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Research Article

Perceived Impacts of Speaking Anxiety on Speaking Performance Among EFL Learners at Khurasan University

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Abstract

Speaking is a vital skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), yet many learners experience anxiety that hinders their performance. This study examines the effects of speaking anxiety among EFL learners and focusing on its relationship with speaking performance in terms of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Descriptive quantitative approach was employed with 39 participants, including lecturers and senior English learners at Khurasan University, Nangarhar province. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items, and multiple-choice. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and SPSS[25]. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is common among EFL learners and adversely affects their performance. Participants reported increased nervousness during speaking activities, particularly around fluent speakers and in exam settings. Key anxiety drivers included fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and insufficient preparation, with anxiety affecting fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of addressing linguistic and psychological factors in language learning and suggests that educators foster supportive learning environments and provide ample

communicative opportunities to help learners overcome speaking anxiety and enhance their oral communication skills.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, fluency, accuracy, linguistic factors, psychological factors.

Introduction

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلوة والسلام على أشرف الأنبياء والمرسلين وعلى آله وأصحابه أجمعين اما بعد: قال الله تعالى: ﴿رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي ۝ وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي ۝ وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي ۝ يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي﴾ [سورة طه: ايه ۲۵-۲۸].

These verses of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) expresses a request for inner ease, facilitation, and the removal of difficulty in speech so that his message could be understood. From an Islamic perspective, the passage highlights the importance of inner calm and ease in effective communication. This perspective is relevant to the present study because speaking anxiety may create psychological pressure, hesitation, and difficulty in expressing oneself effectively. Therefore, the verse provides a meaningful Islamic perspective for understanding the importance of reducing speaking-related anxiety and supporting learners in developing more confident and effective oral communication.

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning a foreign language, as it allows learners to communicate their ideas, interact with others, and participate actively in social and academic contexts (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the British council estimated that English is being spoken as a foreign language by almost 750 million speakers (Graddol, 2006) speaking can often be the most challenging skill due to factors such as limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and unfamiliarity with the language structure. Among these factors, speaking anxiety has been identified as a significant barrier that negatively affects learners' ability to perform effectively in oral communication tasks.

Speaking anxiety, sometimes referred to as oral communication apprehension, is the feeling of tension, nervousness, or fear that learners experience when speaking in a foreign language. (Hashemi, 2011) High levels of anxiety can lead to hesitation, avoidance of speaking opportunities, lower fluency, and reduced accuracy, which ultimately hinder overall language development

(Rajendran et al., 2025). Understanding the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance is therefore crucial for designing effective teaching strategies that promote confidence and active participation among EFL learners

(Ma, 2022).

In the context of Khurasan University, Nangarhar province, where English is learned primarily as a foreign language, learners face unique social, cultural, and educational challenges that may influence their levels of speaking anxiety. Thus, Investigating the effects of speaking anxiety on speaking performance among EFL learners in this region can provide valuable insights for teachers to get over the concerns.

This study examines how speaking anxiety affects the speaking performance of EFL learners at Khurasan University. It also helps identify practical strategies to reduce anxiety, improve classroom practices, and enhance learners' oral proficiency.

Research problem

Speaking English is a critical skill for EFL learners, as it enables them to communicate effectively, participate in academic and social settings, and achieve language proficiency. However, many learners at Khurasan University face speaking anxiety, which can create tension, fear, and hesitation during oral communication. This anxiety often leads to reduced fluency, limited vocabulary use, and avoidance of speaking opportunities, negatively affecting their overall speaking performance.

Despite its importance, speaking anxiety among EFL learners in the context has not been thoroughly investigated, and little is known about the specific ways it impacts learners' oral performance. Teachers struggle to identify effective strategies to support learners, and learners themselves may lack the tools to overcome their anxiety. Without a clear understanding of this problem, speaking performance continues to suffer, limiting students' confidence and progress in learning English. Therefore, it is essential to explore the effects of speaking anxiety on the speaking performance of EFL learners in the mentioned context in order to identify challenges, understand their impact, and inform teaching practices that can enhance learners' oral proficiency.

Research Objectives

This study set out to do three things:

- To examine the perceived effects of speaking anxiety on EFL learners' fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.
- To identify the common causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners.
- To identify strategies perceived as effective for reducing speaking anxiety and improving speaking performance among EFL learners.

