



FROM SILENCE TO SPEECH: STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING SPEAKING ANXIETY IN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: Speaking anxiety is a widespread psychological barrier among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, often hindering oral fluency and participation in communicative tasks. This article explores the root causes of speaking anxiety and identifies evidence-based strategies for mitigating its effects. Based on a mixed-methods study involving surveys and interviews with EFL students and teachers, the findings reveal that affective factors such as fear of judgment, lack of confidence, and linguistic insecurity are the main contributors to speaking anxiety. The study suggests a range of practical solutions including the use of collaborative activities, psychological support techniques, and teacher-led scaffolding approaches.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, EFL learners, oral communication, language classroom, psychological barriers, language pedagogy

Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition, oral proficiency is often regarded as a key indicator of communicative competence. However, for many EFL learners, **speaking in a foreign language evokes anxiety**, leading to avoidance behaviors and reduced classroom participation. This anxiety is not only emotional but also cognitive, manifesting in hesitation, self-monitoring, and performance breakdowns.

Speaking anxiety has been found to correlate negatively with language performance (Horwitz et al., 1986), yet many educational systems continue to emphasize grammar and reading over speaking. This article aims to highlight the critical importance of addressing speaking anxiety and to present pedagogical strategies that move learners "from silence to speech."

Methodology

This research employed a **mixed-methods approach** consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools:

- **Participants:** 60 EFL university students (B1–B2 CEFR levels) and 10 language instructors from three institutions.
- **Instruments:** A structured questionnaire measuring levels of speaking anxiety using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and semi-structured interviews conducted with a selected group of students and teachers.



- **Procedure:** Data were collected over a four-week period during regular speaking classes, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

- **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (descriptive statistics and correlation analysis), while qualitative responses were coded thematically.

Results

The study yielded the following key findings:

- **High prevalence of anxiety:** 73% of student respondents reported feeling nervous before speaking in class. Common triggers included fear of negative evaluation (65%) and limited vocabulary (58%).

- **Gender differences:** Female students showed slightly higher levels of speaking anxiety than males, aligning with prior literature (Park & French, 2013).

- **Effective strategies:** Participants highlighted that speaking anxiety was reduced when:

- Speaking tasks were paired or group-based.
- There was a supportive classroom atmosphere.
- Instructors provided pre-speaking scaffolding (e.g., vocabulary lists, modeled dialogues).

- **Teacher perceptions:** Teachers noted that students performed better when lessons included warm-up games, personalization of topics, and low-stakes speaking opportunities.

Discussion

The findings support previous studies suggesting that **speaking anxiety is primarily affective**, rooted in emotional discomfort and social comparison. However, it is also deeply tied to **pedagogical context**—task type, teacher behavior, and classroom dynamics all influence the level of anxiety learners experience.

Importantly, EFL teachers must be trained to recognize signs of speaking anxiety and to develop **safe, low-anxiety environments**. Simple strategies such as peer collaboration, focus on fluency over accuracy, and use of humor or storytelling were found effective. Furthermore, integrating **mindfulness exercises**, **positive reinforcement**, and gradual exposure to public speaking can significantly improve student confidence.

Conclusion

Speaking anxiety continues to be a substantial barrier to oral language development among EFL learners. However, through intentional instructional design and empathetic classroom practices, teachers can empower students to transition from silence to speech. A blend of emotional support and strategic scaffolding is necessary to reduce fear and enhance fluency.



Future research should explore longitudinal effects of anxiety-reduction techniques and examine how digital tools (e.g., voice recording apps, VR speaking simulations) might assist learners in overcoming communication barriers in increasingly hybrid learning environments.

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