



## REDUCING SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

**Tilavova Muxlisa Maxmudovna**

TIFT University

tilavova2606@gmail.com

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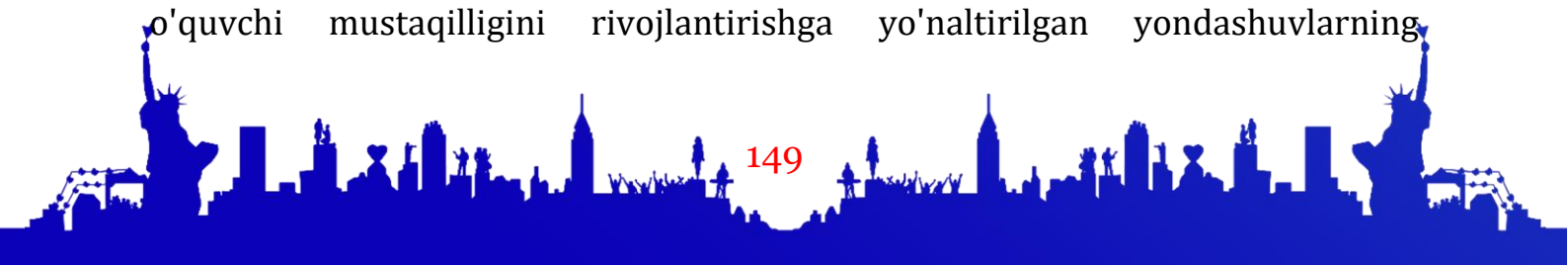
**Abstract.** Speaking anxiety represents one of the most persistent affective barriers in second language acquisition, particularly among learners of English as a foreign language. The study analyzes the origins, manifestations, and educational consequences of foreign language speaking anxiety, drawing on cognitive, affective, and sociocultural frameworks. The findings suggest that a combination of supportive classroom environments, structured communicative tasks, and learner autonomy-oriented approaches can significantly mitigate anxiety-related barriers to spoken English production.

**Keywords:** speaking anxiety, foreign language anxiety, communicative competence, affective filter, pedagogical strategies, EFL classroom.

**Аннотация.** Тревожность при говорении представляет собой один из наиболее устойчивых аффективных барьеров в усвоении второго языка, особенно среди изучающих английский как иностранный. В исследовании анализируются истоки, проявления и образовательные последствия тревожности при иноязычном говорении на основе когнитивных, аффективных и социокультурных подходов. Результаты показывают, что сочетание благоприятной учебной среды, структурированных коммуникативных заданий и подходов, ориентированных на самостоятельность учащихся, способно существенно снизить барьеры, связанные с тревожностью при устном производстве речи на английском языке.

**Ключевые слова:** тревожность при говорении, иноязычная тревожность, коммуникативная компетентность, аффективный фильтр, педагогические стратегии, аудитория иностранного языка.

**Annotatsiya.** Og'zaki nutqdagi xavotirlilik ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirishda, ayniqsa ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'rganuvchilar orasida, eng barqaror affektiv to'siqlardan biri sifatida qaraladi. Tadqiqotda kognitiv, affektiv va sotsiokulturologik yondashuvlar asosida xorijiy tilda og'zaki nutq xavotirliligining kelib chiqishi, namoyon bo'lish shakllari hamda ta'limdagi oqibatlarini tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, qulay ta'lim muhitini shakllantirish, tuzilmali kommunikativ topshiriqlarni qo'llash va o'quvchi mustaqilligini rivojlantirishga yo'naltirilgan yondashuvlarning





majmuasi ingliz tilida og'zaki nutq faoliyatidagi xavotirlilik bilan bog'liq to'siqlarni sezilarli darajada bartaraf etishga xizmat qiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** og'zaki nutq xavotirliligi, xorijiy til xavotirliligi, kommunikativ kompetentlik, affektiv filtr, pedagogik strategiyalar, xorijiy til ta'limi muhiti.

### **Introduction**

Among the numerous psychological and affective variables that influence second language acquisition, speaking anxiety occupies a central and widely documented position in contemporary applied linguistics. Unlike reading or writing, spoken communication demands immediate, real-time linguistic processing under conditions of social exposure, making it uniquely susceptible to anxiety-related interference. Learners of English as a foreign language, particularly those operating in contexts where English is not the dominant medium of daily communication, frequently report elevated levels of apprehension when required to speak in the target language, whether in formal classroom settings or informal interactions. This phenomenon has attracted substantial scholarly attention since Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope introduced the construct of foreign language anxiety in the late 1980s, and subsequent decades of research have confirmed its consistent negative relationship with oral performance, participation rates, and overall language learning motivation [1]. In the Central Asian educational context, including Uzbekistan and neighboring countries, English language instruction has expanded considerably as a result of national language policy reforms, yet the psychological dimension of learner experience remains insufficiently addressed in local pedagogical practice [2].