Research Questions

The study was structured around three questions:

1. What are the perceived effects of speaking anxiety on EFL learners' fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation?
2. What are the common causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners?
3. What strategies are perceived as effective for reducing speaking anxiety and improving speaking performance among EFL learners?

Significance of the Study

The study on the effects of speaking anxiety on speaking performance among EFL learners at Khurasan University is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to a better understanding of the emotional factors that affect language learning. Speaking anxiety is a common barrier for EFL learners, and examining its impact can help teachers, researchers, and educators recognize how fear, tension, and nervousness influence learners' oral performance. Secondly, the study provides practical insights for teachers and educators. By identifying the challenges caused by speaking anxiety, teachers can implement strategies, activities, and classroom practices that reduce anxiety, increase learners' confidence, and improve their speaking skills. This can lead to a more engaging and effective learning environment. Thirdly, the research benefits EFL learners themselves. Awareness of the factors affecting their speaking performance can encourage learners to adopt coping strategies, practice more confidently, and overcome anxiety, leading to improved fluency, accuracy, and participation in oral activities. In summary, this study is significant because it addresses a critical factor affecting EFL learners' oral proficiency, provides practical benefits for teachers and students, and

contributes to the advancement of English language education in Nangarhar province.

Literature Review

English Speaking is one of the most important but challenging skills in EFL learning because learners must use vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency simultaneously while communicating in real time

(Yan, Lowell, & Yang, 2024). These demands can make speaking particularly vulnerable to anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) described foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Their framework suggests that speaking anxiety is not simply a general feeling of nervousness; rather, it develops in response to the specific demands and pressures of using a foreign language. As a result, anxious learners may hesitate, avoid speaking activities, and perform less effectively.

The relationship between anxiety and language performance can also be explained from a cognitive perspective. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argued that anxiety interferes with cognitive processes involved in language learning and performance, including attention, vocabulary retrieval, and language production. Similarly, Krashen (1982), through the Affective Filter Hypothesis, argued that anxiety and other negative emotions can hinder learners' ability to process language input. Although these two perspectives approach anxiety differently, both suggest that anxiety can interfere with learners' ability to use and develop language effectively. This provides a theoretical basis for examining its relationship with speaking performance.

Previous research also shows that speaking anxiety is influenced by both learner-related and classroom-related factors. Young (1991) identified fear of making mistakes, teacher correction, peer evaluation, and lack of preparation as important sources of language anxiety. This suggests that anxiety cannot be explained only by learners' limited language ability; classroom practices and social evaluation may also increase it. Similarly, Aida (1994) found a negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and students' participation and oral performance. The agreement between these findings indicates that anxiety may reduce learners' willingness to participate, particularly when

speaking involves the possibility of making mistakes or being evaluated by others.

More recent research provides further evidence of the connection between anxiety and speaking performance. Zubaydullayevna (2025) reported that speaking anxiety negatively affected pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary use, and speaking confidence, while supportive classroom environments and regular speaking practice were associated with reduced anxiety. Liu and Jackson (2008) likewise found that highly anxious Chinese EFL learners were less willing to communicate, participated less in classroom activities, and showed lower confidence in oral communication. Importantly, their recommendation of peer interaction and communicative teaching suggests that speaking anxiety should not be viewed only as an individual learner problem. The classroom environment and teaching practices may also play an important role in either increasing or reducing anxiety.

Overall, the literature shows a consistent relationship between speaking anxiety and difficulties in oral communication. Fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, inadequate preparation, and linguistic limitations appear repeatedly as important sources of anxiety (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Young, 1991). At the same time, supportive classroom environments, peer interaction, and regular speaking practice are suggested as useful ways of reducing anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Young, 1991; Zubaydullayevna, 2025). However, most of the existing evidence comes from contexts outside Afghanistan, and findings from other EFL settings may not fully reflect the linguistic, educational, and social conditions of Afghan learners. In particular, limited research has examined the perceived effects of speaking anxiety on the specific areas of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation among EFL learners at Khurasan University, Nangarhar Province. Therefore, the present study addresses this contextual gap by examining the causes and perceived effects of speaking anxiety among EFL learners in Nangarhar and by identifying strategies that may help reduce anxiety and improve speaking performance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate speaking anxiety among EFL learners at Khurasan University. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale and multiple-choice items addressing the prevalence, causes, situational factors, and perceived effects of speaking anxiety on learners' speaking performance. Purposive-convenience sampling technique is used to collect data from the targeted participants.

