



New College Students' Shyness and Academic Performance : Some Strategies to cope with shyness -A case Study conducted at Faculty of Education, Misurata University

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خجل طلاب الجامعات الجدد وادائهم الأكاديمي: استراتيجيات للتعامل مع خجل الطلاب- دراسة حالة
أجريت في كلية التربية، جامعة مصراته

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Received: June 05, 2025

Accepted: July 24, 2025

Published: August 02, 2025

Abstract:

The main aim of this study is to examine the effects of shyness on new college students and to explore effective strategies to overcome it. The research seeks to answer two key questions: How does shyness affect students' academic performance and social interactions? And what strategies do students use to cope with or overcome shyness? A descriptive quantitative design was employed using a structured questionnaire consisting of 14 closed-ended statements. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: six items focused on situations where students experience shyness, and eight items on strategies to manage shyness. The sample included 62 randomly selected first-semester English major students at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University. Data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages to identify common patterns in students' experiences of shyness and the coping mechanisms they employ. Results showed that many students feel shy when speaking in front of professors and participating in class discussions, negatively impacting their academic engagement and social interactions. Nonetheless, several strategies such as communication skills improvement-applying communicative language teaching approaches, cultivating peer support, relaxation techniques, and regular practice were identified as effective in overcoming shyness. These findings highlight the importance of addressing shyness to support students' academic success and social adjustment in the university environment.

Keywords: shyness, overcoming, communicative skills , new college students.

الملخص

يعد تحسين الكفاءة التواصلية في اللغة الإنجليزية أمراً ضرورياً للمتعلمين الجدد للمشاركة بفعالية في السياقات الأكاديمية والاجتماعية. ومع ذلك، غالباً ما يواجه المتعلمون الجدد عقبات مثل الخجل الذي قد يعيق اكتسابهم للغة والمشاركة في أنشطة الفصل الدراسي. الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو فحص آثار الخجل على طلاب الجامعة الجدد واستكشاف الاستراتيجيات الفعالة للتغلب عليه. تسعى الدراسة للإجابة عن سؤالين رئيسيين: كيف يؤثر الخجل على الأداء الأكاديمي والتفاعلات الاجتماعية للطلاب؟ وما هي الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها الطلاب للتعامل مع أو التغلب على الخجل؟ تم استخدام تصميم كمي وصفي في هذه الدراسة، حيث استُخدم استبيان منظم يتألف من 14 عبارة مغلقة. تم تقسيم الاستبيان إلى جزأين: ستة عناصر تركزت على المواقف التي يواجه فيها الطلاب الجدد الخجل، وثمانية عناصر تتعلق باستراتيجيات إدارة الخجل. شملت العينة 62 طالباً من طلاب الفصل الدراسي الأول، تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية، في كلية التربية بجامعة مصراتة. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام التكرارات والنسب المئوية لتحديد الأنماط الشائعة في تجارب الطلاب الجدد المتعلقة بالخجل وآليات التكيف التي يستخدمونها. أظهرت النتائج أن العديد من الطلاب يشعرون بالخجل عند التحدث أمام الأساتذة والمشاركة في

المناقشات الصفية، مما يؤثر سلبيًا على تفاعلهم الأكاديمي وتواصلهم داخل الصف. ومع ذلك، تبيّن أن عدة استراتيجيات مثل تطبيق تقنيات التواصل التواصلي، وزراعة الدعم بين الأقران، وتقنيات الاسترخاء، والممارسة المنتظمة على أنها فعّالة في معالجة الخجل لدعم نجاح الطلاب الأكاديمي وتكيفهم الاجتماعي داخل البيئة الاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخجل، التغلب على الخجل، المهارات التواصلية، طلاب الجامعة الجدد.

1. Introduction:

Shyness is a common emotional and social experience that affects many individuals, particularly during transitional periods in life. One such critical transition is the move from high school to university, where students face new environments, unfamiliar people, and increased academic responsibilities. Among first year university students, feeling of shyness can become more pronounced, influencing their ability to interact with peers, participate in class discussions, and adapt socially and academically. However, within the speedily evolving global landscape, proficiency in the English language has appeared as an indispensable asset for personal and professional growth. Libyan society, a nation with an amusing cultural tapestry and an increasingly dynamic economy, recognizes the pivotal role that English language capability plays in facilitating cross-cultural interactions, accessing global awareness resources, and fostering economic opportunities. As the lingua franca of international communication, English functions as a gateway to a world of possibilities, enabling individuals to surpass geographical boundaries and engage with diverse communities and perspectives (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013).

