

Exploring the causes and potential impact of embarrassment in English speaking classes: A case study of Omani students

Manizheh Alami^{1*}

¹University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri, Oman; Manizheh.Alami@utas.edu.om (M.A.).

Abstract: Due to the global prevalence of English, it is essential for non-native learners to develop effective speaking skills. English speaking classes often evoke feelings of embarrassment among EFL learners, which can significantly affect language performance. Various factors contribute to this feeling, which has largely been overlooked by teachers despite its significant impact on language learning. The present study is an attempt to identify the sources of Omani students' embarrassment in speaking classes and the potential negative or positive impact of it (if any) on their language performance. It further investigates whether there is a meaningful relationship between gender and embarrassment in English speaking classes. A sample of n=151 students participated in the study and filled out the questionnaire. The results of the study show that some linguistic and interpersonal factors contribute to students' embarrassment during English speaking activities, among which are: fear of speaking in front of the class, struggle to recall or use the wrong word, feeling less fluent compared to classmates, mispronouncing words, receiving negative feedback or comments from teachers and classmates, and some other factors. Additionally, the cross-gender comparison indicates that in some cases, gender is a significant factor influencing the level of embarrassment experienced by speakers.

Keywords: EFL classroom, English speaking, Embarrassment, Gender differences, Omani students.

1. Introduction

Speaking is an interactive process that involves the exchange of information and ideas. To fulfill our desires and goals we need to express them in the first place, which can be accomplished by speaking. Therefore, it is essential to develop speaking skills to have effective communication. As Brown and Yule (1983) stress "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations". Recent advancements have prompted significant interest in the role of emotions such as anxiety (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999) boredom (Li, Dewaele, & Hu, 2023) and enjoyment (Bensalem, 2021) on students' language learning. The significance of speaking English has escalated in recent years. This is particularly crucial in English speaking classes, where students' lack of comprehension or inability to speak and respond to questions can result in diminished interest and motivation for learning language. For many non-native students, speaking in front of the class, delivering presentations, and participating in role-play activities are particularly daunting tasks. Being reluctant to respond, students prefer to be silent, the most common strategy non-native learners adhere to in speaking classes.

Experiencing a certain degree of embarrassment can contribute to the development of learners' self-confidence and their progress in language learning. However, embarrassment can impede language learning in the long term if it occurs frequently. Thus, it is essential to understand the severity of this issue within the context of Oman. The author believes that embarrassment, as a negative factor, may lead to low motivation, which subsequently impacts students' academic achievements. Therefore, the results of this study can provide teachers with effective strategies to assist students in overcoming embarrassment during the process of language learning.

2. Statement of Problem

Keeping in mind that embarrassment is often associated with the fear of being evaluated negatively by peers and/ teachers, students perceive it as a barrier that must be surmounted to achieve language proficiency.

A comprehensive search by the author across multiple digital databases for scholarly works on ‘speaking embarrassment’ in their title yielded a total of zero results in the field of second/foreign language learning. Thus, the author believes that conceptualization of speaking embarrassment can assist to have much clearer picture of how it affects language learning and communication. Addressing conceptual and measurement issues has led to productive work on speaking anxiety, and a similar approach can be applied to the study of speaking embarrassment. However, to the author’s knowledge, no study has yet investigated the severity of embarrassment among Omani students, its impact on their academic achievements, and the relationship between gender and embarrassment. Thus, to bridge this gap, the current study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main causes of Omani students’ embarrassment in English speaking classes?
2. What are the potential positive and negative effects of embarrassment on Omani students’ language performance?
3. Is there a relationship between gender and embarrassment?

3. Research Objectives

The present study pursues the following 3-fold objectives:

1. To find out the main cause(s) of the Omani students’ speaking embarrassment.
2. To explore the potential impact of embarrassment on students’ language performance.
3. To examine the relationship between the gender and level of embarrassment among Omani students.

4. Literature Review

Among the prevalent challenges faced by many EFL students is embarrassment during speaking activities. Despite its significant influence on language acquisition, this issue has often been overlooked by educators. Attributing students’ embarrassment solely to factors such as low ability, lack of motivation, or tardiness can lead to misconceptions about the underlying causes and hinder the implementation of effective strategies.

4.1. Speaking Skill

Speaking as a productive skill enables us to transfer information and express ideas and goals. Additionally, it helps us to use language to interact and communicate with others. Suparlan (2021) opines that “speaking is the most anxiety-provoking language skill in a foreign language situation” (Suparlan, 2021). There are varieties reasons for students’ embarrassment when speak English. Prominent factors include low levels of linguistic proficiency, such as limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, lack of ideas to discuss, and mispronunciation (Mulyono, Sari, & Ningsih, 2019; Pérez Castillejo, 2019). Moreover, psychological traits such as lack of confidence, fear, and Anxiety (Galante, 2018; Woodrow, 2006) along with teacher’s negative feedback and frequent correction, contribute to the stressful atmosphere in speaking classes.

4.2. Anxiety or Embarrassment

Embarrassment is a deeply personal experience and is frequently exacerbated by the perception that others are observing and evaluating the person. As a self-conscious emotion, embarrassment can have a profoundly negative impact on an individual’s attitude and thoughts.

To use an analogy from sports, anxiety in language learning is like the pressure an athlete feels before a major competition which may affect his/her performance due to fear of failure. In contrast,

embarrassment is akin to the athlete's discomfort after making a public mistake, driven by the fear of negative judgment from others. Though, both impact performance but their triggers and effects differ.

4.3. Background Studies

While extensive research has been conducted on speaking anxiety across various academic disciplines, the phenomenon of speaking embarrassment has been relatively understudied. Existing literature often treats embarrassment as a mere symptom of anxiety and not as a different entity, failing to recognize its identical nature and significance as a unique emotional experience. Consequently, the psychological intricacies and underlying causes of speaking embarrassment have not been comprehensively explored.