Data Collection

The Data is collected through questionnaires this research. They are adapted from other conducted researches and few questions were created. Both were piloted to make the questionnaire more reliable. Also, questionnaires were distributed through google form to participants to fill in. The questionnaire designed has bellow sections;

1- *Section (A*) Demographic details: such as the Email address full-Name of the participant, Academic Rank, Years of experience, and English proficiency level.

2- *Section (B)* Quantitative perception: a series of statements using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (5)), which measure participants view about each statement regarding the topic.

3- Section (C), multiple choice questions: Each question has four options, and participants choose the one which measure their view properly concerning each topic.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using a combination of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Responses from the Likert-scale questions and multiple-choice questions were also analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize response distributions.

Research Limitations

1. Sample Size: The study is based on data from 39 participants, a small sample that may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader EFL learner population.

2. Limited Demographic Diversity: With 35 out of 39 participants being male, the sample lacks gender diversity, potentially introducing bias in understanding the effects of speaking anxiety across different demographics.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The results are based on participants' responses to a structured questionnaire, comprising Likert-scale statements and two multiple-choice questions. The findings examine the prevalence of speaking anxiety, its major causes and situational factors, and its perceived effects on learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. The quantitative data are presented using frequencies, percentages, tables, and figures, followed by descriptive interpretations of the findings.

No	Items / Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	I feel nervous when I speak in class.	2	17	4	13	3
		5.1%	43.6%	10.3%	33.3%	7.7%
2	Speaking with classmates helps reduce my anxiety.	22	16	1	0	0
		56.4%	41%	2.6%	0%	0%
3	Practicing English outside the classroom improves my speaking confidence.	24	10	2	3	0
		62.5%	25.6%	5.1%	7.7%	0%
4		6	16	6	6	5

	I feel anxious because I am afraid my classmates will laugh at me.	15.4%	41.0%	15.4%	15.4%	12.8%
5	lack of preparation causes my anxiety.	14	19	1	3	2
		35.9%	48.7%	2.6%	7.7%	5.1%
6	when the teacher asks an unexpected question, I feel anxious.	7	17	5	7	3
		17.9%	43.6%	12.8%	17.9%	7.7%
7	A supportive and friendly environment help me reduce my anxiety.	30	6	1	1	1
		76.9%	15.4%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
8	Anxiety affects your speaking fluency.	5	32	0	2	0
		12.8%	82.1%	0%	5.1%	0%
9	Anxiety negatively affects your accuracy.	1	32	1	5	0
		2.6%	82.1%	2.6%	12.8%	0%
10	Anxiety has a negative effect on your pronunciation.	0	32	1	6	0
		0%	82.1%	2.6	15.4%	0%

Table 1

Table one presents participants' perceptions of speaking anxiety, its causes, possible ways of reducing it, and its effects on speaking performance. Overall, the findings indicate a high prevalence of speaking anxiety and a strong perceived negative effect on oral performance. Regarding anxiety-reduction strategies, 97.4% agreed that speaking with classmates helps reduce anxiety, while 88.1% agreed that practicing English outside the classroom improves speaking confidence. Similarly, 92.3% agreed that a supportive and friendly

learning environment reduces anxiety, highlighting the importance of positive classroom conditions.

