





The Role of Psychological and Social Factors in Causing Hesitation During Speaking: The Case of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract

EFL learners worldwide find it difficult to acquire proficiency in speaking English, due to various barriers that impact their speaking skills, one of which is hesitation. The aim of this study was to examine the psychological and sociocultural factors that might lead to hesitation during speaking English among Saudi EFL learners. A mixed-method approach was used for collecting data for the study, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, including questionnaires and interviews. The results indicate that hesitation is primarily caused by psychological factors, such as anxiety, lack of confidence, shyness, and introverted personality. Sociocultural factors, including limited use of English in daily life and gender differences, are also found to have played a significant role in causing hesitation. Female learners were found to be more hesitant in using English compared to male learners. The study concludes with recommendations for pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing the effects of anxiety and hesitation among the Saudi EFL learners when trying to speaking English.

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Keywords: Speaking, Hesitation, Psychological Factors, Sociocultural Factors, Saudi EFL Learners.

Introduction

Teaching and learning English has been the focus for researchers in many parts of the world during the recent decades. The status of English language as a means of global communication in almost all walks of life brings more attention to the necessity of learning the language. The growth of English language as a lingua franca, i.e., language of global communication, sheds light specifically on countries where English is used as a second language, foreign language, or as a medium of instruction in higher education. As a result, a number of programmes for teaching English e.g., Teaching English for the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Teaching English as Second Language (TESL), and Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) have been launched in many non-English speaking countries.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, English language is taught as a foreign language and is used as a medium of instruction in science and technology in higher education. However, learning to speak English in countries where English is a foreign language is one of the difficulties encountered by learners. English language learning requires mastering four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, learning speaking skills is a preference for the majority of EFL learners. However, many EFL learners find some difficulties trying to be

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proficient speakers in English. This is outlined by a number of scholars who investigated the barriers that impact speaking skills among EFL learners in a variety of contexts. Among these challenges hesitation was found to be the most salient factors influencing the fluency building a foreign environment. Fluency, the ability to use a language with confidence and quickness, without hesitations or pauses (Bailey & Ferreira, 2003) is one of the important goals of language learners. EFL learners need to acquire a naturally-occurring language when engaged in a vigorous exchange of ideas (Richards, 2008).

A number of significant barriers have been identified as the main causes of fluency impairment, and psychological factors are among the major causes hindering English speaking fluency. Motivation, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence, are responsible for EFL learners' unwillingness to speak English (Brown, 2008). Similarly, sociocultural factors have been found as significant agents preventing EFL learners from being proficient speakers in English. In addition to psychological and sociocultural factors, cognitive process such as thinking, recalling, perceiving, and classifying are crucial to fluency development (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004).

The present study investigated the role of psychological and sociocultural factors causing hesitation among EFL Saudi learners. Sociocultural and psychological factors that affect language learning are crucial in understanding interlanguage development. Sociocultural factors include racism, stereotyping, communication with native speakers, identification with culture, nature of educational system, and the status of student's culture. Psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and introversion, on the other hand, negatively impact hesitation in speaking English. Anxiety is associated with feelings such as discomfort, ridicule and failure, frustration, apprehension, and tension. These feelings are experienced by language learners when trying to speak in a foreign language.

The fear of being ridiculed by peers prevents many students from using the target language orally. Shy and introvert students are particularly influenced by the feelings associated with anxiety. The situation becomes even worse when those students have to use the target language in a society that does not accept speaking a language other than its own. Speaking English in everyday communication is not accepted by most of the Saudi individuals who regard the behavior as a sort of showing off. Some people even get very angry when a language learner tries to practice his English by using some English words in everyday communication. Some of our informants reported that they are bitterly criticized whenever they used English sentences or words in conversing with their friends and relations One participant interviewed reported: " I don't use the English language regularly, neither with family nor with my friends and colleagues. It's not acceptable to use the English language with people around me. They criticise or mock me, and most of the people around me can't speak the English language."

Other social factors such as the attitude towards strangers and lack of contact with English speakers contribute significantly to the limited opportunities for practicing English language. Social factors, then, influence and shape psychological aspects such as personality traits in a way that impact learning a foreign language. Investigating the status of sociocultural factors affecting language learning in the Saudi context will help understand the cultural context of a conservative Muslim society. We need to understand what it means to speak a foreign language to people who are very proud of their cultural and social identity.

