

Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: Case of Second-Year LMD Students at University of Ghardaia, Algeria

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Received: 07-01-2023 Accepted: 04-06-2023 Published: 31-12-2023

Abstract:

This study attempts to investigate the sources of provoking English speaking anxiety among university students. The data were collected through a close-ended questionnaire completed by 40 students randomly selected from the Department of English at University of Ghardaia during the academic year 2021 – 2022. The findings reveal that all Second Year (LMD) EFL Students experience some level of speech anxiety, even those who denied the fact of being anxious when it is needed to speak in class. Moreover, the main common anxiety-provoking situations for the students were performing in front of the classmates, giving an oral presentation and talking to teachers .

The main reasons that led students to be anxious when they speak English in classrooms include the fear of being the center of attention, the lack of preparation, immediate error correction, and comparing oneself with other classmates. The paper concludes with some pedagogical implications for English language instructors who wish to reduce speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, LMD students, gender, EFL, higher education

1. Introduction

Speaking skills are very important for the learners of any language. For a smooth running of any system, the speakers of a language need to be especially and purposefully trained in the skill of speaking. In order to become a well-rounded communicator, one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, but the ability to speak skillfully, provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. The joy of sharing one's ideas with others is immense. (Kadamovna, 2021).

Against this background, foreign language learners do their best to improve this productive skill in many ways. They perform orally in front of their classmates, make oral presentations and take part in group discussion. Some of these activities require them to rehearse, articulate and deliver information in an appropriate and clear fashion.

However, communication in a foreign language can be a source of stress for some learners who often express feelings of stress, nervousness or anxiety while learning to speak the target language. According to Young (1990) speaking activities requiring in front of class and on spot performance produce the most anxiety from the students' perspective and learners experience more anxiety over speaking than other language skills.

Thus, teaching speaking skills is deemed as a rather demanding task for language teachers to achieve as compared to other language skills, and for students, speaking is a highly anxiety provoking situation.

This research therefore aims to examine the sources of speaking anxiety experienced by second-year LMD students of English at University of Ghardaia and their coping strategies with the anxiety-provoking factors. The significance of the study is to help students make an effort to overcome speaking-in-class anxiety and English instructors create a low-anxiety classroom.

2. Literature Review one

A growing number of studies have investigated the issue of students' speaking anxiety in the field of language learning in an attempt to understand the cause of emotional states which link to why students cannot perform well either in foreign language or second language in the classroom.

One of the early examinations belongs to Young (1990) who developed a questionnaire on the related issue of foreign language speaking anxiety and sent them out to 135 university students and 109 high school learners. The results revealed that the challenge was not speaking in the foreign language but mainly speaking in front of class and teachers. A number of other studies have subsequently been conducted. To examine the relationship between second language oral performance and anxiety levels, Woodrow (2006) conducted a study among 275 advanced level English for academic purposes learners. The results pointed at the negative relationship between speaking performance and anxiety levels. The researcher reported oral presentations, role-plays, group discussions and answering teachers' questions as in-class anxiety sources and having interaction with native speakers, talking with more than one native speaker and answering their questions as the out-of-class anxiety sources. The study also indicated that positive thinking, compensation, relaxation techniques and effort to develop language skills as ways to cope with speaking anxiety. Moreover, Ay (2010) found that students reported anxiety in an advanced level in productive skills. The participants of the study reported that their anxiety occurs most when they are required to speak without being prepared in advance.

In addition, several studies have looked into the relationship between speaking anxiety and gender related differences. Tadjouri (2016) examined second year EFL students at Abu Bekr Belkaid University regarding the issue of communication apprehension and found that females were more anxious to speak than males so that she confirmed that gender was a parameter that affected the level of speech anxiety. Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) investigated the impact of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety and motivation and reported that females were more anxious than males while speaking English in the class .

