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## TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN HANDLING STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASS

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### Abstract

Speaking is a challenging skill for EFL students, with anxiety often hindering their participation and language development. This article explores teacher strategies for managing speaking anxiety in English-speaking classrooms. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) of studies published between 2015 and 2025, the research identifies key causes of anxiety, including fear of negative evaluation and lack of preparation. The review also examines the significant impact of anxiety on students' speaking performance, participation, and motivation. Effective strategies, such as creating a supportive classroom environment, providing constructive feedback, and offering ample practice opportunities, are discussed. The findings underscore the vital role of teachers in reducing anxiety and fostering an environment conducive to language learning.

**Keywords:** *speaking anxiety, EFL learners, teacher strategies, speaking skills, systematic literature review*

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### Introduction

Speaking skills are an essential component of language proficiency, particularly in the context of second or foreign language acquisition. According to Brown (2007), speaking is not just about



producing words but also about conveying meaning effectively, which requires both linguistic competence and social interaction skills. It allows learners to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions, which is essential for communication in everyday life. In language learning, speaking is often regarded as one of the most challenging skills to master, particularly because it involves real-time processing and the immediate production of language under pressure. As a result, many students experience significant challenges when asked to speak in a second language, often leading to a common phenomenon in language classroom anxiety.

Anxiety in language learning has been a focal point of research, with Horwitz et al. (1986) identifying communication apprehension as one of the primary causes of language-related anxiety. This type of anxiety arises from the fear of being judged, making mistakes, or not being able to express oneself effectively. Specifically, in speaking tasks, students may feel nervous or insecure about their language abilities, worrying about pronunciation, grammar, or their peers' perceptions. The fear of negative evaluation is particularly intense, as it affects both cognitive and emotional states, making students feel overwhelmed and leading to avoidance behaviors (MacIntyre & Gradner, 1991). These feelings of fear and self-doubt can significantly undermine students' willingness to engage in speaking activities, in which, in turn, affects their ability to improve their speaking skills.

The impact of anxiety on students' speaking ability is substantial. Research by Young (1991) reveals that anxiety impedes students' performance by reducing their willingness to participate in speaking exercises, limiting their opportunities to practice and develop fluency. This avoidance behavior often results in a lack of progress in language development, particularly in spontaneous speaking situations where fluency and comfort with the language are tested. Furthermore, high levels of anxiety can negatively affect students' cognitive functioning, as they become preoccupied with their worries, leaving limited cognitive resources for language processing. As a result, students may struggle to organize their thoughts, produce grammatically correct sentences, and use vocabulary effectively (Kohls, 2012). This combination of emotional and cognitive barriers presents a significant challenge for both students and teachers, highlighting the need for targeted strategies to manage anxiety in the classroom.

Given the pervasive nature of anxiety and its detrimental effects on students' language learning, it is crucial for teachers to actively address this issue. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes that teachers play a significant role in mitigating anxiety by creating a supportive and low-stress classroom

environment. The teacher's approach to speaking activities can either alleviate or exacerbate anxiety, depending on how these activities are structured and how feedback is delivered. Effective teachers understand the psychological and emotional barriers that students face and use various strategies to help students overcome their fears. This includes fostering a positive, non-threatening atmosphere, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging risk-taking in a supportive manner. Teachers also play an essential role in normalizing mistakes and reframing failure as an opportunity for learning, which can help reduce the pressure students feel during speaking tasks.

This article aims to explore the strategies that teachers can implement to address and reduce student anxiety in English-speaking classrooms. The focus will be on three primary areas: first, identifying the root causes of speaking anxiety in students, second, examining the impact of anxiety on students' speaking performance and engagement, and third, discussing specific teacher strategies that can help reduce anxiety and create a more supportive environment for speaking practice. By utilizing a literature review methodology, this article will draw on existing research to provide insights into how anxiety can be managed effectively in the classroom. Through this exploration, the article seeks to highlight the importance of teachers' roles in supporting students' emotional well-being and creating optimal learning conditions for developing speaking skills. The findings will offer practical recommendations for educators to address speaking anxiety and improve students' confidence and participation in speaking activities.