Investigating psychological and sociocultural factors causing hesitation among Saudi EFL learners is expected to serve two purposes First, teachers and syllabus designers within the Saudi educational institution will have a better understanding of the social, cultural and psychological traits that characterize the Saudi community and have some impact on the means and ways Saudi students learn language. Such an understanding will help teachers improve their methods of teaching and syllabus designers consider these factors when writing materials for Saudi students. Second, a significant gap in researching EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context. To this end, this study tried to find answers for the following questions:

- 1- Is hesitation the main reason for speaking difficulties among Saudi EFL learners?
- 2- What is the role of psychological and sociocultural factors in causing hesitation among Saudi EFL learners?

By answering these questions, the study attempted to achieve the following objectives: 1)Identifying the psychological and social factors causing hesitation and ultimately limiting Saudi EFL learners' ability to communicate fluently in English; 2) Finding possible solutions for the problems caused by social and psychological factors to improve Saudi EFL learners' oral communication in English; and 3) Providing a better understanding of the ELT environment in the Saudi context that helps improve EFL teaching and learning English in Saudi educational institutions(i.e. Schools and Universities).

Literature Review

The global importance of English has caused a growing focus on teaching and learning English in different parts of the world including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As a result, language teaching and learning researchers become interested in speaking English among EFL learners and the factors that influence it.

Many scholars have focused on the psychological factors that impact English language learning, specifically speaking skills. These researchers have explored factors like hesitation and dysfluency and their implications for speaking performance, highlighting the need to understand their influence in improving speaking abilities.

Haidara (2016) argues that Indonesian English learners are negatively affected by various psychological factors that hinder their ability to speak English. A qualitative research method was employed for collecting data namely, classroom observation and unstructured interviews with 20 students from the applied linguistic field at the Graduate School of Yogyakarta State University. Results suggest that despite having a good mastery of English vocabulary and grammar, psychological factors such as lack of confidence, nervousness, anxiety, shyness, and fear of making mistakes negatively affected students' ability to speak English fluently and accurately. The study found that students often switched to their mother tongue when they were unable to find a word or an expression. The study recommended some strategies for overcoming psychological barriers, such as reframing the perception of English as a difficult language, accepting mistakes as a natural part of the learning process, and avoiding self-doubt or concern for others' opinions.

Fitriani and Apriliaswati (2015) conducted a study to identify the difficulties and challenges facing EFL learners at Tanjungpura University Pontianak, when speaking English. The study employed a descriptive research method, with a sample of 30 third-semester students selected based on their participation in an academic presentation in a speaking class. Data were collected through video recordings and a 25-item questionnaire. The results indicated that psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence were the most dominant barriers to effective speaking or fluency. Lack of confidence was found to be a common issue among learners investigated. Many students appeared to be afraid of speaking in front of others, worried about their proficiency in English, or being underestimated by their colleagues. Additionally, the students often experienced nervousness and forgetfulness when asked questions by their teachers. The study concluded that students have to be aware of the fact that English is just a means of communication that has to be learned with little stress.

Çağatay (2015) conducted a study to examine foreign language speaking anxiety and its potential correlation with gender. The study employed a quantitative research method, with a sample of 147 EFL university students. Foreign language speaking anxiety scale questionnaire was used to measure the level of speaking anxiety among the participants. The results indicate that the level of anxiety among the participants is moderate. Females were found to be more anxious than males during speaking tasks. Additionally, the study revealed that proficiency level had no correlation with anxiety levels. The researcher suggested that learners should engage in informal social conversation with native speakers in order to be exposed to authentic language, which is expected to reduce the level of anxiety among them.

Siswoyo (2022) explored different forms of hesitation that affect speaking English and their implications to language learning. A qualitative approach was used, and 93 students were randomly selected from various levels of English Language Study Program at Muhammadiyah University for in-depth interviews. Data were collected through open-ended questions on WhatsApp and Google Meet. Analysis was divided into three sections: reformulation, description, and interpretation. The results showed that even though the learners had a high level of proficiency in speaking English, psychological barriers such as hesitation, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes affected their fluency. Consequently, they were less likely to communicate confidently in English preferring to remain silent in most of the speaking activities.

Sociocultural factors also contributed to speaking difficulties, learning a foreign language is a complex process, especially for speaking skills in countries where English is not commonly used. Overall, identifying these difficulties and finding possible solutions is crucial for improving English language proficiency. Alrasheedi (2020) investigated how psychological and sociocultural factors impact the speaking abilities of undergraduate students in the College of Education at Majmaah University. To measure the psychological factors that affect speaking skills, the researcher used a quantitative instrument. The study included 100 male and 100 female participants from different majors, and they were given the questionnaire in equal number. The female participants completed more questionnaires than the male participants. The analysis was done using SPSS. Findings revealed that psychological factors, such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and shyness, as well as sociocultural factors, such as limited exposure to a language and lack of practice opportunities, are responsible for low proficiency in speaking.

