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Investigating Factors Responsible for English Speaking Anxiety among University Students

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Abstract

Gaining skill in speaking English is still a challenge for many students, with anxiety emerging as a major hurdle. This work explores the reasons behind university students' anxiety while speaking English and looks for possible solutions to reduce this issue. This topic is important because nowadays the importance of English language skills has increased a lot, but many students fall victim to confusion while speaking this language. There has been a lot of research on Englishspeaking anxiety, but this topic has not been specifically explored in many universities. In this, a quantitative method was used, in which data was collected from 120 students through a questionnaire. In the key findings, it was found that students are most afraid of the fact that if their English is wrong, their classmates laugh, or the teachers correct it in front of everyone. Because of this, students feel hesitant in answering, trembling while talking, and a rapid heartbeat are all physical effects of anxiety. Students felt that others spoke English better than they did, which made them feel inferior. If the classroom atmosphere is friendly and students get more support, practice, and positive feedback, they can increase their confidence and may reduce their anxiety. Group activities, preparation, and teacher-student interaction can also impact this.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, Students, Fear, Mistakes, Confidence, Support, Classroom

Introduction:

Anxiety is a thought or feeling that a person has in difficult situations. When someone tries to learn something new, especially when he has to explain it to others, it can be even more scary. Language learning is also a similar process in which students not only learn a new language, grammar, and vocabulary but also acquire the ability to speak confidently. But when a person fears that they can make a mistake in speaking or that other people can make fun of their performance, their confidence decreases, and they start to hesitate. This is why English-speaking anxiety has become a serious issue that affects the academic and professional success of many students. English is a language that is being used all over the world and has become essential for science, technology, business, and higher education. Speaking English at one's doorstep is not just an honor but a vital necessity. But many students, especially those whose first language is not English, feel hesitation and fear in speaking it. But many students, especially those whose first language is not English, feel hesitation and fear in speaking it. This hesitation is not only due to linguistic issues, but psychological factors also play a big role in it. When students speak English, they fear that they might make mistakes, and people don't laugh at their accent or grammar. This fear reduces their confidence, due to which they are not able to speak well. According to Rozal et al. (2021), many EFL students feel stress and anxiety while speaking English, which weakens their confidence and fluency. Chen et al. (2021) are of the view that foreign language anxiety affects both academic performance and communication skills. Sadapotto et al. (2022) highlighted that students' emotional and psychological state affects their speaking skills and that fluency and accuracy become difficult if stress is high. According to Supraminto (2022), if students develop a positive mindset, their confidence increases, and speaking anxiety decreases. Similarly, Fauzi & Asi (2023) say that if teachers create a supportive learning environment in which students are given more opportunities to speak and are encouraged, then their hesitation and fear may decrease. Musyarrafah et al. (2022) highlighted that regular practice and interaction with fluent speakers can help reduce students' speaking anxiety because when students experience real-life communication late, their self-confidence increases, and they are able to speak English better. English is a foreign language in Pakistan, which is mostly prevalent in the darkest hours (Sultan, 2017). Students often give more importance to writing and reading English, but do not have the experience of speaking

it (Saeed, 2020). When they have to talk in any presentation, oral exam, or gathering, they feel hesitant (Javid, 2016). This is not just due to a lack of vocabulary or grammar; rather, the fear of making mistakes, the fear of being taunted by others, and a lack of self-confidence are also reasons for this. Students suffering from speaking anxiety often forget classroom discussions and oral exams, which weakens both their English-speaking skills and self-confidence. This issue is not just a problem confined to the dark environment but also creates a hindrance in professional life. Such students who are afraid of speaking English do not practice hard, which further weakens their language fluency. In Pakistan, despite English being an official language, it is not the spoken language of common people. When students try to speak English, instead of getting support, they have to face criticism. This negative feedback further weakens their self-confidence. Because of this, many students hesitate to speak English, which hinders their mental and professional progress. This research aims to understand the reason for English-speaking anxiety among the students of SBBU Sanghar.

Research Questions:

Q1. What are the causes of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students? Q2. What are the remedies for overcoming English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students?

