



**PREDICTORS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS OF ALIKO DANGOTE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY, WUDIL**

By

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Abstract

The development of effective English-speaking skills remains a significant challenge for many undergraduate students, with language anxiety emerging as a major barrier to oral communication. This is despite that the Nigerian Universities Curriculum mandates them to take GST Courses (GST 111) in Communication in English. This study examines the predictors of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil and explores possible strategies for mitigating this challenge. The study is motivated by the growing importance of English proficiency for academic success and global communication, particularly in contexts where English functions as the primary language of instruction. A quantitative research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 120 undergraduate students using a structured questionnaire adapted from established measures of foreign language anxiety. The findings reveal that fear of negative evaluation, particularly concerns about making grammatical mistakes, being laughed at by peers, and being corrected publicly by instructors, constitute a major source of anxiety among the students. The study also identified several physiological manifestations of anxiety, including nervousness, trembling during oral presentations, and increased heartbeat when speaking English in class. In addition, many students reported feelings of linguistic inferiority when comparing their speaking ability with that of their peers from Southern Nigeria. The study further indicates that a supportive classroom environment can significantly reduce students' speaking anxiety. Increased opportunities for practice, constructive feedback from instructors, collaborative group activities, and positive teacher–student interaction were identified as important strategies for enhancing learners' confidence and participation in oral communication. The study concludes that addressing psychological and pedagogical factors in the classroom can play a crucial role in reducing English-speaking anxiety and improving students' communicative competence in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano-Nigeria.

Keywords: English-speaking anxiety, foreign language anxiety, undergraduate students, communicative competence, classroom environment, Nigerian universities



Introduction

Anxiety is a psychological and physiological response to perceived challenges or threats, often experienced when individuals face demanding or evaluative situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In the context of language learning, anxiety is particularly prevalent, as learners are required not only to acquire new linguistic knowledge but also to use it actively in communication (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). English-speaking anxiety, a specific type of foreign language anxiety, which occurs when learners fear making mistakes, being negatively evaluated by peers or instructors, or failing to communicate effectively. Such anxiety can significantly reduce students' confidence, hinder participation, and impair overall oral proficiency (MacIntyre, 2007).

In Nigeria, English functions as the primary medium of instruction at the tertiary level, yet many students, whose first language is not English, experience hesitation and fear in speaking it. This is not solely a matter of linguistic competence; psychological factors, such as fear of criticism and self-perceived inferiority, play a central role (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991). Students often report feeling anxious when speaking English in classrooms, presentations, or oral examinations, even when they possess adequate grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. Such anxiety negatively affects their academic performance, participation, and long-term communicative competence (MacIntyre, 2007; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Research in applied linguistics suggests that learners' emotional and cognitive states directly influence oral proficiency (Zhang & Head, 2010). Studies show that a supportive classroom environment, regular practice, positive feedback, and opportunities for interaction with proficient speakers can significantly reduce speaking anxiety and enhance learners' confidence (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Conversely, excessive fear of making mistakes or being criticized may exacerbate learners' hesitation, reduce fluency, and impede both academic and professional development (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

Given the centrality of English in higher education in Nigeria, understanding the predictors of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students of Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano-Nigeria, is critical. This study seeks to identify the causes of English-speaking anxiety and examine strategies that can help students overcome this challenge, with the aim of fostering more confident and effective English communicators as Nigerian university students.

Literature Review

English-speaking anxiety, a specific type of foreign language anxiety, has been widely recognized as a critical factor affecting students' oral performance and communicative competence (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Speaking a foreign language is inherently more demanding than reading, writing, or listening because it



requires real-time production and immediate responses, which can trigger anxiety in learners (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Students often fear making grammatical errors, mispronunciations, or being negatively evaluated by their peers or instructors, which reduces their willingness to participate and undermines their confidence (MacIntyre, 2007; Gregersen&Horwitz, 2002).

