CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Review

1. Dimensions and Impact of Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is a complex issue that affects English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners in many different ways. In what follows, we clarify what speaking anxiety is, outline its key features, identify the reasons it appears, explore how it interferes with second-language learning, describe the signs it shows, and examine how these parts influence each other in a recurring cycle that undermines students' speaking skills.

a. Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms

Speaking anxiety remains a prominent psychological hurdle for English-as-a- Foreign-Language (EFL) learners, especially during oral tasks. The apprehension appears in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, prompting many students to dodge speaking exercises and gradually lose confidence (Paraguas, 2025). As a result, the students' skill suffers, their overall linguistic growth stalls, and a vicious cycle begins: fear limits practice, lack of practice deepens fear.

1) Definition and Characteristics

Speaking anxiety describes the nervousness or fear people feel when they have to talk in a foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) marked it as a clear-cut kind of language worry, separate from general anxiety, that can hurt both fluency and self-assurance. Newer research, however, shows that speaking anxiety pulls on many strands at once, hitting learners' thoughts, feelings, and even their body responses (Bhattarachaiyakorn & Phettakua, 2023).

2) Factors Causing Speaking Anxiety

There are both internal and external factors that can lead to speaking anxiety. These things directly cause or make worse the anxiety that students' feel when they have to speak English, especially in class when they think their peers or teachers are observing and judging them.

a) Internal factors

i. Fear of Making Mistakes

One of the most significant factors contributing to speaking anxiety is the fear of making mistakes. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified apprehension about committing errors as a primary contributor to speaking anxiety. Such apprehension compels students to steer clear of oral assignments out of fear that they will mispronounce sounds, misapply grammatical structures, or employ inappropriate lexical items. More recent investigations conducted by Demir and Kan (2025) reveal that maladaptive emotional regulation, particularly dread of negative appraisal linked to missteps, acts as a mediating factor between non-rational cognitive distortions and speaking anxiety. Learners who struggle with emotional self-management are subsequently more inclined to withdraw entirely from speaking contexts, which inadvertently exacerbates their anxiety. Example : A student may refrain from participating in classroom dialogue due to anxiety over producing an inaccurate phonetic utterance or an error in grammatical structure.

ii. Low Self-Confidence

Another significant factor contributing to speaking anxiety is low self-confidence, which can deeply affect a learner's ability to participate in speaking tasks. Young (1991) contends that diminished self-confidence constitutes an essential contributor to speaking anxiety. Students who perceive their language proficiency as inferior are inclined to withdraw from oral participation, apprehending that their contributions will fail to fulfil prevailing standards or will invite unfavourable appraisal. Recent investigations conducted by Batubara et al. (2022) reveal a correlated relationship whereby elevated apprehension regarding negative evaluation is associated with lowered self-confidence, thereby intensifying the overall anxiety related to

oral expression. Example: A learner may refrain from volunteering a response to a prompt despite solid comprehension because the individual perceives language proficiency as inadequate; the silence persists even when the conceptual underpinning of the topic is clear.

iii. Perfectionism and Negative Self-Talk

Perfectionism encompasses the inclination to impose unattainably high expectations upon oneself, frequently paired with a pronounced dread of errors. This combination induces an ongoing compulsion to execute flawlessly, particularly during speaking tasks, where the threat of failure magnifies. For numerous students, the compulsion to achieve perfection becomes a burdensome and incapacitating force. Furthermore, it is routinely accompanied by an inner monologue marked by harsh self-criticism, wherein students question their competence and entertain the conviction that their efforts are insufficient. This negative self-reflection sustains the anxiety originating from perfectionism, thus complicating their willingness to engage in speaking tasks. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) characterize the relationship between perfectionism and negative self-dialogue as a self-perpetuating loop, wherein the apprehension of missteps fosters avoidance, perpetuating the anxiety. Empirical work by Flett et al. (2016) reinforces this framework, revealing that students exhibiting perfectionistic traits tend to incur heightened anxiety, attributable to their incessant dread of failure.. Example : A student might think, "If I speak and make a mistake, I'll be embarrassed," which could cause them not want to do any speaking duties at all.