In spite of the acknowledged importance of English language proficiency, At the Faculty of Education, Misurata University, it has been observed that a significant number of new students struggle with shyness especially during their first semester (new students) and mostly, habitually encounter various obstacles in their journey to develop communicative competence. This can lead to challenges in forming social connections, expressing opinions, and engaging fully in their educational journey. Such difficulties if not addressed, may negatively affect students' academic performance and overall university experience.

This study aims to investigate the presence of shyness among first semester students and to identify effective strategies to overcome it. By focusing on students at the Faculty of Education, this research provides insights into their personal experiences, the factors that contribute to their shyness, and the coping mechanisms they use. Understanding these aspects is essential to help educators, counselors, and students themselves create a more supportive learning environment that encourages confidence, participation, and personal growth.

1.1 Statement of the Study:

Shyness among first-semester university students is a significant yet often overlooked issue that can negatively affect their academic performance, social development, and overall university experience. As students transition into a new and unfamiliar environment, many struggle to initiate conversations, participate in class discussions, or engage in campus life due to fear of negative evaluation and lack of confidence. Despite its impact, shyness is rarely addressed in university support programs, leaving affected students at risk of isolation and underachievement. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the root causes of shyness in first-semester students, its effects on their academic and social engagement, and the practical interventions that can support them in overcoming it and adapting successfully to university life.

1.2 Significance of the Study:

This study highlights the importance of addressing shyness in first-semester university students in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, as it can affect their academic and social success. Via addressing the issues of shyness, this study aims to empower new learners to contribute actively in the classroom, engage in meaningful communication, and eventually achieve higher levels of English language proficiency. This, in turn, can unlock chances for personal growth, academic success, and professional advancement in an increasingly globalized world. Moreover, the study's findings may contribute to the growth of more effective pedagogical approaches and classroom management strategies, eventually enhancing the overall quality of EFL education inside classes and beyond.

1.3 Research Questions:

The current study is conducted to answer the following questions :

1. How dose shyness affect new students' academic performance and social interactions?
2. What strategies do new students currently use to cope with and overcome shyness?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Shyness and Language Learning

Shyness is a psychological and social trait that can significantly influence students' academic performance and social interactions, especially during their first semester at university. At this stage, students often encounter unfamiliar settings, new peers, and higher academic expectations, all of which can intensify feelings of shyness and reluctance to participate. Several scholars have explored shyness in relation to various psychological variables, including self-esteem, anxiety, and language acquisition.

First-semester students often face new environments, unfamiliar peers, and increased academic demands, which may trigger feelings of shyness and hesitation in participation. Several researchers have examined the concept of shyness, its causes, its relationship with other psychological variables such as self-esteem, and strategies to overcome it. This literature review aims to present and analyze previous studies that have addressed the issue of shyness among students.

Theoretical backgrounds provide valuable lenses through which to understand and address the trials of shyness in language learning contexts. This section explores three powerful theoretical perspectives – the affective filter hypothesis, sociocultural theory, and motivational structures – and their relevance to creating a supportive and inclusive learning situation which fosters communicative competence amongst new EFL learners. The emotional filter hypothesis, proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982, 231), suggests that affective factors, like anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, can act as filters that either ease or hinder language acquisition. According to this hypothesis, learners with high levels of anxiety or low self-confidence might have a metaphorical "filter" that blocks comprehensible input from getting the language acquisition device, consequently hindering their ability to learn the target language efficiently (ibid). This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to understanding the influence of shyness on language learning, as it can contribute to heightened anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and a reluctance to engage in communicative accomplishments. By addressing these emotional barriers, educators can lower the affective filter and create an environment conducive to language acquisition and communicative capability improvement. Sociocultural theory, developed via Lev Vygotsky and expanded upon by scholars like James V. Wertsch and Michael Cole, stresses the role of social and cultural contexts in shaping cognitive growth and learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006,). From this perspective, language learning is not just an individual process but rather a socially mediated activity that is influenced by the learner's communications with others and the cultural tools obtainable in their environment (ibid). This model has significant implications for understanding the influence of shyness and classroom dynamics on language learning, as a negative social environment could impede learners' ability to engage in meaningful interactions and utilize the available cultural funds for language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Via creating a supportive and inclusive classroom culture, educators can leverage the principles of sociocultural theory to ease language learning through social interactions and the effective exploitation of cultural implements.