Martiningsih, Susilawati, and Rezeki (2024) conducted a quantitative study to identify the strategies employed by students to manage public speaking anxiety. The research involved a total of 40 students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at FKIP, university of Tanjungpur. The findings revealed that students predominately employed relaxation strategies, preparation strategies, peer support mechanisms, preparation strategies, and positive thinking approaches to alleviate their anxiety. These strategies were identified as effective in mitigating the levels of anxiety experienced in academic settings. However, the study's findings should be interpreted with caution, as the limited sample size (40 participants) restricts the generalization of the results.

Suparlan in his study aimed to find out the factors contributing to students' Anxiety in speaking at MTs. Darul Ishlah Ireng Lauq Lombok Barat using questionnaire and interview. The study identified 10 factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety, including being afraid to speak in English, being afraid with teacher's consequence, lack of self-confident, fear of being less competent than other students, embarrassment, insufficient preparation, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and habit in using. While Suparlan considers embarrassment as a factor causing speaking anxiety, this study regards it as a manifestation of anxiety resulting from various other factors.

Using verity of instruments to collect data (semi-structured interviews, group discussion, question-answer sessions, interactions on situation-based spoken English and direct observation) with 30 grade 12 students, Ansari (2015) found that about ten of these students were experiencing English language speaking anxiety as a result of: a) fear of negative evaluation from their peers and perception of low ability in relation to their peers. The results of Ansari's study should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size of participants (30 students).

Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) examined various factors that contribute to the speaking anxiety experienced by Art and Science students from diverse academic backgrounds. These factors were categorized into two primary groups; external and internal, each representing different contributing elements at a micro level. External factors were attributed to deficiency in English proficiency level, grammar, pronunciation, and peer evaluations. In contrast, internal factors encompassed stage fear, lack of confidence and shyness. Rajitha's categorization of anxiety-related factors into internal and external dimensions can be criticized as overly general. The external factors align with linguistic challenges, whereas internal factors correspond to psychological aspects. In addition, similar to Suparlan, he considers shyness as a factor that causes anxiety.

The literature also suggests that the act of communicating with native English speakers can be a significant source of anxiety for EFL learners. Jugo (2020) opines that one key cause of speaking anxiety is the fear of error correction or negative evaluation, which can lead to heightened anxiety and reluctance to actively participate in speaking activities. He further adds that students often experience anxiety in foreign language classrooms due to the fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed or judged by their peers or instructors. This anxiety can significantly impact their learning and overall language proficiency.

4.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study highlights the linguistic challenges and interpersonal factors that contribute to their sense of embarrassment.

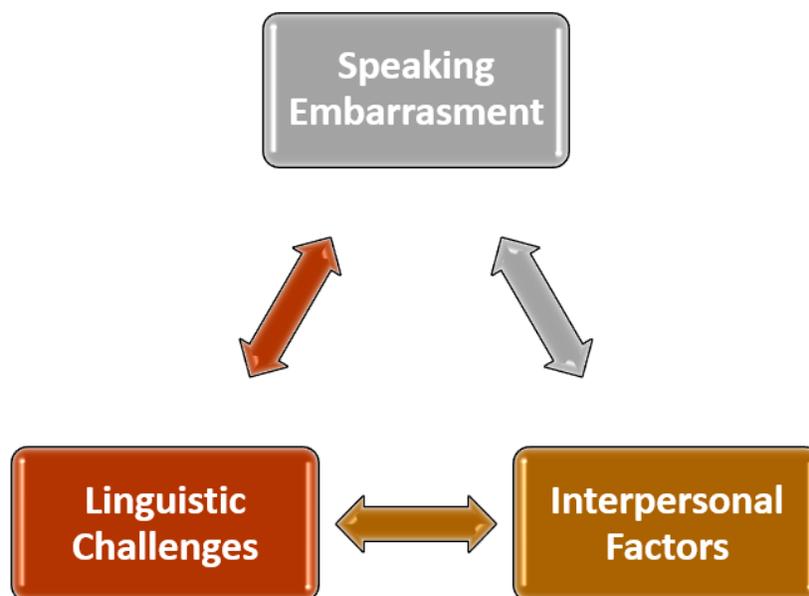


Figure 1.
Contributing factors to speaking embarrassment at Macro level.

5. Method

The current study was conducted at the Preparatory Studies Center, University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri, in Oman. Totally, 151 students who enrolled for Foundation and Post Foundations Programs in the First semester, AY 2024-2025 participated in the study by completing a questionnaire.

5.1. Data Collection

Data collection involved 151 students (77 female and 74 male) who were enrolled in Foundation and Post Foundation Programs at the Preparatory Studies Center. Upon receiving ethical approval from the Research and Consultancy Committee at UTAS-Ibri, teachers were requested to distribute the questionnaire to their students and allocate 10 minutes of the class time to complete the survey.

5.2. Instrument and Data Analysis

The questionnaire used in this study was a modified and adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The FLCAS is a reliable and validated measure of foreign language classroom anxiety. However, for the purpose of this study, the items were modified and translated to Arabic, the native language of students, to enhance students' full comprehension of survey items. The translated version was examined by two Omani lecturers to verify the grammatical and terminology accuracy. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items, with five items (1, 2, 3, 4 &7) focusing on general feelings and levels of ease, comfort and confidence in speaking simple and complex topics in English. The remaining 25 items exploring specific challenges and embarrassing factors that may arise in both linguistic and interpersonal contexts. The statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The primary objective of this research was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the embarrassment experienced by Omani students in English speaking classroom setting. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed as an analytical tool to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire.

6. Discussion

The results of data analysis revealed that Omani students generally find speaking English to be easy and are confident in their ability to express themselves clearly (72%). They perceive making mistakes as a natural part of the learning process and do not feel embarrassed about them. A comparison of male and female students did not show any significant differences in their comfort levels with speaking English in class (67% female vs. 77% male).

