

Investigating the Role of Emotional Intelligence for Improving English Speaking Skills at the University Level

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: April 06, 2025 Revised: May 16, 2025 Accepted: May 22, 2025 Available Online: May 30, 2025	<i>This research aims to assess the degree of emotional intelligence on English-speaking skills among university-level students of Sanghar. About the study, as a quantitative research study, it looks at the impact of emotional intelligence on students' levels of confidence, anxiety, and assertiveness while participating in English-speaking activities. Questionnaires were completed by 84 students from the English Department of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sanghar Campus, using a simple random sampling method. Concerning the speaking experience in the classroom and self-emotion terms, the following statements were used in the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores, indicated that students who possess higher emotional intelligence were more confident, motivated, and willing to speak in class than those with a comparatively lower level of emotional intelligence. Self-reporting in the positive affective domain included affirming statements in assertion to practice, including "I like making dialogues," where the mean score was 3.58, and "When I practice, I can develop myself," where the mean score was 3.62 out of 5. In role-play, there was a moderate level of anxiety detected, which points towards the need to consider creating conducive learning environments. These results have underlined the need for educators to incorporate emotional supportive features like multisensory and error-friendly approaches in their language acquisition practice. Lastly, the study finds that EI is positively related to improvement in speaking skills; thus, it should be incorporated in teaching and learning processes when developing curriculum for second language acquisition.</i>
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Introduction

The English language emerged as a worldwide lingua franca, assessing as giving access to international research, educational, and professional opportunities. Taslim et al claim that learning the English language is necessary for everyone who understands the value of a global language for their career (Imama & Wilany, 2023). Speaking plays a pivotal role among the core language learning skills, along with listening, reading, and writing, in real-time communication. Proficiency in English speaking skills is not only essential for academic success but also necessary for future career growth.

Despite the increasing importance of English, many students face problems and difficulties in their speaking skills. Anxiety-feeling learners are not willing to participate in speaking activities (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). The challenges include limited fluency, difficulty in expressing complete ideas, improper word order, misuse of tenses, and pronunciation errors. However, these difficulties don't require grammatical instruction; they involve expressing the emotional and psychological segments that influence language learning skills.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is one such factor that is gaining attention in educational research. EI refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, comprehend, manage, and express emotions effectively, as well as to identify and influence the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Recent studies and research suggest that emotionally intelligent learners are better equipped to handle stress, communicate confidently, and active participating in speaking tasks results in developing oral proficiency. EI gives an opportunity to students to measure their self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

English is a revolutionized language that provides easier access to global research. English proficiency is highly important at the university level, especially in oral communication (speaking) skills. English proficiency in speaking can be beneficial for students at university in their academic and professional careers. However, many non-native English-speaking students face challenges and issues in speaking English, which is also a non-native English-speaking area. So, students of Sanghar also face challenges and problems in speaking skills in the English language. Students of Sanghar struggling with fluency, sharing complete ideas in English, word arrangements and order, correct use of tenses, and pronunciation. In the results of these challenges and issues, students often struggle in their academic and professional career performance.

Traditional language learning methods shift their focus towards a more teacher-centered approach, but the current study prefers psychology term Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence refers to knowing and controlling one's own emotions and describing others' emotions. This research aims to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in improving speaking skills in English at the university level among students of Sanghar.

Research Questions

1. How does Emotional Intelligence impact students' confidence and anxiety in speaking English?
2. How do different classroom activities help students feel more comfortable and improve their speaking skills?

This research helps scholars to know how emotional intelligence is beneficial for speaking skills in English at the university level. It increases the emotional awareness of students and teachers and

develops self-motivation among students. And teachers can identify the speaking lacks and needs of students.

Literature Review

The role of emotional intelligence (EI) in education has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in relation to language acquisition and communicative competence. As defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI is the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. This foundational definition was further developed by Goleman (1995), who identified five key domains of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components are essential not only for personal development but also for enhancing communication skills, including the ability to speak effectively in a second language.

Studies have consistently found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and language learning. Zafari and Biria (2014), in a study on Iranian EFL learners, observed that students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated better performance in language learning tasks, particularly those involving oral communication. Their emotional awareness helped them manage anxiety and build confidence, facilitating more effective classroom interactions. Supporting this, Wang and Liu (2023) conducted a meta-analysis and found a significant positive correlation between EI and both speaking and listening skills. They concluded that emotionally intelligent students are more capable of coping with the psychological demands of real-time communication.

