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Pysarchyk O., Yamshynska N., Kutsenok N. Understanding and addressing students' fears in esl speaking classes: insights from students. *Освіта. Інноватика. Практика*, 2025. Том 13, № 2. С. 88-93. <https://doi.org/10.31110/2616-650X-vol13i2-011>.

Pysarchyk O., Yamshynska N., Kutsenok N. Understanding and addressing students' fears in esl speaking classes: insights from students. *Osvita. Innovatyka. Praktyka – Education. Innovation. Practice*, 2025. Vol. 13, No 2. S. 88-93. <https://doi.org/10.31110/2616-650X-vol13i2-011>.

УДК 378

DOI: 10.31110/2616-650X-vol13i2-012

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РОЗУМІННЯ ТА ПОДОЛАННЯ ТРУДНОЩІВ У СТУДЕНТІВ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З ГОВОРІННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ: ДОСВІД СТУДЕНТІВ

Анотація. У викладанні та вивченні мови спостерігається значний прогрес щодо розуміння та подолання страхів студентів пов'язаних з мовленнєвою діяльністю та опанування іноземною мовою. Проте, все ще існують аспекти цього питання, які потребують вирішення. Стаття досліджує які саме страхи студентів на заняттях з англійської мови можуть стати на заваді успішного формування навичок іншомовної комунікації та пропонує стратегії їх подолання на шляху до успіху в навчанні. Для того, щоб отримати цілісне розуміння найбільш поширених страхів у студентів, а саме страх помилятися, страх говоріння та страх бути неуспішним у навчанні, було проведено опитування. Опитування складалось із запитань орієнтованих на отримання інформації від студентів щодо їхнього навчального досвіду та страхів, пов'язаних з говорінням, як одним з пріоритетних для формування soft skills у майбутніх випускників. Результати опитування показали, що студенти мають різні страхи, та підкреслили необхідність пошуку ефективних стратегій для їх розв'язання. Загалом, результати свідчать про те, що студенти відчують труднощі на заняттях з говоріння англійською мовою, а також визначають важливість почуттів та емоцій студентів для їх навчального прогресу. Результати дослідження дозволяють отримати корисну інформацію щодо найбільш поширених страхів у студентів на заняттях за англійської мови, а саме страх помилок, страх говорити перед іншими студентами та викладачем, страх негативних оцінок та відставання у навчанні. Зважаючи на те, що страхи студентів мають негативний вплив на результати навчання та перешкоджають прогресу у вивченні мови, надзвичайно важливо дослідити ефективні підходи у викладанні, щоб знизити страхи студентів та допомогти їм набутти впевненості у своїх мовленнєвих навичках. У статті розглянуто декілька стратегій, які допоможуть викладачам підтримати своїх студентів та розвинути їх впевненість на заняттях з говоріння англійською мовою. Серед запропонованих рішень є наступні: відкладене виправлення помилок з метою подолання страху перед говорінням та помилками, взаємодія з одногрупниками та зворотний зв'язок від інших студентів, що сприяє створенню сприятливого навчального середовища, де студенти почуваються впевнено.

Ключові слова: тривожність під час говоріння; страх помилок; підходи у викладанні; впевненість; сприятливе навчальне середовище.

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UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING STUDENTS' FEARS IN ESL SPEAKING CLASSES: INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS

Abstract. There has been significant progress in understanding and addressing students' speaking fears in language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, there are still several issues that need to be addressed. The article explores students' fears in ESL classrooms and suggests strategies to manage those fears as impediments to learning progress. A survey was conducted with the aim of getting a comprehensive understanding of the most common fears of students, namely fear of making mistakes and being corrected, fear of speaking in class, and fear of falling behind in studies. The survey consisted of questions focused on gathering insights from the students regarding their learning experience and fears related to speaking. The survey findings showed that students have different fears and stressed the importance and need to explore effective strategies to address those issues. Overall, the results suggest that the students struggle emotionally in ESL speaking lessons, as well as recognize the significance of feelings and emotions for their academic and personal growth. The study results provided useful insights into students' prevalence of fears in ESL classrooms, which included fear of making mistakes, fear of speaking in front of a teacher and peers, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of falling behind. Considering that students' fears have a negative effect on learning

outcomes and impede advancement in language learning, it is extremely important to examine effective teaching strategies to alleviate students' fears and help them build confidence in their speaking skills. The article reviews several strategies for teachers to support their students and develop their confidence in ESL speaking lessons. Among the suggested strategies are implementing delayed correction to deal with the fear of speaking and making mistakes, peer interaction, and feedback to help students gain confidence and promote a supportive learning atmosphere.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety; fear of mistakes; teaching strategies; confidence; supportive learning environment.*