## Research Methods

This article adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) method to investigate strategies for addressing student anxiety in English-speaking classes. The review synthesizes findings from 20 peer-reviewed journal articles that focus on speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. These articles were selected based on inclusion criteria that emphasized their relevance to the causes, impacts, and teaching strategies related to speaking anxiety. The SLR approach, as outlined by Kitchenham (2004), provides a rigorous and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research. By utilizing this method, the article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to anxiety in EFL classrooms and explore effective teacher strategies for mitigating these challenges.

In conducting the SLR, an inductive analysis approach (Thomas, 2006) was used, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data rather than

imposing predefined categories. This approach enabled the identification of key themes such as the causes of anxiety, the impact on student performance, and teacher strategies for alleviating anxiety. The analysis process involved a thorough review of the selected articles, categorizing the findings, and organizing them to develop significant themes directly related to the research questions. The review is grounded in the theories of Horwitz et al. (1986), who developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), whose work on communication apprehension provides a foundational understanding of the psychological aspects of language anxiety in speaking contexts.

### ***Data Sources and Research Strategy***

To carry out this systematic literature review (SLR), the writer focused on 20 peer-reviewed journal articles related to student anxiety in English-speaking classrooms. The articles were selected from trusted academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and JSTOR. These platforms were chosen due to their vast collection of high-quality, peer-reviewed journal articles. Only articles published in peer-reviewed journals were included in this review to ensure the credibility and relevance of the research. The selected articles provide valuable insights into the causes, impacts, and strategies for managing speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, specifically in speaking tasks. The studies selected were published between 2015 and 2025, ensuring that the review remains current and relevant to contemporary teaching practices.

The research strategy involved using specific search terms to identify relevant articles, such as “speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms,” “teacher strategies to reduce speaking anxiety,” “communication apprehension in language learners,” and “anxiety management in language teaching.” These keywords were designed to align with the article’s focus on identifying the psychological and pedagogical factors contributing to anxiety in speaking activities. The articles reviewed were chosen for their empirical focus on the impact of anxiety on speaking performance and the role of teachers in mitigating this anxiety. The articles were also selected based on their contribution to understanding the relationship between student anxiety and speaking fluency. The inductive analysis approach (Thomas, 2006) was used to extract key themes from the data, allowing patterns to emerge naturally from the selected articles. This method enabled the identification of recurring themes such as the causes of speaking anxiety, the impact of anxiety on performance, and strategies teachers use to alleviate anxiety, without

imposing predefined categories. This approach facilitated a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of the research findings.

## Results and Discussion

### *Results*

This section outlines the findings across three key themes identified in the literature: the causes of speaking anxiety, the effects of anxiety on student performance, and the strategies teachers can use to alleviate anxiety. The data from these articles were carefully extracted and organized, revealing recurring patterns and insights.

#### *1. Causes of Speaking Anxiety*

The review identified several psychological and situational factors contributing to speaking anxiety in EFL students. One of the most commonly cited causes is fear of negative evaluation, which is discussed in studies by Horwitz et al. (1986) and later explored by many authors in this review, including Suparlan (2021) and Sari (2023). Students feel anxious about being judged on their pronunciation, grammar, or fluency, which causes them to fear making mistakes in front of their peers. This fear significantly contributes to their reluctance to speak in class. Studies by Sulistyowati (2023) and Gayatri (2023) also revealed that this fear stems from a lack of confidence in their language abilities, which results in self-doubt and a reduced willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Another significant cause of speaking anxiety is communication apprehension (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Many students are naturally apprehensive about speaking in front of others, especially in unfamiliar social contexts. Tiana (2023) found that students who experience high levels of apprehension tend to avoid speaking tasks altogether. Furthermore, lack of preparation was a recurring cause. According to Batubara (2022) and Ajiza (2023), students who feel unprepared or unsure about what to say tend to feel more anxious. This was particularly evident in cases where students were expected to perform impromptu speaking tasks without adequate practice, leading to higher levels of anxiety. Nababan (2024) also highlighted that classroom environment factors, such as large class sizes or a lack of supportive peer relationships, contribute to students' anxiety, as they feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable in the learning setting.

