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Pedagogical Practices and Psychological Influences on the Development of English-Speaking Skills in University Learners

Jesús Romero-Argueta
Universidad de Oriente, El Salvador
jose.romero@univo.edu.sv

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Abstract

This study examines the combined influence of pedagogical practices and psychological factors on the development of English speaking skills among university students in El Salvador. Persistent challenges in oral proficiency were addressed through a quantitative, correlational research design, using a Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 32 students at a private university. Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.888$, $p < 0.001$) between speaking skill development and the interaction of communicative teaching methodologies with psychological factors such as anxiety, confidence, and fear. The findings indicate that interactive approaches, including flipped classrooms and activity-based learning, together with supportive environments that reduce emotional barriers, significantly enhance students' oral performance. The study highlights the importance of teacher training and curriculum design that combine methodological innovation with psychological support, ensuring more effective language acquisition. These results contribute to the improvement of English language education by offering evidence-based recommendations to strengthen speaking proficiency in EFL contexts similar to El Salvador.

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Keywords: English Speaking Skills; Teaching Methodologies; Psychological Factors; University Students; Communicative Approaches

INTRODUCTION

The development of English language speaking skills is crucial for university students as English proficiency often opens doors to global opportunities, enhancing employability and academic prospects (Byrd, 2013). Hence, the ability to communicate effectively in English can also facilitate international collaboration and cultural exchange, making it a vital competency in today's interconnected world (Aririguzoh, 2022).

English language education has undergone significant changes over the years, with various methodologies being implemented to improve language acquisition. However, despite these efforts, many students still struggle with developing their speaking skills (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). This challenge is exacerbated by psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem, which can hinder students' ability to practice and improve their speaking abilities (Umisara et al., 2021). Therefore, the current research seeks to address the issue of inadequate speaking skill development among English language university students. Specifically, it aims to investigate the role of teachers' methodologies and psychological factors in influencing students' speaking proficiency.

While existing studies have explored various aspects of English language learning, there is a lack of comprehensive research that simultaneously examines the impact of both teaching methodologies and psychological factors on speaking skill development (Rahmadani, et al., 2024). This gap highlights the need for a more holistic approach to understanding the challenges faced by university students in improving their English-speaking abilities. In addition, preliminary observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that traditional teaching methods, which often prioritize grammar and written skills over speaking, may contribute to students' struggles with oral communication (Chishiba & Mukuka, 2024). Additionally, psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes and low confidence levels further impede students' progress (Quvanch et al., 2024). Addressing these issues requires a deeper exploration of how innovative teaching strategies and psychological support can foster better speaking skill development.

Objectives

1. To identify the psychological factors that most significantly impact students' speaking proficiency.

2. To examine the interplay between teaching methodologies and psychological factors in shaping students' speaking skill development.

Finally, the aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers' methodologies and psychological factors influence the development of speaking skills in English language university students. By identifying the key challenges and proposing practical solutions, this research seeks to contribute to the improvement of English language education in the region, ultimately empowering students to achieve greater linguistic competence and confidence in their speaking abilities.

Literature review

Methodological factors

Flipped classroom and active learning are two elements that foster the English speaking proficiency. For instance, Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2019) conducted a systematic review on the flipped classroom method in English Language Teaching (ELT), noting its effectiveness in improving speaking skills. The flipped classroom emphasizes active learning, where students engage with content outside of class and apply their knowledge interactively during class time. This method encourages communicative practices, which directly supports the development of speaking proficiency. The research indicates that while the flipped classroom can enhance speaking skills, challenges related to implementation strategies remain, necessitating further exploration of effective practices tailored to diverse learning environments.

Moreover, communicative games and engaging methodologies enhance the English learners focus on speaking development. For example, Dewi et al. (2016) investigated the impact of communicative games on speaking skills. Their findings highlight that engaging and participatory activities significantly improve students' speaking scores, suggesting that enjoyable methodologies can foster a more conducive learning environment. This research illustrates the importance of incorporating fun and interactive elements into teaching

methodologies, which could be essential for developing English speaking skills among younger learners.