Several studies have shown that speaking anxiety is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by psychological and social factors. Learners with low self-perception of their language ability often experience hesitation and self-doubt, which further diminishes their oral participation and fluency (Dewaele&MacIntyre, 2014; Zhang & Head, 2010). Similarly, fear of negative evaluation, a concern about criticism from teachers or peers has been consistently identified as a major predictor of speaking anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991). Students who compare themselves unfavourably to their peers frequently feel inferior, which exacerbates avoidance behaviours and limits opportunities for oral practice (MacIntyre& Doucette, 2010).

The classroom environment plays a pivotal role in mitigating speaking anxiety. Research indicates that supportive and interactive learning settings, including collaborative group activities, peer discussions, and frequent speaking exercises, can significantly enhance learners' confidence and reduce anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Oxford, 1999). Constructive feedback, which emphasizes learning rather than criticism, encourages risk-taking and promotes oral skill development (Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Meza, 2014). Technology-mediated tools such as AI-based conversational agents and virtual reality environments have also been shown to provide low-stress contexts for speaking practice, improving learners' willingness to communicate and self-confidence in English (Ebadi&Ebadijalal, 2020; Lee, 2020; Tai & Chen, 2020).

Physiological manifestations of speaking anxiety, including trembling, sweaty palms, increased heart rate, and tension, further impair oral performance (von Wörde, 2003; Vicontie et al., 2021). These symptoms often arise in culturally and linguistically unfamiliar settings, highlighting the influence of social and environmental factors on learners' anxiety (Huang & Chang, 2021; Dewaele&MacIntyre, 2016). Importantly, foreign language anxiety has long-term implications for both academic achievement and professional competence, as students who avoid speaking opportunities fail to develop fluency and communicative confidence (MacIntyre, 2007; Horwitz et al., 1986).

Taken together, the literature underscores that English-speaking anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by linguistic proficiency, psychological states, social evaluation, and environmental factors. Effective interventions require both pedagogical and psychological strategies, including supportive classroom practices, opportunities for regular practice, positive reinforcement, and exposure to authentic communicative contexts. Understanding these factors is crucial for enhancing oral communication skills among undergraduate students in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil, where English serves as the primary language of instruction and academic success increasingly depends on proficient oral communication.



English-speaking anxiety negatively affects learners' self-perception, confidence, and academic performance. Students who experience high levels of foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) often doubt their abilities and become increasingly nervous during classroom interactions (MacIntyre&Gregersen, 2022). Anxiety can distract students, reduce concentration, and impede active participation in class activities and assignments, ultimately affecting their overall academic performance (Chin & Lin, 2019).

Studies indicate that traditional, teacher-centred language instruction often fails to address the affective needs of students, exacerbating FLSA (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991). Learners' self-perception and social environment, including peer comparison and fear of negative evaluation, significantly contribute to speaking anxiety (Dewaele&MacIntyre, 2014; Zhang & Head, 2010). Gender differences have also been reported, with female learners often experiencing higher levels of speaking anxiety due to heightened self-consciousness and perceived scrutiny (Ely, 1986; Zulkiflee&Nimehchisalem, 2022).

Speaking anxiety can be both debilitating and facilitating. While high anxiety generally hinders learning and oral performance, moderate anxiety in supportive environments can motivate learners to focus and improve their skills (Horwitz et al., 1986; Zelaia, 2022). Factors such as school environment, teacher qualifications, and subject matter also influence learners' anxiety levels (Broche-Pérez et al., 2022). Students who perceive their linguistic competence as low, or who underestimate their English proficiency relative to peers, frequently exhibit avoidance behaviours that limit speaking practice and slow language acquisition (MacIntyre& Doucette, 2010; Gregersen&Horwitz, 2002).

Research has highlighted effective strategies to mitigate speaking anxiety. Cognitive and behavioural coping strategies, including positive thinking, preparation, and peer collaboration, can reduce anxiety and enhance communicative confidence (Ginting&Sebayang, 2021; Woodley et al., 2020). Informal and spontaneous interactions, such as casual conversations guided by teachers, can help learners feel relaxed and increase their willingness to communicate (Yalçın&İnceçay, 2021). Technology-assisted interventions, including AI-based conversational tools and virtual reality simulations, provide low-pressure environments that improve learners' fluency and reduce fear of negative evaluation (Ebadi&Ebadijalal, 2020; Lee, 2020; Tai & Chen, 2020).