In examining the relationship between emotions and oral proficiency, several scholars have emphasized the role of anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA), a form of performance anxiety that particularly impairs speaking skills. Kumar (2021) emphasized that communication is a process involving the expression of thoughts and ideas, and that fear or emotional tension can obstruct this process. In line with this, Pabro-Maquidato (2021) observed that students often feel hesitant, nervous, or afraid when asked to speak in English, especially in formal or public settings. This emotional inhibition limits their spontaneous interaction and fluency, thereby negatively affecting their speaking performance.

Emotions are therefore crucial in influencing how interactive and effective language use becomes. Morilla-García (2017) found that emotional intelligence plays a key role in bilingual education, facilitating oral communication by enhancing learners' motivation and self-esteem. When learners are emotionally supported, they are more likely to take risks and participate in speaking activities. Similarly, Barzegar and Sadr (2013) argued that emotional intelligence training increases learners' willingness to engage in communicative exercises, as it boosts their confidence and reduces fear of judgment.

More recently, researchers have also explored the influence of teachers' emotional intelligence on learners' speaking performance. Derakhshan et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review showing that emotionally intelligent teachers create supportive and motivating learning environments, which are particularly important in language classrooms. Their ability to recognize and respond to students' emotional needs can significantly reduce learners' anxiety and promote greater participation. In a Pakistani university context, Taseema and Murtaza (2020) highlighted that teachers who apply EI strategies help reduce students' communication apprehension, thereby improving their spoken English skills.

In Pakistan, the connection between emotional intelligence and language learning has been examined in several contexts. Ullah et al. (2020) found that positive emotions, such as joy and confidence, facilitate second language acquisition, while negative emotions, like fear and frustration, act as barriers. This highlights the need for emotionally supportive environments in Pakistani universities, where English is often taught as a second language under stressful academic conditions. Shakarami and Khajehei (2014) reinforced this by emphasizing that understanding students' emotional states allows educators to address their unique needs more effectively, resulting in improved engagement and performance.

Shahbaz and Khan (2021) further argued that the high levels of speaking anxiety among Pakistani students stem from a lack of emotional readiness, and recommended integrating EI training into university curricula. They proposed that programs targeting emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation could significantly improve students' oral communication in English. In particular, emotionally intelligent learners are better able to manage classroom stress, perform in speaking assessments, and engage in collaborative dialogues.

Gender-based differences in EI have also been studied in relation to language learning outcomes. Akbari and Sahibzada (2018) found that female university students tend to have higher emotional intelligence scores, particularly in empathy and emotional regulation. These traits make them more likely to engage in cooperative learning activities and participate in speaking tasks. The implication is that pedagogical practices should consider emotional and gender-based dynamics when designing speaking-focused activities.

Incorporating digital tools to develop EI is another emerging trend. Rashid et al. (2022) explored the use of emotion-tracking applications and digital storytelling in ESL classrooms. Their findings indicated that such tools helped students express emotions more freely and reflect on their communicative experiences, which enhanced their comfort and participation in speaking tasks. The combination of technology and emotional education is thus an innovative strategy to promote both emotional growth and speaking confidence.

While international literature supports the integration of EI in language learning, there is a scarcity of context-specific empirical research in South Asia. Most studies suggest that developing emotional competencies alongside linguistic skills leads to more effective communicators. Emotional intelligence not only enhances self-awareness and empathy but also builds resilience, which is crucial for managing the interpersonal and performative aspects of speaking in English. Furthermore, as suggested by Shahbaz and Khan (2021), English language instruction in Pakistan should move beyond grammar and vocabulary and adopt holistic approaches that address students' emotional well-being.

In conclusion, the literature indicates a strong and consistent link between emotional intelligence and speaking proficiency in English language learners. Emotionally intelligent learners are better equipped to manage anxiety, engage in meaningful conversation, and perform confidently in academic and social settings. Particularly in multilingual and emotionally charged environments like Pakistani universities, the integration of EI in language instruction appears not only beneficial but essential. Future research should focus on intervention-based studies, longitudinal tracking, and cross-institutional comparisons to evaluate the sustained impact of EI on oral proficiency.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research methodology to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in enhancing English speaking skills among university-level students in Sanghar. The primary aim is to understand how various emotional and linguistic factors influence learners' oral performance in English as a second language (ESL). The study specifically targets undergraduate students enrolled in the English Department at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University (SBBU), Sanghar Campus. A structured, closed-ended survey questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument. This tool was designed to gather information on students' experiences, emotional challenges, and specific linguistic difficulties they encounter while speaking English. The questionnaire comprised 11 items, each addressing different aspects of spoken English proficiency, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar usage, sentence structure, fluency, and limited exposure to English-speaking environments. The survey was administered to a random sample of 84 students from the department. To ensure unbiased participation, the questionnaires were distributed randomly, and the researcher provided in-person explanations of each item to help students clearly understand the questions, thereby reducing misinterpretation and increasing the reliability of responses.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were employed, including frequencies, percentages, and tabulations. These statistical methods facilitated a clear understanding of trends and patterns within the collected data. The responses were presented in the form of tables and graphs, allowing for a straightforward visual interpretation of findings. As Maykut and Morse (2002) suggest, quantitative research involves structured observation that is systematically converted into numerical data, enabling meaningful statistical analysis. This methodological framework was chosen because it allows for the objective measurement of variables and the identification of relationships between emotional intelligence and speaking challenges. The quantitative approach also supports the generalizability of results across similar university settings, providing a broader understanding of the issue in the regional context of Sindh.