However, when conversing about complex topics in English, a significant portion of students (67.1%) reported difficulty in finding appropriate words to express their ideas fluently, whereas only 32.8% of students agree that they can find accurate words to talk fluently about complicated topics and feel confident in their ability to do so. This suggests that many students experience a linguistic barrier that prevents them from effectively communicate complex thoughts in English, which may stem from limitation in vocabulary, lack of confidence, or embarrassment about making mistakes in front of their peers and teachers. This finding aligns with theories of second language learning, which emphasize the cognitive load that learners face when they try to construct sentences that require more sophisticated lexical and grammatical knowledge.

Moreover, the cross-gender comparison indicates that both boys and girls report similar difficulties, with 64.7% of female and 69.5% of male students struggling to find the right words to articulate their ideas on complex topics. The lack of significant gender difference points to the conclusion that this issue is not inherently linked to gender but may instead is tied to the linguistic and psychological factors experienced by students in English speaking classes. This difficulty with expressing complex ideas could be due to several factors such as cognitive overload, emotional overload, and lack of exposure and practice. Discussing or speaking about complex topics often requires the integration of various linguistic skills simultaneously, i.e., vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and discourse structures. For non-native speakers, trying to manage all these elements while maintaining fluency can be overwhelming, resulting in pause, hesitation, and difficulty in expressing themselves clearly.

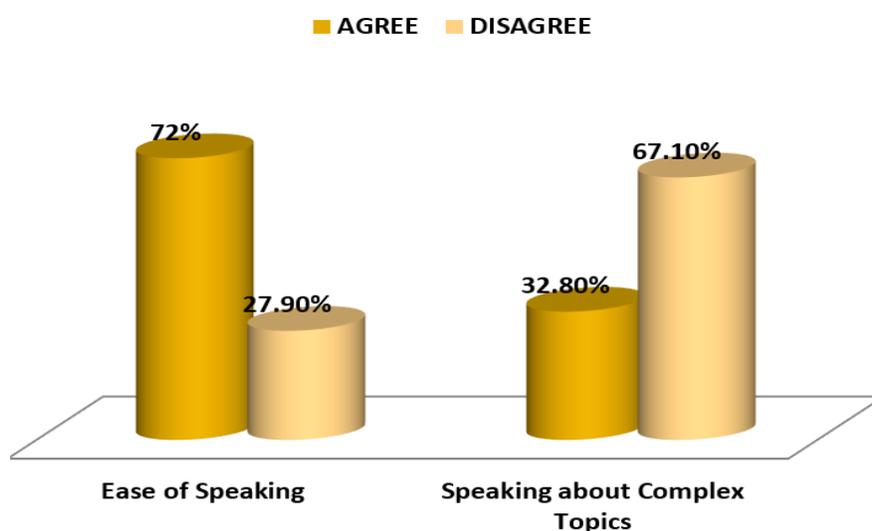


Figure 2. Omani students' general views on speaking English and difficulty in speaking about complex topics.

6.1. Poor/ Incorrect Pronunciation

The present study sought to explore the factors cause students' embarrassment when speaking English in class. One key finding was that a significant portion of students (48.1%) identified poor or incorrect pronunciation of words as a source of embarrassment when speaking English in class. This finding underscores the importance of pronunciation in shaping students' confidence and willingness to speak in a second language.

Pronunciation is a key component of oral proficiency, and learners often associate mispronunciation with a fear of being judged or ridiculed by their peers or teachers. The stigma around incorrect pronunciation is likely linked to the desire to sound "native-like", a common pressure faced by second language learners, particularly in formal learning environments. In this context, embarrassment stemming from pronunciation mistakes can lead to reluctance to speak, further inhibiting the development of oral language skills.

Interestingly, the study also found that most students (51.7%) were comfortable with their pronunciation and did not consider it a source of embarrassment. This indicates a divide in how students perceive the role of pronunciation in their language experience. One interpretation could be that some students are resilient to language learning difficulties, including concerns about pronunciation, and therefore do not allow these issues to affect their willingness to speak.

Furthermore, the study found no significant gender differences in this regard, which suggests that concerns about pronunciation-related embarrassment are likely common among learners, rather than being influenced by gender-specific expectations or pressures. And it is typically influenced by individual learner differences such as self-esteem, prior experiences and/ personality rather than gender alone.

In sum, while the poor pronunciation can be a source of embarrassment for many students, the fact that over half of the students do not experience this embarrassment reflects an opportunity to strengthen classroom practices that support all learners, regardless of their individual experiences with pronunciation challenges.

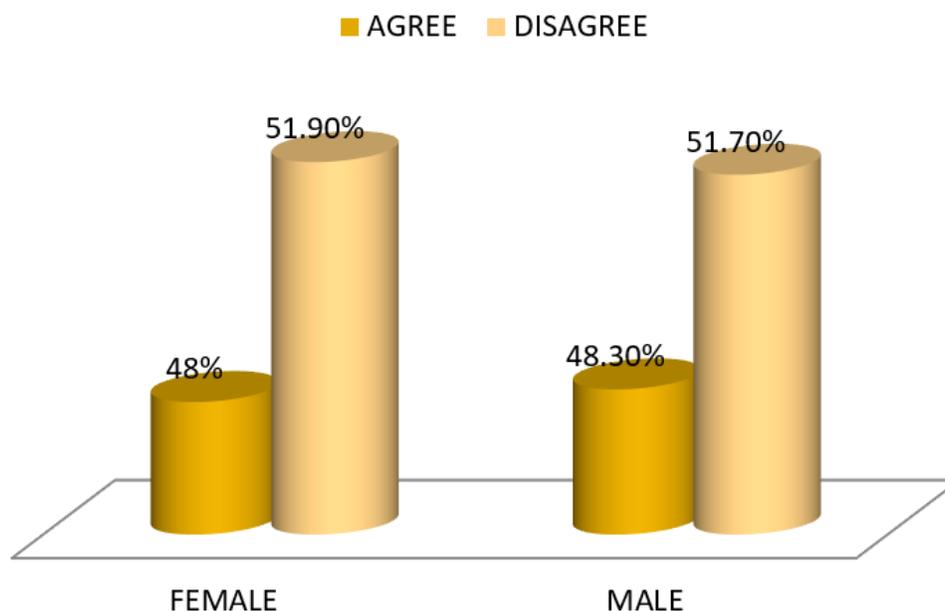


Figure 3.
Gender differences in embarrassment due to poor/incorrect pronunciation.