Literature Review:

In this literature review, English-speaking anxiety has been discussed. Various researchers have observed that students feel nervous while speaking English, which reduces their confidence and performance. In this, the reasons for anxiety, its effects, and ways to reduce it have been discussed. Learning to speak English is very important because it gives students a chance to express their ideas and feelings. But it can also be difficult because it requires providing an immediate answer (Fadhilah, 2022). Reading, writing, and listening students can practice on their own, but speaking requires speaking with another human being, which makes the skill difficult. Speaking anxiety is a major problem that reduces students' confidence and motivation. When students have to speak English, they fear that they can make mistakes, their vocabulary and grammar are weak, or they fear the judgment of those in front of them, which reduces their participation (Palupi, 2021). Speaking anxiety is related not only to psychological factors but also to linguistic competence. Many students are nervous about speaking due to a lack of pronunciation, grammar, and intonation. (Nurul Ain, 2023). When students have to talk in class or a public place, they start to feel proud of themselves, which reflects on their fluency and accuracy. If students have confidence in their communication skills, their anxiety reduces, and they can speak with more confidence. (Fadhilah, 2022). But if they don't have confidence in their language skills, they avoid saying, which prevents their speaking ability from improving.

The role of teachers is also very important in reducing or eliminating speaking anxiety. Often, teachers do not give students proper opportunities to practice speaking, which increases their hesitation and fear (Passiatore et al., 2019). If students get a supportive environment in which they can talk freely without any fear, their confidence level improves, and speaking anxiety reduces. Instead, interactive activities, peer discussions, and frequent speaking exercises should be arranged so that students get used to speaking English, and they should be given constructive feedback instead of criticizing their mistakes so that students can develop their speaking skills better. Recent research studies have extensively explored foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) and students' L2 communication behavior. Islam, Ahmad & Islam (2022) have shown in their study that when students consider their linguistic skills weak, they face difficulty in speaking English in the class. This anxiety is not just a matter of their psychological state but also a result of their selfperception and social environment. When students feel that their English-speaking level is below that of their classmates, they participate less in discussions, due to which their practice also gets reduced, and speaking becomes more difficult. Pabro-Maquidato (2021) also supported this and said that when students underestimate their L2 proficiency, they underestimate their speaking ability and assume that they cannot speak well.

This self-doubt causes their confidence to erode, and they avoid speaking the L2, which affects their learning. This research suggests that if teachers and classmates provide a positive and supportive environment, where mistakes are not criticized but rather, they are given an opportunity to learn, your students' fear may decrease. According to Maysari (2020), fear of speaking English is often due to students' low motivation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of speaking. When students feel that they make mistakes, they are afraid to speak, due to which their speaking does not improve. Maysari (2020) also stated that if students have less vocabulary, fear of grammar mistakes, or have low confidence, all these things also stop them from speaking English. This issue

is not just for new learners but is also faced by students who use English daily (Khairunisa, 2019). According to the research of Ail & Anwar (2021), when students fear negative evaluation, their anxiety increases, which prevents them from learning and speaking English. Test anxiety does not have as much impact as the criticism of people. Several strategies have been proposed to help students overcome English speaking anxiety. Lee (2020) showed in his research that if students get support from teachers and classmates, it increases their confidence in speaking English. This support helps them feel comfortable, due to which encourages them to try to talk more. Tai and Chen (2020) used the new Google Assistant and found that when students practice AI-based tools, their confidence in speaking English increases. This tool gives them the opportunity to talk without any hesitation, which improves their L2 WTC (readiness to speak English). Ebadi and Ebadijalal (2020) have used the new virtual reality (VR) and found that when students practice English in a digital environment, they feel more comfortable, and their hesitation is reduced. Von Wörde (2003) and Humaera & Pramustiara (2022) also showed that anxiety has a negative impact on language learning, but if the anxiety is reduced, students can learn English in a better way. Therefore, both teachers and students should understand how to control foreign language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a problem that causes students to have difficulty learning and speaking English, especially when they are in class and are afraid of making a mistake in what they say (Suadnyana & Nova, 2021; Anggraeny et al., 2020). This anxiety deeply affects the self-confidence and learning process of the students, due to which many learners get upset before speaking English and try to remain silent. Speaking anxiety is also a major issue that affects the fluency and communication of students. Vicontie et al. (2021) said that while speaking English, students' hands shake, they feel sweaty, and their heart starts to beat faster, which further reduces their confidence. Samad et al. (2021) say that the environment of different cultures and strange languages puts a lot of pressure on students, which increases their fear. When students are in a new environment, it becomes difficult for them to adjust there, due to which their confidence level decreases, and this has a great impact on their ability to learn the language. According to Huang & Chang (2021), when students face speaking in a different language, such as English, they feel anxious and afraid, which reduces their performance and confidence.