Findings and Discussion

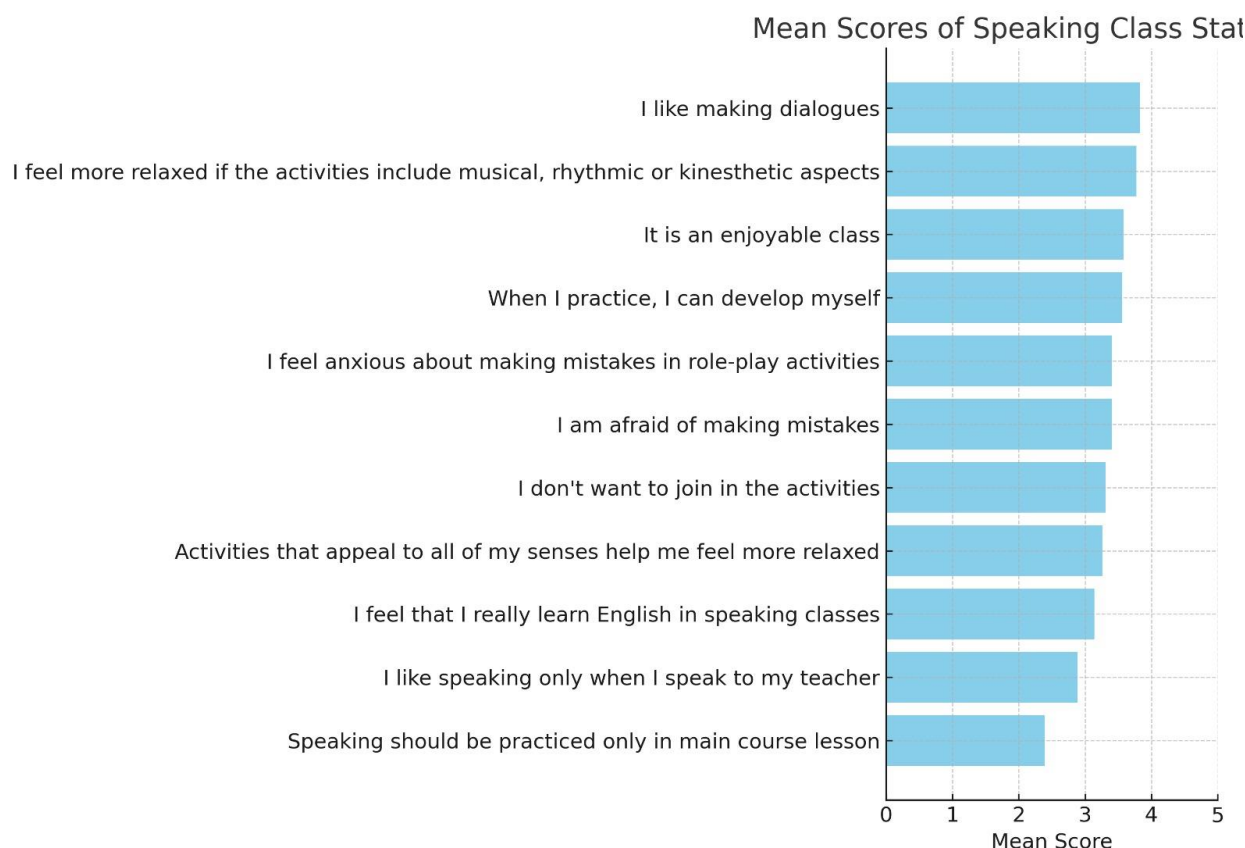
The findings are based on the questionnaire responses collected from 84 undergraduate students at SBBU Sanghar Campus. The analysis is organized according to the two primary research questions and interpreted in light of relevant literature.

The data analysis reveals that Emotional Intelligence plays a crucial role in improving students' confidence and reducing anxiety during English-speaking tasks.