b) External Factors

i) Peer Pressure

Peer pressure denotes the influence that classmates or social collectives exert upon an individual to align with specific

behaviors, expectations, or societal norms. Within the domain of speaking anxiety, such pressure can amplify a student's apprehension regarding verbal performance before peers, particularly when the individual perceives the audience as engaged in evaluative scrutiny.. Dewaele and Al-Saraj (2015) examine the role of peer pressure in amplifying speaking anxiety, highlighting that learners frequently perceive their classmates as evaluators, particularly in communicative settings where oral performance counts toward overall grades. The apprehension of public mockery or disparaging appraisal from fellow students correlates strongly with heightened anxiety levels. Recent findings by Medita Addin et al. (2023) corroborate this effect and indicate that anxiety escalates notably when students are not merely spectators but active raters of one another's spoken contributions. Example: An individual may refrain from contributing verbal opinions during group work, dreading that peers will mock their regional vernacular or hesitancies in articulation.

ii) Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback focuses on the comments, guidance, evaluations, or assessments rendered by a teacher to learners, especially in the case of a spoken assessment. Feedback may be categorically written or orally rendered and aims to assist learners in knowing the constructive and deconstructive aspects of their performance. MacIntyre (1999) emphasizes how teacher comments might make students less anxious about speaking. Teachers' positive, helpful feedback might help students feel less anxious, whereas harsh or too critical feedback can make them feel more anxious. Williams & Andrade (2008) also say that constructive feedback makes students feel more confident and encourages them to participate, but too much criticism makes them more anxious. Recent research by Aini and Rochmahwati

(2020) underscores that excellent teacher feedback can alleviate tension through the provision of clear and helpful comments. Example: An individual learner may withdraw from classroom discourse following a critical evaluative remark from the instructor, apprehensive that subsequent contributions will be similarly scrutinised.

iii) Classroom Environment

Williams and Andrade (2008) contend that a classroom characterised by emotional and pedagogical safety—where errors are treated as integral to the learning process—fosters active engagement and mitigates communicative anxiety. Conversely, environments marked by strict competition or inflexible structures elevate cognitive and affective pressure, thereby intensifying hesitance to contribute verbally. Consequently, the establishment of a nurturing and inclusive pedagogical climate emerges as a vital leverage point for decreasing anxiety while simultaneously enhancing learners' self-efficacy regarding oral expression. Example: A student is more likely to join a discussion in a classroom where the teacher makes everyone feel welcome and supported than in a competitive setting where mistakes are not welcome.

3) Impact of Speaking Anxiety on Language Learning

Speaking anxiety consistently undermines students' efforts to build oral proficiency. Evidence shows that when anxiety runs high, learners participate less, hesitate while talking, and steer clear of language exchanges altogether (Kulsum & Ridwan, 2025). On top of that, physical signs like a racing heart, sweaty palms, and trembling lips make fluent speech even harder to achieve (Power & Kasap, 2019). In the present study, researchers expect to see these same reactions, since earlier work reliably ties such symptoms to high-pressure speaking situations. When the body reacts, hesitation grows, avoidance follows, and a harmful loop forms that stalls improvement in spoken skills.

b. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a term introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986) to describe the type of anxiety experienced by students when learning a foreign language. FLA encompasses various forms of anxiety that can affect the language learning process, and one of its most significant aspects is Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). In this context, the FLA model consists of three interconnected components::

1) Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension describes the unease many learners feel when asked to speak a foreign language and worry that their own language skills will let them down. Students weighed down by such anxiety often struggle to stay in a productive mental zone, interrupt their work with frequent pauses, and avoid speaking whenever they think they can get away with it.

Example: In a university seminar taught in English as a second language, a student often listens attentively but rarely joins the debate, even though friends say they grasp every reading. Their reserve has nothing to do with ignorance; it springs instead from a nagging fear that an awkward vowel or shaky verb tense will paint them as a poor speaker, a worry that vanishes most invitations to contribute.

2) Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation arises when learners become preoccupied with how peers and instructors will judge their work. Such concern is particularly widespread in collectivist settings, where maintaining face and showing a positive public image matter deeply (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015). Consequently, students caught in this web often avoid speaking chances in class, trying to escape possible humiliation or severe criticism.