Malik et al. (2021) investigated the factors that contributed to English communication apprehension and anxiety among Chinese EFL university learners, including psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural factors. The researcher used qualitative data collection methods, namely group discussions and semi-structured interviews, with eight Chinese EFL university learners. Each interview lasted between 40-45 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. The tool used for analysing the data is Direct content analysis. The findings revealed that personality traits such as shyness and introversion were the main cause of communication apprehension. Psychological factors like anxiety and apprehension were also identified, with learners reporting higher levels of anxiety when speaking and listening in English compared to reading and writing. Difficulty remembering and retrieving vocabulary, reluctance to speak in front of others due to low confidence and self-esteem, and fear of negative assessment were also among the factors contributing to communication

apprehension. Sociocultural factors such as geographic background, parental education level, lack of exposure to English, and lack of interaction with English speakers, were also identified. Students feared losing their cultural identity, and linguistic factors, such as a lack of lexical and grammatical knowledge and poor pronunciation, were among the problems hindering effective communication in English.

Lestari et al. (2013) studied the impact of personality traits on the success of foreign language learners in speaking English. The research was carried out using a questionnaire and direct observation, where the behaviour of students was observed while speaking in class to determine the relevance of their personalities. The study selected 33 students to collect data for the research. Findings revealed that introvert and extrovert personalities had a moderate effect on speaking performance. The characteristics of introversion and extroversion may have a simple impact on speaking performance. Additionally, introverted personalities may face several challenges, such as instructors speaking too quickly without allowing time for mental processing, difficulty participating in group discussions, and reluctance to speak in public.

Samatovich and Ruzigul (2023) investigated the role of psychological factors in students' speaking skills. The researcher interviewed 80 EFL learners devoting 30 minutes to each participant. The study findings indicate that most of the participants reported psychological factors as the main cause of their inability to speak English rather than lack of linguistic knowledge. The results also suggest that despite the high level of linguistic proficiency among some participants, psychological factors proved to have negative influence in the participants' ability to speak English. The researcher identified hesitation, lack of motivation, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and low self-confidence as products of psychological factors.

Ajani (2021) suggested that there were various factors that contributed to the speaking hesitation phenomena. To explore this hypothesis, a study was conducted with five students from the English Department at The Institute of Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN Langsa). The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants using twenty semi-structured questions to ensure accurate answers. The study found that cognitive processes such as memory processing, thinking, and perception, are among the factors that lead to hesitation while speaking. The researcher tried to figure out whether the students had gone through these cognitive processes. Some students in the study reported difficulties with focus, confusion, and forgetting vocabulary as the main causes of hesitation as they processed sentences in their brains.

This research aimed to shed light on the reasons behind hesitation and dysfluency among Saudi EFL learners. The study intended to help syllabus designers and teachers understand the role of psychological and social factors in hindering fluency among Saudi EFL learners. The study will focus on aspects of hesitation and disfluency, including psychological and socio-cultural obstacles. Investigating the role of psychological factors and sociocultural factors is expected to be an important step in understanding speaking problems.

Methodology

- *Research Design*

A mixed method research design was employed in this study combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. To gather quantitative data, a survey questionnaire was administered to examine the psychological and sociocultural factors that affect the cognitive processes involved in speaking English. The study aimed to determine whether psychological and sociocultural factors were responsible for difficulties in speaking English, such as hesitation and dysfluency. To obtain qualitative data, structured interviews were conducted with Saudi foreign language learners focusing on the psychological and sociocultural factors that impact their language learning experiences.

- *Data Collection Instrument*

The questionnaire and interview technique were used to collect data in this study. The survey questionnaire was divided into five sections, consisting of 23 questions that required participants to select from four adverbs of frequency: usually, sometimes, rarely, and never. The questions were designed to gather information about the psychological and socio-cultural factors that impacted their speaking fluency. The first section collected personal data, such as gender and age. The second section focuses on hesitation and disfluency among EFL speakers, including their prevalence and potential impact on social communication. Participants were asked questions such as "do you think that shyness contributes to hesitation?", "Do you think that anxiety prevents you from communicating successfully using English", " Do you have lack of confidence when trying to speak English?" and " Hesitation and disfluency are among the main problems I face whilst speaking English?". The third section explored psychological factors that affect fluency, such as anxiety, shyness, introversion, and lack of confidence. The fourth section examined socio-cultural factors specific to the Saudi context, such as reasons for avoiding to use English in everyday communication and its consequences on fluency.

