Exploring Iranian University EFL Students' Attitudes Toward Pedagogical, Sociocultural, and Psychological Factors Influencing the Development of English Oral Communication Skills

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Abstract

Developing effective oral communication skills remains a significant challenge for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where opportunities for meaningful spoken interaction are limited. This study explores Iranian university EFL students' attitudes toward pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors influencing the development of their English oral communication skills. Adopting a quantitative research design, the study investigates students' perceptions of the factors that may facilitate or hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire administered to Iranian university EFL students. The findings indicate that pedagogical factors constitute the most prominent influences on students' oral communication development. In particular, insufficient opportunities for speaking practice, limited use of interactive classroom activities, inadequate support for spoken English, ineffective instructional approaches, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful oral interaction were perceived as major barriers to the development of speaking skills. Psychological factors also emerged as important obstacles, with low self-confidence, foreign language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation negatively affecting students' willingness to participate in oral communication. In comparison, sociocultural factors were perceived as moderate barriers, suggesting that they may influence students' oral performance but are less influential than pedagogical and psychological factors. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of combining effective instructional practices with supportive classroom environments that reduce learners' affective barriers and encourage active participation. The study concludes that greater emphasis on interactive, learner-centered speaking activities and confidence-building strategies may contribute substantially to improving Iranian university EFL students' oral communication skills.

Keywords: EFL students, oral communication skills, pedagogical factors, psychological factors, sociocultural factors

1. Introduction

Effective oral communication skills in English have become essential not only for academic success but also for professional advancement and social interactions in today's globalized world. The development of oral communication skills is vital for postgraduate students as English proficiency often opens doors to global opportunities, such as enhancing employability and academic prospects and facilitating international collaboration (Jo'rayeva, 2024; Aririguzoh, 2022). Over the last few decades, English as a foreign language (EFL) education has undergone critical

changes through implementing various creative teaching methods that have aimed to enhance language learning and acquisition among students.

However, despite these efforts, in many developing countries, such as Iran where English is learnt as a foreign language, many students face significant challenges in developing oral communication skills, rooted in pedagogical, social and psychological contexts (Tawir & Baharum, 2024; Elsaadi & Aqila, 2023; Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021) despite the fact that English Language is taught since students are at primary schools. These challenges have hindered the development of their oral communication skills and have made them incompetent English language speakers. This issue is intensified by psychological factors such as Language anxiety, limited practice, insufficient teacher support, and limited vocabulary, which can hinder students' ability to develop their oral communication skills (Shaiboob & Hablaja, 2024; Romero-Argueta, 2025; Umisara et al., 2021).

Therefore, the current study seeks to address the issue of inadequate oral communication skill development among Iranian EFL university students. Specifically, it aims to investigate the main contributors, such as teachers' instructional methods, psychological factors, and sociocultural factors, in influencing students' speaking proficiency. While existing studies, such as (Jamoom & Bahron, 2024; Eldoumi, 2025; Abdulrahman & Adam, 2025), have explored various factors adversely affecting oral communication skills, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that simultaneously examines the impact of pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors on oral communication skill development. In addition, comparing the impact of pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors on EFL students' oral communication skills remains unexplored. This gap highlights the need for a more holistic approach to understand factors that hinder oral communication skills through the lens of Iranian EFL students' attitudes. This approach is essential for identifying the issues that Iranian EFL university students face while attempting to develop their oral proficiency. Hence, this study seeks to identify the pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors that students consider as primary contributors to their poor oral communication skills. Additionally, this study seeks to highlight which of these factors has the greatest influence on students' oral communication skills.

The research questions are formulated below.

Q1: What pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors do students identify as primary contributors to their poor oral communication skills?

Q2: Which of these factors has the greatest influence on students' oral communication skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Oral Communication Skills

Oral communication skills hold a special importance in academic and professional contexts as these skills enable interlocutors to engage in effective oral interaction that allows human beings to socialize and succeed within a social environment. Developing these skills enables students to express ideas effectively, engage in collaborative environments, and enhance critical thinking and active listening (Dusmurodovna & Shuhratovna, 2024). Oral communication skills refer to the ability to interact effectively through spoken language, including verbal exchange and effective listening. Oral communication skills integrate linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence, which are essential for conveying meaningful communication appropriately according to context, audience, and purpose (Richards, 2008; CelceMurcia et al., 1995). These skills enable individuals to communicate their opinions, supported by facts and feelings to others within a reciprocal process that involves receiving language input, processing of information cognitively and then producing language effectively (Gani et al., 2015).

