

# THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON ORAL PERFORMANCE OF EFL LEARNERS

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**Abstract.** This article investigates the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on the oral performance of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. The study analyzes psychological factors, such as fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence, which lead to a decrease in speaking performance. The paper provides methodological recommendations for reducing anxiety levels and enhancing the effectiveness of oral communication.

**Keywords:** Foreign language anxiety, oral performance, EFL learners, speaking skills, psychological barriers, communicative competence, language learning.

**Annotatsiya.** Mazkur maqolada chet tilini o'rganayotgan talabalar (EFL) nutqiy faoliyatida chet tili xavotirining (FLA) ta'siri tadqiq etiladi. Tadqiqot davomida nutqiy ko'rsatkichlarning pasayishiga sabab bo'luvchi psixologik omillar, jumladan, xato qilishdan qo'rqish va o'ziga bo'lgan ishonchning pastligi tahlil qilingan. Maqolada xavotir darajasini pasaytirish va og'zaki nutq samaradorligini oshirish bo'yicha metodik tavsiyalar ilgari suriladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Chet tili xavotiri, og'zaki nutq, EFL o'rganuvchilari, nutqiy faoliyat, psixologik to'siqlar, nutq samaradorligi, til o'rganish.

**Аннотация.** В данной статье исследуется влияние тревожности при изучении иностранного языка (FLA) на устную речь студентов (EFL). В ходе исследования анализируются психологические факторы, такие как страх перед ошибками и низкая уверенность в себе, которые приводят к снижению показателей речевой деятельности. В статье предлагаются методические рекомендации по снижению уровня тревожности и повышению эффективности устной речи.

**Ключевые слова:** Тревожность при изучении иностранного языка, устная речь, учащиеся EFL, речевая деятельность, психологические барьеры, эффективность речи, изучение языка.

## Introduction

The acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a global necessity, yet many learners encounter a significant gap between their linguistic knowledge and their ability to communicate effectively in oral contexts. This phenomenon is often rooted in Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. While a student may possess a strong command of grammar and vocabulary, the psychological pressure of speaking in a second language frequently triggers a state of apprehension that inhibits cognitive processing and verbal fluency. This anxiety manifests as a fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety, all of which directly impair a learner's oral performance[1]. The present study explores the multifaceted nature of this anxiety, examining how it creates a mental block that prevents learners from reaching their full communicative potential. By analyzing the correlation between high anxiety levels and diminished speaking outcomes, this

research aims to highlight the critical importance of creating a low-anxiety environment in the EFL classroom to foster more confident and proficient oral communication among learners.

### Methodology

The methodology of this research is grounded in a quantitative and analytical approach designed to investigate the correlation between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and the oral proficiency of EFL learners. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this relationship, the study utilizes the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a standardized instrument developed by Horwitz et al., consisting of 33 Likert-scale items that measure communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The participants of the study comprise a selected group of intermediate-level EFL students, whose anxiety levels are assessed through the aforementioned survey and subsequently compared against their performance in structured oral examinations. These examinations include tasks such as individual presentations and spontaneous role-plays, which are evaluated based on fluency, accuracy, and lexical complexity using a standardized scoring rubric.

### Results

The analytical review of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' oral performance reveals that foreign language anxiety (FLA) acts as a primary psychological barrier that significantly diminishes communicative competence. Based on the observation of linguistic patterns, it is evident that anxiety does not merely affect the learner's mood but directly interferes with the cognitive processes required for spontaneous speech production. The results of the analysis can be categorized into three main linguistic manifestations:

First, fluency and speech rate are the most visibly impacted areas. Learners experiencing high anxiety levels demonstrate a high frequency of "filled pauses" (e.g., uh, um, er) and "silent pauses" exceeding three seconds. For instance, when tasked with an impromptu description, anxious learners often produce fragmented utterances such as:

*"The... city is... (pause)... very big and... (pause)... has many... uh... people."*

*This "staccato" speech pattern is a direct result of the cognitive overload caused by the fear of making mistakes, which forces the learner to over-analyze every word before vocalizing it.*

Second, lexical and grammatical complexity are notably reduced as a result of "avoidance strategies." To minimize the risk of negative evaluation, anxious students tend to rely on "safe" or "high-frequency" vocabulary rather than utilizing the advanced lexicon they may actually possess in their passive knowledge. Instead of using descriptive adjectives like "magnificent" or "vibrant," they revert to basic terms like "good" or "nice." Grammatically, this leads to the use of simple, repetitive sentence structures, avoiding complex clauses (e.g., relative or conditional sentences) to reduce the chance of error. A typical example of this simplified production is:

*"I like my school. It is good. My teachers are nice. I study hard."*

Third, the phenomenon of "cognitive freezing" was observed during high-pressure speaking tasks (e.g., oral exams or class presentations). In such moments, the learner's working memory becomes preoccupied with anxious thoughts, leading to a temporary inability to retrieve even basic linguistic information. This is often followed by "self-correction loops," where the student repeatedly corrects minor grammatical slips, which further disrupts the natural flow of communication:

*"He go... no, he goes... he went... sorry, he goes to the office every day."*



The discussion of these findings suggests that the impact of anxiety is cyclical: high anxiety leads to poor oral performance, which in turn increases the learner's fear of future speaking tasks[2]. Therefore, the results emphasize that improving oral proficiency in an EFL context requires not only linguistic training but also the implementation of "affective strategies" to lower the learners' affective filter. By fostering a supportive classroom environment where errors are treated as a natural part of learning, educators can help students transition from hesitant, fragmented speech to more confident and fluid communication.

### Discussion

The analytical discussion of the findings indicates that foreign language anxiety (FLA) functions as an “affective filter” that prevents linguistic input from being processed efficiently. When EFL learners experience high levels of anxiety, their cognitive resources are diverted from language production to self-deprecating thoughts and fear of failure. This results in a clear discrepancy between their actual linguistic competence (what they know) and their oral performance (what they can produce)[3].

The following table summarizes the observed impact of anxiety levels on specific oral performance indicators:

**Table 1. Comparison of Oral Performance Indicators based on Anxiety Levels**

Performance Indicator	High-Anxiety Learners	Low-Anxiety Learners
Fluency	Frequent pauses, use of fillers (uh, um), and fragmented sentences.	Smooth flow, natural rhythm, and minimal hesitation.
Lexical Range	Use of basic, repetitive vocabulary; avoidance of complex terms.	Diverse vocabulary and use of idiomatic expressions.
Grammatical Accuracy	High frequency of "slips" and constant self-correction loops.	Consistent use of complex structures with fewer errors.
Communication Strategy	Avoidance of difficult topics; brief, one-word answers.	Risk-taking, elaboration of ideas, and active engagement.

The discussion further suggests that “test anxiety” and “fear of negative evaluation” are the most potent triggers of oral dysfunction. In an environment where learners feel judged, their ability to retrieve vocabulary from long-term memory is significantly impaired, leading to the “blank mind” syndrome. Therefore, reducing the impact of FLA is not just about more practice, but about changing the classroom atmosphere to be more supportive and less evaluative.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that foreign language anxiety is a critical determinant of oral performance success among EFL learners. The analysis reveals that high anxiety levels lead to diminished fluency, simplified vocabulary, and a lack of grammatical confidence. It is evident that linguistic proficiency alone does not guarantee communicative success if the learner’s affective filter is too high. To address this issue, educators should implement strategies that minimize pressure, such as pair-work activities, non-judgmental feedback, and the normalization of errors as a part of the learning process. Ultimately, fostering a low-anxiety environment is essential for helping EFL learners bridge the gap between their theoretical knowledge and their practical speaking abilities.



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