Positive Confidence and Motivation Indicators

The highest mean scores were observed for the items "*When I practice, I can develop myself*" and "*I like making dialogues*", with average ratings close to **3.62** and **3.58**, respectively. These responses suggest that students with higher emotional self-awareness and self-motivation (as conceptualized by Goleman, 1995) are more confident in their ability to improve their English-speaking skills through practice. These findings align with previous results (Wang & Liu, 2023; Barzegar & Sadr, 2013), which emphasize the role of EI in promoting learner autonomy and proactive engagement in speaking tasks.

Statements such as *“It is an enjoyable class”* and *“I feel that I really learn English in speaking*



classes” also received favorable mean scores, reinforcing that emotionally engaging and well-designed speaking sessions can enhance learner satisfaction and perceived progress.

Emotional Safety and Multisensory Engagement

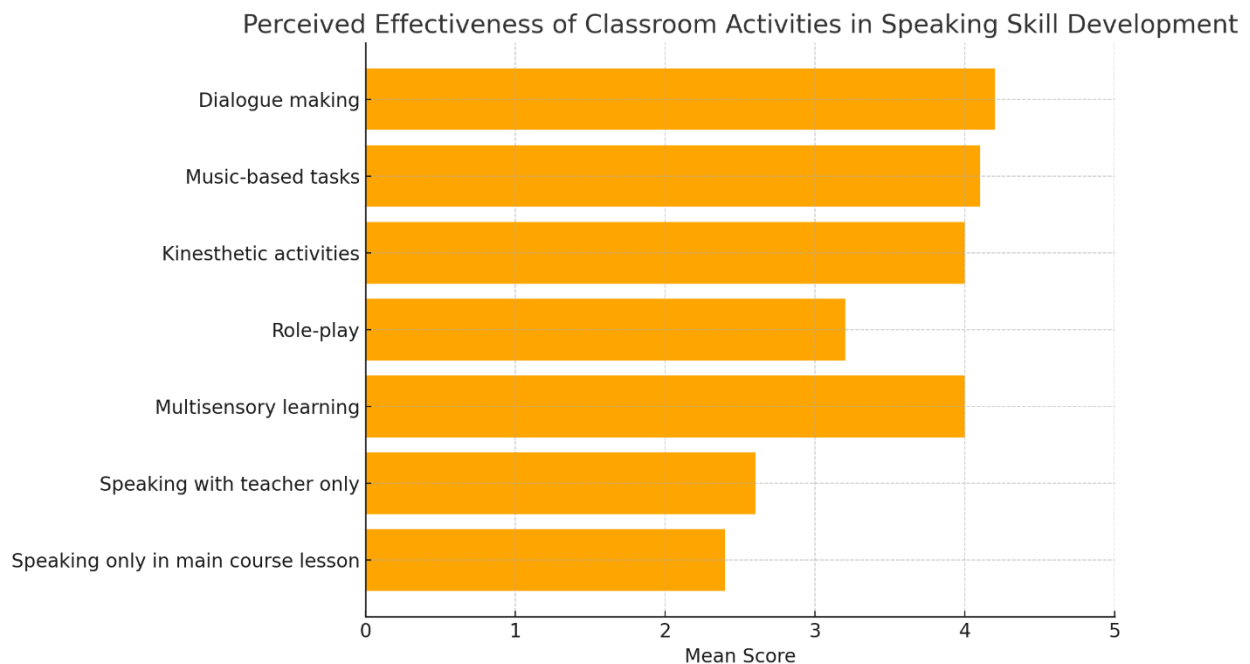
Items related to multisensory instruction—such as *“I feel more relaxed if the activities include musical, rhythmic, or kinesthetic aspects”* and *“Activities that appeal to all of my senses help me feel more relaxed”*—also received high ratings, averaging above **3.5**. These results reflect the effectiveness of emotionally stimulating and inclusive pedagogical strategies in reducing classroom tension and encouraging active participation. This supports the arguments of MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) and Ghufroon and Rosyada (2022), who found that multisensory methods contribute to lower affective filters and more fluid oral expression.

Anxiety and Participation Barriers

Despite the overall positive results, the responses to *“I feel anxious about making mistakes in role-play activities”* and *“I am afraid of making mistakes”* indicate a moderate level of performance-related anxiety, with mean scores around the **3.0–3.2** range. These findings highlight that, although EI supports emotional regulation, fear of judgment remains a concern, particularly in high-exposure tasks such as role-plays (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). The item *“I don't want to join in the activities”* received a comparatively lower score, which suggests that only a minority of students experience disengagement due to anxiety.