Interviews were conducted with participants who were informed about the purpose of the study and the benefit of their valuable efforts in the interview. The interview was divided into four sections. The first section focused on hesitation and disfluency and their impact on speaking English in everyday interaction. Questions such as "Do you face problems like excessive hesitation whilst speaking English? and "What are the consequences of this hesitation in English communication? and "How do you feel when you speak in English language?" "Are you relaxed and comfortable?" were asked. The second section explored the psychological factors that affect fluency. Students were asked about their personal traits such as being shy/extrovert and whether this had a role in causing hesitation when trying to speak English. The third section covered the role of sociocultural factors in shaping fluency. In this section questions such as " Is English language acceptable to people around you in your daily life? If NO, then what are the reasons? and " Do females use the English language more than males? If YES, then why?" were asked.

- *Population and Sampling*

In the quantitative method, a sample of 210 EFL University students were carefully selected from different Saudi Universities. The sample consisted of 114 male and 96 female students who answered Google forms questionnaires. The sample population included only students of medical and engineering colleges. The reason behind this selection was that English is used as a medium of instruction in most of these colleges. This means that mastering English is crucial for the students to complete their study with satisfactory results. Moreover, students need English after graduating from the college and starting their careers. Any future success in the respective job or postgraduate studies depend largely on mastering English. As a result, we expect more efforts and determination from the students' part to improve their English proficiency.

In selecting the sample, we were very keen to maintain some balance between male and female participants. This was very important for the study because we expected notable differences in the attempts to use English in everyday interaction between male and female participants. Gender differences in language learning have been investigated widely in different parts of the world (Coats & Feldman, 1996). Women are found to have used more standard forms than men who used more vernacular forms. In a Saudi context, given the fact that there is a sharp separation between males and females, we expect interesting differences in using English based on gender classification. One of our respondents reported that " Yes, female use English language more than male because if a male speaks in English his friends will mock him because we think it is a type of showing off to speak in English but in female society, they use English language sometimes".

For the qualitative phase of this study, interviewees were chosen from medical and engineering colleges of same Saudi universities, where English was the medium of instruction. Therefore, the language proficiency of the participants was relatively similar. The sample included five female students from medical colleges and five males from engineering and medical colleges. The participants reacted to questions designed especially to investigate the potential impact of psychological and sociocultural factors impacting their ability to communicate fluently in English. Questions such as "Is the English language acceptable to use daily? If it is NO What are the reasons?" were asked. One of the interviewees answered "We do not use English language with our families, friends, or at university. It is not acceptable to use this language because the society thinks that it will endanger their mother tongue, Arabic".

- *Data Analysis*

In the data analysis phase, two types of analyses were employed. For quantitative data, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the questionnaire responses, with each question/response presented in graphical and tabular form. The processed data were organized for analysis using the statistical software SPSS. For qualitative data, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into written text, and each response was analysed to achieve the research objectives. Manual thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the collected data and to summarize the key characteristics and patterns observed in the variables investigated. Frequency (percentage) and standard deviation were used in the process of data analysis. A standard deviation was used to show how much deviation from the mean existed (such as spread, dispersion, spread,). Low, or small, standard deviation suggested that data tend to be close to the mean. High, or large, standard deviation, on the other hand, suggests that data are significantly spread out. This analysis aimed to describe the sample and related variables in terms of their central tendency, dispersion, and frequency distribution. The descriptive analysis included measures such as mean and standard deviation. These measures helped to understand the average values, variations, and distribution of the variables in the study.

Results

- *Reliability Analysis*

Right at the outset, in order to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scale utilized in the study, a reliability analysis was performed. Cronbach's Alpha, a commonly employed statistic, was computed to assess the degree to which the items within the scale consistently measured the same underlying construct. This statistical measure is widely recognized and employed to measure the reliability of a scale by examining the interrelatedness and coherence of its items. By calculating Cronbach's Alpha, the study aimed to ascertain the reliability and internal consistency of the measurement scale.

Table 1: *Internal Reliability Measurement.*

Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
0.864	21

The results of the reliability analysis indicated a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.864, as seen in Table 1. This suggests that the items in the scale were reliable in measuring the study items. The scale consisted of 21 items mentioned in the next section, and the high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient indicated that the items were positively correlated and collectively measured the construct of interest effectively.

To estimate the sample response to the questionnaire and gathered data, cut off points were established to judge the estimates of weighted averages based on the length of the scale. The length of the scale was calculated by using the Likert psychometric scale in the following formula: Range = Highest value - Lowest value. In this case, the range is $5 - 1 = 4$, and the number of categories (level of agreement) is 5, resulting in a category length of $4 \div 5 = 0.8$.