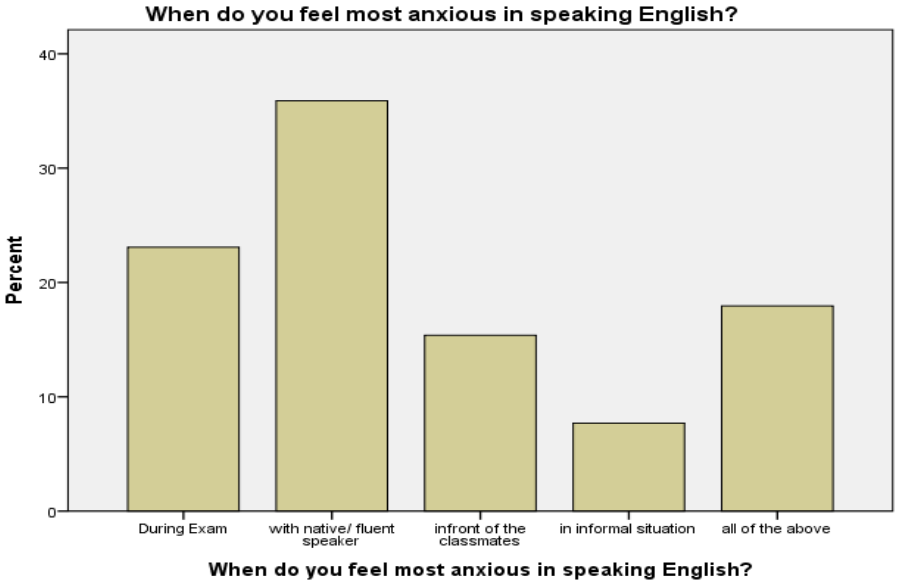
Regarding sources of anxiety, 84.6% agreed that lack of preparation causes anxiety, while 61.5% felt anxious when asked unexpected questions by the teacher. Additionally, 56.4% reported anxiety because they feared classmates might laugh at them. For classroom speaking generally, 48.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel nervous when speaking in class, although 33.3% disagreed.

Most importantly, participants strongly perceived anxiety as affecting their speaking performance. 94.9% agreed that anxiety affects speaking fluency, 84.7% agreed that it negatively affects accuracy, and 82.1% agreed that it negatively affects pronunciation.

Overall, the table demonstrates that speaking anxiety is a significant concern among the participants, particularly because of inadequate preparation, fear of negative peer reactions, and unexpected questions, and it is perceived to adversely affect fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

The following two multiple-choice questions examined the situations in which learners experience speaking anxiety and the main causes contributing to their anxiety. Participants selected the option that best represented their experiences.

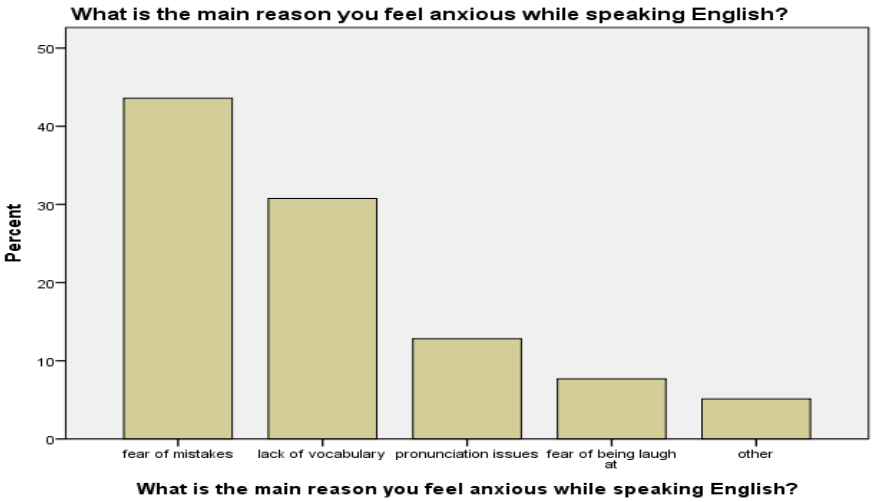
"Figure 1 shows the percentage of participants reporting anxiety in different situation



4.2 findings from Figure 1 (Situational Speaking Anxiety)

The data indicate that the highest level of anxiety occurs when speaking with native or fluent English speakers (36%). Anxiety during examinations ranks second (23%). Speaking in front of classmates accounts for 15%, while 8% reported anxiety in informal situations. Additionally, 18% of participants indicated that they experience anxiety in all situations. Overall, the findings of figure 1 indicate that learners experience the highest speaking anxiety with native or fluent English speakers and during exams, while informal situations cause the least anxiety, though some participants feel anxious in all contexts.

"Figure 2 illustrates the main causes of speaking anxiety among learners."