6.2. Negative Feedback

Negative feedback from teachers and negative comments from classmates significantly contribute to students' embarrassment when speaking English. A significant portion of students (66.3%) reported experiencing embarrassment when criticized for their poor speaking skill. This data suggests that external criticism, particularly in the form of ridicule and negative remarks, significantly impacts students' willingness and confidence to speak English in class.

The high percentage of students feeling embarrassed when subjected to negative feedback highlights the emotional sensitivity that accompanies language learning, especially in a classroom environment. Criticism in this context, whether implicit or explicit, can reinforce students' embarrassment and lead to feelings of inadequacy, further stifling their oral language development. When students are overly focused on avoiding mistakes, their cognitive resources become divided, hampering fluency and spontaneity in their spoken responses.

A particularly interesting aspect of this finding is the pronounced gender disparity, with 74.1% of female students reporting embarrassment from negative feedback, compared to 58.5% of male students. This substantial difference suggests that female students may be more vulnerable to external critique, which can be explained by both social and cultural factors. In many cultures, women are often socialized to be more self-conscious about their public performance, and they may internalize criticism more deeply than their male counterparts. In other words, cultural norms such as traditional expectations discourage overt assertiveness or emotional expression which could heighten female's sensitivity to public feedback. For Omani female students these norms may exacerbate the embarrassment when criticized in academic setting like classroom which in turn contribute to more reserved or hesitant participation in speaking English.

To sum up, negative feedback plays a pervasive role in shaping students' emotional responses to speaking in English, with gender playing a significant role in how deeply this feedback is internalized.

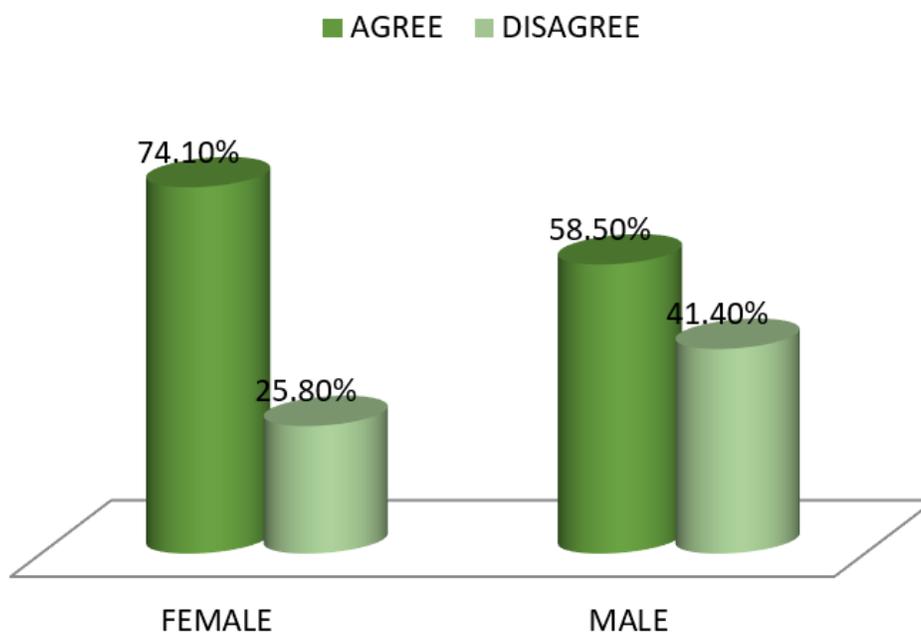


Figure 4.
Gender differences in embarrassment due to negative feedback/comment.

6.3. Asking Teacher for Clarification

Omani students generally did not find it embarrassing to ask their teachers to repeat what they said during teaching (82.2%) if they did not understand, while minority of students agreed that asking teachers to repeat what they said is embarrassing for them (17.6%). In other words, there is a notable consistency across both male and female students, as a majority did not find it embarrassing to seek for clarification from their teachers during lectures. Feeling embarrassed in such situations can be due to several factors. For example, in some cultures, asking questions might be seen as a sign of weakness or lack of knowledge. In addition, individual characteristics such as introversion or extroversion could play a role in students' comfort or discomfort in asking for clarification.

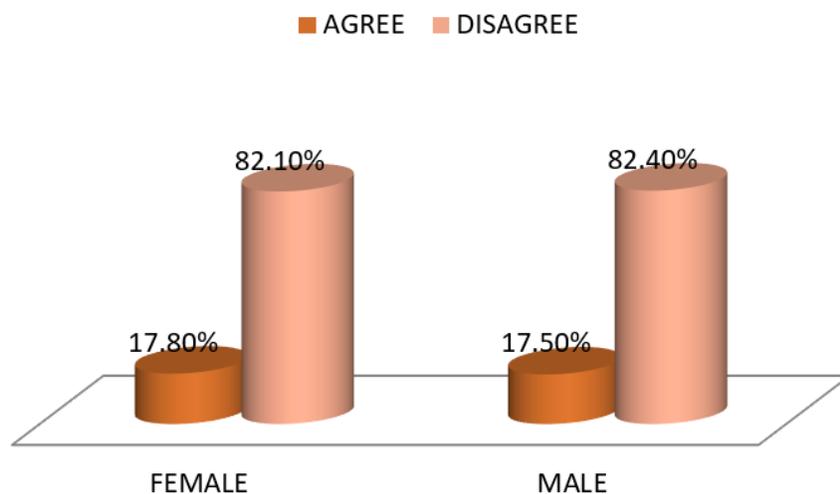


Figure 5.
Cross-gender comparison of students' embarrassment when asking for clarification.

