

## COMMON SPEAKING ANXIETY PROBLEMS AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** Speaking anxiety is a well-documented issue that affects a significant proportion of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners worldwide. The challenge is rooted in a complex interplay between individual learner characteristics, the learning environment, pedagogical practices, social expectations, and the unique stresses of language acquisition. Despite the widespread prevalence of speaking anxiety among EFL learners, the underlying problems are often multifaceted and persistent, making effective communication in English a daunting task for many students.

**Key words:** speaking anxiety, EFL learners, language classroom, communication apprehension, self-confidence, language proficiency, fear of mistakes, oral communication, classroom environment, teacher feedback.

EFL learners frequently experience heightened anxiety while speaking due to the persistent fear of making mistakes and being judged. The fear of negative evaluation in the classroom context is a common trigger of anxiety. Many students worry that they might fail to communicate their intended message accurately, misuse vocabulary, or apply incorrect grammar structures, which makes them hesitant to participate actively. This apprehension is exacerbated by the unfamiliarity with pronunciation patterns and intonation, as well as a lack of exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom setting. The perceived pressure to perform well in front of peers and teachers also contributes immensely to the anxiety experienced by EFL learners. Another major problem is the learners' internal belief systems and self-confidence. When learners possess low self-esteem or have previously failed in oral tasks, their confidence diminishes, making them less likely to take speaking risks. Self-doubt, coupled with a critical self-assessment, often leads to silence or minimal participation, as learners prefer not to risk embarrassment or negative feedback. The inability to express nuanced ideas succinctly or retrieve vocabulary and grammatical structures quickly hinders fluent speech and reinforces a cycle of avoidance and anxiety. The classroom environment also plays a significant role in amplifying or mitigating speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Classrooms that are overly competitive, teacher-centered, or lacking in a supportive and collaborative atmosphere can cultivate fear and reluctance to speak. Inadequate opportunities for meaningful communication, insufficient

practice, and a lack of encouragement result in decreased motivation and increased anxiety. Factors such as large class sizes, limited teacher-student interaction, and time constraints further exacerbate the issue. When pressure to answer quickly or accurately exists, many learners experience anxiety, which impairs their ability to process language and communicate effectively [1].

Pedagogical practices can either help to reduce or intensify speaking anxiety. Methods that focus excessively on error correction, rote memorization, or oral drills without meaningful context can make learners more self-conscious and apprehensive. Students may become preoccupied with accuracy over fluency, fearing that any mistake will diminish their credibility or result in reprimand. Moreover, assessments that prioritize speaking performance under timed or high-stakes conditions only amplify the stress experienced by learners. Without sufficient scaffolding and gradual exposure to speaking tasks, students may not develop the necessary skills or resilience to manage their anxiety. Cultural factors and social expectations exert a profound influence on speaking anxiety. In many societies, students are conditioned to value silence and deference to authority, leading them to refrain from speaking unless addressed directly. Societal norms related to communication, as well as expectations regarding gender roles and hierarchical relationships, may discourage spontaneous verbal participation, particularly in mixed or unfamiliar groups. The fear of losing face or damaging one's reputation is a powerful deterrent that significantly raises anxiety among EFL learners. Language proficiency is another critical determinant of speaking anxiety. Limited vocabulary, inadequate grammatical knowledge, and insufficient exposure to authentic listening and speaking opportunities hinder the ability to participate in spontaneous conversations. Learners with low proficiency levels often struggle to formulate coherent responses, experience frequent communication breakdowns, and perceive the speaking task as overwhelming. The slower pace of language processing, combined with cognitive overload during speaking, further increases anxiety and restricts communicative competence [2].

Listening comprehension also contributes to speaking anxiety, as learners may fear they have misunderstood questions or conversational cues. Inability to process rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, or idiomatic expressions can result in confusion and withdrawal from interaction. EFL learners may avoid speaking opportunities out of concern that they won't be able to follow the conversation, or that their responses will be irrelevant or inappropriate. Another common problem relates to the limited availability of supportive resources and learning tools. In many educational contexts, EFL learners lack access to immersive language experiences, such as conversations with native speakers, language labs, or multimedia resources that could help build confidence in their speaking abilities. A lack of constructive feedback or mentorship further discourages learners from practicing speaking. In the absence of positive

reinforcement and regular opportunities to use the language for real communication, learners remain inhibited and apprehensive. Test anxiety is also a recurring theme in the context of speaking. Oral examinations can induce considerable anxiety, particularly when learners are unaccustomed to being evaluated verbally. The need to perform in front of examiners, adhere to strict time limits, and answer unpredictable questions places additional pressure on learners, often leading to performance decrements, memory lapses, and diminished expressive capability. This anxiety may extend beyond formal exam settings to include everyday classroom discussions or informal speaking tasks [3].

Technology and modern means of communication, while offering opportunities to contact native speakers and use authentic materials, can also increase anxiety among learners who are uneasy with video calls, voice recordings, or public speaking through digital platforms. The permanence of recorded spoken errors, the possibility of broader exposure to mistakes, and unfamiliarity with the technology itself can contribute to avoidance of valuable speaking practice. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is deeply intertwined with speaking anxiety. Learners with clear goals and rewards for speaking English tend to be more persistent, whereas those who are learning for extrinsic reasons, such as fulfilling curriculum requirements or external expectations, may experience more pressure and consequently greater anxiety. The alignment of instructional methods, classroom activities, and feedback mechanisms with learner motivation can profoundly affect the level of speaking anxiety experienced. Memory constraints are another significant problem among EFL learners. Anxiety impedes access to recently learned vocabulary or grammar structures, making it difficult to construct sentences or maintain coherent discourse. The psychological burden of trying to recall correct language forms under pressure further compounds anxiety, impeding successful communication. Peer dynamics and the social environment of the classroom contribute significantly to anxiety. Learners may feel intimidated by more proficient classmates, or fear peer ridicule if they speak with an accent or make mistakes. In multicultural or multilingual classrooms, differences in language background, social skills, or personality traits may affect the willingness to participate, with some students withdrawing from participation altogether [4].

Teacher behavior, expectations, and feedback style strongly influence learner confidence and anxiety. Supportive and empathetic teachers who create a safe environment for language practice, encourage risk-taking, and acknowledge progress help to reduce anxiety. In contrast, authoritarian teaching styles, inconsistent feedback, or public criticism can exacerbate anxiety and erode learners' willingness to speak. Limited practice outside the classroom is another challenge. Many learners have minimal opportunities to use English beyond the classroom and, as a result, speaking remains a daunting and unfamiliar activity. The lack of a supportive community or

access to English-speaking environments limits the practical application of language skills and increases language anxiety due to the largely academic and artificial context of learning. The physical conditions of the classroom, such as acoustics, seating arrangements, and the availability of technological aids, also play a role in speaking anxiety. Poor auditory conditions, uncomfortable seating, and lack of privacy can make speaking tasks even more stressful for learners who are already self-conscious [5].

### **Conclusion:**

In summary, speaking anxiety among EFL learners is a widespread problem that arises from an intricate interaction of psychological, social, pedagogical, and contextual factors. The fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, unaccommodating classroom environments, inappropriate pedagogical strategies, cultural considerations, limited language proficiency, insufficient resources, and various external pressures all contribute to the challenge. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving learner-centered instruction, supportive classroom communities, tailored feedback, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks. Recognizing and understanding the sources of anxiety can help teachers create more effective environments for language development, ultimately empowering learners to communicate confidently in English.

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