STUDENTS FEEL NERVOUS DURING SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: Speaking is not easy for many students. They often feel nervous when they have to speak English in class. This study looks at why students feel this way and what teachers can do to help them. The research was done with Grade 7 students in a state school in Namangan, Uzbekistan. The teacher collected information by watching the class, asking students questions, and writing notes. The results showed four main reasons why students feel nervous. The biggest reason was fear of being judged - 35% of students worried about what their teacher and classmates would think. Next, 25% were afraid of bad reactions from friends. About 20% said they did not practice speaking enough, and 20% felt stressed when the teacher corrected them too often. To help students, the teacher used pair work, group activities, role-plays, games, and kind feedback. After these changes, students started to speak more. They talked longer and felt less nervous. This study shows that students feel better when the classroom is a safe and friendly place. Teachers should use fun activities and give positive support to help students speak with more confidence.

Keywords: speaking anxiety; EFL; nervous; confidence; action research; strategies; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Speaking in front of others is hard for many students. It is different from writing or reading. When students speak, they have no time to think or change their words. For many English learners in Uzbekistan, this is very scary. Even students who know English well sometimes do not speak in class. I saw this problem in my first

week of teaching practice. Some students had studied English for many years. But they were very quiet during speaking activities. When I asked a question, many students looked down or gave only one short answer. At first I thought they did not know the words. But then I understood. The problem was not grammar or vocabulary. The problem was fear. This made me want to find out more. So I did an action research study. My main question was: why do students feel nervous when they speak, and how can a teacher help? I used four steps: Plan, Act, Observe, and Reflect. These steps helped me find the problem, try new ideas, watch what happened, and think about the results.

2. My Teaching Context

I did this research at a state school in Namangan, Uzbekistan. The class was Grade 7. I am a third-year student at the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages named after Is'hakhan Ibrat. This research was part of my teaching practice. The students in this class started learning English in Grade 1. But they did not speak much in class. Before my research, lessons were mostly teacher-centered. The teacher talked a lot. Students did not get many chances to speak. When they did speak, it was short and simple. I thought students felt nervous because they were afraid of making mistakes. They did not want classmates or the teacher to think badly of them. I talked to other teachers too. They said speaking anxiety is very common. They told me that teenagers care a lot about what others think.

II. Literature Review

Dewaele and MacIntyre[1] say that anxiety and enjoyment are two opposite feelings in language learning. When students feel anxiety, they do not want to speak. When they enjoy learning, they try to speak more and take small risks. The classroom can change which feeling is stronger.

[1] Dewaele, J. M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety: The right and left feet of the language learner. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237–274.

Tsiplakides and Keramida[2] explain that many students are afraid of making mistakes. They think mistakes are embarrassing. This often happens when teachers correct errors immediately in front of others. Because of this, students speak less. Ozdemir and Karaoglu[3] also found that students are afraid of what other classmates may think. Even if classmates are not rude, students still feel shy and avoid speaking English. Al-Hebaishi[4] shows that students do not get enough speaking practice in class. In many lessons, students speak only once or twice. This is not enough to become fluent or confident. Harmer[5] says that if teachers correct every mistake immediately, students focus more on accuracy than communication. This makes them afraid to speak. If feedback is given later, students feel more comfortable and speak more. Khajavy et al.[6] found that group work helps students feel less nervous. Small groups are safer than speaking in front of the whole class. Students feel more relaxed and speak more in groups. These studies show that anxiety, fear of mistakes, and lack of practice make students avoid speaking. Group work and careful feedback can help students feel more confident.

III. Research Questions

This study was guided by three questions:

1) Why do students feel nervous when speaking?
2) How does teacher feedback affect students' confidence?
3) How do peers' reactions influence students' confidence?

[2] Tsiplakides, I., & Keramida, A. (2022). Helping students overcome speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom. *English Language Teaching Journal, 76*(1), 1–10.
[3] Ozdemir, E., & Karaoglu, B. (2021). Peer influence and speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 31*(4), 512–526.
[4] Al-Hebaishi, S. M. (2022). Classroom interaction and speaking practice in EFL learning environments. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 13*(2), 45–58.
[5] Harmer, J. (2022). *The practice of English language teaching* (6th ed.). Pearson.
[6] Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Barabadi, E. (2018). Role of foreign language enjoyment and classroom environment in foreign language anxiety. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 47*(3), 1–14.

IV..Exploratory Phase

1.Methods of Data Collection

Three tools were used to collect data throughout the study:

a) My own written reflection

After each lesson, I wrote short notes about what went well and what problems appeared. These notes helped me track students' progress, their participation, and changes

b) Responses to questionnaire

Short questionnaires were given to students before and after the intervention. They were written in both English and Uzbek. The questionnaires included questions about students' feelings when speaking, the types of activities they prefer, and their own confidence in speaking English.

c) Classroom observation

These observations were carried out in all lessons. I monitored how many students participated in speaking activities, what language they used (English or Uzbek), and how active they were in group work compared to individual tasks. This also helped me identify signs of speaking anxiety during classroom activities.

V. Exploratory Research Findings

Data collected during the exploratory phase showed four main causes of speaking anxiety. These results are shown in the pie chart below.