### **Methodology and literature review**

The present study is based on a qualitative review and analytical synthesis of scholarly sources. The review encompasses foundational theoretical frameworks, cross-cultural comparative analyses, and applied pedagogical proposals, excluding any sources that rely exclusively on quantitative experimental designs without accompanying theoretical elaboration. The central theoretical anchor for the discussion is Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which posits that high levels of anxiety, low motivation, and negative self-image collectively raise an affective barrier that impedes the acquisition and production of the target language [3]. This framework situates speaking anxiety not as an isolated psychological trait but as a systemic variable embedded in the learner's broader emotional and motivational profile.

Horwitz et al. defined foreign language classroom anxiety as a distinct, complex construct arising from the unique features of language learning,

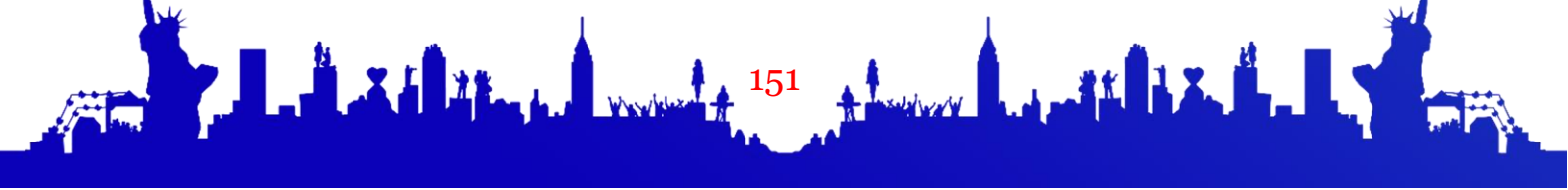




involving communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as its three core components [1]. Communication apprehension refers to the generalized fear of oral communication, while fear of negative evaluation specifically concerns the anticipated judgment of peers and instructors during spoken performance. MacIntyre and Gardner further elaborated these dimensions, demonstrating through longitudinal analysis that anxiety functions as both a state and a trait variable, fluctuating with situational demands while also reflecting stable individual differences [4]. Russian psycholinguistic scholarship has contributed complementary perspectives to this discussion, particularly through the work of Zimnyaya, whose activity-based theory of speech production highlights the role of internal psychological regulation in the generation of spoken utterances and underscores how emotional states directly modulate the quality and fluency of oral output [5].

In the Uzbek educational context, Toshmatova has noted that learners frequently exhibit what she terms communicative passivity, a culturally inflected tendency toward silence and deference in group learning situations that intensifies the manifestation of speaking anxiety in English classrooms [2]. This observation aligns with broader sociocultural analyses by Tsui, who argued that silence in language classrooms is not merely a symptom of linguistic incompetence but a socially and affectively meaningful response to perceived threat [6]. Dewaele and MacIntyre, examining multilingual learners across European and Asian contexts, found that positive emotions such as enjoyment and curiosity can function as anxiety-buffering variables, suggesting that affective interventions need not focus exclusively on anxiety reduction but can also work through the amplification of positive emotional states [7].

Pedagogically, the literature converges on several approaches that have demonstrated theoretical and applied efficacy in reducing speaking anxiety. Young identified a taxonomy of anxiety sources in foreign language classrooms, including learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs and behaviors, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing, arguing that anxiety reduction must address structural and relational dimensions of classroom ecology rather than merely targeting individual learner cognition [8]. Abdullayeva, writing within the Uzbek higher education context, has emphasized the importance of creating psychologically safe learning environments through peer collaboration, formative feedback practices, and the normalization of error as a natural component of language development [9]. Woodrow's review of anxiety-reducing pedagogical strategies highlighted task-





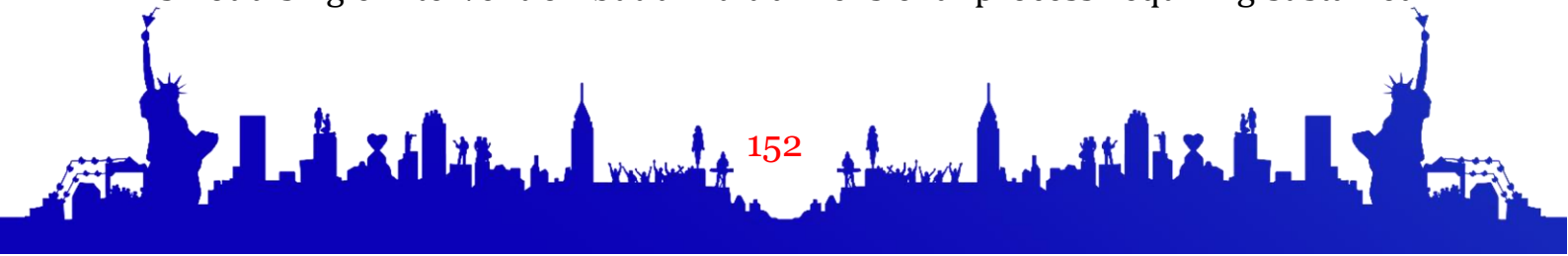
based language teaching, cooperative learning structures, drama and role-play activities, and self-reflection journals as particularly effective tools for progressively reducing learner apprehension in speaking-focused instruction [10].

