Exploring the Factors Influencing Class Participation Among English Majors at Kabul University

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the factors influencing classroom participation among English major students at Kabul University, with a focus on identifying psychological, instructional, environmental, material-based, and motivational elements that shape students' willingness to speak in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The study uses a quantitative descriptive survey design, using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 56 first- and second-year English majors at Kabul University. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations. The data was analyzed using SPSS (version 26). The findings indicated that fear of making mistakes and speaking anxiety were the most frequently reported psychological barriers. At the same time, teacher friendliness and encouragement emerged as the strongest instructional facilitators of participation. Overcrowded classrooms and noise were also identified as environmental constraints. Additionally, students reported that the use of visual aids and multimedia increased their engagement and that participation-based grading served as a strong motivational factor. The study concludes that a combination of emotional readiness, teacher behaviors, physical conditions, instructional materials, and assessment practices influences classroom participation. It recommends that teachers adopt supportive feedback strategies, integrate student-centered activities, and incorporate participation into grading policies to build more inclusive and communicative learning environments in Afghanistan's higher education system.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom participation is widely recognized as an essential component of effective learning in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, as it reflects students' engagement, confidence, and willingness to communicate. At Kabul University, English majors are expected to develop communicative competence across all language skills; however, classroom observations and prior research indicate that students often remain passive during

discussions. Noori and Asir (2024), for example, found that English majors at Kabul University frequently avoid speaking due to anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, despite having adequate linguistic knowledge. Similar findings in regional and international studies highlight the combined influence of psychological factors, teacher behaviors, classroom conditions, and instructional materials on participation (Dewi, 2022; Tu, 2021; Zhang & Kim, 2024). Yet, despite growing interest in student engagement within EFL settings, limited empirical evidence exists on participation patterns in Afghan public universities. The present study addresses this gap by systematically examining the specific factors influencing participation among English majors at Kabul University.

Psychological and personal factors are often the most substantial barriers. Students may feel shy, anxious, or afraid of making mistakes. Research shows that learners who experience speaking anxiety frequently avoid participation and remain silent (Horwitz, 2020). At Kabul University, many English majors also report nervousness when asked to speak in front of peers, fearing criticism or laughter (Noori & Asir, 2024). On the other hand, confidence has been found to increase willingness to participate. When learners feel capable and secure, they are more likely to speak (Listyani & Tananuraksakul, 2019).

Teachers also play a central role in shaping participation. Their attitudes, methods, and feedback styles influence how students respond. Supportive teachers who smile, encourage, and give constructive feedback usually create classrooms where students feel safe to talk. In contrast, strict or unfriendly teachers often discourage participation (Rocca, 2010; Han, 2022). At Kabul University, many classes still rely on lecture-based methods, which reduce opportunities for interaction (Noori & Asir, 2024). Active methods such as pair work, group tasks, and discussions have been proven to increase student involvement (Zhang & Kim, 2024).

The physical and social environment also matters. Large classes, fixed seating, and noisy surroundings limit opportunities for participation (Mai et al., 2024; Tu, 2021). Students often feel "invisible" in overcrowded classrooms (Al-Yaseen, 2019). Afghan students share this challenge, reporting that limited space and distractions prevent them from speaking freely (Noori & Asir, 2024).

Learning materials and technology also play a role. Modern resources such as videos, visual aids, and multimedia presentations increase interest and confidence. Han (2022) found that authentic materials and digital tools make students more active in class. However, many Afghan students complain that textbooks are outdated and repetitive (Noori & Asir, 2024). When teachers use visuals or project-based tasks, participation levels rise significantly.

Motivation, primarily through grading, also affects participation. Some students feel more willing to speak when participation counts towards their final grade (Rocca, 2008). In Afghanistan, grades are highly valued, which makes participation-based assessment a strong motivator. However, unclear or unfair grading may discourage students (Dallimore et al.,

2004). For this reason, participation grades should reward effort and improvement, not only perfect answers.

The issue of participation has been explained through several theories. The Willingness to Communicate (WTC) model suggests that readiness to speak depends on confidence and motivation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Yashima, 2002). The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that learners are motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis explains how anxiety and low confidence block language learning (Krashen, 1982). Together, these theories show that psychological, motivational, and environmental factors shape classroom participation.