Mundelsee (2023) examined the connection between shyness and classroom participation through three empirical studies. The findings revealed that teaching strategies like Think-Pair-Share significantly reduced students' anxiety and encouraged even shy students to participate more frequently. The study also emphasized the role of teacher-student relationships and supportive classroom climates, which were found to foster greater Participation. Interestingly, shy students with strong peer bonds were sometimes less likely to participate, possibly due to increased fear of negative judgment. Additionally, the study categorized shyness into two subtypes-avoidant-shy and conflicted-shy-both of which were associated with reduced verbal and non-verbal participation in class activities.

2.2 Shyness and Classroom Interaction

Classroom interaction plays a vital role in the educational process, as it encourages students to engage with course material, peers, and instructors. However, shyness can significantly hinder such interaction, particularly among first-semester university students who may feel overwhelmed by unfamiliar academic and social settings. Shy students often experience heightened self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation, which can lead to reduce participation in class discussions, group work, and peer collaboration.

Motivational theories, like self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and the L2 motivational self-system, offer visions into the role of motivation in language learning and its possible to overcome challenges like shyness and bullying. Self-determination theory suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are influenced by the satisfaction of three basic psychological requirements: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Via fostering a sense of autonomy, providing opportunities for learners to develop competence, and endorsing a sense of relatedness within the classroom community, educators can enhance learners' motivation and upsurge their willingness to participate and engage in communicative actions. The L2 motivational self-system, on the other hand, proposes that learners' motivated behavior is influenced by their ideal self (the representation of their desired future state) and their ought-to self (the demonstration of external expectations and obligations) (Dörnyei, 2009, 28). Via helping learners envision their ideal selves as proficient language users and addressing exterior pressures

or expectations that may contribute to shyness or bullying, educators could harness the influence of motivation to overcome these challenges.

According to a recent study by Kim and Lee shy students tend to withdraw from classroom interactions due to a , (2023) heightened sensitivity to social judgment. The study, conducted among university freshmen, revealed that shy students participated less frequently in both large group discussions and smaller peer interactions. Even when students had strong content knowledge, their shyness inhibited them from expressing their thoughts or asking Questions, engage in debates, or work effectively in group settings. The study also revealed that these students tended to avoid eye contact and preferred passive roles in group tasks, which limited their learning experiences. Similarly, Farouk (2022) examined the relationship between shyness and classroom behavior among university freshmen in Egypt. The findings indicated that shy students often exhibited avoidance behaviors such as sitting in the back of the classroom, avoiding group presentations, and not responding to open questions. The researchers emphasized that the early stages of university life are critical for students to build academic confidence, and without support, shy students may fall behind both academically and socially. These findings suggest that shyness can create significant barriers to classroom interaction during the critical first semester. Therefore, it is essential for educators to identify and support shy students to foster a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

2.3 Strategies to Overcome Shyness in Classrooms

Via the top theoretical viewpoints – the affective filter hypothesis, sociocultural theory, and motivational theories – present complementary lenses through which to comprehend the complex interchange of affective, social, and motivational factors that influence language learning and communicative capability development. Via integrating insights from these theoretical perspectives, teachers and researchers could develop inclusive strategies to create a supportive and wide-ranging learning environment that addresses the trials of shyness, eventually fostering communicative competence among new EFL learners.

Overcoming shyness among university students-especially those in their first semester is a key step toward fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Shy students often struggle with self-expression, classroom participation, and peer interaction. Therefore, educators and institutions must adopt practical strategies that reduce anxiety and encourage active engagement. A recent study by Hassan and El-Gendy conducted at a university in Libya, investigated classroom-based strategies to ,(2023) reduce shyness among first-year education students. The study implemented cooperative learning activities such as peer teaching and small group discussions Results showed a significant increase in participation levels and a decrease in reported anxiety, particularly among female students who initially displayed higher levels of classroom-related shyness. The study concluded that structured social interaction within a low-pressure environment was key to helping students feel more confident and engaged. By fostering collaboration rather than competition, these strategies allowed shy students to gradually build comfort and trust among their peers. The findings highlight the importance of creating supportive classroom dynamics where students are encouraged to participate without fear of judgment, thus enhancing both academic engagement and emotional well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

Descriptive quantitative approach was used in this study to investigate the effects of shyness among first-semester students at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect measurable data from a specific population, analyze patterns. To gather data, the researcher used a structured questionnaire as the main research tool. This instrument was selected due to its effectiveness in collecting standardized information from a group of participants in a relatively short period of time. The questionnaire included 14 close-ended questions, which allowed for easy quantification and analysis of responses (*see appendix A*).