Problem statement. In learning English as a second language, fear of speaking is a widespread issue among students, which can keep them away from engaging in speaking activities. The main causes of this anxiousness are fear of speaking, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of making mistakes. These fears may impede students' advancement in language learning if they are reluctant to participate in lesson activities. Since these fears can significantly impact students' performance, learning outcomes, and overall state of mind, it is paramount to understand how to manage students' fears in the language classroom. These fears can become a mental barrier to progress in language learning and negatively impact students' confidence in their speaking skills. There are effective strategies teachers can apply to help students manage their fears, encourage active participation, and promote a positive learner-centered learning environment. Due to the implementation of such strategies, teachers can minimize the negative effects of fears on students' language learning experiences by creating opportunities to speak English in comfortable settings where peer collaboration and constructive feedback are encouraged.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Numerous studies have been conducted with a focus on students' fears related to speaking. Their aims were to understand the nature and reasons behind the most common fears students face in language classrooms and find the methods to address those fears and increase the effectiveness of the language learning process. Budayanti et al. [1] conducted a study on students' anxiety in ESL-speaking classrooms, encouraging teachers to acknowledge students' fears and implement strategies to overcome them, promoting active participation in speaking activities. Daymiel et al. [2] examined how language anxiety affects students' speaking performance in a second language and suggested that it can hinder language learning and engagement in the class. According to Harmer [4], it is essential to manage students' fears in speaking lessons since confidence and fluency are the main aims here, but fears related to speaking may impede the achievement of these aims. Harmer [4] points out the unhappy experience of students who can "conjugate a verb, but are unable to respond to a simple question" and acknowledges the need to focus lessons mainly on using language and engaging in real-life communication, not just concentrating on grammar and accuracy.

In addition, Harmer [4] and Hedge [5] discussed the causes of students' fears of speaking in language class, such as lack of "experience in using language" [4], "lack of confidence or fear of losing 'face' by making mistakes" [5]. Among the other reasons that may cause nervousness and speaking anxiety, researchers mentioned that students "may fear seeming foolishly in front of others" and "worry about getting things wrong." Therefore, such students tend to "avoid comments or corrections," "avoid the embarrassment in front of their peers and a teacher" [4], "even if that 'public' is a relatively small number of their peers in group work" [5]. Hedge [5] and Scrivener [7] argued that when activity is aimed at fluency, then interruptions "would stop the flow and possibly intimidate students" [5] and "take the focus off their message" [7] such "students often find it hard to continue after a correction, whilst others in the class may become more reluctant to speak for fear of similar interruptions" [5].

Researchers such as Grieve, Woodley, Hunt, and McKay [3] highlight that students experience fears related to public speaking and explore how these fears influence the overall experience in higher education. Grieve et al. [3] observed that students experience a "fear of making mistakes and getting information wrong," adding that "this desire not to get anything wrong and striving for perfection may increase stress and anxiety levels concerning public speaking". Additionally, Grieve et al. [3] note that "students' fears of speaking affect the interactions with peers, reduce their participation and impact progress" [3]; therefore, it is important to address this issue. Ridell [6] outlines the disadvantages of teacher error correction during speaking activities: students may feel intimidated and embarrassed, however sensitive the teacher might be. Hedge [5], who also studied this issue, posited that a strategy for dealing with the fear of making mistakes outlines two main decisions for teachers: which mistakes must be corrected and how.

To alleviate speaking anxiety, Budayanti et al. [1] recommend creating a positive classroom atmosphere, encouraging pair and group activities, providing positive feedback, and praising students' efforts regardless of their speaking proficiency. Similarly, Daymiel et al. [2] recommended creating a relaxed environment with various engaging oral tasks, providing opportunities for students to speak freely to help them grow confident and reduce fears over time.

The article aims to explore students' fears in ESL learning settings and provide strategies for overcoming those fears as barriers. The article uses a combination of qualitative analysis by studying and researching the relevant publications and quantitative by collecting and analyzing students' responses to the survey. The findings obtained from the research demonstrate the most common fears students experience in the ESL-speaking classroom, which are fear of making mistakes, fear of speaking, and fear of falling behind in

studies. Based on the survey results, the article discusses teaching strategies that educators can use to support their learners, increase their confidence, and maximize learning outcomes.