Besides, the integration of critical thinking determines the success of the students' speaking skill development. Malmir and Shoorcheh (2012) examined the effect of critical thinking on speaking abilities among Iranian EFL learners. By integrating critical thinking techniques into speaking practice, the study found substantial improvements in students' speaking skills. This highlights the necessity for innovative teaching methodologies that not only focus on language mechanics but also enhance cognitive skills. The incorporation of critical thinking as a methodological factor presents an avenue for further research into its long-term impacts on speaking proficiency.

Digital storytelling has emerged as a compelling method for enhancing speaking skills. Dewi and Sari (2022) reported that this approach positively impacts students' confidence and engagement, which are essential for effective communication. Additionally, Sinaga and Oktaviani (2020) highlighted the use of Fun Fishing as a motivating teaching media for elementary students, reinforcing the importance of creative methodologies in language learning. Both studies underscore the effectiveness of interactive and imaginative strategies in supporting English speaking skill development.

Likewise, authentic assessment challenges are effective strategies to pursue the purpose pertaining the English speaking skill development. For example, Zaim et al. (2020) addressed the challenges teachers face in authentic assessment of speaking skills, emphasizing the need for effective assessment strategies. Their research highlights that comprehensive assessment approaches are crucial for accurately evaluating and supporting English speaking skill development. This raises a pertinent question about how assessment practices can be refined to better align with innovative teaching methodologies and the diverse needs of learners.

Psychological factors

The research findings consistently highlight the significant influence of psychological factors on students' English-speaking abilities (Alqarni & Dewaele, 2018). Psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation hinder students from actively participating in English-speaking activities (Mei & Masoumeh, 2017). These factors negatively affect students' speaking performance and create difficulties in expressing themselves in English (Haidara, 2016).

The impact of psychological factors on English speaking skills is not limited to specific contexts (Qureshi.et al., 2020). Moreover, EFL student teachers also experience hindrances in speaking English due to psychological factors such as anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation (Arifin, 2017). Similarly, primary school pupils face psychological barriers like fear, shyness, and anxiety when speaking in English (Nijat et al., 2019). EFL learners also struggle with speaking difficulties due to psychological factors like anxiety, fear of mistakes, unwillingness, and fear of negative evaluation (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Moreover, psychological factors such as lack of self-confidence, self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and motivation significantly impact students' speaking performance in English language teaching programs (Bakhtiar & Suwandi, 2022).). These factors also hinder the speaking performance of students in postgraduate English language teaching programs (Yorke et al., 2016). Some EFL learners cope with similar defiances, as psychological factors like lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and motivation affect their speaking performance (Alrasheedi, 2020).

In addition, creative methodologies, such as digital storytelling and fun activities help achieve evident outcomes related to the speaking skill in English.

Knowledge gaps and future research

While the provided research findings shed light on the psychological factors affecting English-speaking skills, several knowledge gaps need to be addressed in future research. Firstly, there is a lack of research on the specific impact of methodological factors on students' English-speaking performance. Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies, classroom activities, and instructional materials in enhancing students' speaking abilities. Additionally, the existing research primarily focuses on the psychological factors hindering English-speaking skills in specific contexts, such as El Salvador. Future research should explore the universality of these psychological barriers by examining their impact in diverse cultural and linguistic settings.

Furthermore, while the research findings highlight the negative influence of psychological factors, there is a need for a more in-depth analysis of the underlying mechanisms. Future studies should investigate the specific cognitive and affective processes through which psychological factors hinder students' English-speaking performance. Lastly, the research insights provided primarily focus on the perspectives of language learners. Future research should also consider the perspectives of language

teachers and explore their role in addressing and mitigating the psychological barriers to English speaking.

METHODS

Design and participants

This paper contemplated the sample of 32 higher education students from a private university located in El Salvador through a quantitative approach that "is said to be mostly numerical and is designed to ensure objectivity, generalizability, and reliability. One important feature of quantitative techniques is that the process of data collection is distinct from analysis" (Rihoux, 2003, p.3). Besides, a correlation method was applied, which is used to connect two variables, namely the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y) (Abdullah, 2015, cited by Misa et al., 2022, p. 54).

Instrument

The instrument is a Likert-type scale, considering a non-probability sample for convenience (Otzen & Manterola, 2017, cited by Severino-González et al., 2020). The questionnaire was designed by the research team. The first section includes sociodemographic variables that allow for the sample to be categorized (see Table 1). The second section contemplates a questionnaire with 20 items. Thirdly, the Likert scale considered 0 (never) as the minimum agreement value and 4 (always) as the maximum agreement value. Finally, the questionnaire was divided into four dimensions, which reflected 0.87 as Cronbach's alpha.