Due to this anxiety, students doubt their speaking abilities and become more nervous. Chin & Lin shared the effects of EFLSA in their studies as anxiety, tension, and fear distract the students, due to which they are unable to concentrate and are not able to participate properly in class activities and homework. This hindrance also has a big impact on their care and results because instead of worrying, they are not able to perform well in their full capacity. MacIntyre & Gregersen (2022) also confirmed that students who suffer from FLSA gradually slow down their language learning process. Anxiety prevents them from efficiently performing the basic tasks of language acquisition, which affects their progress. They find it difficult to speak and learn English. Ironsi (2023) and Ironsi & Popescu (2021) have also found that traditional language teaching methods do not effectively address FLSA. These traditional methods do not address students' anxiety issues, so they need better, more student-centered, and anxiety-reducing methods. According to research by Zulkiflee & Nimehchisalem (2022), gender also has a significant impact on FLSA. They say that girls feel more afraid when they speak English. They think that people can notice their mistakes more, which raises their voice. This anxiety affects their performance a lot and prevents them from speaking English with full confidence. Zelaia (2022) relates the FSLA to situation-specific anxiety experienced during foreign language learning. This anxiety is divided into different types, such as debilitating anxiety, which affects learning, and facilitating anxiety, which can be slightly helpful but is only in the appropriate learning environment. According to Broche-Pérez et al. (2022), many factors influence FLSA, such as gender, school location, and subject matter. These factors are especially significant in schools where the teacher has a master's degree, which contributes to L2 (second language) speaking anxiety. According to Kulsoom et al. (2021), research has shown that anxiety is an important factor when learning a foreign language, especially when talking. They say that when students improve their speaking skills, their self-confidence increases, which motivates them more, and their learning outcomes are better.

For this, they need to understand the importance of their speaking skills and try to develop them. Ginting & Sebayang (2021) suggested that when students use their language learning strategies better, they can reduce their anxiety. If students keep their thinking positive and improve their skills, they can increase their confidence. Yalçin & Ìnceçay (2021) mentioned informal and spontaneous activities that reduce students' nervousness, such as when they participate in casual conversations with the help of teachers. These ways make students feel relaxed and comfortable, which improves their speaking skills. Tieng et al. (2023) discussed the expansion of higher education in Cambodia and pointed out that after the educational institutions were closed, there was significant expansion in higher education.

Utari et al. (2022) state that anxiety is the feeling people experience when performing a task in public. When students have to speak in front of their class, they feel nervous, worried, and afraid. Due to this, their confidence goes down and they are unable to express themselves properly. Ariani and Dewi (2020) say that students feel anxiety about their speaking skills, which lowers their self-confidence. This anxiety also affects their speaking abilities. Badrasawi et al. (2020) and Halder (2018) reported that less anxious students have better academic performance. Students with high anxiety may find it difficult to improve their speaking skills. Kalsoom et al. (2021) studied that speaking anxiety is common in foreign language learning. She suggested that students should be made aware of the importance of speaking skills so that they can practice and gain confidence. Mobarak (2020) conducted a study on Bangladeshi students and found that the major reasons for their speaking anxiety were communication uncertainty, fear of peer judgment, and fear of an oral test.

Abbasi et al. (2019) studied the students of Sindh Madressatul Islam University and found that the students feel anxiety and nervousness while speaking English. He also suggested that students should practice English and teachers should create an atmosphere where English is regularly spoken. K & Alamelu (2020) identified external and internal factors of anxiety. External factors mainly include language, grammar, peer pressure, and pronunciation, whereas internal factors mainly include stage fright, lack of confidence, and shyness. Yildiz (2021) identified speaking anxiety among non-English major students and found that this anxiety was due to their English proficiency, self-evaluation, learner behaviors, and cultural differences. This study shows that levels of anxiety vary widely depending on the individual experiences of students. In the study by Taqwa et al. (2022), they included 62 students and found that eight students had very anxious levels of anxiety, while 29 students were nervous and 23 had a mild level of anxiety, showing that speaking anxiety is quite common and exists at different levels. Netta et al. (2020) reported that methods such as preparation and body movements help manage students' speaking anxiety.