Thus, oral communication skills are underlying for effective interaction. They combine linguistic knowledge, cognitive process, and sociocultural awareness to produce meaningful and successful communication in academic and professional contexts.

2.2 Pedagogical Factors Impacting Oral Communication Skills

There are many pedagogical factors that hinder oral communication skills among EFL students. The literature reveals that several factors have been identified as predictors of poor oral communication skills in English as a foreign language. Teacher-related factors, for instance, have a significant impact on learners' unwillingness to communicate in English in the EFL classroom and remain a barrier to students' development of oral communication skills (Israa, 2025; Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024). Factors such as teacher-centered practices, ineffective teaching methods, limited classroom interaction, linguistic competence, and the school environment have been identified as significantly affecting oral communication skills (Dela, 2025; Israa, 2025; Khasawneh, 2023; Rahman & Singh, 2022). Jamöom & Bahron (2024) and Eldoumi (2025) reported that a lack of practice, insufficient teacher feedback, a lack of paraphrasing strategies, and fillers for substituting unknown words are significant contributors to poor oral performance among EFL students. Therefore, pedagogical factors can have a negative impact on students' development of oral communication skills in the classroom when they fail to provide a safe and supportive learning environment that encourages oral practice.

2.3 Psychological Factors Impacting Oral Communication Skills

Psychological factors play a key role in predicting success and failure in English language learning. Previous studies have shown that fear of peers, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence are considerable predictors of learners' engagement in oral communication (Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024; Zhou & Dewaele, 2023; Alrasheedi, 2020). Gawi (2020) reported a significant effect of foreign language anxiety on Saudi male students' performance. Other studies have highlighted that such anxiety can be caused by shyness towards the audience, a lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, peers' criticism, and low self-confidence (Fikni et al., 2022; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Motivation is a psychological factor that hinders students from communicating fluently and effectively. High levels of motivation can boost students' engagement in oral communication activities, while low motivation can result in reluctance to speak and less effort to improve oral communication skills (Aleidan, 2024; Aashiq & Zahid, 2024; Gràcia et al., 2021); Dörnyei, 2001). Together, these studies show that anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence are interrelated factors that jointly impede oral communication in EFL contexts. Hence, psychological factors can negatively impact EFL students' development of oral communication skills if they are not well managed by teachers and students inside and outside the classroom.

2.4 Sociocultural Factors Impacting Oral Communication Skills

Lack of practice, unfavorable learning environments, limited social interaction, the influence of mother tongue, and lack of family support are reported to be primary contributors to poor oral communication skills among EFL students (Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024; Rahman & Singh, 2022; Gholami et al., 2012). Additionally, exposure to authentic English input plays a critical role in boosting oral communication skills. Tools such as news, movies, TV shows, and conversations with native speakers outside the classroom are important for boosting students' motivation and developing their speaking skills (Aleidan, 2024). Farhan et al. (2025) found that the lack of supportive speaking environments, limited practice opportunities, passive classroom interaction, and curriculum-practice misalignment minimizes students' exposure to real-life spoken English and hinders students' ability to apply English meaningfully outside the classroom. Indeed, sociocultural

factors are fundamental to enhancing students' oral communication skills as they provide a linguistically and affectively supportive environment for oral practice.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors are crucial and interrelated barriers to the development of oral communication skills among EFL students. Factors, such as exposure to authentic English input, motivation, anxiety, ineffective teaching methods, low self-confidence and limited classroom interaction, do not operate in isolation but form a complex set of hurdles for EFL students. While existing research has effectively investigated these factors across various contexts, a prominent gap remains in understanding the role of pedagogical, psychological, and sociocultural barriers Iranian EFL students themselves perceive as the most significant to their own speaking difficulties. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by directly examining the students' attitudes regarding pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors they identify as primary contributors to their poor oral communication skills in the Iranian higher education setting.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative research approach has been adopted to investigate Iranian EFL students' attitudes regarding the factors contributing to their poor oral communication. This research approach is employed to test ideas by deducing hypotheses from them and is primarily based on the researcher's interpretation of the studied phenomena. The quantitative research approach requires data collection procedures that result in numerical data, which are then analyzed primarily by statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2005).