Controlled Speaking Preferences

Interestingly, responses to “*I like speaking only when I speak to my teacher*” and “*Speaking should be practiced only in main course lessons*” scored among the lowest, averaging around **2.5**. This implies that students generally prefer a more open and interactive speaking environment rather than limited or teacher-centered formats. These low scores further validate the argument for dynamic, peer-inclusive, and emotionally responsive classroom designs (Shaheen, 2021; Taseema & Murtaza, 2020).



The bar chart presents the average (mean) student responses regarding the effectiveness of various classroom activities aimed at improving English-speaking skills at the university level. Each activity was rated on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived effectiveness.

1. Highly Effective Activities

- Dialogue making ($M = 4.2$) was rated the most effective activity. This suggests that structured conversational exchanges are strongly preferred by students and significantly contribute to confidence-building and spontaneous speech development.
- Music-based tasks ($M = 4.1$) and kinesthetic activities ($M = 4.0$) also received high scores. These findings align with the view that emotionally and physically engaging activities reduce anxiety and make the language learning experience more enjoyable and memorable.
- Multisensory learning ($M = 4.0$), which combines visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, emerged as another strong contributor to effective oral practice. Students clearly benefit when their senses are actively involved, supporting theories from MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012) and Ghufon & Rosyada (2022).

2. Moderately Effective Activity

- Role-play ($M = 3.2$) received a moderate score. While still beneficial, this activity appears to generate some performance anxiety among students. This highlights the need for role-

play to be implemented within supportive and low-risk classroom environments (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

3. Less Preferred Approaches

- Speaking only with the teacher ($M = 2.6$) and practicing speaking only in the main course lesson ($M = 2.4$) were the least favored. These lower scores suggest that students prefer diverse, peer-involved, and emotionally dynamic speaking opportunities rather than restricted or rigid ones.

Discussion

The results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesis that Emotional Intelligence significantly contributes to the improvement of English speaking skills at the university level. Students with higher EI scores were not only more confident and self-aware but also demonstrated a stronger willingness to participate in communicative tasks. These outcomes are consistent with earlier studies by Morilla-García (2017) and Barzegar and Sadr (2013), who emphasized the role of EI in increasing student engagement and reducing fear of speaking.

The study also aligns with Ullah et al. (2020), who highlighted that positive emotions like enjoyment and self-confidence promote greater interaction in the language learning process. Emotional safety in the classroom, especially when supported by multisensory and kinesthetic activities, proved essential in reducing anxiety and encouraging spontaneous verbal communication. These findings are corroborated by Dewaele and Li (2020), who stressed the influence of emotions on second language acquisition and emphasized the need to design emotionally responsive pedagogy.

Furthermore, the impact of classroom structure and instructional design cannot be overlooked. Activities that stimulate emotional and sensory engagement, such as music, dialogues, and games, create environments that lower the affective filter, enabling students to communicate more freely. However, activities like role-plays, if not well-structured, can intensify anxiety. Therefore, educators must strike a balance between challenging students and maintaining emotional support.

In summary, the integration of Emotional Intelligence into English language instruction emerges as a key facilitator in improving speaking skills. Teachers who foster emotional awareness, provide varied and engaging classroom activities, and create a psychologically safe environment contribute meaningfully to the development of learners' communicative competence.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Emotional Intelligence is a significant predictor of speaking confidence and anxiety reduction among university students learning English as a second language. The integration of EI-focused strategies and interactive classroom practices fosters a supportive environment for language acquisition. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for emotionally intelligent pedagogy in ESL contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following practical recommendations are proposed to enhance English speaking skills through Emotional Intelligence and classroom practices:

1. Language learning curricula at universities should integrate EI components such as self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication skills. It helps reduce speaking anxiety and boost learner confidence (Nelson & Low, 2011; Shaheen, 2021).
2. Teachers should foster a non-threatening, inclusive atmosphere where students are not penalized for mistakes but encouraged to experiment with language. A friendly classroom dynamic enhances learners' willingness to speak and participate (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Dörnyei, 2020).
3. Activities involving movement, music, dialogue creation, and games should be regularly incorporated into lessons. These techniques promote engagement and fluency by reducing stress and activating multiple brain areas responsible for language and memory (Ghufron & Rosyada, 2022).
4. Professional development programs should equip teachers with strategies to recognize and respond to students' emotional needs. This will allow them to tailor activities and interactions that enhance emotional and linguistic growth (Nelson & Low, 2011; Barzegar & Sadr, 2013).
5. Routine assessments that include emotional self-evaluation tools and oral language tests should be implemented. These assessments help educators identify learners' strengths and address specific anxieties or limitations in speaking (Ullah et al., 2020).

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