Maharani & Roslaini (2021) investigated students' coping strategies during online learning and found that preparation, positive thinking, and peer seeking were used more frequently to manage their anxiety effectively. Ramayani et al. (2022) highlighted relaxation, deep breathing, and calmness as coping strategies to reduce students' anxiety, but some students also adopt avoidance strategies, such as non-active strategies in which they avoid speaking interactions to prevent anxiety. Woodley et al. (2020) reported that many students have a fear of public speaking, which affects their oral presentations. Suciati (2020) raised the point that "fear of negative evaluation" among students also increases their anxiety.

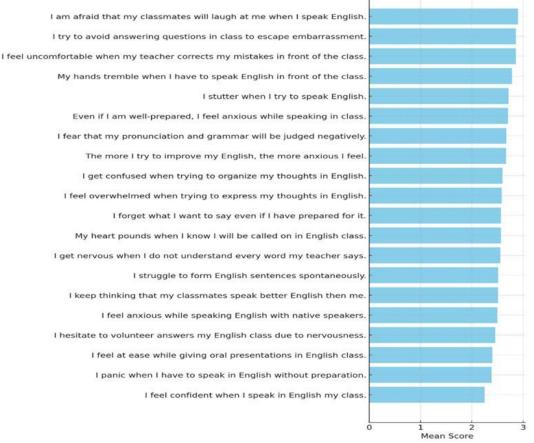
Methodology

This research used a quantitative research method in which data was collected through a questionnaire. The objective of the research was to find out the causes and symptoms of English-speaking anxiety. This study was descriptive, focused on understanding the thoughts and feelings of undergraduate students. The study was conducted on undergraduate students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sanghar Campus. A total of 120 students participated in the survey. These students belonged to different semesters, mostly from the English and Information Technology (IT) departments. To collect the data, a questionnaire was developed on a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was made into two parts: Each part contained multiple statements through which students' feelings and experiences were understood. The survey was distributed manually, where students filled in their answers personally. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured so that students could express their opinions openly. The data collected was analyzed with the help of SPSS software. Descriptive statistics such as I, standard deviation, and frequencies were derived. Through these statistics, it was understood which statement the students reacted to. Graphs and bar charts were created to show the results in a visual form.

Findings:

The findings of the research and the analyzed data are presented based on the research questions in the following paragraphs.

Q1. What are the causes of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students?



English-Speaking Anxiety: Mean Scores of Survey Items

Figure 1. Percentage of Causes for English Speaking Anxiety

From this graph, it is clear that the most anxious students are those who are afraid that their classmates can laugh at them (Mean Score = 2.9) or that their English is wrong, and the teacher can correct it in front of everyone (Mean Score = 2.8). Because of this, he tries to avoid answering in class (Mean Score = 2.8). Many students also say that when they have to speak English, their hands shake (Mean Score = 2.7), they stutter (Mean Score = 2.6), their heart beats fast (Mean Score = 2.5), and they feel nervous. This shows that their anxiety is not just mental, but also physical. Some students say that despite preparation, they still feel anxious (Mean Score = 2.6) or they find it difficult to organize their conversation properly in English (Mean Score 2.5). This means that they are not confident about their ability to speak English. Many students feel that their classmates speak English better than they do (Mean Score = 2.2), and due to this, they feel weak. All the aspects of the graph show that low scores indicate that only a few students feel confident in speaking English (Mean Score = 1.8), while most of the students lack confidence. Overall, this graph shows that while speaking English, students feel fear, embarrassment, pressure of preparation, and lack of self-confidence, which is the reason behind their speaking anxiety. To solve this problem, they need support, a friendly environment, and more practice so that they can build courage and confidence within themselves.

Q2. What are the remedies for overcoming English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students?

