

# The Influence of Students' Emotions on the Acquisition of English-Speaking Skills Among Secondary School Students in Homa Bay County, Kenya

 Cheptabok Cherop Mary and Okari Florence

Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media, School of Education,  
University of Eldoret, P.O. Box 1125 Eldoret, Kenya

## Abstract

Language learning is a part of the psychological process because it is based on learner's individual difference. Speaking skills allow individuals to speak comfortably to each other. It provides us with the ability to express information verbally. However, many students do not feel confidently enough to develop their speaking skills. This paper, therefore, evaluates the influence of students' emotions on acquisition of English speaking skills among secondary school students in Homa Bay County, Kenya. The study was anchored on socio-cultural and behaviourist theories and adopted a concurrent triangulation research design. The study employed descriptive research design and underpinned on pragmatist research paradigm. The target population was 29141 secondary school students as well as principals and teachers. A sample size of 365 respondents was selected using Yamane's sample size determination formula through multi stage sampling design and 9 principals and 27 teachers were purposively chosen. The data was collected using structured questionnaire. Collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as tables, frequencies and percentage were used while inferential statistics were obtained using Person correlation coefficient. The results indicated that students with high emotional understanding showed better speaking skills; 75.45%. This showed that emotions of students had weak positive significant correlation with learning of speaking skills ( $r = .71, p < 0.01$ ) and acquisition of speaking skills ( $r = .30, p > 0.01$ ). Further, there was a positive relationship between learning and acquisition of speaking skills ( $r = .56, p > 0.01$ ). Emotions are very important in teaching and learning process. The study recommends that the close relationship between speaking abilities and emotions yields a wealth of information that could influence and change educational practices across the board, from curricula to policies.

**Keywords;** Emotions, speaking skills, acquisition, students, teachers, learning

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**Correspondence:** [cheropmary5@gmail.com](mailto:cheropmary5@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

English language (EL) is very important worldwide. It is mostly used nationally and internationally in communication. It is expected to establish intellectual, economic, social and even diplomatic relationships among countries (Archana & Usha 2017). Emotions are so important that they can influence a person in deciding whether to study a foreign language and whether to continue doing a task in a language classroom or not. Marzuki et al. (2017) explained that emotion was an important element to determine student's speaking skills. Emotional experiences play a significant role since behind the reasons for deciding to study FL or keep up with the task, emotions and feelings are involved. Emotions can make a student stop a particular action or continue making the best effort possible to achieve a particular goal. Emotions and feelings are important

to understand the concept, so teachers can adjust their approach to help students reduce the negative impact emotions can have on students' emotional energy, and enhance the promotion of those emotions that can activate students' motivation.

Other researchers assert that constructs such as anxiety, motivation, inhibition, compassion, comfortability, confidence and attitude may lead to despondence and a sense of failure in learning of speaking skills (Dogar et al., 2011). Hence emotional affective aspects have been considered important in language learning success (Aragao, 2011). They are very relevant to the learning of FL since students mostly come with previous positive or negative experiences.

Alzaanin (2024) purposed to explore capturing the emotional experiences of English as a foreign language among university teachers in Saudi Arabia. From the study, it emerged that relationships in the classroom and the

institutional system greatly influenced how teachers construct, express, and communicated their emotions. Teachers' passion for teaching, students' classroom engagement, and students' appreciation of teachers' efforts triggered the teachers' sense of happiness and pride and contributed to their occasional positive valence.

Cheng (2002) and Chen (2022), negative emotions affect learner motivation, attention and use of learning strategies. Foreign language anxiety has negative impact on the learners' productive skills. This confirms that the development of positive interpersonal relations in language learning processes is a core aspect of instilling motivation and effective EL teaching (Xhemajli, 2016).

In classroom, students should be supported in developing emotions and fixed expressions to be used in role-play and topic based situations and that serve as a basis for further learning and language use. Moradi and Talebi (2014) study affirm that speaking is difficult to learn due to lack of motivation and psychological factors such as lack of confidence to express their ideas in front of the class due to fear of making mistakes.

Speaking skills are key in getting success in all fields. People cannot achieve their aims, objectives and goals without using proper language to communicate. Incompetence in speaking is evidenced when one makes a public speech which is more often after completing school. Emotions can make a student stop a particular action or continue making the best effort possible to achieve a particular goal. Constructs such as anxiety, motivation, inhibition, compassion, comfortability, confidence and attitude may lead to despondence and a sense of failure in learning of speaking skills (Dogar

et al., 2011). Negative emotions are considered detrimental to foreign language learning. Chen (2022) affirms that, negative emotions affect learner motivation, attention and use of learning strategies. Acquisition of speaking skills is greatly affected by emotions. It is evidenced that emotions are strongly associated with the acquisition of a language if it is not a speaker's language.