3.2 Participants

The study respondents were thirty-five EFL Iranian students enrolled in English as a foreign language program at Farhangian University of Arak, Iran. both female and male students participated in the present study. The respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 23 years. The respondents were selected randomly.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Close-Ended Questionnaires

A closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale was used to collect data regarding students' attitudes regarding pedagogical, sociocultural, and psychological factors they identify as primary contributors to their poor oral communication skills in the Iranian higher education setting. This is a type of questionnaire that was used as it is an effective way of gathering quantifiable data from a large sample (Dornyei). The researcher developed the questionnaire based on previously validated instruments used in similar studies. The questionnaire items were clear and straightforward. The questionnaire consists of 13 closed-ended items. The Likert scale was used in which respondents determined their level of agreement to the questionnaire items in five points: (1) Never; (2) Rarely; (3) Sometimes; (4) Often, and (5) Always (see table 1). For the sake of checking the questionnaire's validity and reliability, I used a Face Validity Test. I distributed the questionnaire to five students to check the clarity of the questionnaire items and make sure that the items are straightforward and easy to understand.

Table 1: Likert Scale

Answer	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Degree	1	2	3	4	5

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The level of agreement was measured using a Likert scale, and the weighted average values of Likert scale responses used to compare the obtained data are presented below:

Table2: the weighted average values obtained from the analyses of the answers

Level of Agreement	Weighted Average
Never	From 1 to 1.79
Rarely	From 1.81 to 2.60
Sometimes	From 2.61 to 3.40
Often	From 3.41 to 4.20
Always	From 4.21 to 5

The weighted average values of the Levels of Agreement on Likert Scale describe the following:

1. The arithmetic mean from 1-1.79 describes no agreement with the item.
2. The arithmetic mean from 1.81 – 2.60 describes rare agreement with the item.
3. The arithmetic mean from 2.61 – 3.40 describes average agreement with the item.
4. The arithmetic mean from 3.41 – 4.20 describes agreement with the item.
5. The arithmetic mean from 4.21 – 5 describes constant agreement with the item.

3.4.1 Measurement tools of Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics test is used to convert data into numeric values to provide a description of the research problem. The Descriptive Statistics measurements used in this study are percentage and arithmetic mean. The researcher hypothesized a mean value (3) equal to %60 to measure the level of respondents' agreement with the questionnaire items.

4. Results

The descriptive analysis (see Table 3) shows that most factors contribute to poor oral communication skills among EFL students. The mean scores above the hypothesized mean (3.0 = 60%) reflect a generally high level of agreement among respondents. This indicates that students clearly perceive pedagogical, psychological, and sociocultural challenges as primary challenges to improving their oral communication skills in English. In addition, according to the weighted average scale (table 2), eight statements (table3) fall within the "Often" and "Always" agreement levels, and this confirms the consistency and severity of these barriers to students' oral skills.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

Item	Mean	Agreement Percentage
There are insufficient interactive activities in class to help me enhance my speaking skills.	4.3857	%86

The classroom environment does not provide enough support for practicing spoken English.	4.1561	%83
I tend to avoid speaking English because I fear making mistakes.	3.9226	%78
I do not have enough chances to practice speaking English.	3.7275	%74
Limited exposure to English movies, news, and TV shows negatively affects the development of my oral communication skills.	3.6565	%73
I feel anxious when I know I will be asked to speak English in class.	3.5514	%71
I lack confidence in my ability to speak English fluently.	3.5125	%70
I struggle to improve my oral skills due to a lack of sufficient practice.	3.2647	%65
Lack family and friends' support negatively affect my willingness to speak.	3.2429	%65
I worry that others will judge me when I speak English.	3.2000	%64
Speaking English in front of others makes me anxious	3.1000	%62
I worry about being negatively evaluated by my teachers and classmates when I speak English.	2.9412	%59
My cultural background affects my willingness to speak English.	2.1284	%43

Pedagogical, psychological, and sociocultural factors impact students' development of oral communication skills, each applying a different level and style of impact as follows:

4.1 Pedagogical Factors (Most Influential)

Pedagogical factors received the highest mean scores as presented below:

Factor	Mean	Percentage of Agreement	Frequency
Insufficient interactive classroom activities	4.39	86%	Always
Lack of classroom support for spoken English	4.16	83%	Often
Insufficient opportunities to practice speaking	3.73	74%	Often
Lack of sufficient practice to improve oral skills	3.26	65%	Sometimes Often

This indicates that instructional practices and classroom conditions are the main contributors to poor oral communication skills. Students strongly agree that teaching methods and learning environment in the classroom do not provide adequate interaction or speaking opportunities. That is, more communicative, student-centered teaching approaches are needed for creating oral practice opportunities in the classroom.