Example: a student from Germany learning English freezes when asked to present in class, seized by worries that she will mangle one word or swap a subject and verb. Certain that her peers will replay

each error on loop, she opts to turn in a polished essay instead, where errors may be quietly corrected.

3) Test Anxiety

Test anxiety refers to the intense worry and nervousness students often experience during oral examinations, fearing that even minor errors will be noticed and criticized by the examiner. That kind of pressure can interfere with actual performance, causing longer pauses, sudden blanks, and speech that comes out either too slow or unsteady.

Example: Imagine a well-prepared candidate standing before the panel; when the question lands, nerves kick in and important words vanish. Instead of flowing, her dialogue breaks into clipped phrases, preventing her from unpacking the argument she knows inside out..

Foreign-language anxiety often undermines learners' efforts to speak fluently, because nerves make conversation feel almost impossibly stressful. By identifying the sources of worry, teachers can design classrooms that calm students' fears and gradually strengthen their confidence in everyday communication.

c. Symptoms of Speaking Anxiety

Learners who struggle with speaking-related nerves typically show noticeable signs across their thinking, feeling, acting, and bodily systems. Horwitz et al. (1986) point to these signs as telling markers of foreign-language tension and show how they can block fluent classroom talk. Researchers generally place the observable effects into four separate categories:

1) Cognitive symptoms: Negative self-talk, excessive worry about errors, and avoidance of speaking situations.
2) Emotional symptoms: Nervousness, fear of embarrassment, and heightened stress during oral communication task.
3) Behavioral symptoms: Hesitation, reluctance to participate, withdrawal from speaking activities, and avoidance of eye contact.
4) Physiological symptoms: Increased heart rate, sweating,

trembling and dry mouth when speaking.

By recognising these signs, teachers can introduce targeted strategies and help students gradually lower their anxiety.

d. Interconnected Component of Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is not a single issue; instead, it comprises various interconnected components that affect and reinforce one another. According to Ansari (2015), speaking anxiety consists of three interconnected components:

1) Cognitive component : Negative self-perception, perfectionism, and excessive worry about errors.
2) Emotional component : Stress, nervousness, and fear of failure associated with speaking tasks.
3) Physiological component : Physical manifestations such as trembling, rapid heartbeat, and dry mouth, which exacerbate anxiety

These three parts feed into each other, locking learners in a painful spiral where negative thoughts spark strong feelings, which in turn trigger uncomfortable physical signs and push the student away from conversation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

When teachers grasp this loop, they can introduce interventions—such as mindfulness exercises, gradual exposure, and realistic goal-setting—that break the cycle and provide learners with stable ground from which to speak with more confidence.

2. Coping Strategies and Anxiety Management

manage speaking anxiety, students lean on a mix of do-it-yourself strategies that psychologists usually sort into three big groups: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. These everyday efforts build on classic theories like Beck Cognitive-Behavioural Theory (1976), Kytle and Bandura Social Learning Theory (1978), and Gross Emotion Regulation Theory (2002), which together explain how people wrestle with and steer their nerves. The following pages look closely at these tactics, explain the theories behind them, and assess how effective they are in reducing the fear of speaking.

a. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies seek to change the way people think about public speaking in order to make their nerves less overwhelming. Rooted in Cognitive Behavioural Theory, first articulated by Beck (1976), these techniques show that when a speaker reworks negative self-talk, the resulting shift in feelings can calm anxious energy. Central to the approach is the idea that distorted beliefs, like overestimating faults or imagining worst-case scenarios, usually swamp a person's confidence, yet that same flood of worry can be drained through careful, systematic reframing:

1) Reframing Negative Self-Talk

Reframing negative thoughts is a core cognitive technique that has the potential to alleviate anxiety. The objective is to change self-defeating thoughts like “I will fail” to “I am capable and well-prepared,” a far better alternative. This approach is a derivative of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which attempts to ‘undo’ negative emotions by identifying and correcting irrational and skewed thinking. For example, a student who is anxious about speaking in front of the class may think “I will embarrass myself,” but instead changes it to “I have practiced, and I know this material.” Horwitz et al. (1986) documented that students who spoke more often and incorporated this technique to manage their speaking anxiety subsequently began to feel more confident. In the same vein Troy et al. (2017) observed that the anxiety and self-esteem of participants who regularly practiced cognitive reappraisal strategies improved.

