score that the participant receives from the researcher or researcher's colleagues that has 10 point.

### Data Collection and Date Analysis

To determine the degree of shyness, the revised Persian translation of Stanford scale (1997) was administered. Before taking the questionnaire the researcher explained them how to answer questions. A test of speaking by one of the researchers was administered, and the speaking scores by their teachers were collected.

The data collected by these tests was analyzed by SPSS 15. And mean, standard deviation, variance were calculated. Pearson product correlation coefficient was used for finding the relationship between shyness and English speaking scores, reliability of English speaking scores and reliability of shyness test. And one sample T-test was run.

### Results

The highest degree of shyness on shyness test was 120 and the lowest degree was 62 while the highest possible degree is 160 and the lowest possible degree is 40. The mean of total scores 85.15 and  $SD=12.33$

The highest score on speaking test conducted by the researcher was 10 while the lowest score was 1. the mean of scores was 6.42 and  $SD=2.76$ . The highest speaking score received from the teacher of the class was 10 while the lowest score was 1. the mean of scores was 6.81 and  $SD=2.47$ .

Table 1: summary of descriptive statistic

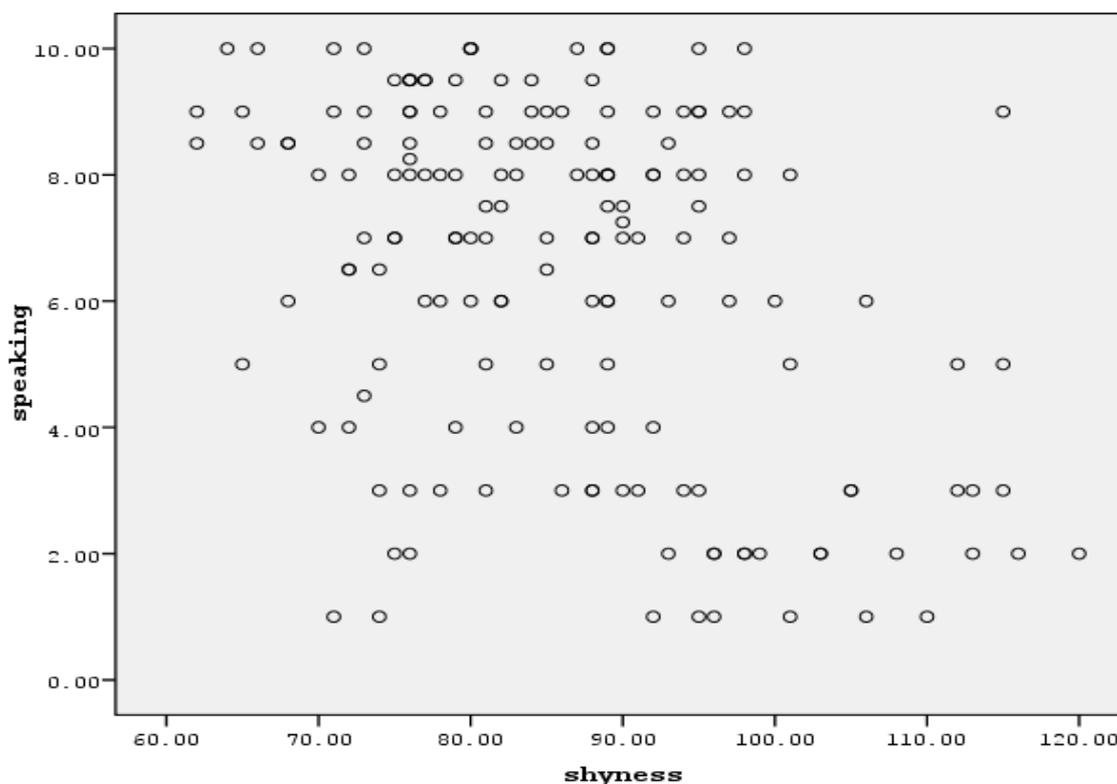
Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Scores by the teacher	165	10.00	1.00	6.8152	2.47131
Shyness	165	120.00	62.00	86.1515	12.33061
Scores by researchers	165	10.00	1.00	6.4212	2.76118
				165	Valid N

The Pearson product correlation coefficient between English speaking scores by the researchers and the teacher of the class was 0.94 at 0.01 level of significant and its standard error mean was calculated by one sample T-test 0.21. these statistics shows that there is a high positive correlation between English speaking scores given by the researchers and English speaking scores given by students' teachers thus English speaking scores of the researchers are reliable.

To calculate the reliability of shyness test, students' questionnaires were divided into two half, and the correlation between the degrees of first half and second half was  $r=0.748$ , thus the shyness test is reliable at 0.01 level of significant and its standard error mean was calculated by one sample T-test 0.95.

Finally, for finding the relationship between shyness and English speaking scores of the participant, Pearson product correlation was run  $r=-0.404$  and it shows that there is a significant moderate negative correlation between shyness and English speaking scores of the students in EFL classes. The higher degree of shyness causes the lower score on speaking test and oral production of student in EFL classes of Iran. Correlating shyness with English speaking scores of the participants in two different subgroups revealed  $r=-0.29$  for male subgroup and  $r=-0.57$  for female subgroup.

Table 2: correlation between speaking and shyness by scatter dot



The correlation between variables (table 3)

	Speaking scores by researchers	Shyness	Speaking scores by teachers
Speaking scores by researchers	1	-0.40	0.94
shyness	-0.40	1	- 0.37
Speaking scores by teachers	0.94	- 0.37	1

At 0.01 level of significant (one tailed)

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The result of data analysis shows that the first null hypothesis (there is no relationship between shyness and speaking scores of Iranian EFL learners) is rejected and the research hypothesis can be verified because there is a negative correlation between shyness and English speaking scores of student ( $r = - 0.40$ ) at 0.01 level of significance. The second null hypothesis (there is no stronger relationship between shyness and speaking scores in male subgroup) is true. Thus the second hypothesis is rejected, and the third null hypothesis (there is no stronger relationship between shyness and speaking scores in female subgroup) is rejected. The correlation coefficient between dependant and independent variables in female subgroup was stronger than male subgroup. Thus third hypothesis was verified that there is a stronger negative correlation between shyness and speaking scores of Iranian female EFL learners than male learners.

Sometimes affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self esteem are disregarded in the EFL classrooms, although they affect on learning process. Today these factors are more considered than shyness. Shyness is a construct that most of instructors disregard it. Shy students may have the knowledge but he/she over uses the monitoring for not being negatively evaluated thus hesitate, pause and stop to think to answer the question, and this pause most of the times is thought because of not knowing the answer and they are underestimated.

## Significance of the study

### *Implication*

There was a gap in former investigation about the effect of shyness on speaking skill in EFL classes. Although some researches had worked on this area, most of them just collected the data based on interviews, and those researchers that have done a correlational research, their research examine the relation between shyness and language proficiency as a general term. As it was hypothesized this correlational study found that shyness is an affective factor in EFL classes. The higher degree of shyness will cause a lower speaking score in EFL classes.

### *Application*

Most of the time there are shy students in EFL classroom. So the teachers should be cautious to not underestimate shy students. Teachers can identify shy student and help them to express their ideas by utilizing techniques such as role-play, repetition, and less oral tasks that are less stressful for shy person. Identify shy student and help them not underestimate them. Underestimation does not help them to be stronger instead it makes them weaker and weaker by losing their self esteem.

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