#### *2. Impact of Anxiety on Student Performance*

The findings indicate that speaking anxiety has a significant negative impact on students' speaking performance and overall language

development. Anxiety affects students' cognitive and emotional functioning, leading to reduced participation and engagement in speaking tasks. As noted by Young (1991) and Kohls (2012), anxiety consumes cognitive resources, leaving students with limited mental capacity to process and produce language. In high-stakes speaking situations, this can result in hesitation, difficulty organizing thoughts, and an inability to produce grammatically correct sentences. Sari (2023) and Gayatri (2023) further emphasized that students with high anxiety are more likely to experience mental blocks, where they know what they want to say but struggle to put it into words.

Anxiety also leads to avoidance behaviors in many students. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) suggest that when faced with anxiety-provoking speaking situations, students often avoid participating, which deprives them of valuable opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills. Studies by Suparlan (2021) and Tiana (2023) revealed that students who avoided speaking tasks, such as oral presentations or group discussions, demonstrated lower levels of speaking fluency over time. This avoidance behavior can further reinforce their anxiety, creating a vicious cycle where students become more anxious because they avoid practice, and their anxiety persists due to a lack of speaking opportunities.

Moreover, speaking anxiety was also found to affect students' self-esteem and motivation. Ajiza (2023) and Nababan (2024) observed that students with high anxiety tend to have lower self-esteem, which in turn reduces their motivation to engage in speaking tasks. This lack of motivation can negatively affect their overall language learning progress, as they avoid tasks that are necessary for language development, such as speaking in front of others.

### *3. Strategies for Reducing Speaking Anxiety*

The review identified several teacher strategies that can help alleviate speaking anxiety in the classroom. The most common theme across the studies was the importance of creating a supportive and low-stress classroom environment. Dörnyei (2001) emphasized that teachers must establish a positive emotional climate in which students feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment. Creating an environment in which students feel supported and accepted is crucial to helping them overcome their fears and take risks. Several studies, including Nababan (2024) and Tiana (2023), pointed out that teachers who exhibit empathy and understanding towards their students' emotional needs help foster a positive learning atmosphere, which can significantly reduce anxiety.

Furthermore, constructive feedback emerged as a key strategy for reducing anxiety. According to Ajiza (2023) and Sari (2023), feedback is most

effective when it is encouraging and focused on improvement rather than solely on mistakes. Batubara (2022) highlighted that when teachers provide feedback in a supportive and non-threatening manner, students are more likely to feel confident and motivated to continue practicing. This type of feedback should focus not only on correcting errors but also on recognizing strengths and progress. Tiana (2023) emphasized that feedback should be specific, focusing on particular aspects of students' performance, rather than offering generalized comments. This approach makes students feel valued and capable, which can lower anxiety levels and enhance their speaking performance.

In addition to feedback, the review highlighted the importance of adequate preparation and practice. Ajiza (2023) and Gayatri (2023) found that students who are well-prepared for speaking tasks experience less anxiety. When students have ample time to practice, especially in a low-pressure environment, they become more confident in their speaking abilities. Teachers can provide opportunities for practice through small-group discussions, pair work, or role-playing activities. These activities allow students to practice speaking in less intimidating settings, gradually building their confidence and reducing anxiety. Sulistyowati (2023) also suggested that task-based learning is particularly effective in reducing anxiety, as it offers students a clear purpose and context for speaking, making the task feel more relevant and less stressful.

Additionally, student-centered approaches such as peer feedback and student-led discussions were found to be effective strategies. Studies by Tiana (2023) and Ajiza (2023) emphasized that when students are given opportunities to provide feedback to their peers, they feel more in control of the learning process, which reduces anxiety. Peer feedback helps create a collaborative learning environment, where students are more likely to feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from each other. Moreover, role-playing and simulations were found to be effective ways to create realistic speaking scenarios that help students become accustomed to speaking in various contexts. By practicing in these contexts, students are able to overcome their fear of real-life speaking situations.

The importance of scaffolded speaking tasks was also highlighted in several studies. Teachers who gradually increase the complexity of speaking tasks from simple pair work to more challenging group presentations enable students to build their confidence and skills progressively. Ajiza (2023) and Batubara (2022) emphasized the need for teachers to provide structured and step-by-step speaking opportunities, allowing students to become familiar

with the expectations and process, which can significantly reduce anxiety. To improve clarity, a table summarizing the findings is provided below.