Studies from different countries support these patterns. Research in Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan has shown that participation is limited by teacher correction styles, lack of engaging materials, and large class sizes (Han, 2022; Mai et al., 2024; Ahmed & Kumar, 2023). In Kuwait, Al-Yaseen (2019) found that students in large classes often avoided speaking. These findings match the Afghan context, where students struggle with similar issues but also face unique cultural challenges. One important cultural factor in Afghanistan is the strong respect for teachers. Many students avoid speaking unless directly invited. They fear losing face in front of peers or challenging authority (Noori & Asir, 2024). This cultural dimension suggests that teacher encouragement may have an even greater impact in Afghan classrooms than in other contexts. Similarly, the importance of grades in shaping academic futures makes assessment policies a powerful tool for motivating students.

Despite the global literature, there is limited research explicitly focused on Afghan EFL classrooms. The available studies suggest that both internal and external challenges reduce student participation (Maleki, 2021). However, a systematic, data-driven investigation of English majors at Kabul University has been missing. This gap highlights the importance of studying the issue in detail and providing evidence-based recommendations. By situating this study at Kabul University, the research adds new insights to the international literature and responds to a clear local need.

Accordingly, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- What psychological and personal factors most strongly influence English majors' classroom participation?

- Which teacher behaviors and instructional practices are most frequently associated with increased participation?

- To what extent do classroom environment and logistical conditions affect students' willingness to participate?

- To what extent do learning materials and technology influence students' motivation to participate in class?

- To what extent do grading and assessment practices contribute to students' participation levels?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for examining existing conditions and identifying patterns without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, a quantitative descriptive survey design involves the systematic collection of numerical data via a structured questionnaire to summarize frequencies, means, and standard deviations related to factors influencing classroom participation. The population consisted of approximately 160 English majors enrolled in the English Language and Literature Department at Kabul University, of whom 56 were first- and second-year students.

Population and Sampling

The study population included English majors enrolled in the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature at Kabul University during the 2024–2025 academic year. Given the study's purpose and scope, the participants were selected from two educational levels: first-year and second-year students. The total number of participants in both classes was 56 students, with 28 students from the first year and 28 from the second year. The sample size was deemed sufficient for a small-scale educational study and enabled manageable yet meaningful statistical analysis. A convenience sampling method was used because these students were directly aligned with the study objectives. Only students who were majoring in English and had completed at least one semester of coursework were invited to participate. This criterion ensured that the respondents had sufficient exposure to classroom learning environments and could provide informed responses.

The demographic data collected included students' age, academic year, and self-assessed English proficiency level. A majority of participants were between 20 and 22 years old, and most identified as having an intermediate level of English proficiency.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection tool was adapted from Rohi and Muslim (2023), whose work investigated similar participation factors in the EFL context. The adaptation process involved reviewing the original questionnaire in light of the present study's literature review and refining items to align with the specific research questions. Minor modifications were made to improve clarity and contextual relevance, while preserving the core structure and validity of the original instrument.

To ensure content validity, the adapted questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in applied linguistics from Kabul University, who evaluated item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study variables. Minor wording adjustments were made based on their suggestions. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded acceptable internal consistency values across the five scales: psychological factors (α = .81), teacher

practices (α = .84), classroom environment (α = .79), learning materials (α = .83), and grading/motivation (α = .80). These coefficients indicate that the instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability for descriptive analysis.

The questionnaire consisted of five thematic sections, each corresponding to one of the major categories identified in the literature:

- Personal and Psychological Factors – 5 items exploring self-confidence, anxiety, fear of mistakes, and perceived speaking ability.

- Teacher's Role and Teaching Practices – 5 items assessing teacher encouragement, feedback style, and classroom management approaches.

- Classroom Environment and Logistics – 4 items on class size, seating arrangement, noise levels, and overall physical comfort.

- Learning Materials and Technology – 4 items measuring the influence of visual aids, multimedia, and interactive resources on participation.

- Grading and Motivation – 4 items evaluating the role of assessment, recognition, and reward systems in fostering engagement.

Each section contained 4–5 statements, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This format allowed respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement, facilitating the collection of nuanced quantitative data. The questionnaire also included a demographic section to capture participant background information.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place between 15 June to 25 June in the Spring 2025 semester. The researcher coordinated with course instructors to identify suitable class times for administering the questionnaire. Before distribution, the researcher provided a brief verbal introduction to the study, explaining its purpose, scope, and ethical considerations. Students were assured that participation was voluntary, that their responses would remain anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any stage without penalty.

