

## The Impact of Speaking Anxiety on the Development of Communication Skills

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**Abstract:** Language anxiety is a common phenomenon experienced by learners while learning a foreign language. Due to its significant impact on learners, language anxiety can lead to a decrease in motivation, overall decrease in language proficiency, and a lack of participation in classroom activities. The negative correlation between proficiency and speaking anxiety is a significant issue in language learning. Distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by anxiety is an emotional encounter any language learner could have. However, speaking anxiety makes language learners feel inhibited and does not allow them to perform their tasks effectively. This paper suggests some strategies to language learners that help them cope with their speaking anxieties.

**Keywords:** Speaking, Anxiety, Communication Skills, Language Learning

### 1. Introduction

Language anxiety can be briefly defined as fear-related emotions learners encounter while learning a foreign language. Spielberger (1983) defines anxiety as “an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension and worry and by activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (cited in Horwitz et. al. 1986, p.125). A great number of language learners experience anxiety in their learning process. Due to a state of apprehension or fear, language learners feel inhibited and cannot perform their tasks appropriately. According to Samimy and Tabuse (1992, p.379), “anxiety is a state of being uneasy, apprehensive or worried about what may happen; being concerned about a possible future event”. Foreign language anxiety is defined as “the subjective feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1993, p. 284). Language anxiety is a common phenomenon experienced by learners who are learning a foreign language. Although, most of the language learners are affected by anxiety, it usually occurs when learners are not proficient in the target language. Language anxiety can have significant effects on language learning. It can lead to a decrease in motivation, overall decrease in language proficiency, and a lack of participation in classroom activities. When learners are demotivated, learning does not take place.

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Speaking is both a productive and an interactive skill (Carter & Nunan, 2002); therefore, many language learners find it difficult to perform speaking tasks. Learners acquire speaking skills only if they interact with other people within the environment (Altun, Hussein, 2022). The use of the target language in interaction is one of the main goals in learning a foreign language (Zohoorian, Zeraatpishe, Khorrami, 2022). Speaking anxiety impedes the development of communication skills. Communication anxiety has a significant impact on language learning and it can create barriers to effective communication in the target language. This paper attempts to explore why language learners feel anxious or stressful in language learning settings and suggests some useful strategies for learners how to overcome speaking anxiety.

## 2. Literature Review

Foreign language anxiety is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p 128). Another definition came from MacIntyre (1998) who defined it as “the worry and negative reaction aroused when learning or using a second language”. These definitions made it clear that anxiety in language learning is a serious problem that hinder language development, thus; it should be overcome. Language learning can be a challenging task, especially for those who experience speaking anxiety.

In order language learners to convey their messages, communication skills hold an important place. Ur (1996) argues that speaking is the most important skill. Language is for communication; therefore, language learners should be able to use the target language in a skilful way. However, most learners are negatively affected from anxiety while speaking. In order language learners to convey their messages, communication skills hold an important place. Ur (1996) argues that speaking is the most important skill. Language is for communication; therefore, language learners should be able to use the target language in a skilful way.

It is also true that high levels of anxiety are a barrier for the development of communication skills. Allright and Baily (1991) state that “the more anxious learners are, the less likely they are to do well at speech skills” (p. 173). Anxiety can have a significant impact on language learners, as it hinders their ability to communicate effectively in the language they are trying to learn. Unless learners control their anxiety, they cannot stand a better chance of developing their proficiency.

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) stressing the correlation between language learning and anxiety argue that “language learning anxiety is related to how an individual reacts in a nervous manner when speaking in the second language”. Due to some challenges in language learning, learners are stressful at times and suffer from anxiety. In particular, speaking anxiety is one of the most serious challenges for language learners. One of the main causes of speaking anxiety in language learning is the fear of making mistakes. Many language learners worry about being judged by others or being perceived as unintelligent or incompetent. This fear can be particularly strong in cultures where making mistakes is considered taboo, as learners may feel pressure to speak flawlessly. However, the fear of making mistakes while speaking should not act as a barrier as it hinders communication. It goes without saying that making mistakes is a part of the learning process.