Physiological manifestations of speaking anxiety, such as trembling, sweating, and increased heart rate, further impact students' performance, particularly in public speaking or oral assessments (von Wörde, 2003; Vicontie et al., 2021). Additionally, research demonstrates that avoidance strategies, such as withholding participation, are common among highly anxious students, although proactive strategies like deep breathing, preparation, and peer support can mitigate these effects (Ramayani et al., 2022; Maharani &Roslaini, 2021).

Overall, the literature indicates that English-speaking anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by individual, social, pedagogical, and environmental factors. Addressing these factors through supportive teaching practices, opportunities for practice, positive reinforcement, and technology-assisted interventions is crucial to enhancing oral communication and building learners' confidence in the classrooms.



Research Questions

1. What are the primary causes of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students of Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil?
2. What strategies can mitigate English-speaking anxiety and enhance students' oral proficiency?

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the causes and predictors of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil. A descriptive survey approach was adopted to understand students' thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding English oral communication. The research was conducted on the campus, and it involved 120 undergraduate students from the 6 faculties of the University, viz: Faculty of Science, Faculty of Science and Technology Education, Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Computing and Mathematical Science and Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences, primarily enrolled in the Level One GST 111 Communication in English.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first section assessed the causes and manifestations of speaking anxiety, while the second focused on strategies and remedies for overcoming anxiety. The survey was administered manually, and participants completed it individually, with confidentiality and anonymity assured to encourage honest responses.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and frequencies, were computed to identify patterns in students' responses. Visual representations, such as graphs and bar charts, were used to illustrate the distribution of responses and highlight key findings. Below is a summary of the methodological parameters:

| Parameter | Details |
|------------------|---|
| Research Design | Quantitative – Descriptive Survey |
| Study Site | Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil |
| Population | 20 Undergraduate students across |



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| | the faculties (FASCI, FASTE, FAAAT, FAENG, FAEES & FACOMS) |
| Sample Size | 120 students across multiple semesters |
| Data Collection | Structured questionnaire administered) Likert-scale (manually administered) |
| Scale | 5-point Likert: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree |
| Analysis Tool | SPSS (descriptive statistics: mean, SD, frequencies) |
| Ethical Measures | Confidentiality and anonymity assured |

The questionnaire's two-section structure ensured that both the problem space (causes of anxiety) and the solution space (remedies) were adequately covered. Responses were collected individually to minimise social desirability bias.

Analysis of Findings

Causes and Predictors of English-Speaking Anxiety

The analysis of Research Question 1 reveals that speaking anxiety is widespread and multidimensional. The overall mean confidence score among respondents was 1.8 on a 5-point scale, indicating that the large majority of students lack confidence in speaking English. This low mean substantially below the neutral midpoint of 3.0 confirms that anxiety is not an isolated experience but a structural feature of the oral English classroom at Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil..

Mean Scores Summary

Figure 1 below presents the mean scores for key anxiety-related factors, illustrating the gap between actual student confidence and the neutral threshold.