Research into the role of teacher support in reducing speaking anxiety among university students has also gained some attention among researchers. The teacher could organize some classroom tasks that can be implemented to decrease anxiety, such as doing projects, establishing a learning community, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. Providing indirect correction, accepting the need for self-growth protection, employing teacher immediacy, and praising are also effective strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom. (Tsiplakides &

Keramida, 2009). Furthermore, teacher support is crucial for students to be self-motivated in doing their school work (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

Based on a review of the studies above, it becomes obvious that speaking anxiety is a global problem that a significant number of students experience more or less severely. It is not linked to nationality or race, but does seem to have many different causes, according to the outcomes of studies conducted by several researchers. The present study attempts to examine the sources of speaking anxiety experienced by second-year LMD students of English at University of Ghardaia and their coping strategies with the anxiety-provoking factors. Based on these objectives, four research questions were formulated:

- 1- What are the speaking situations that make second-year LMD students of English at University of Ghardaia anxious to speak?
- 2- What are the causes that make second-year LMD students anxious to speak?
- 3- What are some coping strategies with the anxiety-provoking factors used by students?
- 4- Is gender a parameter that affects the level of anxiety when speaking?

. Research Methodology.3

This is The present study aims to shed light on foreign language speaking anxiety among second-year LMD students of English at University of Ghardaia, Algeria. A total of 40 volunteer student participants were recruited for this study, 09 males (22.5%) and 31 females (77.5%). The participants were informed of the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was then distributed during the academic year 2021 - 2022 .

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by a questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data were analyzed via content analysis.

The questionnaire used for the present study had four parts of questions. First, a single question to identify the gender of respondents, which would help interpret the data, second, 03 questions to know if second year EFL students feel anxious in speaking situations and under which situations,

three, 06 questions to find out the main causes that lead second year EFL students to be anxious while speaking as well as to discover if those reasons push them to continue the speaking task or to stop speaking, and, fourth, 03 questions to know students' attitudes toward the issue of speaking anxiety and to end up with some strategies suggested by the respondents to cope with it.

4. Discussion and analysis of results

.1 Part One: Personal Information⁴

.1.1 Question One: Students' gender⁴

Before answering the questions of the survey, it was considered necessary to identify the gender of students completing the questionnaire since this latter was an important parameter for the researcher to know if females are more .anxious to speak than males or not

Thirty-three of students (77.5%) who completed the questionnaire were .females, while nine of them (22.5%) were males

This is quite important, as it indicates that there are a significant number of females in the English department compared with the number of males and .reflects females' interest in learning foreign languages

4.2Part two: Situations of Speaking Anxiety

.2.1 Question Two: Students' awareness of speech anxiety⁴

This question was set to find out whether there was any anxiety among second year EFL students when speaking English as a foreign language in the classroom. In this regard, twenty seven of the students (67.5%) reported that they felt anxious when it is needed to speak, while thirteen of them (32.5%) claimed that they didn't feel anxious to speak .

Then, from the nine males, five of them reported that they felt anxious to speak English in class and four of them claimed that they did not. From the thirty three females, twenty two of them said that they felt anxious and nine of them said 'no .'

4. 2.2 Question Three: Speaking anxiety situations

The next question was about the situations that make students anxious to speak. Here students could select one or more of the choices provided (7 closed answers. (

There were several categories of anxiety-provoking situations found in the obtained data. Performing in front of the classmates and giving an oral presentation were the two most common anxiety-provoking situations for the students (55% .(

Other anxiety-provoking situations include when talking to teachers (40%), in oral tests (37.5%) and when there is a stranger in class (32.5%).(

Talking in front of the other gender (27.5%) and contributing in formal discussions (12.5%) were less common anxiety-provoking situations.

It should be noted here that some results are consistent to some extent with that of Tadjouri (2016) whose findings reveal that giving an oral presentation was among the most common anxiety-provoking situations for the students (50%) while talking in front of the other gender was among the less common anxiety-provoking situations (13.33%).(

Then from the nine boys, six boys (66.66%) confirmed that they experienced speaking anxiety when performing in front of their classmates, four of them (44.44%) felt anxious in oral presentations. Two males (22.22%) were anxious while talking to their teachers, three of them (33.33%) claimed that they experienced anxiety in oral tests, three of them (33.33%) felt anxious when there is a stranger in class, four of them (44.44%) were anxious when talking in front of the other gender, and no male (00%) felt anxious while contributing in formal discussions.