The questionnaires were administered in person, during regular class hours, in a quiet environment to minimize distractions. Each session lasted approximately 10–15 minutes, allowing students sufficient time to read and respond to all items without feeling rushed. The in-class administration ensured a high response rate and prevented questionnaires from being misplaced or delayed, which can occur when instruments are taken home. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected immediately by the researcher and stored securely. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, which was later entered into SPSS for analysis. No identifying information—such as names, student numbers, or contact details—was recorded, thereby ensuring participant anonymity.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (version 26). Each item was assigned a numerical value from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For each of the five factors, composite scores were computed by averaging the items belonging to that scale. The dataset contained no missing responses because the questionnaires were collected in controlled, in-class conditions. Basic screening procedures were conducted before analysis; skewness and kurtosis values indicated no severe deviations from normality, supporting the appropriateness of descriptive statistics. The study focused on means and standard deviations to identify dominant patterns across the five categories. The results were then organized into tables.

Ethical Considerations

The Research Committee of the English Language and Literature Department at Kabul University granted ethical approval for this study. Participants were informed about the study objectives, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before administering the questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. No identifying personal information, such as names, student numbers, or contact details, was collected, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants. All completed questionnaires were stored securely, with hard copies kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher and digital files protected by password encryption. The collected data were used solely for academic purposes and were reported in aggregate form, avoiding any disclosure that could compromise participant privacy. By upholding these ethical measures, the study created an environment in which students could respond openly and honestly, free from the fear of judgment or negative consequences.

Limitations of the Study

Like all descriptive studies, this study faced certain limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting the results. First, the sample size was relatively small, comprising 56 English majors from a single institution, Kabul University. While this number was sufficient for a small-scale academic project, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other faculties, universities, or regions in Afghanistan. The study was also confined to first- and second-year undergraduate students, so the perspectives of more advanced students were not represented.

Another limitation concerns the reliance on self-reported data. Since participants provided their own assessments of the factors influencing their classroom participation, their responses may have been influenced by personal biases, memory limitations, or a tendency to present themselves in a socially desirable way. Furthermore, the exclusive use of a quantitative research design, while suitable for identifying trends and measuring the relative importance of various factors, did not allow for an in-depth exploration of students' personal experiences, emotions, or nuanced perspectives. Qualitative methods, such as interviews or

focus groups, could have provided richer, more context-rich insights. Despite these constraints, the study was carefully designed to minimize their impact, and the findings remain valuable contributions to the growing body of research on classroom participation in Afghan higher education.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis aimed at identifying the primary factors influencing classroom participation among English major students at Kabul University. The presentation of findings is organized into five thematic categories based on the research instrument: personal and psychological factors; teachers' role and teaching practices; classroom environment and logistics; learning materials and technology; and grading and motivation. Each section contains descriptive statistics presented as tables, supported by clear explanations that highlight the two highest and the lowest mean scores in each category.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 below illustrates the demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study. The data indicate that 56 English majors participated in the study. The participant pool was evenly split between first-year and second-year students, ensuring representation of both newer and more experienced learners. Nearly half (46.4%) were aged 21–23, a period often associated with higher academic maturity and increased career awareness.

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Year	1st Year	28	50%
	2nd Year	28	50%
Age	18–20	22	39.3%
	21–23	26	46.4%
	24 and above	8	14.3%
English Proficiency	Beginner	9	16.1%
	Intermediate	36	64.3%
	Advanced	11	19.6%

Moreover, a significant proportion (64.3%) identified as having intermediate English proficiency, which suggests they possess a functional level of language competence but may still face challenges in academic speaking contexts. This profile indicates that the findings largely reflect the perspectives of learners at a mid-to-advanced stage in their undergraduate English studies.

Factors Influencing Classroom Participation Among Students

Personal and Psychological Factors

This category included items related to students' confidence, anxiety, and willingness to speak. Table 2 summarizes the mean and standard deviation (SD) of the responses.

Table 2: Personal and Psychological Factors

Statement	Mean	SD
I feel anxious when speaking in front of others.	4.32	0.66
I worry about making mistakes while speaking.	4.57	0.52
I lack the confidence to speak in English during class.	4.21	0.73
I avoid speaking to prevent embarrassment.	4.11	0.85
I enjoy participating when I feel confident.	4.43	0.61
Overall Mean	**4.33**	**0.67**

The highest mean score (M = 4.57, SD = 0.52) shows that fear of making mistakes is the most significant psychological barrier. This high value reflects a strong tendency among students to remain cautious and silent rather than risk public error. The second-highest score (M = 4.43, SD = 0.61) highlights the role of confidence in enabling participation, suggesting that when learners feel self-assured, their willingness to engage increases sharply. Conversely, the lowest mean score (M = 4.11, SD = 0.85) relates to avoiding speaking to prevent embarrassment. Although it ranks lowest in this set, the score is still relatively high, showing that embarrassment remains a notable challenge for a considerable portion of students. Together, these results suggest that psychological readiness is a decisive factor in participation, with fear and self-confidence forming the ends of a single spectrum.