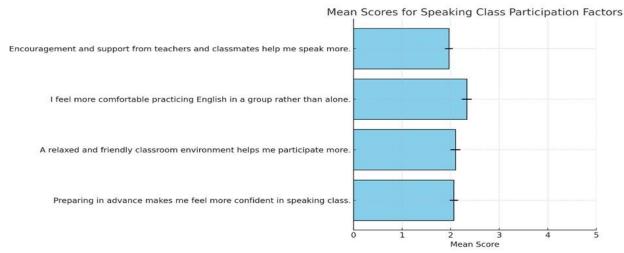


Figure 2. Percentage of Remedies for Overcoming English Speaking Anxiety

This graph shows that the confidence of students in the English-speaking class is very low. Most students said that speaking in groups was slightly better (Mean Score = 2.4), but overall participation was still low. It makes a lot of difference to them that you are not ready and that the friendly classroom environment boosts their confidence (Mean Score = 2.3). Everyone said that less response was received at the point where support from teachers and classmates was mentioned (Mean Score = 2.1), which shows that students get less positive feedback and encouragement. This means that more hard work is needed to motivate students in the speaking class, where they are given opportunities to practice, group activities, and a supportive environment so that they can speak English without any fear. Preparing in advance also helps them feel more confident (Mean Score = 2.2).

Discussion

This research revealed that fear of speaking English (speaking anxiety) is a common issue among undergraduate students of SBBU Sanghar. Many students said that they are afraid that if their English is wrong, their classmates can laugh at them, or the teacher can correct them in front of everyone. This thing further reduces their confidence. Because of this, he starts avoiding answering in class. These findings confirm the concept of "fear of negative evaluation," which has been discussed in several studies that found that students are most afraid that others can laugh at their mistakes or judge them when speaking English (Macdonald, 2025). Some students also reported physical symptoms such as trembling of hands, heart palpitations, and feeling of dizziness, which shows that their anxiety is not just mental but physical as well. These findings match those of research that found that anxiety among language learners is not only emotional but also physical, which affects their speaking performance (Priya, 2023). This means that students not only lack confidence in speaking English, but they also feel mental and physical pressure.

It also came to light that students feel that their classmates speak English better than they do, due to which they consider themselves weak. This is having a bad effect on their self-confidence. Only a few students called themselves confident, while most students admitted to anxiety and a lack of confidence. This highlights the concept of "self-efficacy," which states that students who lack confidence in their skills are more likely to have language anxiety (Wijewantha, 2021). When examining possible solutions, it was found that group discussion or a friendly environment improves confidence a little, but overall participation is still low. Students said that they do not get much support from teachers and classmates and feel a lack of positive feedback and motivation. These findings confirm the role of "classroom environment", which may prove helpful in reducing language anxiety if the support relationship between teachers and students is strong (Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2021). This means that the classroom environment is not as supportive as it should be. These findings are consistent with research that suggests supportive classrooms help students overcome speaking difficulties (Raja, 2017). To overcome English speaking anxiety, teachers and universities should create an environment where students feel open and free. Group activities, regular practice, and positive feedback can help increase their confidence. These suggestions have also been given in research, which says that students can be confident through practice and constructive feedback (Macdonald, 2025).

Conclusion

In this research, it has been found that the undergraduate students of SBBU Sanghar have to face a lot of difficulties while speaking English, with the biggest difficulty being their speaking anxiety. This anxiety is not just mental but is also physical, such as trembling of hands, rapid heartbeat, and dizziness. Students are afraid to answer questions due to fear of their mistakes because they feel that if they speak English, their classmates can laugh, or the teacher can immediately correct them. This reduces their mother's confidence, and they are not able to focus on their speaking skills. This research also reveals that students feel lacking in their English-speaking skills, and they feel that their classmates speak English better than they do, due to which leads not a lack of confidence in themselves. It has also been said that if students get a friendly and supportive environment, are given the opportunity to take part in group discussions and activities, and teachers give them positive feedback, then their confidence can increase, and they can be able to reduce their fear. Teachers and classroom atmosphere are very important, because when students get support from their teachers and classmates, their fear and anxiety are reduced, and they develop their skills in a better way. Therefore, this study suggests that if students get more practice, a friendly environment, and positive feedback, their confidence can increase and they can be able to overcome their fear of speaking English, which can prove helpful in their academic and professional growth.

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