6.4. Unprepared for Speaking

Omani students exhibited varying levels of discomfort when engaging in impromptu English-speaking tasks. Whereas 57.8% of students feel it challenging to speak English without preparation or notes, for 42% of students do not find such situations embarrassing. The data indicates that more than half of students struggle with impromptu English-speaking tasks, likely due to factors such as limited confidence, fear of judgment, or insufficient fluency. The statistic (57.8%) reflects a common challenge in language learning, where students may be hesitant to express themselves without the security of preparation. The fact that 42% do not feel embarrassed suggests a varying level of self-assurance and proficiency among students.

The comparative gender analysis reveals a significant distinction between male and female students, with females feeling more embarrassed than their male peers when unprepared for speaking English in front of class (67.7% vs. 52.8%). This suggests that gender might influence students' perception and reactions to spontaneous English speaking in class. The sense of embarrassment experienced by female students compared to males could be attributed to social or cultural expectations, anxiety or perhaps differences in confidence levels when speaking in public or academic settings. The significant gap suggests that females might feel more vulnerable to judgment or less confident in their speaking abilities when unprepared.

Since this study is specific to Omani students, cultural factors might also influence these dynamics. In certain societies, gender expectations regarding public performance or communication may affect students' comfort levels, particularly in mixed gender settings.

Overall, the data shows how both preparation and gender play critical roles in students' comfort with English speaking in academic environment.

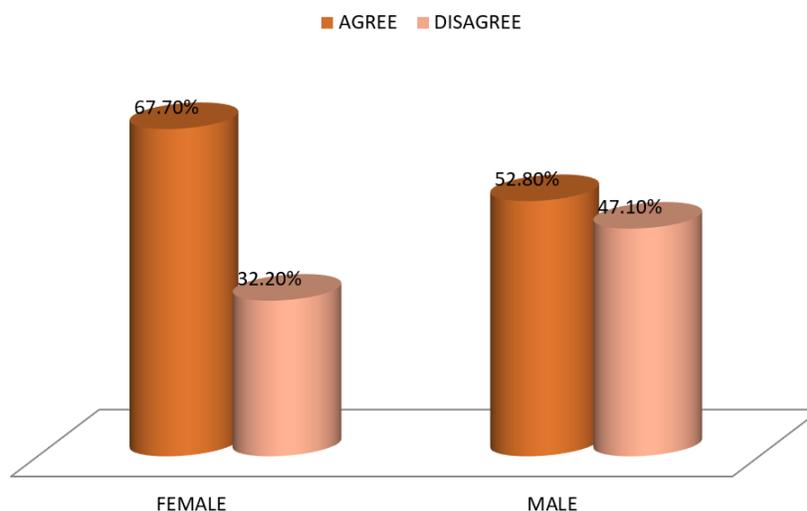


Figure 6. Cross-Gender comparison of embarrassment due to unpreparedness.

6.5. Frequent Correction by Teacher

The frequent correction from teachers is among the factors that has impact on students' feeling of embarrassment. As it is illustrated in the above figure, 46.7% of Omani students reported feeling embarrassed when frequently corrected by their teachers, which suggests that such corrective feedback can negatively affect some students' confidence conversely, 53.1% of students do not find teacher corrections embarrassing, viewing it instead as an integral part of the learning process and necessary for identifying and correcting mistakes. The findings underscore the significant effect that teacher feedback can have on students emotional and psychological well-being. Constant correction, especially in classroom settings, can undermine a student's self-esteem, leading to embarrassment and potentially affecting their long-term motivation to engage in language learning activities. This is especially important for second language learners, who may already feel self-conscious about their proficiency. Interestingly, most students (5.1%) do not experience embarrassment in response to teacher corrections, suggesting that these learners recognize the instructional value of feedback. This group likely perceives mistakes as natural and necessary for progress, demonstrating a higher level of resilience and a growth-oriented mindset.

The division between students who feel embarrassed and those who do not, might be influenced by classroom culture or individual personality traits. In some educational environments, teacher corrections are perceived as harsh or overly critical, which can foster a fear of failure among students. Alternatively, a classroom atmosphere that normalizes mistakes and views corrections as constructive can help students feel more comfortable.

A comparative analysis between male and female students provides insight into gender dynamics, revealing that there is no significant difference between two gender groups regarding their feelings of embarrassment due to teacher corrections (53.7% females vs. 52.6% males). This suggests that the experience of embarrassment from corrective feedback is relatively uniform across genders, challenging the notion that one gender might be more susceptible to feelings of inadequacy in response to public correction.

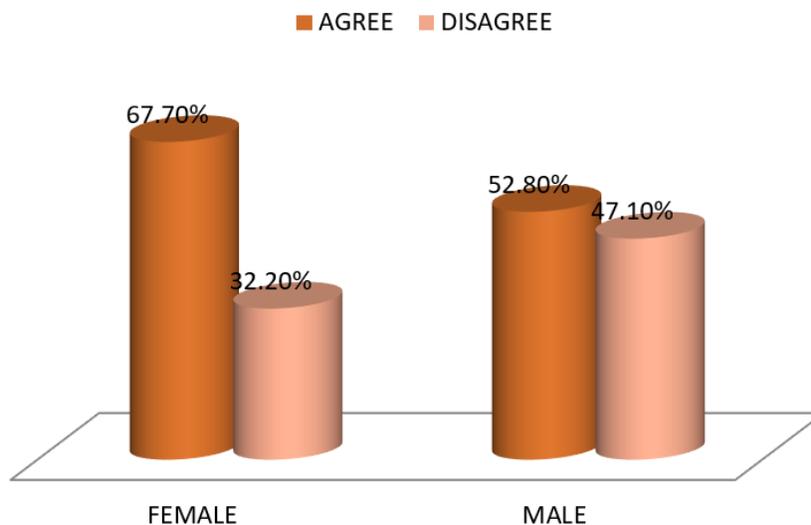


Figure 7.
Gender differences in embarrassment level due to frequent teacher correction.