Teacher's Role and Teaching Practices

Table 3 below summarizes how teacher behavior affects student participation. The highest mean (M = 4.55, SD = 0.62) indicates that teacher friendliness and supportiveness have a direct and consequential influence on student engagement. The second-highest score (M = 4.45, SD = 0.67) relates to teacher encouragement, reinforcing the idea that verbal prompts and active facilitation can stimulate active participation.

Table 3: Teacher's Role and Practices

Statement	Mean	SD
My teacher encourages class participation.	4.45	0.67
My teacher uses group work to support engagement.	4.34	0.72
I participate more when my teacher is friendly and supportive.	4.55	0.62
I avoid speaking when the teacher is strict or unfriendly.	4.18	0.71
I feel more involved when the teacher gives personal feedback.	4.29	0.68
Overall Mean	**4.36**	**0.68**

On the other hand, the lowest score (M = 4.18, SD = 0.71) concerns the impact of strict or unfriendly teacher behavior, suggesting that negative attitudes may discourage students; however, its relatively high mean suggests that this factor is a common concern among respondents.

Classroom Environment and Logistics

This category examined physical and social classroom factors. The highest score (M = 4.36, SD = 0.77) indicates overcrowded classrooms as a key obstacle, suggesting that large class sizes

limit individual speaking opportunities. The second-highest (M = 4.28, SD = 0.69) emphasizes that noise and distractions can significantly interfere with the focus required for practical oral contributions.

Table 4: Classroom Environment

Statement	Mean	SD
Overcrowded classrooms reduce my chance to participate.	4.36	0.77
Noise and distractions make it hard to focus or speak.	4.28	0.69
I speak more when the classroom layout is comfortable.	4.12	0.74
I avoid participation when seating arrangements are fixed.	4.07	0.83
Overall Mean	**4.20**	**0.75**

Yet, the lowest score (M = 4.07, SD = 0.83) relates to fixed seating arrangements, which, while the least impactful in this category, still appears to limit flexibility and comfort for some learners.

Learning Materials and Technology

This section evaluated how resources and instructional tools influence students' willingness to participate. The highest mean (M = 4.41, SD = 0.64) indicates the strong influence of videos and visual aids on classroom engagement. The second-highest (M = 4.38, SD = 0.66) suggests that group projects incorporating visual elements also foster a dynamic, interactive learning environment, making students more inclined to participate in discussions.

Table 5: Learning Materials and Technology

Statement	Mean	SD
Videos and visual aids help me engage more.	4.41	0.64
I participate more when modern tools (such as PowerPoint) are used.	4.33	0.69
Repetitive or boring materials reduce my interest in speaking.	4.24	0.71
Group projects involving visuals make me more active.	4.38	0.66
Overall Mean	**4.34**	**0.67**

On the other hand, the lowest mean (M = 4.24, SD = 0.71) was obtained for repetitive or boring materials**,** confirming that monotony in resources can weaken motivation; however, the score indicates that this issue remains widespread.

Grading and Motivation

This final category examined how academic rewards affect classroom participation Table 6.

Table 6: Grading and Motivation

Statement	Mean	SD
I participate more when I know it affects my grades.	4.26	0.71
Participation should be part of class grading.	4.48	0.63
I feel motivated when my efforts are recognized in class.	4.39	0.68
I avoid speaking unless it is part of the assessment.	4.11	0.72
Overall Mean	**4.31**	**0.68**

The highest score (M = 4.48, SD = 0.63) indicates a strong student preference for grading participation, suggesting that academic recognition provides a tangible incentive for speaking in class. The second-highest (M = 4.39, SD = 0.68) highlights that verbal and non-verbal recognition of effort is equally effective in fostering motivation. Meanwhile, the lowest score (M = 4.11, SD = 0.72) indicates that the lack of assessment discourages some students from contributing, although its value suggests this factor remains present in many classrooms.