2) Viewing Speaking Opportunities as Learning Experiences

Considering speaking engagements as opportunities for development is more effective as a cognitive strategy. This change in perspective relaxes anxious feelings. Take, for example, an English student, Ali. He used to experience a lot of anxiety when asked to speak in front of a class. After beginning to view each speaking practice as a chance to work on something, his anxiety levels dropped. He started to view public speaking as a way to learn, rather than an assessment of his

capabilities. Speaking tasks, especially when approached with a learning focus as per MacIntyre's (1994), worry less about speaking anxiety because such tasks are perceived as self-evaluation.

3) Goal Setting

Having clear goals that are within reach encourages students to make steady progress while alleviating perfectionism, thus reducing anxiety. As an example, a student working on an oral presentation may aim to "complete the presentation while only referring to my notes a maximum of two times," or "I will keep eye contact for the entire presentation." Such aims help the student achieve direction and a sense of control. Locke and Latham (2002) argue that measurable goals enhance performance and motivation. Also, as noted by Lee and Ko (2023), students perceived lower anxiety as a result of the ability to achieve manageable and concrete objectives, emphasizing the impact of goal-setting on anxiety.

4) Self-Monitoring and Reflection

Self-monitoring entails evaluating one's progress and performance against preset goals, while self-reflection revolves around evaluating and analyzing one's individual performance in relation to the goals in order to derive improvement strategies. Self-monitoring and reflection help people to understand their capabilities and gains, and what can be improved. Self-reflection encourages heightened conscious awareness and improved self-regulation, self-monitoring, and self-confidence. For example, after delivering a presentation, self-analysis in the form of the reflective prompts, "What did I do well? What can I do to improve?" may be employed. Zimmerman (2002) indicates self-reflection enhances control over emotional responses, a skill critical in querying anxiety. Also, Komala and Rohmah (2024) documented the findings in a case study of students who undertook self-reflection post speaking tasks, self-reflection post performance led to a significant reduction of the speaking anxiety as a result of ownership over the educational process.

b. Emotional Strategies

Emotional methods focus on controlling the emotional responses associated with speaking anxiety. These methods stem from Emotion Regulation Theory (Gross, 2002), which explains how people manage and alter their emotions in response to certain triggers. The theory posits that effective emotion management, especially in demanding situations, such as public speaking, is critical to dealing with anxiety.

1) Relaxation Techniques

Listening to calming music, doing deep breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation are some relaxation techniques that can mediate calming and physiological arousal, especially prior to speaking. For instance, prior to giving her presentation, Rahma may spend about five minutes deep breathing, which aids in relaxing her body and mitigating symptoms of anxiety like shaking and rapid heartbeat. These techniques are in accordance with Relaxation Theory, which posits that managing emotional stress can be supported by the reduction of physical tension (Jacobson, 1938). Relaxation techniques have been shown to improve anxiety by calming the body and mind in studies by Young (1991) and Salim et al. (2024).

2) Mindfulness and Visualization

Focusing on the present moment and imagining favorable results through mindfulness and visualization techniques mitigates anxiety. Visualization, for example, involves imagining oneself as a confident and successful speaker. Consider Alex, who prepares for a big speech. He might visualize himself delivering the speech smoothly and receiving positive feedback; therefore, he mentally rehearses to alleviate anxiety and increase confidence. As MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012) and Peirce & Parker (2020) demonstrate, visualization during preparation is an effective technique to reduce anxiety for a public speaking experience.

3) Positive Imagery

Positive imagery refers to a mental construct where one envisions oneself performing successfully in a particular speaking scenario. This

process aids in reducing anxiety and boosting confidence. Consider Lisa, for instance. As a novice speaker, she pictures herself speaking with clarity and self-assurance before her class. After repeating this visualization technique, she reports feeling significantly calmer and better equipped to handle the perceived audience. As highlighted in the findings by Gregersen & Horwitz (2002), the application of positive imagery has been shown to enhance confidence and reduce anxiety by assisting with mental preparation for actual speaking situations.