Calculate $5-1=4 \div 5=0.8$ for very high ($5-0.8=4.20$). The criterion for measuring the level of agreement for questionnaire items is given below in the Table 2.

Table 2: *Level of Agreement.*

1.00 – 1.79	Very Low
1.80 – 2.59	Low
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate
3.40 – 4.19	High
4.20 – 5.00	Very High

The criteria used to assess the level of agreement for the questionnaire items in the study included the range of values for the level of agreement and their corresponding categories. The scores were divided into five normative categories: Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, and Very High.

- *Hesitation prevalence among EFL learners*

The participants reported that hesitation is one of their major difficulties while speaking English as revealed in Table 3. The mean score for this statement showed 3.55 (SD = 0.788), indicating a high level of agreement. Hesitation was identified as a prevalent difficulty for EFL learners. The mean score for this statement was 3.53 (SD = 0.813) which suggests a high level of agreement as in the previous statement.

Table 3: *Hesitation Prevalence Among the Participants.*

Research-questions		Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1- Hesitation is one of my major difficulties whilst speaking the English language.	N	145	46	9	10	3.55	0.788
	%	69.0%	21.9%	4.3%	4.8%		
2- Hesitation is a prevalent difficulty for English language speakers.	N	143	48	7	12	3.53	0.813
	%	68.1%	22.9%	3.3%	5.7%		
3- Hesitation in the English language are associated particularly with speaking in public.	N	80	37	14	79	2.56	1.33
	%	38.1%	17.6%	6.7%	37.6%		
4- Hesitation has an obvious impact on communication and social interaction in the English language.	N	150	47	4	9	3.61	0.732
	%	71.4%	22.4%	1.9%	4.3%		
Sub-scale average						3.31	

The table also reveals that participants associated hesitation when speaking English language, particularly in public. The mean score for this statement is shown 2.56 (SD = 1.33) indicating a relatively lower level of agreement. The participants acknowledged that hesitation has an obvious impact on communication and social interaction in English. The mean score for this statement is 3.61 (SD = 0.732),

suggesting high level of agreement. The average score for the sub-scale of hesitation is 3.31 which indicates a moderate level of agreement among participants.

In order to recognise speakers' awareness of hesitation difficulty and the prevalence of hesitation among EFL speakers, the following questions were asked. For the first question, do you encounter problems like excessive hesitation whilst speaking English, and what are the consequences of hesitation in English communication? All participants agreed that hesitation was encountered by all the participants reporting various consequences. One participant reported that hesitation was one of the difficulties he experienced and that excessive hesitation led to devastating the conversation and then refraining from speaking. Another participant reported that hesitation was one of the consistent difficulties experienced while speaking English language. Being hesitant to replace words or reconstruct sentences can contribute to a massive misunderstanding in the conversation. Misunderstanding conversation content due to excessive hesitation was confirmed by one of the participants. Most participants believed that hesitation was a consistent difficulty while speaking English leading to frustration and unwillingness to complete the conversation.

- *Psychological Factors*

A descriptive analysis was conducted to explore the psychological factors causing to hesitation among the participants while speaking English, as revealed in Table 4.

Table 4: Psychological Factors Causing Hesitation.

Research-questions		Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1- Do you feel nervous and anxious whilst speaking in the English language?	N	140	44	11	15	3.47	0.887
	%	66.7%	21.0%	5.2%	7.1%		
2- Do you have a lack of confidence whilst speaking in the English language?	N	132	41	17	20	3.36	0.984
	%	62.9%	19.5%	8.1%	9.5%		
3- Do you have a communication apprehension that led to hesitation and disfluency whilst speaking the English language?	N	136	37	15	22	3.37	1.004
	%	64.8%	17.6%	7.1%	10.5%		
4- Do you suffer from hesitation and disfluency whilst speaking English due to nervousness, anxiety, and lack of confidence?	N	127	37	19	27	3.26	1.072
	%	60.5%	17.6%	9.0%	12.9%		
5- Do you encounter difficulty in paying attention, thinking, and remembering the information in the English language due to anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence?	N	127	41	17	25	3.29	1.042
	%	60.5%	19.5%	8.1%	11.9%		
6- An introvert-personality impacts speaking fluency in the English language.	N	61	51	23	75	2.47	1.246
	%	29.0%	24.3%	11.0%	35.7%		
7- Shyness contributes to hesitation and disfluency in speaking the English language.	N	154	38	11	7	3.61	0.738
	%	73.3%	18.1%	5.2%	3.3%		
Sub-scale average						3.26	