Kagita et al., (2021) explained that negative emotions dragged the speaker so that it should manage well to enhance speaking abilities in English language. Emotional affective aspects have been considered important in language learning success and there is need to equip students with enough speaking skills to avoid embarrassment and enable them compete globally. Marzuki et al. (2017) reported that emotion was an important element to determine student's speaking skills. How teachers and learners construct, express, and communicated their emotions have effects in learning speaking skills. Moradi and Talebi (2014) study affirm that speaking is difficult to learn due to lack of motivation and psychological factors such as lack of confidence to express their ideas in front of the class due to fear of making mistakes. Therefore, this study investigated the role of emotion in the acquisition of speaking skills in English.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical review

The study was guided by socio-cultural and complemented by behaviorism theories.

### The Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT)

This theory is based on collaborative interaction and instructional

conversations. This theory allows social interaction on learning for instance, students construct sentences in pairs. It believes in active participation since speaking is a social process. Learning takes place first in contextual interactions and then on individual basis. There is space between the learner and the teacher. The interactions are mediated by tools which may be physical (computer) or symbol (gesture). Application of SCT is basically based on Vygotsky's notion of two plainness, where the learner moves from controlled environment to mediated providing strategies and ZPD, learner move from being regulated to teacher mediated environment and finally to self-regulated activities. Socio-cultural theory relies on the linguistic component and require developed meta-linguistic skills.

### **Behaviorism theory by Skinner (2011) & Watson (2013)**

This theory mainly focuses on behavior. Behaviorism is the learning of new words through teaching; learning is expressed through fluent and accurate speaking through shaped environment and ideologies of proximity and support are key in learning process in this theory. Language speaking (speaking) is learnt by a matter of imitation and habit formation. Students imitate sounds and correct pronunciation of words and sentence patterns and they get positive reinforcement for doing so with the encouragement of their listening environment (Skinner 2011).

### **Empirical review**

Richards and Rodgers (2014) posit that effective learning occurs within a state that is both relaxed and focused, emphasizing the importance for educators to promote a positive mental state and a

secure learning environment conducive to optimal learning outcomes. Emotional factors are influential in determining individuals' decisions regarding foreign language study and their perseverance with language learning tasks within the classroom. Ismail (2013) discovered that both positive and negative emotions experienced by learners during English classes significantly impact their achievement in the language. Consequently, educators aiming to mitigate negative emotions and cultivate tranquility in their classrooms must acknowledge and address their students' academic emotions. Negative emotions detrimentally affect learner motivation, attention, and application of learning strategies, with foreign language anxiety particularly hindering productive language skills (Cheng, 2005).

Emotions are pertinent to foreign language learning due to students' prior positive or negative experiences, sometimes encountering vastly different learning environments and possessing diverse motives for language acquisition. The intricate interplay of these variables during classroom instruction can yield varied implications for individual students' motivation (Garret & Young, 2009). Emotional experiences significantly influence students' decisions regarding language study and task engagement, underscoring the importance for teachers to tailor their approaches to mitigate negative emotional impacts and promotes emotions conducive to motivating students (Juhana, 2012). Various studies highlight the significance of emotional factors in language learning success, emphasizing the need for greater attention to emotions in foreign language instruction (Aragao, 2011; Imai, 2010). Furthermore, psychological factors such as

shyness, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about peer judgment significantly affect students' speaking performance and needs redress by educators to create a supportive learning environment conducive to language development (Juhana, 2012). This necessitates a personalized approach by teachers to cultivate a positive learning atmosphere and enhance students' speaking proficiency.

*Lack of confidence:* In the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, students often grapple with a psychological phenomenon where they become disheartened upon realizing that their conversational partners fail to grasp their intended messages when speaking English (Juhana, 2012). This frustration, compounded by a pervasive sense of inadequacy in their language proficiency, leading many to withdraw from verbal participation altogether (Juhana, 2012). Remarkably, a notable proportion, approximately 13% of students, identify this lack of confidence as a significant hurdle in their English speaking endeavors (Juhana, 2012). To promote a climate of confidence among students, educators must proactively offer positive reinforcement and encouragement (Juhana, 2012). Furthermore, motivation emerges as a cornerstone in language acquisition, particularly in the context of English oral proficiency (Jin, 2014). Indeed, Juhana (2012) emphasizes that 6% of students attribute their faltering confidence to a dearth of motivation, often influenced by the perceived effectiveness of their instructors' pedagogical approaches.