Table 1. Sociodemographic information about the participants

Category	Type and percentages
Gender	Female: 65.6%
	Male: 34.4%
Zone	Rural: 21.9%
	Urbarn: 78.1
Age	21-25 years: 81.3%
	26-30 years: 15.6%
	31-35 years: 3.1%

RESULTS

This section includes data gathered through a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to explore the influence of teaching methodologies and psychological factors on the development of English-speaking skills. Moreover, it features figures illustrating student perceptions regarding the role of teaching methodology, engagement in speaking practice, psychological influences, and attitudes toward oral language use. Additionally, a table details the statistical correlation between these variables and students' speaking proficiency, providing a comprehensive overview of the collected data.

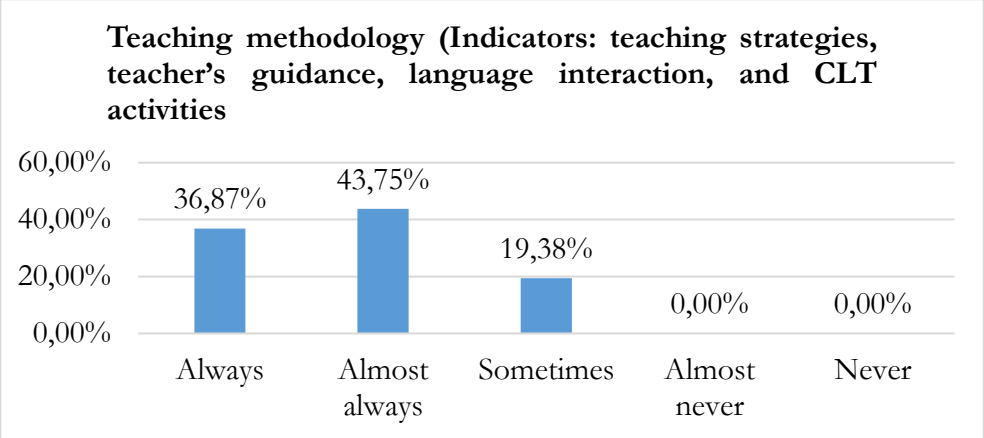

Figure 1. Teaching methodology

In Figure 1, students indicated that teaching methodology determines the success of the development of the speaking skill in the class. Firstly, it can be perceived that 43.75% of students expressed that *almost always* this variable is a key factor to succeed in this purpose. Another important percentage, 36.87%, described that *always* this variable has incidence in this regard. Also, it is shown a relative 19.38% of participants declared that *sometimes* teaching methodological factors have an incidence in the development of oral skill in the students. This means that learners have a clear perception of the important role of the teacher's methodology when it comes to engaging students in speaking activities.