4) Engaging in Stress Reducing Activities

Regular exercise, spending time with friends, and participating in leisure activities all mitigate stress, improve mood, and, in turn, reduce speaking anxiety. For instance, Rina's running routine allows her to destress and feel calm and rejuvenated before her presentations. These activities promote emotional homeostasis and enhance one's health and well-being. Such activities have been well-documented to reduce anxiety and bolster emotional control and have been studied in depth by Folkman (2013).

c. Behavioral Strategies

Behavioural strategies encourage students to take part in speaking activities, and through repeated practice, they gradually reduce the anxiety that first accompanied these events. These actions sit squarely within Kytle and Bandura Social Learning Theory (1978), which argues that people learn by watching others, copying what they see, and confronting the same stressful situations until those situations feel less frightening.

1) Seeking Additional Speaking Opportunities

Actively seeking additional speaking opportunities is one of the most impactful behavioral techniques for overcoming speaking anxiety. Through repeated speaking placements, individuals get the chance to navigate anxious situations, making those situations less scary over time. Take, for example, Budi, who now joins a debate club, but initially was anxious to speak in front of a class. With each speaking

activity that he partakes in, he becomes less anxious and more confident. Maharani & Roslaini (2021) and Racz et al. (2024) propose that the ability to repeatedly confront speaking situations aids in the alleviation of anxiety, as individuals learn to manage the responsibilities of speaking and feel more at ease during those situations.

2) Practicing Outside the Classroom

Informal rehearsal prior to formal speaking engagements enhances self-assurance and aids in managing anxiety. For instance, Dina rehearses her presentation with her peers or does so solo in front of mirrors. Such practices ensure that she is more familiar and confident with the content. As pointed out by Horwitz and Oxford (1991) and Ericsson et al. (1993), thorough and repetitive practices of speaking for more fluent and confident individuals greatly lessen anxiety.

3) Seeking Constructive Feedback

Actively looking for constructive feedback is an important factor in enhancing one's public speaking and reducing anxiety. Specific and clear feedback enables the student to recognize areas that need improvement and areas that would instill confidence. After a presentation, student Dira demonstrated self-reflective behavior by soliciting her peers and professor for feedback on her strengths and weaknesses. Such feedback informs her improvement efforts in her speaking skills while simultaneously boosting her self-assurance. According to research by Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) and Kluger & DeNisi (1996), constructive feedback enhances skills and emotional stability, thus reducing anxiety in speaking situations.

4) Role playing and Simulations

Through role-playing and simulations, individuals can practice speaking within a controlled context. Through participation in these simulated tasks, individuals are able to develop their speaking skills in a more relaxed environment prior to their real-world engagements. For example, students can participate in role-playing activities in class,

where they take turns speaking as either a moderator or a panelist. These activities enhance their self-efficacy and preparedness towards real-world speaking engagements. Kolb (1984) and MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) argued that experiential learning—such as role-playing and simulations—helps alleviate anxiety, in this case, by exposing students to real-life speaking opportunities and providing them with the chance to gain self-confidence, which builds up gradually through repetition.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

A growing body of literature identifies key predictors of speaking anxiety and outlines strategies instructors can use to alleviate it. Jin et al. (2021) show that worry over peers' judgments and general communication fear often discourage students from taking part in speaking exercises. Their conclusions echo AlGhazo's (2023) observation that learners who rate their own language skills poorly tend to feel more anxious, which in turn makes them less willing to practice.

Cultural background also shapes how anxious learners feel when they speak a new language. Evidence shows that students raised in collectivist societies worry more about being judged by peers and upsetting group harmony, which heightens their foreign-language nerves (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022). Recognising these cultural currents is vital when educators create support programmes that respect and work with each student's social context..

Previous research on language classrooms has mainly highlighted teacher-directed interventions, such as anxiety-reducing exercises guided by instructors (Omer M. Al Tamimi et al., 2020). In contrast, far less attention has been given to the coping strategies that learners themselves employ when nerves arise. The present investigation addresses this oversight by exploring the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural techniques students use autonomously to manage their speaking anxiety.