As the issue of students' fears related to speaking has been recognized, additional research is needed to pinpoint specific fears and strategies for addressing them. With this knowledge, teachers would be more equipped to help their students alleviate their fears and build a safe and supportive learning environment where their needs and concerns are dealt with. There are still many aspects that need to be considered despite the remarkable progress in understanding and addressing fears related to speaking. For instance, lack of confidence remains a problem for many language learners, especially when they have to speak in the presence of other students. Although such methods as delayed correction and peer interactions have shown promise, we still need to take into account different individual causes of anxiety and find strategies to manage them. Effective teaching strategies, such as giving constructive feedback, creating a supportive learning environment, and encouraging learning from mistakes, can relieve stress, help students overcome their fears, and make the learning process engaging and enjoyable.

Presenting the main research. In teaching English as a second language, understanding and addressing students' fears is important, as it can impact their abilities to achieve language learning aims and excel in their studies. The research indicates the significance of recognising and dealing with students' fears associated with speaking to improve teaching strategies and build a positive learning environment. The article provides practical ideas for teachers to build effective speaking lessons by looking at students' fears of speaking, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of fluency. The results show that students' fears can be reduced by providing them with speaking opportunities to gain confidence, and by encouraging learner autonomy, pair and group work in supportive learning settings.

The survey findings. A survey was conducted to gather a comprehensive understanding of university students' fears in the language classroom. For this research, 45 technical students aged 18 to 21 studying English for Specific Purposes took part in the survey. The survey consisted of a series of questions aimed at collecting insights from the participants regarding their experiences, fears and feelings related to speaking in the context of language learning. The overall aim of all questions was to learn about students' fears, their expectations for developing speaking skills, and their opinions on how emotions affect communication and the atmosphere in the class. The analysis of survey results gave us valuable insights and will help teachers select strategies to deal with students' fears.

In terms of what they want to achieve as far as speaking skills are concerned, students were able to select multiple options (to improve pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy and gain confidence,). For the majority of students, the prior goals are pronunciation (8 responses), vocabulary (8 responses), confidence (8 responses), and fluency (7 responses). Only the minority of students chose accuracy (4 responses). These results illustrate a ranged focus on different aspects of speaking. The rest of students (10) didn't define their speaking goals and didn't provide answer to this question.

The next question of the survey was "What is your greatest fear in our classroom?" and allowed students to choose from multiple options (speaking, making mistakes, falling behind in the class, other). Most students (15 responses) pointed out fear of making mistakes as their greatest concern in the classroom, emphasising the importance of creating supportive learning settings, where mistakes are treated like learning opportunities. An equal number of students (6 responses) reported fear of speaking as their main concern, and falling behind the class (6 responses), indicating a need to create opportunities for collaboration and peer interaction. A few respondents (9 responses) answered that they had no fears in ESP lessons, one of them stating, "to be honest, I don't have fears about English lessons". This is a positive sign, suggesting that students feel confident, and the learning environment is conducive to their learning and progress. Additionally, 9 students chose the option "other", and wrote "thinking too long", "being in the group with people have no interest in talking".

The analysis of the responses to the open-ended question, "What are your feelings when it comes to speaking in the lessons?" revealed that most students have positive feelings (22 responses), some wrote "confident", "normal", "positive ones", "I'm pretty confident", while some students (16 responses) reported to have negative feelings, such nervousness or insecurity about their vocabulary range, pronunciation and other aspects of speaking, for instance some wrote "I feel a little insecure because I can't remember a word for a long time or I can't pronounce it correctly", "uncomfortable", "I'm a little nervous", "anxious". The rest of the responses (7 responses) varied and can't be regarded as either positive or negative feelings, for example, "don't know", "don't think about feelings", "No two times are ever the same".

The answers to the open-ended question "How do you think other students in your class feel when they have to speak?" vary in opinions, indicating the differences in students' attitudes, experiences and confidence. 17 students reported their peers have positive emotions and feel confident, "I think that most students aren't afraid to express their opinions and feel fairly comfortable when they speak, although it depends on the teacher", "as far as I heard, most of them have a good level of speaking skills so they don't have many problems with these tasks, however, some students sometimes forget or don't know some words which

is okay in my opinion". 11 students mentioned insecurities connected to vocabulary, pronunciation or fear of making mistakes, saying "I think the same as me, insecurity due to vocabulary and pronunciation", "some of them can feel baffled when they forget some words or losing a point while speaking (as am I)". A few respondents (3 responses) noted that their peers avoid speaking due to a lack of confidence in their language skills "They are not confident in their level of English, so they decide just not to speak or even go to lessons", "Sometimes, I feel like maybe they're a bit nervous". There were 14 students wrote that they are uncertain or have no interest in their classmates' feelings.