### **Results and discussion**

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals several consistent and theoretically grounded conclusions regarding the nature and remediation of speaking anxiety in English language learners. First, speaking anxiety is neither a fixed nor purely individual phenomenon; it is dynamically shaped by the interaction between learner characteristics and the pedagogical environment in which learning takes place. This means that instructional design and teacher behavior are not peripheral factors but central determinants of the anxiety levels learners experience. Second, the cultural and institutional context of language learning significantly mediates the expression and intensity of speaking anxiety. Learners in collectivist educational cultures, such as those prevalent in Central Asian countries, may face heightened anxiety due to the social visibility of spoken errors and the weight assigned to peer judgment in group settings [2, 6].

Third, the reviewed literature consistently supports the value of low-threat communicative activities in the early stages of oral skill development. When learners are introduced to speaking tasks through structured pair work, collaborative problem-solving, and information-gap activities before being exposed to performance-oriented speaking tasks, the gradual scaffolding of communicative competence reduces the evaluative pressure that generates anxiety [8, 10]. Fourth, teacher feedback practices emerge as a particularly salient variable. Corrective feedback delivered in ways that stigmatize error or publicly expose learner inadequacy significantly elevates anxiety, while feedback embedded in positive reinforcement and focused on communication success rather than linguistic accuracy fosters a more permissive affective climate [9].

Fifth, learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness play an underappreciated role in anxiety management. When learners develop an understanding of their own anxiety patterns and acquire strategies for self-regulation, including preparation routines, breathing techniques, and positive self-talk, they demonstrate greater willingness to communicate and more sustained engagement in speaking tasks [4, 7]. The integration of these findings into a coherent pedagogical framework suggests that effective anxiety reduction is not a single intervention but a multidimensional process requiring sustained





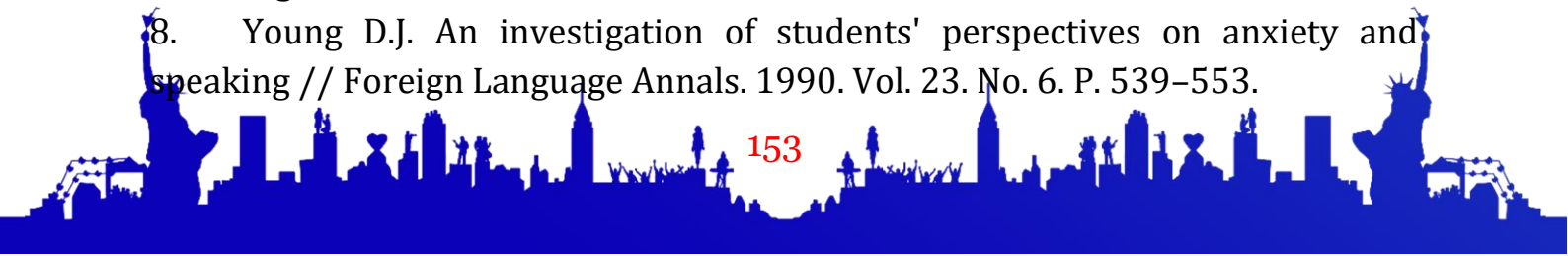
attention to classroom culture, task design, feedback methodology, and learner identity support.

### Conclusion

Speaking anxiety constitutes a significant and theoretically well-documented obstacle to the development of oral communicative competence among English language learners, particularly in EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic communication are limited and evaluative pressure is high. The present review demonstrates that this anxiety is rooted in complex interactions between cognitive, affective, social, and cultural variables, and that its reduction demands a correspondingly multifaceted pedagogical response. Teachers who create psychologically safe, error-tolerant learning environments, employ graduated communicative tasks, provide constructive and non-stigmatizing feedback, and actively cultivate learner metacognitive skills are best positioned to reduce the affective barriers that impede spoken English production. Future research in the Uzbek and broader Central Asian educational context should extend theoretical frameworks developed in Western and East Asian settings to account for locally specific sociocultural dynamics, as the full picture of speaking anxiety in these learner populations remains incompletely documented in the international literature.

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