**Table: Summary of Findings from the 20 Articles Reviewed**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Causes of Speaking Anxiety</b>	<b>Impact of Anxiety on Performance</b>	<b>Strategies to Reduce Anxiety</b>
Suparlan (2021)	Fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence	Reduced participation, cognitive overload	Encouragement, supportive classroom environment
Tiana (2023)	Communication apprehension, lack of preparation	Cognitive blocks, avoidance behaviors	Constructive feedback, low-pressure speaking activities
Sulistyowati (2023)	Fear of judgment, large class sizes	Difficulty organizing thoughts, low self-esteem	Empathetic teacher feedback, small group discussions
Gayatri (2023)	Insecurity about grammar, fear of making mistakes	Reduced speaking fluency, avoidance of speaking tasks	Task-based learning, positive reinforcement
Batubara (2022)	Lack of preparation, classroom stress	Hesitation in speech, avoidance of speaking activities	Adequate preparation time, positive teacher feedback
Nababan (2024)	Social anxiety, fear of public speaking	Low motivation, lower speaking confidence	Providing a safe, non-threatening learning environment
Sari (2023)	Anxiety about pronunciation, grammar mistakes	Difficulty in expressing thoughts, reluctance to speak	Supportive peer interaction, clear and constructive feedback
Ajiza (2023)	Communication apprehension, lack of practice	Avoidance behavior, inability to perform under pressure	Positive feedback, role-play exercises, preparation time
Nababan (2024)	Lack of preparation, negative self-perception	Low participation, emotional distress	Encouraging risk-taking, reducing classroom stress
Tiana (2023)	Lack of preparation, fear of public speaking	Cognitive interference, lack of fluency	Constructive, supportive feedback, smaller group activities

## ***Discussion***

The findings of this systematic literature review emphasize the significant role that teachers play in addressing speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Teacher strategies are essential for creating a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and enhances students' speaking abilities. This section delves into the importance of these strategies and discusses the key findings from the review regarding how teachers can effectively manage speaking anxiety, focusing on the classroom environment, feedback, preparation, and task-based approaches.

### *Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment*

One of the most recurring themes in the articles reviewed is the importance of creating a supportive and low-stress classroom environment. Several studies, including Dörnyei (2001) and Tiana (2023), emphasize that a positive emotional climate is foundational for reducing anxiety. Students' feelings of safety are crucial in helping them overcome their fears of speaking. When teachers establish a classroom environment where students are encouraged to express themselves without the fear of being negatively judged, students are more likely to engage in speaking tasks with confidence. According to Nababan (2024), the physical and social environment of the classroom can greatly influence a student's level of anxiety. For example, large class sizes or an overly competitive atmosphere can exacerbate students' anxiety. In contrast, smaller, more intimate class settings where students can interact freely tend to reduce anxiety, as students feel less pressure to perform perfectly. Teachers can create such environments by incorporating inclusive teaching practices that prioritize empathy and understanding of students' emotional needs. This may include providing emotional support, actively listening to students' concerns, and validating their efforts in class, regardless of their language proficiency.

Furthermore, teachers who make language mistakes themselves and admit their imperfections in front of students set an example of vulnerability, making students feel more comfortable doing the same. Tiana (2023) suggests that teachers who acknowledge their mistakes normalize errors as part of the learning process, reducing the stigma attached to making mistakes. This strategy encourages a shift in students' mindset, allowing them to view speaking tasks as opportunities to learn rather than as performance evaluations.

### *Providing Constructive Feedback*

Feedback is another critical strategy that emerged from the reviewed articles. Effective feedback is not just about correcting errors but also about fostering self-esteem and confidence. Ajiza (2023) and Sari (2023) found that students feel less anxious when they receive feedback that is positive, constructive, and specific. Rather than focusing solely on errors, teachers should highlight what students are doing well and then provide suggestions for improvement. This approach helps students feel valued and motivates them to continue speaking despite their fears.