Responding to the question "Do you agree that only low-level students are afraid of speaking?" a minority of students (10 responses) chose the option "agree". Meanwhile, most participants disagreed (35 responses) to whether only low-level students are afraid of speaking, pointing out their understanding that fear of speaking and nervousness is not limited to proficiency levels, saying that "...some people just can have social skill issues", "I think it is not because of a low level of knowledge, but simply because some discomfort is felt when you have to answer in another language for a long time".

When asked "Do you agree that all feelings are important in the class?" 12 students admitted the need to control their feelings, stating that "... sometimes it's better to keep some emotions to yourself, not to bottle it up, but not to express it too openly to avoid problems in case if you feel some "tough" emotions such as anger or excitement: you have to know how to express things in certain situations so that you don't cause troubles", most of the respondents (33 responses) agreed that such feelings are appropriate in language lessons and help in communication, with one comment "I think emotions and feeling help communication".

Discussion of the results. The survey's overall findings indicate that students have emotional difficulties in the lessons, and they understand the value of emotions in their educational and personal development. These results emphasise the importance of creating a positive and safe atmosphere that supports a variety of emotional states, and encourages confidence when speaking. Overall, students showed an understanding of the typical challenges in the classroom when it comes to speaking. The results of the survey showed that students experience different fears and other negative feelings in language classroom, and highlighted the need to search for effective strategies to help our students deal with those issues.

The data collected from the survey were useful in understanding students' most common fears in the classroom, such as fear of making mistakes, fear of speaking, and fear of falling behind. Fear of making mistakes was identified as a main concern of students, which results from their high focus on accuracy and judgment or feedback from peers and the teacher. Students who are anxious about making mistakes and receiving feedback may be reluctant to participate actively, therefore, they practice less and make little progress towards gaining fluency and confidence in speaking. As one of the respondents reflected on how other students might feel, "I think they're scared to make mistakes, are embarrassed about their pronunciation/accent or feel pressure over other students finding their speech lacking". When students are afraid of speaking, they may avoid answering questions and participating in discussions, which ultimately may weaken their confidence in speaking skills. Speaking anxiety can be triggered by various factors, like peer criticism, and personal worries about pronunciation or accent. Such students may feel inferior to their peers, discouraged, and not willing to collaborate. Students who are afraid of falling behind might start to feel even more stressed or anxious, which might influence their ability to concentrate and retain information.

It is worth mentioning that not all students who participated in the survey reported having fears related to speaking, and described their learning experience to be rather positive. One of such students shared his perspective as follows, "I think that most students aren't afraid to express their opinions and feel fairly comfortable when they speak, although it depends on the teacher." This indicates the crucial role of a teacher as someone who encourages students to participate and supports them in their learning. Altogether these findings emphasise how important it is to create a friendly learning atmosphere, where mistakes are seen as a normal part of the learning process that students can learn from. Moreover, the survey results draw attention to the crucial role of collaboration with peers, recognizing feelings as an integral part of communication and the development of the growth mindset in overcoming fears.

Choosing effective teaching strategies to decrease students' fears, is crucial since these fears can negatively impact learning outcomes. These strategies should be focused on creating an environment, where students feel supported, motivated, encouraged to participate, and understand that making mistakes is an inherent part of the language learning process. For instance, Ridell [6] indicates that making mistakes is an essential aspect of learning, and "students need to realise that they will make mistakes because it is impossible not to if you are learning a language". Using these strategies will help teachers foster a collaborative learning environment, where students won't skip lessons or remain silent and will participate actively without fears of making mistakes, speaking, or falling behind the class, as well as other concerns.

Strategies that teachers can use to help students overcome their fears are the following: delayed correction, self-correction and peer correction; creating a safe learning environment; giving students enough preparation time in fluency-based activities, such as discussions, role play and games, and scaffolding them by properly structuring such activities.