From the thirty-one number of females, sixteen females (51.61%) confirmed that they experienced speaking anxiety when performing in front of their classmates, eighteen of them (58.06%) felt anxious in oral presentations. Fourteen females (45.16%) were anxious while talking to their teachers, twelve of them (38.70%) claimed that they experienced anxiety in oral tests, ten of them (32.25%) felt anxious when there is a stranger in class, seven of them (22.58%) were anxious when talking in front of the other gender, and five of them (16.12%) felt anxious while contributing in formal discussions.

4.2.3 Question Four: Other situations of speaking anxiety

This question aimed to find out the other situations that the researcher did not mention in the previous question and that make students anxious to speak.

Five students (females) confirmed that they experience some level of speech anxiety when they are surprised at a question to which they have no answer, five students (four females and one male) felt anxious when the listeners stare at them as this distracts their minds, and makes it harder to put words together. Two students (one female and one male) claimed that they were anxious when they cannot make heads or tails of the topic discussed. Two other students (females) experience some sort of speech anxiety when they talking with advanced English speakers, and one student (female) felt anxious when mispronouncing some words .

4.3 Part Three: Causes of speaking anxiety

4.3.1 Question Five: Speaking Anxiety Causes

The ensuing question asked students to determine the reason(s) for their anxiety when speaking in class. They were given 4 choices, namely 4 different causes of speaking anxiety, to choose from.

Twenty-two of the students (55%) were anxious due to the fear of being the center of attention, sixteen (40%) felt anxious due to the lack of preparation, thirteen (32.5%) felt anxious to speak English because of the lack of linguistic competence, and nine (22.5%) were anxious due to the lack of motivation.

The fact that the students viewed fear of being the center of attention as the first cause of anxiety for them to speak English is interesting. This finding is consistent with that of Louise Katz (2000) who pointed out that the most common form of Social Phobia is public speaking anxiety and that students experiencing public speaking anxiety say they get upset thinking about others looking at them or being the center of attention.

Moreover, lack of preparation was viewed by (40%) of the students as a second major cause of anxiety. A reasonable explanation for this is that students cannot express their own ideas clearly and with confidence without advance preparation. This is true according to Suleimenova (2013) who

wrote that experiencing anxiety in the foreign language classroom is due to various reasons, such as showing carelessness, coming late, and arriving unprepared. She mentioned that giving learners some tips for a successful preparation and providing them with positive thinking strategies through collaborative work and other techniques may be necessary.

From the whole number of males, four boys (44.44%) were anxious due to the fear of being the center of attention, three boys (33.33%) felt anxious due to the lack of preparation, two boys (22.22%) felt anxious to speak English because of the lack of motivation, and no one said they were anxious because of the lack of linguistic competence. Also, from the whole number of females, eighteen girls (58.06%) were anxious due to the fear of being the center of attention, thirteen girls (41.93%) felt anxious due to the lack of preparation, thirteen girls (41.93%) felt anxious to speak English because of the lack of linguistic competence, and seven (22.58%) said they were anxious because of the lack of motivation

4.3.2 Question Six: Immediate error correction as a cause of students 'communication apprehension

Immediate error correction IEC in a language class is inevitable during interaction. However, this practice produces varied and opposing reactions among students. Some students readily welcome the immediate oral correction done by their instructor. Yet others react negatively by shutting up and refraining in oral interaction. In this vein, the following question aims to find out whether immediate error correction is a cause of students 'communication apprehension. In this regard, the students who speak again do not feel anxious when their errors are corrected, whereas those who make more efforts to enhance their speaking competence feel anxious due to the previous cause. Thirty-three students (82.50%) stated that they needed to exert more efforts with a view to improving their speaking level, i. e., they felt anxious to speak. On the other hand, seven students (17.50%) reported that they speak again when their errors are corrected immediately, i. e., they did not experience speaking anxiety .