Participants reported feeling nervous and anxious while speaking in English. The mean score for this statement is 3.47 (SD = 0.887), indicating a high level of agreement. Shyness was found to cause hesitation and disfluency in speaking English. The mean score is 3.61 (SD = 0.738). These figures indicate a high level of agreement. On the other hand, some participants reported that they lacked confidence in themselves while speaking in English. The mean score of this claim is 3.36 (SD = 0.984). The table also shows that communication apprehension was identified as a factor leading to hesitation in speaking English by a considerable proportion of participants represented with a mean score of 3.37 (SD = 1.004). In addition, participants reported that the hesitation they experienced was influenced by nervousness, anxiety, and lack of confidence. The mean score of this claim is 3.26 (SD = 1.072). Difficulties with concentration, thinking, and remembering information while speaking in English were attributed to anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence. The mean score of this claim is 3.29 (SD = 1.042). This indicates a moderate level of agreement among the participants regarding the role of hesitation in hindering speaking fluently in English. Introvert personality, for instance was reported as impacting speaking fluency in English by a mean score of 2.47 (SD = 1.246), which indicates a relatively low level of agreement. The average score for the psychological factors, on the other hand, was reported by participants constituting 3.26.

To investigate the psychological variables that impact cognitive processes and cause hesitation, two questions were asked: 'How do you feel when you speak in the English language?' and 'Are you relaxed and comfortable when speaking in English?' All of the participants agreed that they have encountered feelings such as nervousness or being anxious while speaking English. One participant reported that anxiety and nervousness were feelings that the learners experienced while speaking English. Another participant reported that the feelings that disturbed him the most were worriedness, and hesitation. Moreover, a participant commented that speaking in English was connected to being uncomfortable, and anxious, which contributes to misunderstanding during conversation

For the second question, 'Do you feel that you lack confidence whilst speaking English language?' The majority of the participants mentioned reported that they did not have enough confidence while speaking in English. However, one participant pointed out that lack of confidence was not one of difficulties he encountered in speaking English. On the contrary, another participant comments that he struggled with lack of confidence while speaking English, especially in public. This claim seemed to be the same with many other participants.

To cover another psychological factor, personal traits, Question 3 was asked, 'Are you a shy person?' If the answer is YES, then do you feel hesitant when you feel shy? One participant stated that shyness was one of the personality traits he experiences, leading to hesitation, and feeling embarrassed, which makes him unable to speak properly. Another participant reported that he has a shy personality, and that he feels hesitant while speaking in English, particularly when speaking in front of others. A third participant commented that she is a very shy person, and she pauses excessively when speaking in English language. Finally, one more participant noted that she is a shy person, and she always feels hesitant when feeling shy trying to express herself in English.

Answering Question 4, 'Are you an introvert person?' If YES, then does it impact your communication in English?', and do you feel hesitant? Most of the participants indicated they did not have introvert personalities. One participant indicated that he was not an introvert person, and an introvert personality does not impact English communication. Another participant comments went in the same line denying being an introvert person. The participants reported that he was noticed by his colleagues which limited his ability to express himself in English. One more participant reported that he was not an introvert person, nevertheless, he experienced hesitation. On the other hand, one of the participants confessed that he was an introvert person, but he was unsure if this impacted his ability to express himself in English.

- *Sociocultural Factors*

Table 5 exhibits the findings of the various items that relate to the sociocultural factors impacting English speaking skills of Saudi students.

Table 5: Sociocultural Factors Impacting Speaking English.

Research-questions		Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
1- Do you speak the English Language in the Saudi community regularly?	N	19	61	30	100	2	1.065
	%	9.0%	29.0%	14.3%	47.6%		
2- Does the Saudi community accept speaking in the English language regularly?	N	13	62	33	102	1.93	1.014
	%	6.2%	29.5%	15.7%	48.6%		
3- Does the Saudi community recognise the meaning of speech whilst speaking in the English language?	N	24	84	78	24	2.51	0.843
	%	11.4%	40.0%	37.1%	11.4%		
4- Does the Saudi community criticise you when you are using the English language constantly?	N	107	69	18	16	3.27	0.911
	%	51.0%	32.9%	8.6%	7.6%		
5- Does the Saudi community perceive that speaking in the English language is a type of boasting?	N	124	63	11	12	3.42	0.834
	%	59.0%	30.0%	5.2%	5.7%		
6- Does the lack of using the English language cause hesitation and disfluency in the English language?	N	146	47	10	7	3.58	0.736
	%	69.5%	22.4%	4.8%	3.3%		
Sub-scale average							3.26