6.6. Being Watched

Being watched by the teacher and classmates while speaking English, is considered as potential factor for embarrassment. It could be a daunting experience for many students. The result of the study reveals that for a significant portion of respondents (57.4%) speaking in front of teacher and peers and participating in class activities such as role-playing is not embarrassing. Conversely, 42.5% of students expressed discomfort in such situations. This finding suggests that for those students who experience embarrassment when speaking in front of others, this feeling can be a barrier to language learning, as it may discourage them from actively participating in class activities and seeking opportunities to practice speaking. Several factors are involved in students' discomfort in speaking English in front of teacher and classmates such as worry about being corrected or ridiculed for their mistakes and lack of confidence in their ability to speak fluently.

However, the study also identifies gender disparities, with female students demonstrating a low level of discomfort (36.6%) compared to their male counterparts (48.4%). This finding challenges any stereotype or assumption that female students have more inclination to avoid speaking in public and when they are monitored by teacher and peers.

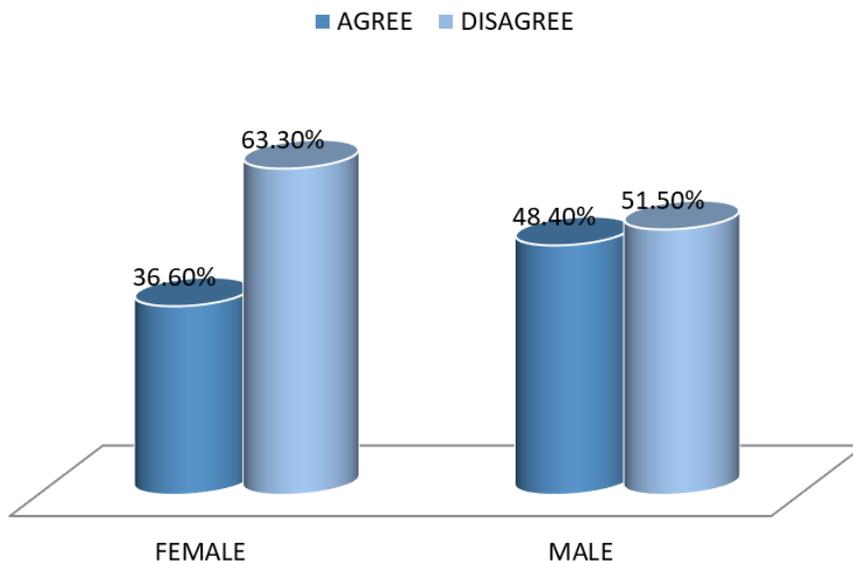


Figure 8.
Impact of gender on student's embarrassment when being watched by teacher and peers.

6.7. Competitive Classroom Environment

Another aspect examined in the current study was the impact of competition on students' feelings of embarrassment, particularly in the competitive classroom environment. As reported by the students in this study, the proportion of students who feel embarrassed when their classmates speak English more fluently (49.7%) is lower than those who do not experience this feeling when their peers demonstrate superior English proficiency (50.2%). This suggests that competitive atmosphere may have a mitigating effect on embarrassment level. The findings offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between competition and embarrassment in the context of language learning. While competition can sometimes motivate students to strive for excellence, it can also create a stressful atmosphere that can lead to feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment.

As illustrated in Figure 9, female Omani students were significantly more likely to experience embarrassment (60.6%) compared to male students (38.8%) when their classmates outperformed them in speaking skill. This indicates that despite the potential influence of the competitive classroom environment, gender may still play a crucial role in shaping emotional responses. To determine the statistical significance of this gender-based discrepancy, a Chi-square test was conducted. This statistical analysis is used to assess whether the observed difference is meaningful or if it could be due to chance.

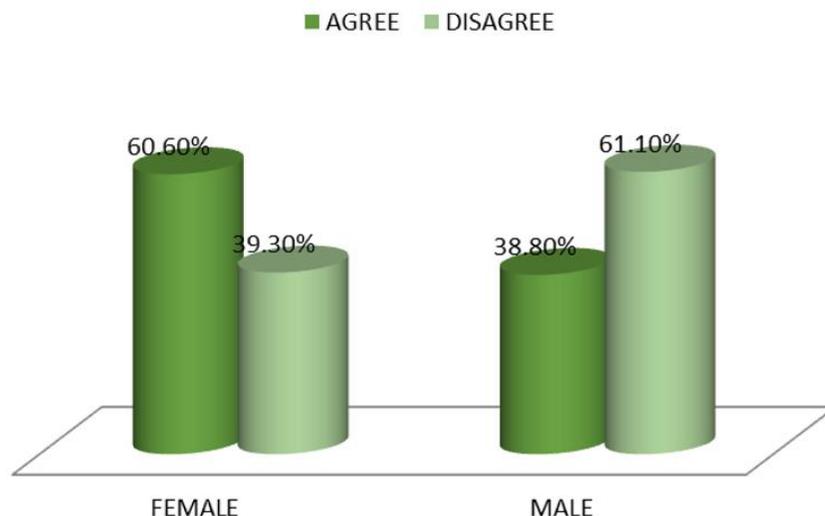


Figure 9.
Impact of gender on embarrassment when classmate outperform in speaking.

The result of Chi-square analysis revealed statistically significant differences between male and female participants, as indicated by p-values of $0.001 \leq 0.05$ for female and $0.005 \leq 0.05$ for male. These values are below commonly accepted significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ suggesting that the observed gender disparities are not likely due to chance which means that female students experience more embarrassment compared to their male peers when their classmates have high English proficiency level and can speak fluently.

In sum, the result of data analysis provides compelling evidence of the impact of gender on embarrassment levels of Omani students in competitive class environment. These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive learning atmosphere that promotes learning without excessive competition.

Table 1.
Gender differences in embarrassment levels when classmate outperform in Speaking.