From the whole number of males, three boys (33.33%) reported that they speak again when their errors are corrected immediately, while six of them (66.66%) felt anxious when correcting immediately their errors. As for females, four girls (12.90%) did not feel anxious when their errors were

corrected immediately, and twenty-seven of them (87.09%) were anxious to speak when correcting their errors immediately,

It can be concluded that the majority of students (males and females) have negative reaction to IEC since the practice prevents their creativity to produce more output in speaking performance, as opposed to (17.50%) who felt so happy and satisfied when the teacher corrected their errors immediately, arguing that this practice increased their enthusiasm as it helped them learn from their mistakes.

The interpretation of the answers indicates that there is a failure to select the appropriate type of timed error correction, as the negative reaction of the majority of students is due to immediate corrective feedback which might ruins the learners' motivation, confidence, and consequently the flow of communication .

It should be noted that other surveys in the past have investigated the impact of immediate and delayed error correction on improvement of EFL learners' speaking fluency, such as the survey by Mousavi and Gorjian (2018), and the results revealed that both immediate and delayed error correction affect the fluency of learners, although, in case of former, the effect was negative, while for the latter, the results were quite positive. Therefore, the study concluded that correcting learners immediately could be demotivating and it could end up killing their self-confidence, a little delay could do wonders

Dabbaghi (2006) also mentions that selecting delayed correction type is more preferable and effective than immediate one because when the purpose of speaking is on fluency, errors should be corrected with some delay.

4.3.3 Question Seven: Competitiveness as a cause of students 'communication apprehension

The purpose of this question was to see if comparing oneself with other classmates diminishes the will of students and make them anxious to communicate in class.

Twenty students (50.00%) answered "yes" and the other twenty students (50.00%) answered "no ."

From the whole number of males, two boys (22.22%) answered "yes" and seven of them (77.77%) answered "no". As for females, eighteen girls (58.06%) answered "yes" and thirteen of them (41.93%) answered "no."

Hence, it can be deduced that females tended to become anxious when they compared themselves with other learners in the class and found themselves less willing to communicate in class. The fact that competitiveness can be a cause of students' communication apprehension has been confirmed by Young (1994) who categorized sources of foreign language anxiety into those stemming from learners, from teachers, and from institutional practices. He stated a number of individual learner characteristics that include competitiveness, low self-esteem, low self-perceptions of ability, lack of affiliation of group membership with peers, and beliefs about language learning communication.

4.3.4 Question Eight: Direct questions as a cause of students' speaking anxiety

This question seeks to examine if direct questions lead students to respond anxiously or comfortably .

Twenty five of the students (62.05%) reported that they responded anxiously when asked a direct question, while fifteen students (37.05%) claimed that they responded comfortably .

From the whole number of males, four boys (44.44%) said that they responded "anxiously" and five of them (55.56%) responded "comfortably". On the other hand, twenty-one females (67.74%) responded "anxiously", while ten of them (32.26%) responded "comfortably ."

4.3.5 Question Nine: Other causes of students' speaking anxiety

This question aims to find other reasons that lead students to be anxious when speaking English publicly.

The fear of making mistakes was viewed by eleven of the students (four male and seven females) as a major cause; fear of judgment by others (one male and two females), limited vocabulary (two females) and lack of ideas (one male and one female) are considered as less frequent causes, while lack of self-confidence (one female) as a minor cause of anxiety.

As it is seen, fear of making mistakes is a significant factor that causes EFL speaking anxiety on learners. This finding is consistent with the study of Öztürk, and Gürbüz (2014) whose participants confirmed that the fear of making mistakes was a main cause for their anxiety in oral English classrooms. Therefore, language instructors should change the students' perspective for mistakes and teach them that making mistakes is quite normal in a learning process.