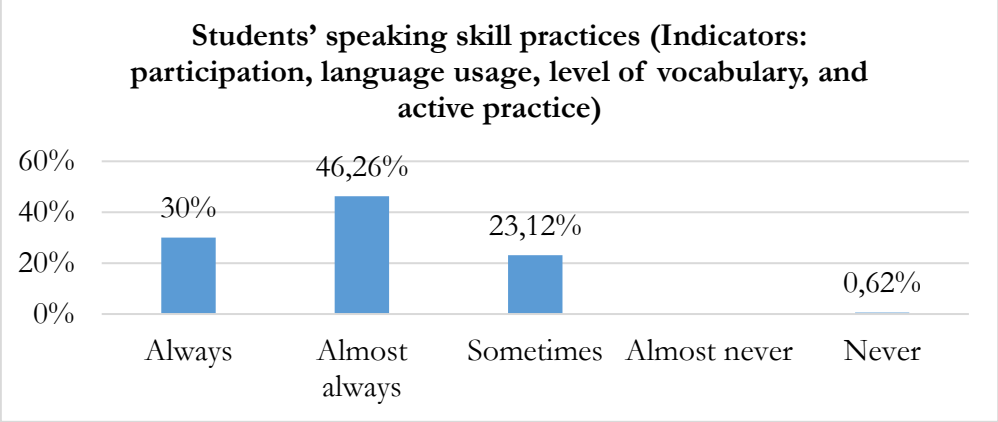

Figure 2. Students' speaking skill

In Figure 2, students portray how important practice is to develop the speaking skill. It can be noticed that 46.26% of them revealed that *almost always* practical activities lead to an effective and solid development of this skill; meanwhile, 30.00% reflected that *always* practice consolidates the eventual fluency in the language. Likewise, 23.12% of the surveyed students replied that they *sometimes* are involved in speaking practices. Finally, 0.62% demonstrated that they *never* practice speaking in class. In conclusion, it can be noticed that there are positive answers toward these objective variables; nevertheless, teachers, also, should focus on those cases in which students are reluctant to participate in oral assignments.

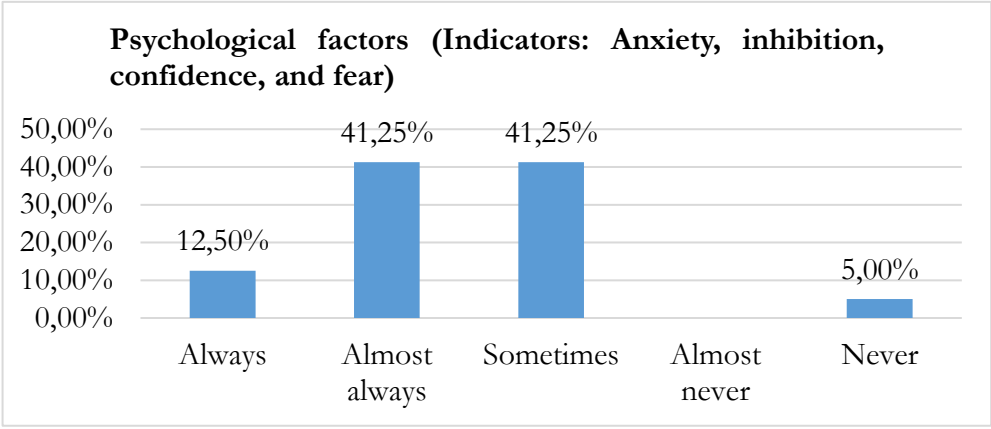

Figure 3. Psychological factors

In Figure 3, students manifest how psychological factors affect the development of speaking. First, it can be observed that 41.25% of students answered that *almost always* the development of speaking depends on indicators related to this variable. Likewise, 41.25% considered that *sometimes* this variable hinders students from developing this skill. This last percentage implies that students assume the fact that psychological factors might be related

to learners' attitude. In the same way, 12.50% of the participants replied that psychological factors are *always* related to oral language production. There is a minimal 5.00% who responded that psychological issues *never* are associated with oral activities.

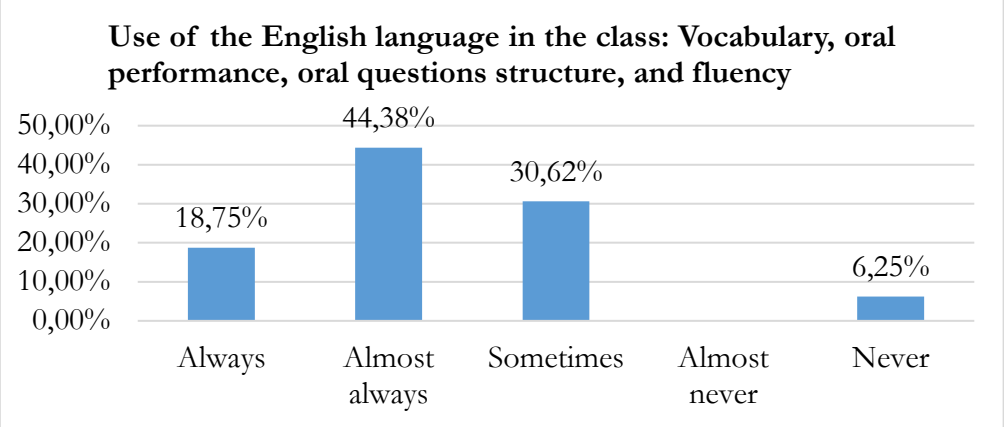

Figure 4. Use of the English language in the class

In Figure 4, students showed how their attitude plays a decisive role in the pursuit of this skill development using language. It can be witnessed that 44.38% of them confirmed that *almost always* having a positive attitude derives all psychological barriers in the context of speaking development; meanwhile, 30.62% of learners reflected that *sometimes* having a positive attitude effectively benefits this process. Besides, 18.75% revealed the use of English in the classroom is *sometimes* a key factor in increasing the oral language domain. Finally, 6.25% conceived that this aspect is *never* a decisive fact on language improvement.

