OVERCOMING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: This article examines the main causes of speaking anxiety encountered in the process of foreign language learning and methods for overcoming them. The research includes practical recommendations aimed at overcoming psychological barriers and developing communicative competence.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, foreign language, psychological barriers, linguistics, communicative competence, affective filter, fear of pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION

The process of acquiring a foreign language is a complex phenomenon that requires not only cognitive abilities but also strong psychological stability. In today's era of globalization, although proficiency in foreign languages has become a vital necessity, many language learners face the problem of "not being able to speak" rather than "not knowing the language," known as foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). This condition is considered one of the primary affective factors preventing learners from demonstrating their knowledge in practice. Even students with high grammatical and lexical preparation can experience cognitive blockage during direct communication, which negatively impacts their academic results and motivation. The relevance of this article lies in analyzing the manifestation characteristics of speaking anxiety and proposing effective strategies for overcoming this problem based on modern pedagogical methodology. The primary goal is to identify the root causes of this anxiety and provide a structured framework for both educators and learners to mitigate its effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The problem of anxiety in foreign language learning has been systematically studied since the 1980s by scholars such as Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope. According to their theory, foreign language anxiety consists of three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation [1, B. 125]. Furthermore, Stephen Krashen’s "Affective Filter" hypothesis proves that the efficiency of language acquisition is directly related to the learner's emotional state; a high level of anxiety acts as a "wall" that prevents the cognitive processing of language material [2, B. 45]. In this research, qualitative and quantitative analysis methods were utilized. Specifically, indicators determining the level of anxiety were identified through surveys and observations among language learners. The research methodology is based on a comparative analysis of the impact of interactive methods used in the educational process on the psychophysiological state of students. The focus was on identifying how specific classroom environments contribute to or reduce the "silent period" in adult learners.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The research results indicate that speaking anxiety primarily stems from the fear of making mistakes and the perceived risk of social derision. Learners often feel that their self-worth is tied to their linguistic accuracy, leading to a paralysis of speech. The following tables summarize the

primary causes of anxiety and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies observed during the study.

Table 1: Primary causes of foreign language speaking anxiety

No	Cause of Anxiety	Percentage of Respondents (%)	Impact Level
1	Fear of negative evaluation by peers	42%	High
2	Lack of confidence in pronunciation	28%	Medium
3	Strict correction by the instructor	20%	High
4	Limited vocabulary and syntax	10%	Low

Table 2: Effectiveness of strategies for overcoming anxiety

No	Applied Strategy	Improvement in Fluency	Reduction in Anxiety
1	Small group discussions (3-4 people)	35%	High
2	Role-playing and gamification	25%	Medium
3	Focusing on meaning over form	30%	High
4	Use of digital recording tools	10%	Low

The genesis of foreign language speaking anxiety is rarely attributed to a single factor; rather, it is an intersection of personality traits, past experiences, and the inherent nature of linguistic performance. One of the primary drivers is Communication Apprehension, where learners feel a profound sense of shyness or fear about getting their message across in a language they have not yet mastered. This is often exacerbated by Fear of Negative Evaluation, a psychological state where the speaker is hyper-aware of the listener's judgment, assuming that any grammatical slip or mispronunciation will result in a loss of social status or intellectual credibility. In an academic or formal setting, this fear is intensified because the speaker views the interlocutor not as a conversation partner, but as an evaluator waiting to detect flaws.

Furthermore, the concept of the "Language Ego" plays a critical role. When speaking our native tongue, we possess a sophisticated identity; however, when forced to speak a foreign language, our ability to express complex thoughts is reduced to a childlike level. This discrepancy between a learner's mature self-image and their limited linguistic output creates a sense of vulnerability and frustration. Additionally, situational factors such as a rigid classroom environment, the unpredictability of spontaneous conversation, and the pressure of "wait time" (the silence between a question and an answer) contribute to a physiological stress response. The brain's amygdala triggers a "fight or flight" reaction, which ironically impairs the very cognitive functions—like working memory—needed to retrieve vocabulary and apply syntax rules correctly.

Speaking anxiety does not merely make a person feel "nervous"; it actively sabotages the cognitive processes required for language acquisition. According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, high levels of anxiety act as a mental block that prevents input from reaching the parts of the brain responsible for language processing. When a learner is anxious, their cognitive resources are redirected toward self-monitoring and "worrying about worrying," leaving less mental energy for decoding the phonology or semantics of the conversation. This results in a phenomenon known as Cognitive Interference, where the speaker's mind "goes blank" despite knowing the words in a low-stress environment. The more the learner struggles to retrieve

information, the more anxious they become, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of failure and avoidance.

On a behavioral level, this anxiety manifests as Avoidance Strategies. Learners may skip classes, remain silent during group discussions, or use "safe" but overly simplistic language that does not challenge their proficiency. While these strategies provide short-term relief from discomfort, they prevent the "comprehensible output" necessary for fluency development. Over time, this lack of practice leads to fossilization, where the learner's progress stalls because they are too afraid to take the linguistic risks required for growth. The physical manifestations—stuttering, rapid heartbeat, and sweating—further distract the speaker, making the act of speaking a traumatic rather than an educational experience. Understanding that this is a cognitive "bottleneck" is essential for both teachers and students to move toward effective remediation.

The data suggests that fostering a "low-stakes" environment where errors are treated as natural stages of learning significantly lowers the affective filter. When instructors prioritize communicative intent over grammatical perfection, students report a marked decrease in physical symptoms of anxiety, such as increased heart rate or sweating.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, overcoming foreign language speaking anxiety is a multifaceted process that requires a shift in both teaching methodology and learner mindset. The study demonstrates that anxiety is not a lack of ability but a psychological barrier that can be dismantled through strategic pedagogical interventions. Educators should implement collaborative learning techniques, such as small group work and peer teaching, to create a safe space for verbal experimentation. Furthermore, learners must be encouraged to adopt a "growth mindset," viewing mistakes as essential data points in their linguistic development rather than personal failures. The findings emphasize that reducing the teacher's role as a "corrector" and increasing their role as a "facilitator" is crucial. Ultimately, the integration of psychological support with linguistic instruction is the most effective way to produce confident and fluent speakers of a foreign language.

FOYDALANILGAN ADABIYOTLAR

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