Gender	Observed Value (O)	Expected Value (V)	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Female (SD)	8	10.7	-2.7	7.29	0.68
Female (D)	16	18.3	2.3	5.29	0.28
Female (N)	16	18.3	2.3	5.29	0.28
Female (A)	29	21.4	7.7	59.29	2.77
Female (SA)	8	8.1	0.1	0.01	0.001
Male (SD)	13	10.2	2.8	7.8	0.76
Male (D)	20	17.6	2.4	5.76	0.32
Male (N)	20	17.6	2.4	5.76	0.32
Male (A)	13	20.5	-7.5	56.25	2.7
Male (SA)	8	7.8	0.2	0.04	0.005

6.8. Seeking Assistance from Peers

Asking for help from classmates is common among students. However, when it comes to asking for the meaning or pronunciation of a word that we do not know, it may cause embarrassment. The findings of the current study show that significant majority of Omani students are comfortable asking their classmates for help with the meaning or pronunciation of word they do not know or how to express something in English (83.2%). This highlights the prevalence of seeking help from classmates among Omani students, emphasizing the collaborative and supportive environment where students feel

comfortable seeking for assistance. Interestingly, the study found no notable gender differences in this behavior, suggesting that both male and female students are almost equally likely to seek assistance (82.7% female vs. 83.7% male).

The prevalence of seeking for assistance from classmates highlights the importance of peer interaction and collaboration in fostering a supportive learning environment. Asking for help contributes to the betterment of interpersonal skills. Engaging with classmates in a collaborative manner can enhance students' interpersonal and communicative skills. In other words, seeking help reflects a positive and supportive learning culture that can contribute to students' language development. While the potential for embarrassment exists, creating a classroom atmosphere that promotes open communication, and mutual respect can help mitigate embarrassment.

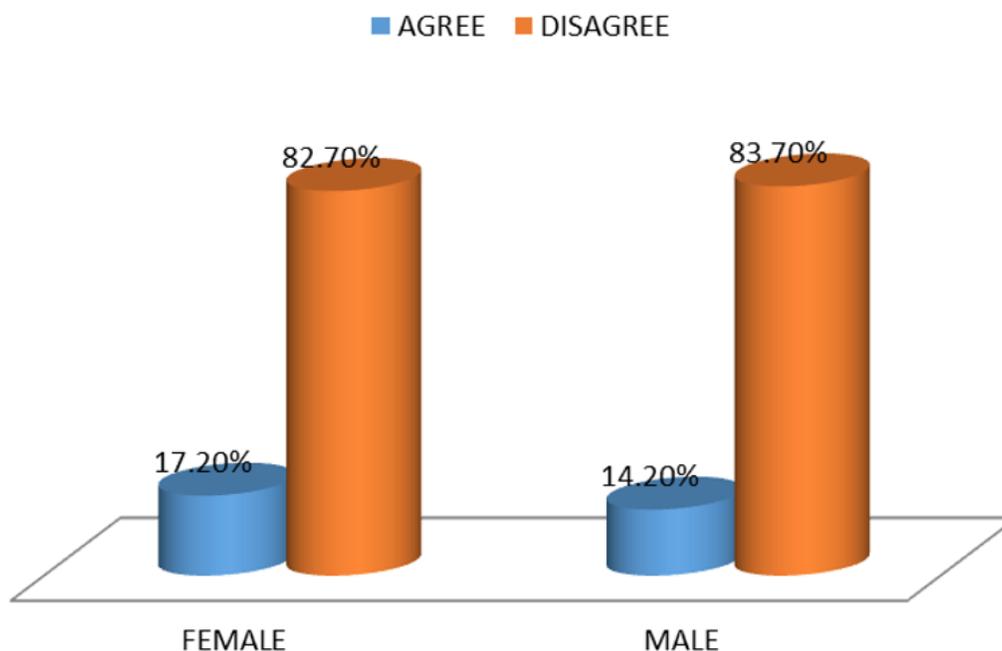


Figure 10.

Difference between male and female students' embarrassment when asking for help from classmates.

6.9. Forgetting and Using Wrong Word

Sometimes forgetting a word and using the wrong word when we speak is a real embarrassment. It is the universal nature of linguistic slip-ups which is a common occurrence for speakers of all languages. According to the results of the present study, 49.5% of respondents experienced embarrassment when unable to recall a word or used incorrect word when speaking, while a slightly higher percentage (50.2%) reported no embarrassment. This reveals that nearly half of the Omani respondents experienced embarrassment in such situations which indicates a substantial prevalence of embarrassment associated with linguistic errors. There are several psychological, social and linguistic factors that contribute to embarrassment when students forget a word or use incorrect words. Fear of being judged by peers or teachers for not having complete mastery over the language especially in competitive classroom environment may cause embarrassment. The student's high internal expectation that I should be able to speak perfectly and falling short of this expectation can cause embarrassment. Classroom atmosphere creates pressure to perform well, particularly in front of others. Thus, the fear of failure due to forgetting or misusing a word amplifies feeling of embarrassment when speaking in front of others. In cultures where perfectionism is highly valued, students may feel that making mistakes shows a lack of effort or intelligence, which increases embarrassment. Additionally, language is tied to identity, and any

linguistic mistake might feel like a personal failure. The teacher's reaction to a student's mistake also affects the level of embarrassment.

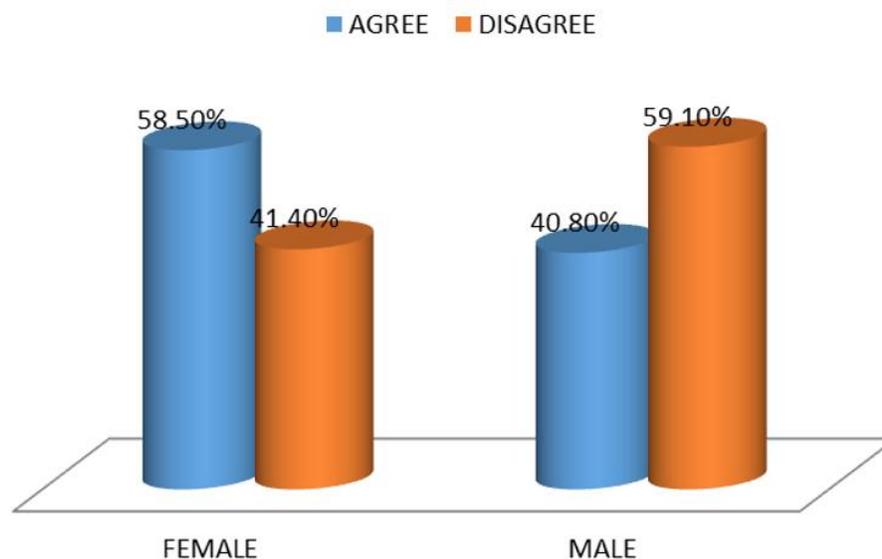


Figure 11.
Gender difference in embarrassment level due to forgetting/misusing a word.

