

Educational sciences: speaking anxiety

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Abstract

The ability to speak English fluently is an essential skill that expands students’ professional opportunities. Many university students face *speaking anxiety*, which creates psychological barriers during oral communication. This article explores the main causes and difficulties of speaking anxiety and presents effective pedagogical strategies, such as shadowing, pair work, and short self-speaking practice. The discussion is based on the author’s personal experience and highlights methods that help students speak English more confidently and fluently.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, English language learning, university students, shadowing technique, pedagogical methods, oral communication, confidence building

In today’s globalized world, the ability to speak English fluently is considered one of the essential competencies that expand students’ professional opportunities. However, many

university students encounter mental barriers when speaking English, including psychological obstacles, anxiety, and lack of confidence. This phenomenon is commonly referred to in academic literature as *speaking anxiety* or *speech anxiety*. I have personally experienced such situations.

During my first year, I often felt very nervous speaking English in front of others and sometimes could not express my thoughts clearly. When asked a question, I frequently needed time to organize my ideas and was afraid of making mistakes. Speaking in front of the entire class particularly increased my anxiety, sometimes causing me to stop suddenly or mix up words. These experiences demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a real and widespread issue among students and directly influenced my choice of this topic.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the causes and main difficulties of speaking barriers among university students and to propose effective pedagogical strategies to reduce speaking anxiety. Additionally, I describe the effectiveness of these strategies based on my personal experience.

Definition and Impact of Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is a combination of feelings of insecurity, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and difficulty expressing one's thoughts. This phenomenon not only slows the development of speaking skills but also limits students' ability to use vocabulary confidently.

Research identifies three main factors causing speaking anxiety:

1. *Linguistic insecurity* – limited vocabulary, inability to use it correctly, and fear of grammatical mistakes.
2. *Psychological factors* – shyness when speaking in public and fear of negative judgment.
3. *Learning environment* – fear of excessive criticism, lack of teacher support, a critical group atmosphere, or worries about what more knowledgeable students might think.

Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety in Higher Education

Even after years of studying English, many university students cannot speak fluently. Common behaviors during lessons include:

- Avoiding answering or hesitating for a long time;
- Responding with very short sentences;
- Avoiding eye contact;
- Repeating themselves and using filler words such as “um” or “mmm”;
- Stopping mid-sentence after making a mistake and failing to fully express their ideas.

Such behaviors limit students' language experience, reduce confidence in using English, and create barriers in communication. Therefore, it is essential to implement systematic methods to reduce speaking anxiety.

Effective Methods for Reducing Speaking Anxiety

The methods described below are suitable for higher education and significantly helped me speak English more confidently in a university environment.

Shadowing Technique

One of the most effective ways to improve speaking skills is shadowing. Shadowing involves immediately repeating what is heard in an audio or video material without pausing, matching the speaker's pace, intonation, and emotion. Students can choose a favorite cartoon or movie. Repeating characters' lines with appropriate emotion enhances intonation, stress, and naturalness of speech. Shadowing can also be applied to interviews with famous people.

In my experience, I followed these steps:

1. *Select a short interview (1-2 minutes)* - short clips are easier to remember and repeat.
2. *Watch the video fully first* - to grasp the general meaning.
3. *Repeat sentences in segments* - pause 3-5 seconds after each sentence and repeat it, imitating the speaker's emotion and intonation. After several repetitions, try repeating along with the speaker without pausing.

Additionally, recording one's own voice and comparing it to the original helps identify errors and improve pronunciation. This method allows students to practice speaking in realistic contexts and adapt it according to personal interests. In my case, shadowing was the most effective technique for reducing speaking anxiety.

Pair Work

Pair work creates a safe environment in which students can freely express their thoughts. Speaking to one person is much easier than addressing the whole class. This practice can be done with a friend, sibling, or any English-speaking partner and is especially effective for beginner and intermediate learners.

Short Self-Speaking Practice

Another useful method is giving short daily speeches about one's day or experiences, lasting 30-60 seconds. Daily practice builds confidence and demonstrates that speaking English is not as difficult as it may seem. Mini-presentations, storytelling, or task descriptions allow gradual development without pressure. Any topic can be chosen, such as a favorite movie or daily activities. You can add the **mirror technique** to your practice. You look at yourself and tell a

story while looking into the mirror. This can help you overcome your fear of speaking in front of an audience and through this, you can see how you look when you speak. The effectiveness of this technique has been proven through the research and experience of many scholars

Speaking anxiety is one of the most common challenges in learning English, but effective solutions exist. As discussed, it affects not only speaking ability but also overall motivation for language learning. With appropriate strategies, anxiety can be significantly reduced or eliminated. These approaches enable students to speak English fluently and confidently, which is one of the key competencies in today's labor market.

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