4. 3 findings from Figure 2 (Causes of Speaking Anxiety)

Participants identified fear of making mistakes as the primary cause of anxiety (44%). Lack of vocabulary was the second most reported factor (31%). Pronunciation issues accounted for 13% of responses, while fear of being laughed at represented 8%. Other factors made up 5% of the responses. In summary, the key points of figure 2 shows that the main causes of speaking anxiety are fear of making mistakes and limited vocabulary, with pronunciation and being laughed at playing a smaller role. Cognitive and language issues are bigger triggers than social fears.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that speaking anxiety is a significant issue among EFL learners. Nearly half of the participants reported feeling nervous when speaking in class, which supports previous research indicating that classroom speaking tasks are often anxiety-provoking. According to Horwitz (2001), foreign language anxiety is closely related to fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, both of which appear evident in this study.

The extremely high agreement that peer interaction reduces anxiety suggests the importance of collaborative learning. This finding aligns with Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learning

occurs through social interaction. When students speak with classmates rather than being individually evaluated, they experience less pressure and more confidence.

Lack of preparation and unexpected teacher questions were also major triggers of anxiety. These findings indicate that predictability and structured guidance play an important role in reducing learners' stress. When students feel unprepared, their self-confidence decreases, leading to heightened anxiety.

The results further show that high-pressure contexts, such as speaking with native speakers and during examinations, generate the highest levels of anxiety. This suggests that evaluation and perceived proficiency gaps increase stress. Lower anxiety in informal situations indicates that relaxed environments encourage more confident communication.

Fear of making mistakes emerged as the most significant cause of anxiety. This finding strongly supports the concept of fear of negative evaluation described in foreign language anxiety theory. Learners appear more concerned about linguistic accuracy than social ridicule, as fear of being laughed at was comparatively low.

Limited vocabulary was identified as the second major cause. This confirms that lexical competence plays a crucial role in speaking performance. When learners struggle to retrieve words quickly, fluency breaks down, which increases anxiety and self-doubt. The findings also demonstrate that anxiety negatively affects fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. This supports the work of MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991), who argue that affective variables directly influence language performance. Anxiety interferes with cognitive processing, making it difficult for learners to produce language effectively.

Overall, the discussion indicates that speaking anxiety in this context is primarily driven by cognitive and linguistic concerns rather than social ridicule. Therefore, reducing anxiety requires creating supportive classroom environments, encouraging peer collaboration, providing vocabulary support, and shifting focus from strict accuracy to communicative competence.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of speaking anxiety on the speaking performance of EFL learners at Khurasan university, Nangarhar province. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety is a common and significant challenge for many learners and has a noticeable impact on their ability to communicate effectively in English. A considerable number of participants reported feeling nervous when speaking in class, which confirms that classroom speaking activities often create psychological pressure for learners.

The results also demonstrate that speaking anxiety negatively influences important aspects of speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Many learners indicated that fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of preparation are the main causes of their anxiety. In addition, situations such as speaking with fluent or native English speakers and answering unexpected questions from teachers were identified as major sources of stress. However, the findings also highlight several factors that help reduce speaking anxiety. Peer interaction, regular speaking practice, and practicing English outside the classroom were found to significantly improve learners' confidence. Furthermore, a supportive and friendly classroom environment plays a crucial role in helping learners feel comfortable and willing to participate in speaking activities.

The qualitative results further emphasize that learners believe continuous practice, vocabulary development, preparation before speaking, and positive attitudes are effective strategies for increasing speaking confidence. Similarly, participants suggested that reducing fear of mistakes, encouraging peer support, and focusing more on communication rather than grammatical perfection can help minimize speaking anxiety.

In conclusion, the study concludes that speaking anxiety is an important affective factor that influences EFL learners' speaking performance in Nangarhar province. Addressing this issue requires supportive teaching practices, increased speaking opportunities, and classroom environments that encourage learners to express themselves without fear of negative evaluation. By implementing these strategies, teachers and educational institutions can help learners develop greater confidence, improve their speaking skills, and achieve better outcomes in English language learning.

Recommendations

- Create Supportive Learning Environments: Educators should strive to foster a supportive and non-judgmental classroom atmosphere. This can involve encouraging risk-taking in communication, minimizing fear of negative evaluation, and ensuring that students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.
- Promote Vocabulary Development: Providing targeted vocabulary exercises and activities can help learners expand their verbal repertoire. This can include practical exercises that familiarize students with language commonly used in speaking tasks.

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