Table 2. ***Correlation between teachers' methodology and psychological factors and the students' speaking development skill***

Variables	Correlations	Teachers' methodology and psychological factors	Students' speaking development skill
Teachers' methodology and psycholinguistic factors	Spearman correlation Sign. (2-tails) N	1.000 32	.888 .000 32
Students' speaking development skill	Spearman correlation Sign. (2-tails) N	.888 .000 32	1.000 32

Table 2 presents the correlation between teachers' methodology and psycholinguistic factors and students' speaking development skill, analyzed using the Spearman correlation method; notably, the correlation between teachers' methodology and psycholinguistic factors and itself is 1.000 ($p = .000$), indicating a perfect positive correlation, while the correlation with students' speaking development skill is 0.888 ($p = .000$), suggesting a strong positive relationship. Furthermore, the correlation between students' speaking skill and itself is 1.000 ($p = .000$), reinforcing its consistency, and the p-values of .000 across all comparisons indicate that these correlations are statistically significant, highlighting the robust connection between these variables.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate interplay between pedagogical practices and psychological influences in shaping English speaking skills among university students in El Salvador, revealing a robust positive correlation ($r = 0.888$, $p < 0.001$) between these variables and oral proficiency development. Also, this strong association suggests that effective teaching methodologies, when integrated with strategies to mitigate psychological barriers, can significantly enhance students' communicative abilities. Notably, participants overwhelmingly perceived teaching methodologies as pivotal, with 80.62% indicating that they *almost always* or *always* determine success in speaking skill acquisition (Figure 1). This perception aligns with the emphasis on practice-oriented activities, where 76.26% of respondents reported that practical engagement *almost always* or *always* consolidates fluency (Figure 2). However, psychological factors emerged as a double-edged sword, with 82.5% of students acknowledging their frequent impact, either positively through confidence-building or negatively via anxiety and fear (Figure 3). Furthermore, a positive attitude toward English use in class was seen as beneficial by 75% of participants (Figure 4), reinforcing the notion that emotional readiness amplifies methodological efficacy.

Therefore, these results resonate deeply with the existing literature on methodological factors, extending prior insights into how innovative pedagogies foster speaking proficiency. For instance, the high valuation of interactive teaching in this study mirrors Turan and Akdag-Cimen's (2019) systematic review of the flipped classroom in English Language Teaching (ELT), which demonstrated its role in promoting active,

communicative learning that directly bolsters oral skills. By shifting content delivery outside class and emphasizing in-class application, such approaches address the implementation challenges noted in the review, as evidenced by the participants' preference for methodologies that encourage engagement over rote learning. Similarly, the correlation between practice and proficiency echoes Dewi et al.'s (2016) findings on communicative games, where participatory activities not only improved speaking scores but also created enjoyable environments that reduce reluctance to speak, a pattern reflected in the minimal 0.62% of th sample who *never* practiced orally. Building on this, Malmir and Shoorcheh's (2012) integration of critical thinking into speaking practice finds parallel in the data, as cognitive enhancement through methodological rigor appears to strengthen the observed link between teaching strategies and skill development. Moreover, the endorsement of creative tools like digital storytelling (Dewi & Sari, 2022) and motivational media such as Fun Fishing (Sinaga & Oktaviani, 2020) aligns with the results, suggesting that these elements could amplify the 46.26% of respondents who viewed practice as *almost always* effective. Finally, Zaim et al.'s (2020) call for refined authentic assessments to evaluate speaking ties into the correlation analysis, implying that assessment practices must evolve alongside methodologies to support holistic development, particularly in contexts like El Salvador where traditional grammar-focused methods have historically dominated (Chishiba & Mukuka, 2024).