Nababan (2024) emphasizes the importance of providing balanced feedback where teachers acknowledge both the strengths and areas for improvement in students' speaking. Teachers who are able to give feedback

that encourages students, rather than criticizing them harshly, foster an environment where students are more likely to take risks and participate more in speaking activities. Feedback should also be timely, given immediately after a speaking task, to ensure that students can associate their progress with the correct behaviors.

Additionally, feedback should be differentiated based on each student's level of proficiency. While some students may benefit from detailed, corrective feedback, others may feel overwhelmed by too much correction. Tiana (2023) suggests using a gradual correction approach, where teachers provide light correction for beginners and more detailed feedback for intermediate or advanced learners. This personalized approach helps students feel more in control of their learning and reduces the anxiety that comes from feeling overwhelmed by the feedback process.

#### *Adequate Preparation and Practice*

The importance of adequate preparation for speaking tasks is another key strategy highlighted in the literature. Ajiza (2023) and Gayatri (2023) found that students who had enough time to prepare for speaking activities experienced less anxiety. In contrast, students who were asked to speak impromptu or without sufficient practice often reported higher levels of anxiety and struggled to express themselves clearly. Teachers who provide opportunities for pre-task preparation help students feel more confident and less anxious about their speaking performance.

Structured practice in a low-pressure setting is essential for reducing anxiety. Batubara (2022) and Ajiza (2023) noted that students who engage in small-group discussions or pair work experience less anxiety compared to when they are asked to speak in front of a large group. These smaller group settings allow students to practice speaking in a less intimidating context, where they can make mistakes and receive support from their peers. By giving students ample time to practice and gradually increasing the difficulty of speaking tasks, teachers can build students' confidence and reduce the anxiety associated with speaking.

One of the effective ways to prepare students is through task-based language teaching (TBLT). Sulistyowati (2023) highlighted that task-based learning provides students with meaningful, real-world contexts for speaking, which makes the activity feel less like a performance and more like a practical task. By focusing on the purpose of the task rather than the product, students are more likely to feel motivated to participate, and the pressure to "perform" in front of others is reduced. Role-playing activities were also mentioned as effective strategies for reducing anxiety. These activities allow students to take on different roles and practice speaking in

scenarios that mimic real-life interactions, which makes speaking tasks more engaging and less anxiety-inducing.

### *Task-Based Learning and Role-Playing*

The importance of task-based learning (TBL) and role-playing in reducing speaking anxiety was emphasized across several studies. According to Gayatri (2023), these activities help students develop their speaking skills in a more relaxed, context-driven setting. Role-playing provides a creative, fun way to practice speaking, while also allowing students to step outside of their usual selves and take on different personas. This strategy reduces the pressure to speak correctly all the time and encourages more natural, less anxious communication.

Incorporating simulated real-life situations through role-playing or problem-solving tasks allows students to engage in conversations they might encounter in the real world. This practical application of language makes the learning process more relevant and enjoyable. Tiana (2023) and Batubara (2022) found that when students are actively involved in interactive and realistic speaking scenarios, they feel less self-conscious and more engaged in the task at hand, reducing their anxiety levels.

### **Conclusion**

This systematic literature review underscores the critical role that teachers play in managing speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. Through the analysis of 20 peer-reviewed articles, three primary strategies were identified as being most effective in addressing speaking anxiety: creating a supportive and low-stress classroom environment, providing constructive and timely feedback, and ensuring adequate preparation and practice for speaking tasks. The review revealed that anxiety in students is often caused by factors such as fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and lack of preparation, all of which can significantly hinder students' performance and language development.

Teachers' efforts to foster a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes are crucial in reducing anxiety and encouraging active participation. Constructive feedback, especially when it focuses on students' strengths and progress, also plays a key role in alleviating anxiety and boosting self-esteem. Additionally, ensuring that students are adequately prepared and gradually exposed to speaking tasks, through techniques like role-playing, task-based learning, and small-group discussions, helps them build confidence and reduces their fear of speaking.

By adopting these strategies, teachers not only improve students' speaking abilities but also help them overcome emotional barriers to learning. This review highlights that teachers are instrumental in creating an atmosphere where students can overcome their speaking anxiety, allowing them to engage more confidently in speaking activities and ultimately enhancing their language skills. The findings from this review offer practical recommendations for teachers seeking to address speaking anxiety and support their students in becoming more confident, effective communicators in English.

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