When comparing the overall mean scores across all five categories, the teacher's role and teaching practices scored highest (M = 4.36, SD = 0.68), indicating that teachers have the most significant influence on student participation. This result suggests that teacher encouragement, friendliness, and supportive behaviors can significantly increase students' willingness to speak and engage in class. The next highest category was learning materials and technology (M = 4.34, SD = 0.67), indicating that modern tools, visuals, and engaging resources play a key role in motivating and empowering students to participate. Personal and psychological factors (M = 4.33, SD = 0.67) were very close, highlighting that while anxiety and fear of mistakes are common barriers, confidence can strongly enhance classroom involvement when present. Grading and motivation (M = 4.31, SD = 0.68) also showed a high impact, suggesting that students are more eager to participate when their efforts are recognized or linked to assessment. Finally, classroom environment and logistics scored the lowest (M = 4.20, SD = 0.75), but it still represents an essential factor, as overcrowding, noise, and fixed seating arrangements can limit opportunities to contribute. Taken together, these results reveal that participation is shaped most strongly by the teacher's role, but also depends on a supportive balance of resources, confidence, recognition, and a manageable learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that multiple, interrelated factors are associated with students' willingness to participate in English-speaking activities at Kabul University. Psychological readiness, teacher behavior, classroom conditions, learning materials, and motivational structures all appear to work together to either support or limit participation. When these elements create a sense of safety, clarity, and relevance, students report feeling more willing to speak. When fear, uncertainty, or environmental barriers arise, participation tends to decline. This pattern is consistent with earlier work showing that emotional comfort, teacher–student relationships, and suitable classroom environments are closely linked to participation in EFL classes across various contexts (Dewi, 2022; Han, 2022; Tu, 2021; Zhang & Kim, 2024).

One of the strongest patterns in the data concerns students' psychological experiences. Many reported fear of making mistakes, worry about embarrassment, and tension when speaking in front of peers. Those who felt confident were more willing to engage, while those with high anxiety tended to remain silent. These associations reflect the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that anxiety may limit language use, and the Willingness to Communicate framework, which highlights readiness and perceived safety as essential

elements for speaking (Krashen, 1982; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Yashima, 2002). Although this study cannot determine causality, the consistent pattern suggests that reducing fear and strengthening confidence may play a meaningful role in supporting participation, a trend also noted in related research from Afghanistan and other countries (Dewi, 2022; Listyani & Tananuraksakul, 2019; Noori & Asir, 2024).

Teacher behavior is among the most influential factors in students' reported willingness to participate. Students consistently associated encouragement, friendliness, and constructive feedback with higher levels of engagement, while strict or distant behavior was linked to hesitation and silence. These perceptions resonate strongly with Afghanistan's cultural context, where teacher authority carries significant weight and many students wait for explicit cues before speaking. Supportive behavior may therefore have a powerful effect in this setting. This pattern is also compatible with Self-Determination Theory, which argues that feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy help energize learners' actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While the current findings cannot claim direct effects, they suggest that the interpersonal tone of the classroom may play a substantial role in shaping students' sense of security and readiness to participate.

Environmental and logistical conditions—such as crowding, noise, and fixed seating—were also reported as barriers to participation. These issues reflect broader challenges in many Afghan university classrooms, where space constraints and large class sizes are typical. Similar limitations have been noted in other EFL contexts, where room layout and group size influence opportunities for communication (Mai et al., 2024; Tu, 2021). Although physical infrastructure is complex to change, minor adjustments such as pair rehearsals, rotating groups, or speaking circles within fixed rows may help distribute opportunities more evenly. These strategies align with the associations observed in the current study and offer practical, low-cost ways to improve the speaking environment.

Students also linked participation to the types of materials and tasks used in class. Visual aids, short videos, and collaborative assignments were associated with greater willingness to speak, while repetitive or unvaried content was linked to lower interest. These perceptions support longstanding arguments that meaningful, multimodal input helps students understand content more clearly and lowers the emotional barriers that often restrict speaking (Han, 2022). Even in low-resource settings, printed visuals, simple charts, and teacher-prepared materials can support engagement by providing structure and shared reference points.

Motivational factors further clarify why some students participate more than others. Many respondents expressed a desire for participation to be recognized in assessment, and they reported greater willingness to speak when teachers acknowledged their efforts. In the Afghan context, where grades strongly influence academic and professional opportunities, this link is understandable. Prior studies similarly note that transparent and fair participation criteria can correspond with higher student involvement (Rocca, 2010; Dallimore et al., 2004;

Dörnyei, 2001). A balanced approach—rewarding effort, preparation, and growth—may encourage participation without intensifying anxiety for more hesitant students.