4.2 Psychological Factors (Highly Significant)

These factors, such as anxiety, fear, and low confidence, also received high levels of agreement as presented below:

Factor	Mean	Agreement Percentage	Frequency
Fear of making mistakes	3.92	78%	Often
Speaking anxiety	3.55	71%	Often
Lack of confidence in speaking fluently	3.51	70%	Often
Fear of judgment and negative evaluation	3.20–2.94	59–64%	Sometimes Often

This result indicates that these barriers significantly hinder students' oral performance. The findings show that students' emotional states play a key role in reducing oral participation. Anxiety and fear of classmates' or teachers' feedback discourage active engagement in speaking activities.

4.3 Sociocultural Factors (Least Influential)

These factors received least levels of agreement as follows:

Factor	Mean	Percentage of Agreement	Frequency
Limited exposure to watching English movies, news, TV shows	3.65	73%	Often
Lack of family and friends' support	3.24	65%	Sometimes
Cultural background affecting willingness to speak	2.13	43%	Rarely

These barriers moderately hinder students' oral performance, indicating that Sociocultural Factors are not perceived as a major barrier compared to pedagogical and psychological factors.

4.4 Ranking of Factors (from most influential to least influential)

1. Pedagogical factors (instructional methods, interaction, practice opportunities)
2. Psychological factors (anxiety, fear of mistakes, lack of confidence)
3. Sociocultural factors (minimal impact)

In conclusion, the findings show that pedagogical and psychological factors are the primary contributors to poor oral communication skills among EFL students, while sociocultural factors play a minor role. That is, adopting interactive teaching strategies and creating supportive classroom environments are essential for limiting anxiety and encouraging active oral participation.

5. Discussion

The present study aims to examine Iranian EFL students' attitudes toward the factors contributing to their poor oral communication skills at Alajaylat faculties of arts and education. The study findings demonstrate that students perceive pedagogical factors, such as insufficient

interactive classroom activities, a lack of classroom support for spoken English, inadequate opportunities to practice speaking, ineffective teaching methods, and insufficient practice to improve oral skills, as the primary contributors to their weak oral communication skills in English. These findings are consistent with previous studies which report that instructional practices and teacher-related factors significantly and negatively influence EFL students' oral performance (Jamoom & Bahron, 2024; Eldoumi, 2025; Abdulrahman & Adam, 2025; Dela, 2025; Israa, 2025; Khasawneh, 2023; Wang et al., 2025; Al-Nouh, 2015). The results of this study suggest similar factors hindering oral communication skills among students from developing countries where English is taught as a foreign language. The findings of this study reinforce earlier arguments that effective oral communication in EFL contexts is closely shaped by pedagogical quality and classroom interaction, echoing what Fauzan identifies as the centrality of communicative, student-centered teaching practices in fostering learners' oral proficiency (Fauzan, 2014).

In addition, psychological factors, including low self-confidence, foreign language anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, were identified as significant barriers to students' oral communication development. This finding aligns with previous studies, indicating that EFL learners often experience anxiety, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes and concerns about negative peer evaluation during speaking activities, which discourage active engagement in classroom interactions (Jamoom & Bahron, 2024; Eldoumi, 2025; Abdulrahman & Adam, 2025; Aleidan, 2024; Aashiq & Zahid, 2024; Gracia, 2016). Accordingly, affective factors are seen as significant challenges for EFL students when developing their oral communication skills.

The present study also indicates that sociocultural barriers moderately hinder students' oral performance, but they are not perceived as a major barrier compared to pedagogical and psychological factors. This indicates that instructional practices and learners' affective state have a more significant influence on oral communication development than sociocultural factors in the context of this study. This result is inconsistent with previous studies that indicated social environment as a prominent factor hindering oral competency among EFL students (Putra & Zulhermindra, 2024; Hernandez, 2024; Kumar et al., 2025) Compared with studies conducted in the Iranian higher and secondary education context, Iranian students face similar pedagogical and affective challenges. However, sociocultural barriers were not as significant as pedagogical and affective barriers.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate Iranian EFL students' attitudes towards the factors contributing to their poor oral communication skills. The present study found that students perceive pedagogical factors, such as insufficient interactive classroom activities, a lack of classroom support for spoken English, inadequate opportunities to practice speaking, ineffective teaching methods, and insufficient practice to improve oral skills, as the primary contributors to their weak oral communication skills in English. Moreover, psychological factors, including low self-confidence, foreign language anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, were also identified as significant barriers to students' oral communication development. The study also indicates that sociocultural barriers moderately hinder students' oral performance, indicating that Sociocultural Factors are not perceived as major barriers compared to pedagogical and psychological factors. This indicates that instructional practices and learners' affective states have a more significant influence on oral communication development than sociocultural factors in the context of this study. Thus, the study suggests adopting effective and interactive teaching strategies and creating supportive classroom environments to reduce emotional barriers and encourage active oral participation.

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