In light of these challenges, teachers are key in cultivating a supportive learning environment. Hence, demonstrating

enthusiasm and actively engaging in English communication both inside and outside the classroom, teachers can inspire and embolden their students (Juhana, 2018). Abrar et al. (2018) evaluated the complex nature of the speaking challenges encountered by EFL learners. While comprehension may not pose a significant obstacle, the hesitancy in expressing oneself effectively underscores the complexity of language exchange. In response, EFL students employ a variety of strategies, including self-assessment, metacognitive reflection, cognitive techniques, social interactions, interpersonal approaches, and communicative experiences, to navigate these linguistic hurdles.

*Self-assessment:* In this approach, the educator prompts learners to engage in self-evaluation exercises where they reflect upon their proficiency in spoken English, identifying both their areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

**Metacognitive strategies:** Students utilize this approach within their educational endeavors. They employ various methods, including establishing objectives for English communication, self-assessment, and evaluating their academic progress, as well as determining the content for discussion (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017). The study encompassed six participants, with all six opting to define the aim of English communication. Additionally, two participants engaged in self-monitoring and self-evaluation, while four participants selected topics for discussion (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017). Consequently, this methodology stands to augment students' oral proficiency within the classroom setting.

*Cognitive strategies:* In the cited study conducted by Heryanti and Hazairin (2017), they observed that among the strategies employed by students to address the issue, five students opted for translation while six students favored repetition, along with guessing the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary. Furthermore, the researchers noted that some students resorted to guessing meanings directly, and five students engaged in creating contextual clues for unfamiliar words as part of their problem-solving strategies. These efforts were perceived as potential aids in improving their speaking proficiency in subsequent instances.

*Social strategies:* The approach promotes active engagement among students in honing their oral communication abilities. Within this framework, students employ various methods; for instance, six students opt for collaborative techniques, four students utilize questioning for elucidation, and two students engage in self-directed discourse (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017). Furthermore, students leverage questioning for clarification and internal dialogue to equip themselves for specific scenarios, such as public speaking engagements, speeches, or presentations (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017).

*Interpersonal strategies:* In this approach, students are encouraged to practice their oral presentations within the classroom setting. Heryanti and Hazairin (2017) outlined various methods within this strategy, including group sessions where six students solicit feedback from others, individual practice sessions chosen by five students, and engaging in conversation with peers for six students. Additionally,

this method aids students in overcoming obstacles they face in English speaking.

*Communicative-experiential strategies:* In this approach, six students collaborate to construct a proficient sentence by identifying synonymous terms. The assistance of the teacher is key for students to surmount the obstacles encountered in English speaking (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017). Furthermore, four students find it easier to express themselves by interpreting the nonverbal cues of their instructors (Heryanti & Hazairin, 2017).

Previous research endeavors have examined various facets of English language learning. Abrar et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study involving eight participants to explore the experiences of Indonesian EFL teachers in English speaking. Their findings highlighted language hurdles such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, alongside psychological factors like anxiety, attitude, and motivation deficiency. The study also underscored the significance of learning environments and language practice methods, including self-practice, tutoring, and utilization of media and technology. Nazara (2011) undertook a mixed-methods study involving interviews and questionnaires to investigate students' perceptions of English-speaking skill development. The research, encompassing 40 respondents, unveiled varying levels of self-assessment among participants, with 45% acknowledging high proficiency and 55% expressing uncertainty. Consequently, a desire to enhance speaking abilities emerged as a common theme among participants.

Juhana (2018) explored psychological impediments to English speaking among

students, employing observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The study identified fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and motivation as prominent factors hindering speaking proficiency. It emphasized the pivotal role of teacher motivation and active student participation in addressing these challenges. Emotional dynamics in language learning were further scrutinized by Imai (2010), who posited that even negative emotions could serve as developmental resources for language students during group-work preparations. Brown & White (2010) and Becker & Roos (2016) delved into the emotional experiences of students in the classroom, underscoring the importance of positive interpersonal relations and supportive learning environments in promoting motivation and effective language teaching.

Ali & Savas (2013) explored teachers' beliefs regarding speaking skills and motivational orientations, revealing a dichotomy between the perceived significance of speaking instructions and negative opinions among teachers. Similarly, students' self-assessment of their speaking skills often leaned towards negativity, reflecting feelings of incompetence (Ali & Savas, 2013; Urruti & Vega, 2010). Attitude emerged as a key determinant of students' language learning participation (Abdullah & Shah, 2014; Nijat et al., 2019), with psychological factors such as fear of mistakes, anxiety, and shyness significantly impeding speaking practice (Haidara, 2016). These challenges are compounded by deficiencies in classroom learning practices, as highlighted by Azman (2016), with students expressing a reluctance to

engage in communicative activities due to perceived inadequacies in foundational language skills.

