

**SPEAKING ANXIETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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**Abstract**

Speaking anxiety is one of the most significant psychological barriers affecting learners in English Language Teaching (ELT). Despite having adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, many learners struggle to communicate effectively due to emotional and psychological constraints. This article examines the role of speaking anxiety and related psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and the affective filter in second language acquisition. Using a qualitative approach based on literature analysis, the study identifies the major causes of speaking anxiety and their impact on learners' communicative performance. The findings suggest that reducing anxiety and fostering a supportive learning environment are essential for improving speaking skills. The article concludes with pedagogical recommendations for minimizing anxiety and enhancing learner confidence in ELT classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Speaking Anxiety, Psychological Factors, ELT, Affective Filter, Motivation, Language Learning*

**Introduction.** In the process of learning a foreign language, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill. While learners may develop reading, writing, and listening skills relatively successfully, speaking requires real-time processing, spontaneous production, and interaction, which can be intimidating.

One of the primary reasons for this difficulty is speaking anxiety, a psychological condition that negatively affects learners' ability to communicate

in a second language. Speaking anxiety is closely related to other affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes.

In modern ELT, there is increasing recognition that language learning is not purely a cognitive process but also an emotional one. Learners' psychological states can significantly influence their performance and progress. Therefore, understanding the role of psychological factors is essential for effective language teaching.

This article aims to explore the causes and effects of speaking anxiety and to analyze how psychological factors influence language learning. It also seeks to provide practical strategies for reducing anxiety and improving learners' speaking abilities.

**Literature Review.** The concept of affective factors in language learning has been widely studied. Stephen Krashen introduced the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. A high affective filter, caused by anxiety or low motivation, prevents learners from effectively processing language input.

Elaine Horwitz and her colleagues developed the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety, identifying it as a specific type of anxiety related to language learning. Their research highlights three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

According to H. Douglas Brown, psychological factors play a crucial role in language learning success. He emphasizes that learners with high self-confidence and motivation are more likely to take risks and engage in communication.

Similarly, Zoltán Dörnyei stresses the importance of motivation in sustaining learners' efforts and overcoming challenges. His work suggests that motivated learners are more resilient and less affected by anxiety.

These theoretical perspectives indicate that speaking anxiety is not an isolated issue but part of a broader set of psychological variables influencing language learning.

**Methodology.** This study employs a qualitative research approach based on an extensive review of existing literature on speaking anxiety and psychological factors in ELT.

Data were collected from academic books, journal articles, and empirical studies related to second language acquisition and educational psychology. The analysis focuses on identifying common themes, causes, and effects of speaking anxiety, as well as strategies for reducing it.

A thematic analysis method was used to categorize the findings into key areas, including emotional barriers, classroom environment, and pedagogical practices.

**Nature of speaking anxiety.** Speaking anxiety is a complex emotional state characterized by feelings of nervousness, fear, and tension when using a foreign language. It often occurs in situations where learners are required to speak in front of others or participate in classroom discussions.

This type of anxiety can manifest in various ways, including:

- Hesitation and pauses
- Avoidance of speaking tasks
- Physical symptoms such as sweating or increased heart rate

These reactions can significantly hinder learners' ability to communicate effectively.

**Fear of negative evaluation.** One of the primary causes of speaking anxiety is the fear of being judged by others. Learners often worry about making mistakes and being criticized by teachers or peers.

This fear leads to:

- Reduced participation
- Lack of confidence

- Avoidance of interaction

Creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment is essential to reduce this fear.

**Lack of self-confidence.** Self-confidence plays a crucial role in language learning. Learners with low self-confidence tend to underestimate their abilities and avoid speaking opportunities.

This issue is often linked to:

- Previous negative experiences
- Limited success in language learning
- Comparison with more proficient peers

Building learners' confidence requires positive reinforcement and encouragement from teachers.

**Role of motivation.** Motivation is a key psychological factor influencing language learning. Highly motivated learners are more willing to participate in speaking activities and take risks.

There are two main types of motivation:

- Intrinsic motivation (internal interest)
- Extrinsic motivation (external rewards)

A lack of motivation can increase anxiety and reduce engagement in learning activities.

The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is influenced by multiple psychological and contextual factors. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that considers both emotional and pedagogical aspects of language learning.

Teachers must play an active role in reducing anxiety by adopting learner-centered approaches and fostering a positive classroom atmosphere. Additionally, institutions should provide training programs to help teachers understand and manage psychological factors in ELT.

In conclusion, speaking anxiety is a major obstacle in English language learning, significantly affecting learners' ability to communicate effectively. Psychological factors such as fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation play a crucial role in this process. Reducing speaking anxiety requires a combination of supportive teaching practices, positive classroom environments, and increased learner awareness. By addressing these factors, educators can help learners overcome their fears and develop strong communicative skills.

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