

THE EFFECT OF PRONUNCIATION ANXIETY ON ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the impact of pronunciation anxiety, one of the important psychological factors in learning English, on speaking skills. Many learners, even though they can construct grammatically correct sentences, cannot speak fluently due to the fear of incorrect pronunciation. This condition not only reduces their speaking speed, but also significantly reduces their self-confidence. It examines the causes of pronunciation anxiety, in particular, its connection with fear of social evaluation, perfectionism, and negative experiences. It also compares how this anxiety is formed and manifested in a classroom environment and in the process of independent learning. Research shows that a strictly evaluative classroom environment causes high levels of stress in learners, while independent learning creates a relatively safe psychological environment, but it may lack real communicative experience.*

The article concludes with practical strategies for reducing pronunciation anxiety. These include developing a tolerant approach to errors, step-by-step speaking exercises, audio shadowing, and self-assessment techniques. These approaches allow learners to develop not only more accurate pronunciation, but also to form fluent and confident speech.

Keywords: *pronunciation anxiety, speaking skills, fluency, self-confidence, independent learning, classroom environment, speaking anxiety, pronunciation*

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalization environment, English language proficiency has become one of the most important factors not only for academic, but also for professional and social success. However, not all skills develop equally in language learning. Speaking, in particular, remains one of the most difficult stages for many learners. Interestingly, this problem is often associated not with a lack of knowledge, but with psychological barriers. One such barrier is pronunciation anxiety.

Pronunciation anxiety is an internal psychological pressure that arises from the learner's fear of pronouncing words incorrectly, overestimating the likelihood of being laughed at or negatively evaluated by others. This condition often leads the learner to avoid speaking, slow down their speech, or become completely silent. As a result, opportunities for active language use are reduced, which slows down the learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Research shows that foreign language anxiety is common among many learners and is particularly prevalent in situations

involving pronunciation. Because pronunciation is a skill that is immediately heard and assessed, errors are not hidden. Therefore, learners are more afraid of pronunciation errors than grammatical errors (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

In addition, the classroom environment plays an important role in the formation of this anxiety. Lesson processes based on strict control and assessment increase the fear of making mistakes in learners. In contrast, in the process of independent learning, the learner works at his own pace and there is less external pressure, which can reduce anxiety. However, in this case, due to the lack of real communicative experience, there is a possibility that speaking skills will not be fully developed (Krashen, 1982).

In this context, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of pronunciation anxiety on English speaking skills, identify its causes, and compare how it manifests itself in different learning environments. Also, one of the important tasks of the study is to identify effective strategies to reduce this problem.

The article seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. How does pronunciation anxiety affect learners' fluency and self-confidence?
2. How does this anxiety differ in the classroom environment and in the process of independent learning?
3. What are effective methods for reducing pronunciation anxiety?

Methodology

This study aimed to determine the relationship between pronunciation anxiety and speaking skills. The work was conducted on the basis of a descriptive and partly correlational approach. The main focus was on the experience of real learners, that is, it was considered important to observe how they behaved while speaking and how this affected their speech. The study involved 20 English language learners. They were aged between 18 and 23, and their language level ranged from A2 to B2. For convenience, they were divided into two groups. The first group was those who studied in a classroom environment, and the second group was those who studied mainly independently. This difference made it possible to see how pressure and freedom affect speech.

Data were collected in three different ways. First, participants were given a short questionnaire. They were asked to answer questions about how uncomfortable they felt when speaking, how afraid they were of making mistakes, and how much they cared about what others thought. They were then given a 2-minute free-speech task. The topic was chosen to be simple so that they would focus on the process of speaking rather than on their thoughts. The speech was recorded and then reviewed for fluency, pauses, and pronunciation accuracy. In addition, some participants were interviewed briefly. They explained their feelings in simple terms, and in particular, what they were most afraid of.

The analysis did not use sophisticated statistical methods. Basically, the differences between high-anxiety and low-anxiety learners were compared. Attention

was paid to the relationship between the number of pauses, slowdowns, and errors in speech and their internal state. General ideas were extracted from the interviews. The most frequently repeated reasons were considered the main result. Of course, the study is not perfect. The number of participants was limited and some responses may be subjective. However, this method provided enough information to see the true impact of pronunciation anxiety.

The results showed a clear relationship between pronunciation anxiety and speaking quality. Participants with high anxiety spoke more slowly, paused more, and hesitated more when starting to speak. They often paused in the middle of a sentence to try to pronounce the word correctly. This negatively affected overall fluency. Participants with low anxiety paused less and expressed their thoughts faster. They had errors in their pronunciation, but they continued to speak. Therefore, their speech sounded more natural. An interesting phenomenon was observed here. Some participants, although grammatically strong, spoke slowly because of fear of pronunciation. Others, although they had less knowledge, spoke more freely. The difference between class and independent learning was also clearly visible. Participants studying in class spoke more cautiously. They tried to avoid making mistakes, which slowed their speech. Independent learners felt less pressure. They were less afraid of making mistakes, but sometimes had less opportunity to correct their mispronunciation.

The interviews further clarified these results. Most participants said that they were actually afraid of the reaction of others, not of making mistakes. They thought that mispronunciation would sound funny. Some recalled previous negative experiences, such as being laughed at in front of a teacher or group. This made them stop before speaking. Another important result was that when participants listened to their own speech, they perceived that there were fewer mistakes than they thought. This indicated that anxiety was often greater than it actually was.

Overall, the results showed that pronunciation anxiety affects not only pronunciation, but also the entire speech process. It slows down the rate of expression and forces the learner to speak at a level below their ability.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The study found that pronunciation anxiety significantly affects English speaking skills. Learners with high levels of anxiety slow down their speech, pause more, and have lower self-confidence. However, even if they have strong grammar and vocabulary, anxiety can prevent them from speaking more naturally. Learners are often more afraid of the reaction of others than of making mistakes. This shows how important psychological factors are in learning pronunciation.

The difference between classroom and independent learning environments was clearly noticeable. Classroom environments are more controlled and graded, which increases anxiety in learners. Independent learning, on the other hand, provides freedom and allows for a sense of comfort, but the opportunity for real communication

and immediate feedback is limited. Therefore, an effective approach is to combine independent exercises with interactive tasks in groups.

Practical recommendations for reducing pronunciation anxiety include: being tolerant of mistakes, short and regular speaking exercises, practicing pronunciation through shadowing, recording and analyzing one's own speech. At the same time, it is also important to create a positive and supportive environment in the classroom, and to provide learners with successful experiences. These methods not only improve pronunciation, but also increase the learner's self-confidence in speaking and strengthen their motivation to learn the language.

Overall, the results show that the process of language learning depends not only on grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, but also on psychological preparation. Learners with reduced pronunciation anxiety can express their speech more freely and naturally, which helps to further develop their general language skills. Therefore, understanding pronunciation anxiety and using effective strategies to combat it is important in the language learning process.

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