## Methodology

The approach utilized was descriptive research design and underpinned on pragmatist research paradigm. The study was conducted in Homa Bay County, Kenya. Out of a target population of 29141, the study sampled 365 students through multistage sampling technique, 9 principals and 27 teachers who were purposively chosen. The questionnaire included both open and closed ended question items. The sample size was arrived at using Yamane, (1967) formula of sample size determination. Descriptive statistics used in this study included tables, frequencies and percentage while inferential statistics were obtained using Pearson correlation coefficient.

## Results and Discussion

### Emotions of the students and its influence on the learning of speaking skills

The table 1 uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure the frequency of students' emotions and their influence on the learning of speaking skills.

The findings reveal that students experienced a range of emotions that influenced their learning of speaking skills. Confidence levels varied, with the majority of students (27.0%) feeling confident less often, while 25.6% always felt confident, and 18.7% never felt confident. Excitement was more common, as 27.1% of students always felt excited and 24.2% felt excited more often, though 10.3% never experienced excitement.

**Table 1:** Emotions of the students and its influence on the learning of speaking skills

	Never		Less often		UN		More often		Always	
	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %	N	N %
Confidence of the student	67	18.7%	97	27.0%	61	17.0%	42	11.7%	92	25.6%
Excitement of the student	36	10.3%	80	22.8%	55	15.7%	85	24.2%	95	27.1%
Fear of the student	86	24.3%	101	28.5%	78	22.0%	54	15.3%	35	9.9%
Nervousness of the student	74	20.8%	89	25.1%	61	17.2%	88	24.8%	43	12.1%
Anxiety of the student	96	26.9%	73	20.4%	62	17.4%	74	20.7%	52	14.6%

Fear, on the other hand, was prevalent, with 28.5% of students feeling fearful less often and 24.3% never feeling fear, but only 9.9% reported always feeling fearful. Nervousness affected a large group, with 25.1% feeling it less often and 24.8% more often, while 20.8% never felt nervous. Anxiety followed a similar pattern, with 26.9% of students never feeling anxious, 20.4% feeling it less often, 20.7% feeling it more often, and 14.6% always experiencing anxiety. These results indicate that while positive emotions like confidence and excitement tend to support learning, negative emotions such as fear, nervousness, and anxiety have a more complex and mixed impact on students' learning of speaking skills. Negative emotions affect learner motivation, attention and use of learning strategies. Foreign language anxiety has negative impact on the learners' productive skills (Cheng, 2002; Chen, 2022). The finding is also supported by Urruti and Vega (2010) focused on students' oral performance was influenced by their lack of vocabulary, difference and

fear of being despised. Huang et al. (2022) postulates, learning happens in a both relaxed and focused state. It is important for teachers to create a positive state of mind and secure environment for the development of optimal learning of the learners. Emotions are so important that they can influence a person in deciding whether to study a foreign language or not. The finding is also in line with Garrido (2020) who reports, emotions can make a student stop a particular action or continue making the best effort possible to achieve a particular goal. Garrido 2020) affirms emotions can make a student stop a particular action or continue making the best effort possible to achieve a particular goal.

### Correlation Matrix of Emotions of Students and Speaking Skills

This study examined the correlations between emotions of students, learning of speaking skills and acquisition of speaking skills and presented the findings in table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Pearson's correlation coefficients

	Emotions of students	Learning of speaking skills	Acquisition of speaking skills
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Emotions of students	1		
Learning of speaking skills	.71*	1	
Acquisition of speaking skills	.30*	.56*	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Reference to table 2 results show that emotions of students had significant correlation with learning of speaking skills ( $r = .71$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and acquisition of speaking skills ( $r = .30$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). Further, there was a positive relationship between learning and acquisition of speaking skills ( $r = .56$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). Emotions are very important in teaching and learning process. Emotion encourages participation and stimulates learning. A successful communicator shows empathy; he is able to convince the students that he cares about their learning and is there to support them throughout the process.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results, there is a significant relationship between emotions and speaking skills. Students with high emotional understanding show better speaking skills. Emotion plays a major role in improving speaking abilities. It is proven by this study that the students' speaking skills is mostly affected by emotions. Hence, it is important to optimize students' emotion to enhance learning. Schools could introduce emotional intelligence training or workshops that help students understand how their emotions affect their performance and offer strategies to regulate them. Further, emotional involvement and speaking skills in developing oral communicational skills is a path towards further enhancement of language teaching results and learning outcomes in schools

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