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 62 voluntaries first semester English major students enrolled in the academic year 2025 at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University, and they all were chosen randomly ,The average age of the participants ,was approximately 19 years old. These participants were selected because they are at the beginning of their university experience, a period often marked by emotional and social transitions. This stage is considered important for investigating shyness, as students are adjusting to new academic and social environments.

3.3. Instruments and Procedures

The study used a questionnaire as the main tool for collecting data. It consisted of a set of structured questions designed to gather information from the students. The researcher believed that the questionnaire is the most appropriate tool to achieve the objectives of the study, as it helps in identifying the levels of shyness among first semester university students and explores the possible reasons, as well as the strategies they use or could use to

overcome it. 7 3.3.1. Questionnaire To explore the issue of shyness among university students, the researcher designed a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 14 statements divided into two parts. The first part (6 statements) focused on situations where students experience shyness, such as speaking in class or interacting with peers. The second part (8 statements) addressed strategies students use to manage or reduce shyness (*see appendix A*). Participants responded using a four-point frequency scale: Always, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. After designing the questionnaire, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students. As long as the data were collected, it was organized and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to identify patterns, trends, and key findings relevant to the research objectives

4. Data Analysis

The researcher used percentage and frequency as statistical tools. Percentage was calculated by taking the frequency from each category divided by the total number of participants, which is 62, and multiplying it by 100%. (*see table 1*)

4.1 Results and Discussion

the results of the questionnaire in response to the two research questions related to students' perceptions of shyness and the strategies they use to overcome it.

The first research question is: **How does shyness affect new college EFL students' academic performance and social interactions?**

The data show that shyness has a noticeable effect on both academic and social aspects of students' university life. In response to the statement "You feel shy when speaking in front of the professor" (Q1), 88% of students agreed or strongly agreed (58% Agree, 30% Strongly Agree), while only 12% disagreed. For "You avoid participating in classroom discussions due to shyness" (Q2), 76.6% agreed or strongly agreed, and 23.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that shyness may not prevent participation for all students. Regarding academic performance (Q3), 66.6% of students agreed that shyness affects their academic performance (16.3% Agree, 50.3% Strongly Agree).

When asked if they feel shy when delivering presentations (Q4), 73.3% agreed or strongly agreed, reflecting that public speaking is a major challenge due to shyness. Concerning social interaction, 63.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they experience anxiety when interacting with new classmates (Q5), and 56% reported that shyness affects their social interaction on campus (Q7). These results suggest that shyness is a common barrier in both academic situations such as class discussions and presentations, and in social contexts like meeting new people or engaging with peers on campus.

The second research question: **What strategies do new college EFL students currently use to cope with or overcome shyness?**

The results show that students use a variety of strategies to manage shyness, many of which are proactive and based on self-awareness.

The majority (93.3%) believe that improving communication skills can help reduce shyness (Q6), showing that students view shyness as something that can be managed with effort. 73.2% use deep breathing or relaxation techniques to calm themselves before social or academic interactions (Q8). 73.3% practice regularly by speaking in front of a mirror or with friends (Q9), indicating a hands-on approach to developing confidence of students prefer to use social media to interact rather than face-to-face communication (Q10), reflecting the role of digital platforms as a coping mechanism. Approximately 60% of students use presentation preparation techniques to reduce shyness and anxiety (Q11), showing that planning helps ease nervousness. Most students (79.9%) prefer speaking in small groups rather than addressing large audiences (Q12), highlighting the discomfort many feel in large settings. 56.6% record themselves speaking to identify areas for improvement (Q13), demonstrating a willingness to self-evaluate and improve. Lastly, 73.3% reported that they engage in conversations with friends who understand and support their self-confidence (Q14). These results indicate that students are not passive in the face of shyness. Instead, they actively seek ways to manage it through self-practice, social support, and leveraging both traditional and digital tools.

In summary, the results demonstrate that shyness significantly influences students' academic participation and social engagement. However, many students take conscious steps to overcome it by using strategies such as self-practice, breathing techniques, peer support, and preparation. The findings highlight both the challenges posed by shyness and the resilience of students in finding effective ways to cope with it.

Table 1: Participants' Responses to the Survey on Shyness Among New University Students and Strategies to Overcome It.