4.3.6 Question Ten: Students 'type of speaking anxiety

According to Horwitz and Young (1991), there are two types of anxiety: facilitative and debilitating .

Facilitative anxiety is the kind of anxiety which motivates the students to fight the new learning task and prepares them emotionally to approach the learning task as a challenge. On the other hand, debilitating anxiety is the kind of anxiety which motivates the students to flee the new learning task and stimulates them emotionally to adopt avoidance behavior.

In this sense, this question aims to discover the type of students 'speaking anxiety from the factors they provide, i.e., if students fight the speaking task, they have facilitative speaking anxiety and if students flee it, they have debilitating speaking anxiety.

Twelve students (30%) fled the speaking task and twenty eight of them (70%) fought the speaking task .

Also from the whole number of males, four boys (44.44%) fled the speaking task and five of them (55.56%) fought it. From the whole number of females, eight girls (25.80%) fled the speaking task and twenty three of them (74.20%) fought it.

4.4 Part Four: Coping with Speaking Anxiety

4.4. 1Question Eleven: Students 'attitudes toward communication apprehension

This questions aims to see students' attitudes towards the issue of speaking anxiety. Twenty eight of the students (70%) said that coping with speaking anxiety was very important, while six students (15%) claimed that coping

with this problem was less important and six other students (15%) claimed that coping with it was not important.

From the whole number of males, six of them (66.67%) reported that coping with speaking anxiety was very important; one of them (11.11%) claimed that coping with it was less important and two of them (22.22%) claimed that coping with this problem was not important. On the other hand, from the whole number of females, twenty two of them (70.97%) reported that coping with speaking anxiety was very important; five of them (16.13%) claimed that coping with this problem was less important and four of them (12.90%) claimed that coping with it was not important.

4.4. 2 Question Twelve: Students 'strategies to cope with speaking anxiety

The aim of this question is to see how students cope with speaking anxiety in the classroom. Eleven of the students (two males and nine females) reported that they practice, and then practice some more. They rehearse their presentations. They do it for some people they are comfortable with and ask for feedback. They also practice with strangers online and sometimes they practice in front of a mirror. Nine of the students (three males and six females) said that they build trust and increase their self-confidence by thinking positively about themselves and their abilities, as this can help them to enhance speech performance and reduce stress and anxiety .

Six students (two males and four females) said that they challenge their fears of public speaking by identifying probable and alternative outcomes and any objective evidence that supports the likelihood that their feared outcomes will happen.

Five students (one male and four females) pointed out that they prepare the topic, arguing that when the better they understand what they are talking about, the less likely they will make a mistake or get off track, and they will be able to recover quickly if they do get lost. One of them said that she takes some time to consider what questions the audience may ask and have her responses ready.

Three students (females) claimed that they take a deep breath to calm their nerves, relax their body, and give it enough oxygen to enhance their voice.

They reported that when they breathe, they focus, and this gives them the strength to walk toward their fear and embrace it.

One student (male) said that he doesn't care about others, arguing that the fear of being judged by others can hold him back from doing what he really wants.

One student (female) claimed that she doesn't compare herself to others because it is a slippery slope that can leave the person feeling ashamed of their own accomplishments. She added that she is the only person on her path, so there's no comparison.

One student (male) pointed out that he watches good speakers to understand what is needed to deliver a great speech. He pays particular attention to things like pacing, fluidity, and eye contact. He also focuses on the way they interact with their slides when presenting with visuals .

4.4. 3 Question Thirteen: Students 'expectations from teachers

Teacher support can enhance students' performances during conversations. The support provided by the oral expression teacher includes comments and recommendations dealing with strategies for improvement, instead of providing only corrective feedback .

This question aims to find out what respondents expect from their teacher to help them in dealing with speaking anxiety.