The first statement of speaking in English language regularly within the Saudi community was reported by a small proportion of participants (Mean: 2; SD = 1.065), which indicates a relatively low level of agreement among the participants. The data show that the proportion of using English regularly in everyday interaction vary significantly from a person to another. Learners of English who are enrolled in the medical colleges tend to use English regularly when interacting with each other or with people within the medical personnel. When involved interaction within their social networks, use of English becomes very difficult as people from other

walks of life regard it sorts of unnecessary show off. Some people may even get very angry as they think that the speakers are looking down on them. This is obvious in the recognition of using English within the Saudi community which was perceived differently. The mean score for this statement is 2.51 (SD = 0.843), indicates a low level of agreement. Criticism from the Saudi community for using English language constantly was reported by the participants. The perception of speaking in English is a type of boasting within the Saudi community was reported by many participants. The mean score for this statement is 3.42 (SD = 0.834), indicating a high level of agreement. In this context, use of English in every day interaction becomes extremely rare. Thus, lack of using English was identified as a potential factor causing hesitation and disfluency among Saudi EFL learners. The mean score for this statement is 3.58 (SD = 0.736) which indicates that the participants unanimously agree that social factors play a negative role in causing hesitation.

Going to the first question, is the use of English in everyday life acceptable to the local community? If NO, then what are the reasons for not accepting the use of the language? One participant explained that he did not use English language regularly with his family or his friend and colleagues. This is because the people in the community criticise and mock those who use English phrases and sentences in talking to the people around them who are in most cases have no master of English. Another participant mentioned that they did not use English language in talking to the people in the local community at all, because the community does not accept it regarding speaking English is at the expense of Arabic, the mother tongue. Other participants reported that they did not use English in everyday conversation because there is no need to use a language rather than Arabic, the mother tongue of the Saudi community. Other participants they used English only when necessity arises such as in traveling or communicating with foreign people.

- *Gender and the Use of English*

For the second question, do females use English language more than males? If YES, then why? Some participants believed that females preferred to use English language to show that they were educated, while males did not have such a tendency. One participant reported that males avoided speaking in English because they would be mocked and ridiculed by their friends. Some participants reported that females used only some English words and phrases without being able to communicate in English successfully. Males, on the other hand, find it inappropriate to use a language other than Arabic, their mother tongue and the symbol of their social identity. Interestingly, some participants reported that males would not use English in everyday conversation they would be judged negatively and criticised heavily by their friends and colleagues who insist that no language should be the medium of interaction in everyday conversation rather than Arabic.

Regarding Question 3, in your opinion, do females hesitate more than males? If YES, then why? Some participants believe that females are more hesitant than males. This is because males speak in public more than females do. This is in addition to the fact that men are dominant in the community and are more confident compared to women. Furthermore, one participant remarked that females were more hesitant due to the feeling of shyness when speaking in public. On the contrary, one female participant believes that females are not more hesitant than men in public conversation. She thinks that all EFL learners are hesitant when they use English because they do not have enough opportunities to use the language. However, some female participants agree that females are hesitant because they think carefully before using any word trying their best to produce accurate and proper utterances. This goes in line with research results conducted in different parts of the world that female speak tend to use more standard forms than men. Social dialectologist suggested four different interpretations for this pattern namely; social class, women's role in society, women's status as a subordinate, and the functions of speech in expressing masculinity (Holmes, 2009).

Our data suggest that female respondents used English more than men because they are more status conscious than men. This means that the female respondents in this study are aware that speaking English signals their social class background as educated women. A male respondent was reported that female Saudi students speak English more than their male counterparts in everyday interaction ('Yes, I guess, girls/females like to use English language to show they are educated more than boys/males do'). Speaking English is generally associated with good education, and so according to this explanation, Saudi women use more English than men as a way of claiming this status. The fact that women interviewed in New York and Norwich reported that they used more standard forms than they actually did, can also be taken as strong evidence in support of this explanation in the Saudi context. Women are believed to have a lower status in the society, so it is assumed that women try to acquire it by speaking English.

Discussion

The current study proposes that EFL learners in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia encounter hesitation as a consequence of psychological and sociocultural factors that hinder fluency in speaking English. The responses elicited from survey items indicate that a significant number of learners consider hesitation as one of the major difficulties while speaking English. The results suggest that most of the participants associate hesitation with speaking in public due to some psychological and sociocultural factors. Moreover, the majority

of the participants agreed that hesitation negatively impacted communication in everyday interaction. In parallel, the replies elicited from the interviews indicate that hesitation posed some difficulties for all of the participants who expressed different points of view on the impact of hesitation during speaking in English. Learners are frustrated whilst speaking English as hesitation deprived them from understanding fully what the current speaker is talking about. They were able only to recognise the main ideas in the current speaker's speech. This supports the empirical studies conducted by [Siswoyo \(2022\)](#), and [Haidara \(2016\)](#).