On the psychological front, the study's emphasis on factors such as anxiety, confidence, and fear as hindrances to speaking proficiency corroborates a broad body of research identifying these as universal barriers in English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. The 41.25% of participants who reported psychological issues *almost always* affecting performance echoes Alqarni and Dewaele (2018), Mei and Masoumeh (2017), and Haidara (2016), who collectively highlight how fear of mistakes and shyness impede active participation. This is further supported by context-specific studies, such as Arifin (2017) on EFL student teachers and Nijat et al. (2019) on primary pupils, which document similar anxieties across educational levels. These findings also extend Bakhtiar and Suwandi (2022), Alrasheedi (2020), and Amoah and Yeboah (2021), where low self-esteem and motivation deficits were linked to poor speaking outcomes in postsecondary programs. The interplay observed here, where psychological factors mediate methodological impacts, addresses a key gap noted in the literature review, as prior works like Rahmadani et al. (2024) called for holistic examinations of these dual influences. By demonstrating that supportive

environments can transform barriers into facilitators (e.g., through positive attitudes mitigating fear), this study bridges methodological innovations with emotional support, as advocated by Quvanch et al. (2024) and Umisara et al. (2021).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted, offering actionable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in El Salvador and similar EFL contexts. Pedagogically, the strong correlation advocates for a shift toward communicative, interactive approaches, such as flipped classrooms and games, that integrate psychological scaffolding, like anxiety-reduction techniques and confidence-building exercises. This balanced strategy could empower the 23.12% of students who only *sometimes* engage in speaking practices, fostering greater inclusivity and aligning with global trends toward learner-centered ELT (Byrd, 2013; Aririguzoh, 2022). For teacher training, programs should emphasize dual competencies in methodology and emotional intelligence, equipping instructors to create safe spaces that counteract the 41.25% of cases where psychological factors *sometimes* hinder progress. Institutionally, universities might implement workshops or digital tools (e.g., storytelling apps) to address the 5% who view psychological issues as irrelevant, ensuring broader applicability. Ultimately, these practices could enhance employability and cultural exchange, as posited in the introduction, by producing more fluent, confident speakers.

Despite these contributions, several limitations warrant consideration. The sample size of 32 students from a single private university limits generalizability, potentially overlooking variations in public institutional settings in El Salvador. The reliance on self-reported Likert-scale data introduces subjectivity and social desirability bias, while the correlational design precludes causal inferences. Hence, future experimental studies could test whether methodological interventions directly alleviate psychological barriers. Additionally, the convenience sampling may not capture diverse demographics, such as varying proficiency levels or socioeconomic backgrounds, which could influence perceptions.

To address these gaps and build on the literature's identified needs, future research should pursue longitudinal designs with larger, stratified samples to track speaking development over time. Comparative studies across cultural contexts could test the universality of psychological barriers, as suggested in the knowledge gaps section. Intervention-based research, such as randomized trials of flipped classrooms combined

with anxiety management programs, would provide causal evidence. Moreover, incorporating teacher perspectives, absent in this study, could explore their role in mitigating barriers, while qualitative methods like interviews might uncover underlying cognitive mechanisms. By filling these voids, subsequent work can refine ELT practices, ultimately advancing equitable language education in resource-constrained regions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both teaching methodologies and psychological factors significantly impact the development of English-speaking skills in university students. Statistical results support the notion that students benefit most when instructors implement communicative, interactive, and supportive teaching strategies while also acknowledging and addressing psychological barriers such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence.

The strong positive correlation found in this research ($r = 0.888$) underscores the need for teacher training programs to integrate psychological awareness and flexible pedagogical approaches tailored to student needs. By creating a psychologically safe and methodologically stimulating environment, educators can empower students to participate more confidently in speaking activities.

It is recommended that future research expand the sample size, include comparative studies in different cultural or institutional contexts, and incorporate qualitative insights from both students and teachers to deepen the understanding of how emotions and teaching approach intertwine. Additionally, exploring specific methodological practices (e.g., project-based learning, peer dialogue, feedback techniques) may yield further insights into effective strategies for speaking development.

Ultimately, by addressing both the internal (psychological) and external (methodological) dimensions of language learning, educators can foster a more comprehensive and effective learning environment that promotes not only speaking proficiency but also learner autonomy and confidence.

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