Seen through a cultural lens, these patterns gain additional meaning. Respect for authority and fear of public mistakes play significant roles in Afghan classrooms. Students often avoid speaking unless conditions feel safe and their contribution is explicitly invited. This cultural dynamic may amplify the influence of teacher warmth, clarity, and approachability. It may also help explain why grade-related motivation appears prominent in the responses: students rely on formal evaluation to understand what is valued in the classroom.

Across all domains, the findings suggest that participation develops gradually rather than suddenly. Students seem more willing to begin with pair discussions, then small-group sharing, and eventually whole-class contributions. This progression aligns with research showing that manageable steps help reduce anxiety and build autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dörnyei, 2001). Establishing routines—brief pair discussions, structured turn-taking, and low-stakes responses—may help build participation more reliably over time.

Taken together, the results contribute to the broader literature by illustrating how emotional, interpersonal, environmental, and motivational factors are associated with participation in an Afghan university context. They reflect patterns found in studies from Indonesia, China, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Pakistan (Han, 2022; Mai et al., 2024; Ahmed & Kumar, 2023; Logsy et al., 2022), while also showing how local cultural norms and classroom realities shape these associations. Although the study is based on self-report data from two cohorts at one university and should not be generalized beyond similar contexts, the consistency of the patterns offers valuable practical insight. Minor, sustained adjustments in classroom climate, task design, and feedback routines may help create more supportive environments that encourage students to speak more confidently and frequently in English.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychological, instructional, environmental, material-based, and motivational factors influencing classroom participation among English major students at Kabul University. Using a quantitative descriptive design with 56 participants, the study found that speaking anxiety, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence were the most commonly reported barriers. Teacher encouragement, friendly behavior, and the use of visual and multimedia resources were identified as strong facilitators of participation, while overcrowded classrooms and fixed seating arrangements limited opportunities for engagement.

Although these findings cannot establish causal relationships, they contribute to current theoretical discussions by demonstrating how affective factors (Krashen, 1982), motivational needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and willingness-to-communicate models (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) are reflected in the perceptions of Afghan EFL learners. The study's limitations—such

as its single-site sample, reliance on self-reported data, and descriptive design—suggest that future research should incorporate qualitative interviews or longitudinal methods to gain deeper insight into participation dynamics. Overall, the results underscore the importance of supportive teacher behavior, engaging instructional materials, and clear assessment practices in fostering more interactive and communicative EFL classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and supported by the literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Teachers

- Adopt supportive behaviors: Use students' names, give positive feedback, and avoid public criticism.

- Encourage group and pair work: Collaborative activities can ease pressure and help shy students speak up.

- Use active teaching methods: Replace lecture-only formats with discussion, debates, and presentations.

For Curriculum Developers

- Integrate participation-based tasks: Design classroom activities that reward speaking and critical thinking.

- Incorporate multimedia content: Videos, visuals, and audio materials can reduce anxiety and increase comprehension.

- Ensure balance in language skills: Avoid focusing excessively on grammar and writing at the cost of speaking practice.

For Policy Makers and University Leaders

- Reduce class sizes: Smaller classes allow more opportunities for students to speak and receive feedback.

- Improve physical classrooms: Invest in flexible seating, quiet spaces, and better lighting to support interaction.

- Train teachers in modern methods: Offer professional development workshops on student-centered, participatory teaching.

For Students

- Practice self-reflection and confidence-building: Recognize fear, but do not let it control learning opportunities.

- Engage actively in peer discussions: Participation can begin in smaller groups and gradually move to class-level speaking.

- Seek feedback: Request constructive suggestions from teachers to improve performance over time.

Suggestions for Future Research

Observing the limitations in the current study, the following suggestions are proposed for future research:

- Investigate gender-based differences in participation tendencies.

- Explore the long-term impact of classroom participation on language proficiency and academic performance.

- Examine teachers' perspectives on the challenges and strategies for student participation.

- Conduct comparative studies between public and private universities or between different provinces in Afghanistan.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

This study was conceptualized, designed, and academically supervised by Abdullah Noori, who shaped the research framework, methodology, and overall direction of the study. Ahmad Zaheer Nasiry conducted the investigation and carried out the data analysis under this guidance. Ahmad Arsalan Zaiel supported the writing and revision process in collaboration with the other authors. All authors were involved in interpreting the results, revising the manuscript for intellectual content, and approving the final version of the research report.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Raw data is available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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