Table 1. Main Causes of Speaking Anxiety

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Fear of being judged by peers or teacher	Most common	35%
Negative peer reactions during speaking	Frequent	25%
Lack of speaking practice opportunities	Common	20%
Pressure from teacher corrections	Common	20%

Source: classroom observation and questionnaire data

Fear of being judged was the main cause of speaking anxiety (35%). Students felt very embarrassed when they made mistakes in front of others. Many of them preferred not to speak rather than risk being wrong. Negative peer reactions (25%) were also an important factor. Students were afraid of what their classmates might think, even though in reality classmates were usually not unkind. Lack of practice (20%) was another reason. Most students had only a few chances to speak during lessons, so they did not feel confident. Teacher correction style (20%) also affected students. They felt more nervous when mistakes were corrected immediately. They felt better when correction was given after speaking. During informal interviews, students said they wanted more practice with friends, easier and interesting topics, and more encouragement instead of immediate correction.

VI. Action Plan

Based on the findings, an eight-week action plan was implemented to create a more supportive classroom environment and increase low-anxiety speaking practice. The plan followed the action research cycle: Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect.

a. Pair and Group Work

Whole-class question-and-answer activities were reduced and replaced with pair and small group work. Students first practiced with a partner or in a group before speaking in front of the whole class. This helped them feel safer and less nervous.

b. Role-plays and Games

Role-play activities and communicative games were added in every other lesson. Students could speak as a character or play a game, so they felt less pressure and more students started to participate.

c. Interactive Teaching Methods

Think-pair-share activities were used regularly. Students had time to think and discuss before speaking. Topics were chosen from students' daily life and interests, which made speaking easier and more engaging.

d. Teacher Modelling and Positive Feedback

The teacher showed that making mistakes is normal by sometimes using imperfect language. Errors were corrected after students finished speaking, not during speaking. More focus was given to encouragement and effort, which helped improve classroom confidence over time.

VII. Results

After eight weeks, clear improvements were observed in all four areas identified in the exploratory phase.

Table 2. Students' Performance Before and After Intervention

Indicator	Before	After
Voluntary speaking per lesson	2-3 students	8-10 students
Sentence length	Short, hesitant	Longer, complete

Indicator	Before	After
Frequency of long pauses	Very frequent	Noticeably reduced
Pair and group task participation	Partial	Nearly all students
Confidence in games and role-plays	Low	Significantly higher

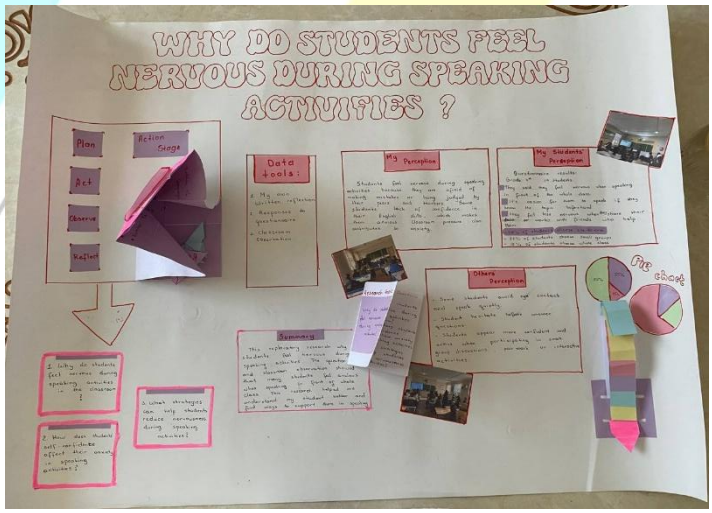
Source: classroom observation data

Students who were previously silent began to take part in group discussions. Some even showed leadership in group tasks. In the post-intervention questionnaires, most students said they felt less nervous when speaking. They explained that practicing with classmates first and the teacher not correcting them in an embarrassing way were the most helpful changes.

VIII. Discussion of Findings

The findings show that the main reason students did not speak was emotional, not language ability. Students had enough basic English to take part in simple tasks, but they were afraid of being judged by the teacher and their classmates. This idea is supported by previous studies, which also found that fear of making mistakes and social pressure often stop students from speaking. It shows that feelings can be more important than language level in speaking activities. Pair and group work helped students feel safer because the risk of making mistakes was shared with others. Role-plays also helped because students could speak as a character, so they felt less pressure. Giving feedback after speaking and focusing on communication instead of perfection helped students become more confident and willing to speak.

However, outside factors such as exam pressure from parents still affected students. This problem cannot be fully solved only in the classroom. The study also had some limitations, such as a small number of students, no comparison group, and a short time period.



IX. Conclusion

1.What I Learned

This study showed that students' speaking confidence depends more on feelings than on language knowledge. Students are not silent because they cannot speak, but because they are afraid. When mistakes are accepted, students speak more. This action research changed my view of teaching. At first, I focused on what to teach. Later, I understood that how students feel is also very important.

2. Challenges

The main challenges were balancing curriculum demands with time for speaking activities, managing noise during group work, and helping the most anxious students start speaking. Some students were still shy by the end of the study. Improving speaking confidence takes time, and eight weeks is not enough to fully change long-term habits. However, it is enough to begin progress.

References

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