N	Statement (summarized)	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	You feel shy when speaking in front of the professor.	29 (30%)	36(58%)	0(0%)	8(13%)
2	You avoid participating in classroom discussions due to shyness.	27(43.3%)	21(33.3%)	8(13.3%)	6(10%)
3	Shyness affect your academic performance.	31(50%)	10(16.3%)	6(10.3%)	15(23.3%)
4	You feel shy when delivering presentation.	31(50%)	15(23.3%)	0(0%)	17(26.6%)
5	You experience anxiety when interacting with new classmates at university.	27(43.3%)	12(20%)	21(33.3%)	2(3.3%)
6	You believe that improving communication skills can reduce shyness.	33(53.3%)	25(40%)	2(3.3%)	2(3.3%)
7	Shyness affect your social interaction within the university campus.	21(33.3%)	15(23.3%)	10(16.6%)	17(26.6%)
8	You use deep breathing or relaxation techniques to reduce shyness.	17(26.7%)	29(46.6%)	6(10%)	10(16.6%)
9	You rely on daily practice, such as speaking in front of a mirror or with friends, to reduce shyness.	15(23.3%)	31(50%)	2(3.3%)	15(23.3%)
10	You use social media as a means of interacting with others instead of direct fact-to-fact interaction.	17(26.6%)	21(33.3%)	10(16.6%)	15(23.3%)
11	You utilize presentation preparation techniques to reduce anxiety and shyness.	12(20%)	23(36.6%)	8(13.3%)	19(30%)
12	You prefer speaking with a small group of people rather than addressing a larger audience.	23(36.6%)	27(43.3%)	8(13.3%)	4(6.6%)
13	You record yourself while speaking in order to identify areas of improvement.	15(23.3%)	21(33.3%)	6(10%)	21(33.3%)
14	You engage in conversation with friends how understand your self –confidence.	19(30%)	27(43.3%)	4(6.6%)	12(20%)

(N. = 62)

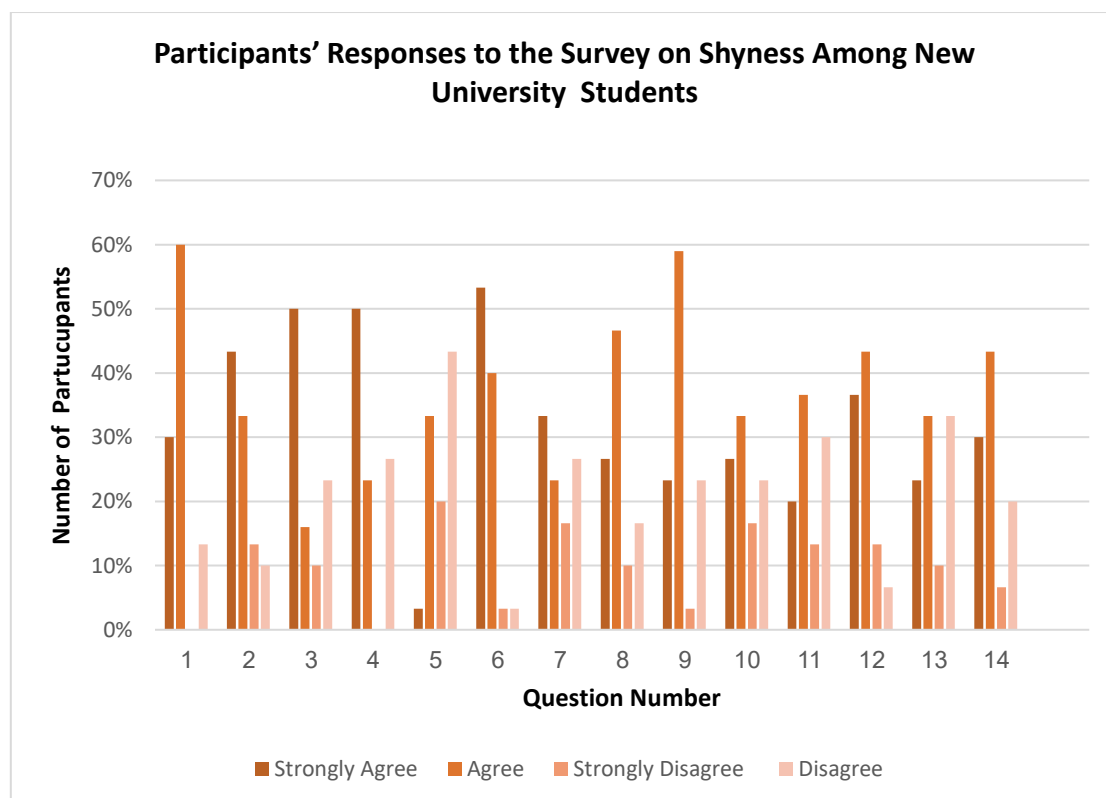


Figure1: Participants' Responses to the Survey on Shyness Among New University Students.