Eleven of the students (one male and ten females) pointed out that they expect their teacher to create a safe environment where they feel that it is ok to make mistakes and that mistakes are actually encouraged. Ten of the students (four males and six females) said that they find it difficult to speak, not because they do not know how to, but because they are afraid to do so. So they expect the teacher to motivate them to speak out and participate. Five students (two males and three females) claimed that the teacher should provide them with practical advice and solutions on how to overcome their fear and speak without anxiety. Three students (two males and one female) agreed that the teacher should give them enough time to think and prepare themselves well to speak in class, as they believe that this is a good way to quell their anxiety because speaking, like any other activity, requires better preparation so that performance will be better .

Two students (males) suggested adding humor and fun to the oral expression sessions, for example by starting the sessions with opening games to activate the students and get them into positive mood.

One student (female) preferred the teacher to let her speak freely without interruptions and when she makes mistakes, the teacher notes them down and addresses them later because she gets distracted easily and loses her train of thought if the teacher is constantly interrupting her .

One student (male) suggested providing some icebreakers to reduce speaking anxiety and create community in the class, arguing that students often enter public speaking classes with a bit of anxiety and trepidation about speaking in front of their classmates. Therefore, providing icebreaker activities can get the students talking, connecting and feeling more open to each other in order to foster cooperation between them.

5. Conclusion

When considering the situations of speaking anxiety, it is found that all Second Year (LMD) EFL Students experience some level of speech anxiety, even those who denied the fact of being anxious when it is needed to speak in class; they ticked on situations that provoked anxiety. Moreover, it is obvious that performing in front of the classmates, making oral presentations and talking in front of the other gender are significantly dominant speaking anxiety situations for males, while making oral presentations, performing in front of the classmates and talking to the teachers are significantly dominant speaking anxiety situations for girls.

The other anxiety-provoking situations that were provided by both genders include: facing complicated questions, being stared at, not understanding the topic discussed, and being afraid of mispronouncing some words .

Many reasons led students to be anxious in the previous situations. That is, (55%) of the students experienced some level of speech anxiety due to the fear of being the center of attention mainly for girls. (40%) felt anxious due to the lack of preparation, and only girls (32.5%) felt anxious to speak English because of the lack of linguistic competence. Also, both genders were equally anxious (22%) due to the lack of motivation.

Moreover, immediate error correction was another cause that made the majority of students (males and females) anxious to speak.

Comparing oneself with other classmates and answering direct questions were reasons of being anxious to communicate in class especially females.

The other causes that were provided by both genders were varied, i.e., the fear of making mistakes, the fear of judgment by others, limited vocabulary, the lack of ideas, and the lack of self-confidence .

All these situations and causes of speaking anxiety lead students to have either facilitative or debilitating anxiety. (30%) of the students had debilitating speaking anxiety and (70%) had facilitative speaking anxiety fought the speaking task. Indeed, females had more facilitative anxiety than males.

Coping with speaking anxiety was very important for the majority of both male and female students through different ways, such as intense practicing, building trust and increasing the self-confidence, challenging fears of public speaking, preparing the topic, taking a deep breath, not caring about others and not comparing oneself to others, and watching good speakers .

The students wanted their teachers to help them reduce their speaking anxiety by creating a safe and supportive learning environment, motivating them to speak out, and giving them enough time to think and prepare themselves well before they speak. They can also help them by adding humor and fun to the oral expression sessions, letting them speak freely without interruptions, and providing some icebreaker activities.

Based on the study's results, the following recommendations can be made:

Teachers of oral expression should use delayed error correction DEC more than the immediate type in order to improve learners' fluency of oral production and avoid the negative effects of the immediate error correction. They should also create a safe and supportive environment where mistakes are tolerated and learned from and should also make sure not to correct students in a way that makes them feel ashamed.

Also, when correcting the speaking mistakes, the oral expression teachers should stop interrupting learners to correct their mistakes and instead collate the most common and important ones and give a mini workshop to the whole class so that everyone benefits equally and not only one student.

Moreover, teachers should bear in mind that providing enough time for students to prepare themselves before responding will allow them to gather their thoughts, and this would consequently improve the quality of their responses and boost their confidence

On the other hand, students should be supported enough before speaking, so that they can lessen their anxiety and perform better in speaking.

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