A comparative approach between two gender groups shows no big discrepancy in the reported levels of embarrassment, where 58.5% female felt embarrassment vs. 40.8% male. To find out whether this difference between male and female students is meaningful Chi-square test were utilized.

The Chi-square test analysis revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and the degree of embarrassment students experience when they forget or misuse words while speaking English ($P \leq 0.05$). This means that based on the data analyzed, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that one gender is more likely to feel embarrassed than the other when speaking English in class. The lack of a meaningful difference suggests that gender is not a strong predictor of embarrassment levels among Omani students.

Table 2.

Cross-gender analysis of embarrassment when forgetting/ missing a word.

Gender	Observed Value	Expected Value	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ²
					E
Female (SD)	10	14.43	-4.43	19.62	1.35
Female (D)	31	35.06	-4.06	16.48	0.47
Female (A)	46	38.67	7.33	53.72	1.38
Female (SA)	12	10.82	1.18	1.39	0.12
Male (SD)	18	13.56	4.44	19.71	1.45
Male (D)	37	32.93	4.07	16.56	0.5
Male (A)	29	36.32	-7.32	53.58	1.47
Male (SA)	9	10.17	-1.17	1.98	0.19

7. Conclusion

The issue of students' embarrassment in EFL speaking classes is a prevalent concern that needs to receive attention in the field of language education. Numerous studies have explored the various factors that contribute to speaking anxiety challenge, shedding light on the experiences of EFL learners. However, to the author's knowledge few/ no study conducted to explore the leading factors that cause

embarrassment in English speaking classes. This study was an attempt to explore these factors. To summarize the findings of the study, Omani students generally perceive speaking English to be challenging but are confident in their ability to communicate effectively. They view mistakes as a natural component of the learning process and do not experience significant embarrassment about them. While they acknowledge the inevitability of mistakes during the learning process, embarrassment is not a significant barrier to their oral proficiency. However, several factors can induce embarrassment, among them are:

1. unpreparedness for speaking in front of the class,
2. lexical challenges when they do not remember a specific word or use incorrect word,
3. perceived fluency gaps with peers when they observe their classmates are more fluent in speaking than them,
4. pronunciation difficulty when they mispronounce a word,
5. feedback from instructors or classmates when they receive frequent negative comments about their speaking performance or being corrected repeatedly by the teacher,
6. request for clarification if they did not understand class materials and
7. the feeling of being observed when they do class activities such as role playing.

The findings of the study are consistent with the research conducted by Samad, Ali, and Khan (2021) which stress that speaking in front of peers is among the contributing factors to speaking anxiety. Rafada and Madini (2017) similarly highlights the role of teacher evaluation in exacerbating speaking anxiety. When teachers demand immediate responses from students without adequate preparation, it can create a stressful and anxiety-inducing environment.

As the results of the current study show the degree of embarrassment experienced by students can vary depending on the nature of the challenges encountered and the student's gender. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by Omani students and inform the development of effective language teaching and learning strategies to overcome these obstacles.

8. Limitations of Study

Among the main limitations of the present study is that the results may not be fully generalizable to other contexts or populations. The findings may be specific to a particular group of students and educational setting of the PSC at UTAS-Ibri. Furthermore, the main drawback of using questionnaire to collect the data is that they are based on self-reports from the participants and there is a possibility of social or cultural bias where participants may provide responses that they believe are socially or culturally acceptable rather than truthful

9. Recommendations

Speaking embarrassment is a common phenomenon in EFL context that is elicited by the fear of speaking in front of others. There are numerous strategies that students and teachers can employ to make speaking situations more manageable. The primary responsibility for mitigating students' speaking embarrassment lies with teachers who evaluate students' performance. Here are measures teachers can implement to make students feel comfortable and relaxed when speaking.

1. Reminding students that making errors is a natural part of the learning process.
2. While corrections are essential for language development, teachers should be mindful of the tone, timing and method of feedback to avoid discouraging students. Feedback delivered in a supportive, non-threatening manner can mitigate embarrassment and help students view corrections as part of their learning journey.
3. Practicing tolerance when a student makes a mistake and avoid creating a negative atmosphere.
4. Developing a relaxed and supportive classroom environment that encourage risk-taking and provide opportunities for students to practice speaking without fear of judgment or embarrassment.

5. Encouraging students to the collaboration with peers to reduce embarrassment and fear. Games, group discussion, and role-plays are effective strategies for promoting engagement and reducing embarrassment.

To mitigate speaking anxiety, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) proposed several strategies. These include the implicit correction of errors, the incorporation of humor, the use of students' first names when addressing them, non-verbal praise such as shoulder pat or warm smiles and providing adequate wait time for responses (Cited in Ansari, 2015, p: 44). The author believes that these methods are effective in alleviating students' embarrassment as well.

While teachers play a vital role in reducing speaking –related embarrassment, students can also take proactive steps to alleviate their speaking embarrassment. Here are some effective techniques:

1. Have a deep understanding of the material you are going to speak about. It can enhance confidence and prevent any potential obstacles during your presentation/ speech.
2. Listen to authentic English conversations and watch movies in English to improve pronunciation, vocabulary and overall fluency.
3. Maintain a positive attitude to alleviate embarrassment and boost self-belief.
4. Practice speaking English with peers outside classroom.
5. Think about speaking as an opportunity for communication rather than a test to evaluate your performance.
6. Utilizing AI language tools such as Gemini and ChatGPT can aid in improving pronunciation, fluency and overall language skills.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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