Conclusion and implications

This study was initially driven by a desire to understand how shyness affects first-semester university students at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University, and what strategies they use to overcome it. The study used quantitative data collected through a questionnaire to explore students' perceptions and behaviors.

The incorporation of various theoretical perspectives, including the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), sociocultural concept (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), and motivational notions, provides a comprehensive outline for understanding the multifaceted interplay of affective, social, and motivational factors that impact language learning and communicative competence improvement.

By examining the study's outcomes over these theoretical lenses, it offers valuable insights that shyness has a clear impact on students' academic performance and social interactions. Many students reported difficulty speaking in front of professors, participating in class, and engaging in social settings due to shyness. At the same time, the results showed that students are aware of their shyness and actively use various strategies—such as communication practice, breathing techniques, and support from friends—to manage and reduce it. Telling a student in advance to answer a question, give an opportunity to independent practice before sharing the answer aloud which gives the student the confidence to participate without fear or inhibition. This revision highlights the importance of creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that nurture a sense of belonging, respect, and psychological safety for new EFL learners. Furthermore, creating ways for students themselves to help one another build their confidence. Some students just need to know that they aren't alone and will not be the absolute center of attention to feel OK getting up in front of class. When students are allowed to work together, they can help each other grow more confident in the space. Peer support and cooperation can play a crucial role in addressing shyness in new EFL classrooms.

Last but not least, there will always be some students who like to speak up and some who find it extremely scary, particularly shyness, in their early academic journey. Via adopting CLT techniques that emphasizes the development of communicative competence and promotes learner-centered activities, task-based learning, and collaborative discussions, over meaningful interactions and authentic language use, EFL teachers can create opportunities for new learners to practice and mature their communicative skills in a supportive and engaging setting.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a- Future studies should examine the relationship between emotional factors like shyness and other academic skills (e.g., participation, presentation skills, peer interaction).
- b- Teachers in the English Department should incorporate techniques and classroom activities that support shy students, such as group discussions, interactive tasks, and gradual exposure to public speaking.
- c- Training sessions or workshops focusing on communication and confidence-building should be offered to help students overcome shyness and participate more actively in university life.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of shyness among first-semester students, it faced certain limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted within a short period of time, which limited the possibility of collecting data through multiple tools. The only data collection method used was a questionnaire; using interviews or classroom observations would have offered deeper insights into students' behavior and feelings related to shyness.

Additionally, the sample size was limited to 62 participants from the English Department, which may not fully represent the broader student population. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Future research should consider a larger sample size, longer study duration, and multiple data collection methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire on Shyness Among First-Semester University Students and How to Overcome It - A Case Study Conducted at the Faculty of Education- Misurata University.

Name (optional)

Gender: Male/Female

Instruction: This questionnaire is designed to understand the issue of shyness among first-semester university students and explore strategies to overcome it. Please read each statement carefully and tick (✓) the box that best represents your response.

Your answers will help us gain insight into the factors contributing to shyness and effective ways to address it. Your responses are valuable in understanding the challenges faced by students and finding potential solutions.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1. You feel shy when speaking in front of the professor.				
2. You avoid participating in classroom discussions due to shyness.				
3. Shyness affect your academic performance				
4. You feel shy when delivering presentation.				
5. You experience anxiety when interacting with new classmates at university.				
6. You believe that improving communication skills can reduce shyness.				
7. Shyness affect your social interaction within the university campus.				
8. You use deep breathing or relaxation techniques to reduce shyness.				
9. You rely on daily practice, such as speaking in front of a mirror or with friends, to reduce shyness.				
10. You use social media as a means of interacting with others instead of direct fact-to-fact interaction.				
11. You utilize presentation preparation techniques to reduce anxiety and shyness.				
12. You prefer speaking with a small group of people rather than addressing a larger audience.				
13. You record yourself while speaking in order to identify areas of improvement.				
14. You engage in conversation with friends how understand your self –confidence.				