We would like to highlight some tips how to deal with the fear of making mistakes, since students identified fear of making mistakes to be the main concern in the class. In speaking activities, when it comes to correction and feedback, it is important to consider if the correction “is likely to provide useful feedback and can help the class to progress”. Teachers must decide which of the mistakes “impede communication” and avoid unnecessary corrections which might elevate fears and demotivate students. Teachers should make the correction process positive and ensure students “know why it is a mistake” and learn from it [6]. There are several ways for teachers to approach error correction: delayed correction, self-correction and peer correction, each helpful in its own manner. Delayed correction refers to noting mistakes, as well as examples of “good language to praise students” during fluency activities and addressing them later in the lesson. One of the benefits of this method is that feedback is ‘depersonalised’ or “less ‘personal’” [4] suggesting it doesn’t matter who made the mistakes. While students may understand who made the mistake, they will not agonise over it and will learn from the correction process [6]. Another advantage of this method of error correction is that it doesn’t interrupt the flow of speaking and allows students to maintain their focus on the activity [7]. On the other hand, some mistakes need to be corrected immediately, but “too much teacher correction might be demoralizing for students” [6]. Therefore, we can not rely on the only method of error correction and use other methods depending on the situation. Teachers can turn to self-correction and peer correction. These two methods are learner-centred and have the same advantage, as they both encourage students’ independence. Since students are involved in the correction process, they feel autonomous and confident if they can correct themselves and other students. According to Ridell [6] self-corrected mistakes are more memorable and less likely to be repeated, and it demonstrates students’ awareness and abilities. It is worth noting that not all students are capable of self-correcting. Peer correction involves students in the process, promotes collaboration, and strengthens self-confidence, yet it may not be appropriate for some students [6]. When it comes to choosing methods of error correction, teachers need to make informed decisions, aiming at the balanced and effective use of all the above-mentioned methods.

How to deal with the fear of speaking? As mentioned previously, it is important to choose the right error correction method in speaking lessons and ensure the flow of speech is not interrupted, otherwise, students feel unsafe, afraid or hesitant to participate in further speaking activities.

According to Harmer [4] one of the best ways to help students deal with fear of mistakes while speaking is to “put them in ‘safe’ situations in class where they are inspired and encouraged to use language from their ‘store’”. It is suggested that students are motivated to use language they already know, even if they are not confident doing so yet. This can be achieved by planning activities that let students feel less nervous about speaking. Yet, finding the right balance and encouraging students to take risks and use new language is still important. Teachers need to be careful not to oversimplify the task for their students, setting the right level of challenge and giving them autonomy and the ability to grow. Harmer states that “you also want learners to feel under some pressure to take a risk and use language that they may have been avoiding using until now” [4].

The suggestions for activities to develop confidence are discussions, and fluency-focused tasks, “provided they are carefully structured to minimise stress and enable active participation” [4].

In contrast to carefully planned and structured activities, it can be worth trying to “move from planned speaking activities to spontaneous ones to build students’ confidence in speaking skills” [5]. To help students who struggle with speaking anxiety and lack of confidence, “managing expectations away from a perfect delivery” [3] can be helpful. It is essential to “give them planning time to speaking in activities which demand more spontaneous production” [5], provide support, structure and establish goals for discussions, with preparation time. To alleviate speaking anxiety, Budayanti et al. [1] recommend “... making speaking enjoyable and including role plays and games, integrating relaxation techniques to manage fears before speaking, and having an individual session to address student’s specific needs. It is also suggested, “to organise speaking activities in pairs, threes and small groups, as well as with the class as a whole”, “enabling as many students as possible to speak as much as possible” [4]. By using these strategies, teachers can help students manage their fears and encourage active participation in speaking activities and improvement of overall language proficiency.

Conclusion. In conclusion, addressing students’ fears is a required component of language learning, especially when speaking skills are considered. Educators can create a safe and supportive learning environment by recognising and dealing with students’ fears and emotions. Effective educational strategies will allow them to overcome these fears, gain confidence when speaking, and ultimately improve their language proficiency. The willingness of students to engage in speaking activities can be hindered by feelings of nervousness, insecurity, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged by a teacher and peers, all influencing language development. By recognising these fears and implementing appropriate teaching strategies, such as delayed correction, peer interaction and feedback, and fostering a supportive learning environment, educators can help students overcome those challenges and benefit from speaking activities. Encouraging students to experiment with a new language and learn from mistakes in a safe learning environment, advances language acquisition, builds confidence and emotional safety, and promotes a beneficial learning experience.

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