Psychological factors and their impact on cognitive processes that hinder fluency and cause hesitation have been addressed by this study. The study that anxiety, lack of confidence, and communication apprehension are among the psychological factors that negatively impacted fluency among Saudi EFL learners. Besides, the interview replies indicate that all learners reported that anxiety, and lack of confidence as the main problems they experienced when trying to express themselves in public and/or before native speakers of English. These results are in line with a number of studies such as [Haidara \(2016\)](#), [Fitriani and Apriliaswati \(2015\)](#), [Çağatay \(2015\)](#), [Alrasheedi \(2020\)](#), and [Malik et al. \(2021\)](#). Furthermore, the correlation between psychological factors and hesitation was demonstrated by the results of this study. More than half of the participants agreed that the hesitation they experience was due to psychological factors, which strongly supports [Samatovich and Ruzigul \(2023\)](#) study. The current study also highlighted some personal traits like shyness and introvert personalities as the main causes of hesitation that hinders fluency. The survey shows that the majority of learners agreed on the correlation between a shy personality and hesitation. The interview findings show that shyness is one of the personal traits of some of the participants that causes confusion, incapability to speak properly, and excessive hesitation. This result is supported by many studies in the literature namely; [Haidara \(2016\)](#), [Alrasheedi \(2020\)](#), and [Samatovich and Ruzigul \(2023\)](#).

Analysis of responses to questions about introvert personality and hesitation, about 35.7 selected that introvert personality was never impacted by hesitation. 29% of the participants agreed that introvert personality was always impacted by hesitation, and 24.3% of the participants agreed that introvert personality was sometimes impacted by hesitation. However, the interview responses revealed the majority of the participants believed that introvert personality was not among the factors causing hesitation. Some participants report hesitation is caused by lack of communication and exposure to English language in everyday interaction. These findings are supported by [Lestari et al. \(2013\)](#) which suggests that introvert personality has little impact on speaking fluency. The study also discussed the impact of sociocultural factors on cognitive processes leading to hesitation. The results of the survey revealed that there was a lack of using English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for numerous reasons including community's unwillingness to use English in everyday communication. English is used only for necessary work, study, or speaking with foreigners. People consider speaking English in everyday communication a type of boasting, besides the fact that many people do not speak English. Analysis of specific sociocultural factors revealed that females used English more than males did. Furthermore, hesitation in speaking among females is more prevalent females. This is females feel shy more than males. In addition females think carefully about any word before using it. These results support previous studies by [Çağatay \(2015\)](#), [Alrasheedi \(2020\)](#), and [Malik et al. \(2021\)](#).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the psychological and sociocultural factors that cause hesitation and their on-speaking English among Saudi EFL learners. The study concluded that psychological factors such as anxiety, and lack of confidence negatively impacted fluency in speaking English in the Saudi context. The effects of psychological factors on cognitive processes hamper learners' ability to speak effectively as they are incapable of thinking properly, forgetting information, and encountering difficulty in perceiving questions. Sociocultural factors, on the other hand, were found to contribute to the prevalence of hesitation among the investigated sample population. Furthermore, hesitation was found to be higher among females compared with males although females used English more than males did. Hesitation among female respondents can be attributed to the nature of the Saudi society where female do not tend to speak in public especially when the conversation involves both sexes.

The study has a number of pedagogical implications based on the results obtained. First, in order to address the psychological factors that hinder fluency in speaking English among Saudi EFL learners, it is important to create a comfortable and flexible learning environment for EFL learners in schools and universities. This will allow learners to speak freely and make mistakes without fear, which can ultimately help to reduce the anxiety associated with speaking English. The role of instructors is crucial in this process, as they can use certain strategies and techniques to enrich the learning content and provide opportunities for the learners to practice speaking regularly. Instructors can also help their students become more familiar with the language in a social context by incorporating activities such as role-play, group discussions, brainstorming, and oral presentations. It is also important for instructors to take into account the individual differences between the learners and personality traits that impact learners' speaking performance. That is, shy and extrovert students need to be handled in a way that helps them gain self-confidence so that they can participate actively in activities involving spoken English.

Regarding the influence of the sociocultural factors that may hinder speaking, the study recommends the adoption of a variety of methods and activities that help promoted social and cross-cultural interaction with non-Saudi communities and individuals. Organizing social interaction between students and native speakers of English via the widely accessible social media. Moreover, special strategies and activities should be introduced in the syllabus to meet the needs of shy and extrovert students. By so doing, teachers can help students overcome communication barriers and provide more opportunities for practicing English in a conducive environment.

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