Another factor that contributes to speaking anxiety is a lack of confidence in one's language skills. This can be caused by various reasons such as limited exposure to the target language, inadequate practice, or negative feedback from others. When learners doubt their ability to communicate in the target language, they may become anxious and avoid speaking situations altogether. Additionally, learners' competence towards language learning is also viewed as a factor that can constitute anxiety. Spolsky (1998) argue that anxiety is interrelated with learners' aptitude, and their previous experience about foreign language learning. The negative correlation between proficiency and speaking anxiety is a significant issue in language learning. Distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by anxiety is an emotional encounter any language learner could have. Lucas et al., (2011), state that "foreign language learners ... equip themselves with learning strategies that would help them not only to learn the target language but also to cope with their language learning anxieties". With this in mind, it is essential for learners to deal with their anxiety. Overcoming speaking anxiety in language learning requires a proactive approach that involves addressing the root causes of the fear. Here are some strategies that can help learners manage their speaking anxiety:

**Practice regularly:** Practice is essential for developing confidence in speaking skills. Learners should aim to practice speaking in the target language regularly, even if it is with a language partner, tutor or through online platforms like language exchange apps. The more learners speak, the more they will become comfortable with the language, and the less anxious they will feel. To address speaking anxiety in language learning, it is important for learners to take steps to build their confidence and develop their communication skills. This can include practicing speaking and listening activities in a safe and supportive environment, such as with a language exchange partner or in a language learning group. Additionally, learners can work to improve their language proficiency through regular study and practice, which can help to build their confidence and reduce their anxiety.

**Focus on fluency, not accuracy:** It is very important to use the target language accurately, however, paying too much attention to grammatical rules while speaking causes worry and anxiety. Language learners may worry about their accent, grammar, or vocabulary use, and this can lead to feelings of self-doubt and anxiety. Although Vocabulary is very important for successful and meaningful communication (Bilgin & Bingol, 2022), learners should focus on communicating their message effectively, rather than worrying about making mistakes. Making mistakes is a natural part of language learning, and learners should embrace them as an opportunity to learn and improve. Additionally, learners who are not confident in their language abilities may struggle to engage in conversations or participate in group activities, which can further exacerbate their communication apprehension.

**Prepare for speaking situations:** If learners have some ideas what to say before they speak, they can experience less anxiety. It is helpful to prepare for speaking situations in advance, such as memorizing key phrases, practicing conversations, or rehearsing presentations. This can help learners feel more confident and prepared when they need to speak in the target language. Preparing for speaking situations in advance can greatly increase your confidence and effectiveness in communication. This preparation can also help you to feel more comfortable and focused and enables you to anticipate potential challenges or questions and prepare thoughtful responses.

**Gradual exposure:** Practice the language with a friend beforehand can motivate a learner for a stressful situation. Motivation plays an important role in the learning process (Celik, 2022; Mart, 2011; Mart,

2022). It is essential to start speaking in low-pressure situations, such as with close friends or language partners, before moving on to more challenging situations. Gradual exposure to speaking situations can help learners build confidence and reduce anxiety. If you're not accustomed to using the target language in everyday conversation, it's important to begin with low-pressure situations, such as speaking with close friends or language partners, before moving on to more challenging environments. Practicing with friends who are supportive and encouraging can help you gain confidence and fluency in the language. Language partners can also be a great resource for practicing speaking and receiving feedback on your progress. Once you feel comfortable speaking in low-pressure situations, you can gradually move on to more challenging environments.

**Positive self-talk:** Learners should practice positive self-talk, such as telling themselves that they can do it, or that mistakes are normal and part of the learning process. This can help build self-confidence and reduce anxiety. It is possible to say that learners with low self-esteem show a great amount of stress which can result in poor performance. When learners do not believe in their own abilities, they are not motivated to accomplish. Self-confidence is an essential component of successful language learning. It allows learners to take risks, make mistakes, and engage in authentic communication with others. When learners believe in their abilities to learn and use a new language, they are more likely to take on new challenges and persist in the face of difficulties. Building self-confidence in language learning can be achieved through regular practice, setting achievable goals, and receiving positive feedback and support from others. With self-confidence, language learners can overcome their fears and become confident and effective communicators in their target language.

**Seek support:** Receiving support from others while learning can contribute to a large extent. It can be helpful to seek support from others, such as language tutors or counselors, who can provide guidance and encouragement. Joining a language learning community or participating in language exchange programs can also help learners connect with others who share similar struggles. It is also important for language teachers and tutors to be aware of learners' communication apprehension and to provide support and guidance as needed. Teachers can create a positive and supportive learning environment that encourages learners to take risks and make mistakes and can provide feedback and constructive criticism in a way that is supportive and non-judgmental.

### **3. Conclusion**

Speaking anxiety can be a significant barrier to language learning, but it is possible to overcome it with the right approach. The fear of using the language orally is quite common in language learning but learners should focus on regular practice, gradual exposure, positive self-talk, and seeking support from others to overcome this fear. By embracing mistakes as an opportunity to learn and building self-confidence, learners can reduce their anxiety and become more effective communicators in the target language. Needless to say, language is for communication; thus, it is very important for language learners to convey their messages effectively in the target language. Learners can encounter anxiety and fear while speaking; however, with the right support and guidance, learners can overcome their anxiety and become confident and effective communicators in their target language.

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