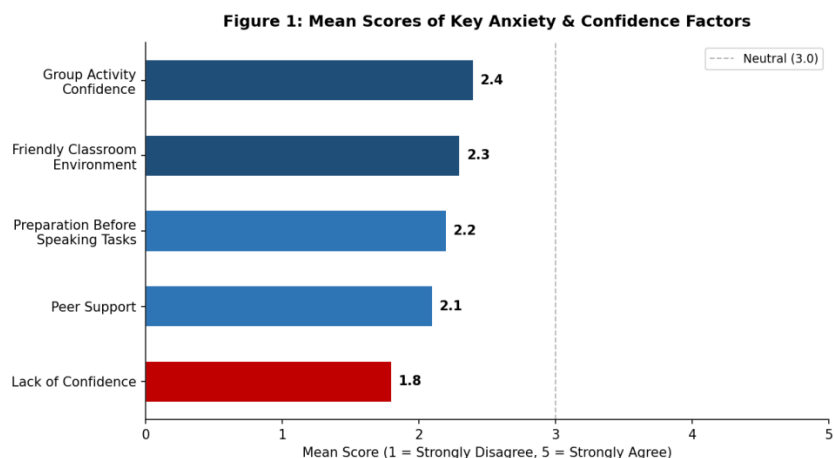


Figure 1: Mean Scores of Key Anxiety and Confidence Factors (n = 120)

As Figure 1 demonstrates, "Lack of Confidence" yielded the lowest mean score (1.8), while "Group Activity Confidence" was comparatively higher (2.4), though still well below neutral. This gradient suggests that collaborative learning contexts offer marginally more supportive conditions for oral performance, yet are insufficient on their own to overcome anxiety.

Response Distribution Across Anxiety Causes

Figure 2 presents the frequency distribution of student responses across five identified causes of speaking anxiety. Agreement rates (Agree + Strongly Agree) consistently exceeded 80% across all items, confirming that these are prevalent, not peripheral, concerns.

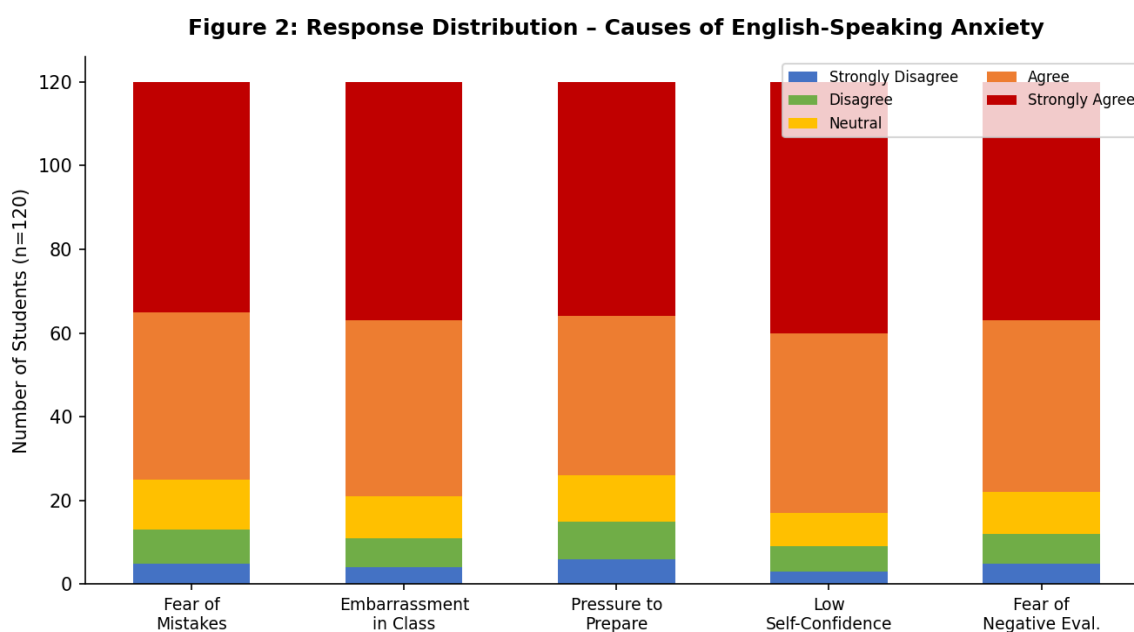


Figure 2: Response Distribution: Causes of English-Speaking Anxiety (n = 120)

Fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence attracted the highest proportions of "Strongly Agree" responses (60% and 57% respectively), reinforcing the theoretical framework of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who identified fear of negative evaluation as a primary component of foreign language classroom anxiety. Embarrassment and public correction by lecturers were also widely endorsed, suggesting that the affective classroom climate plays a decisive role in sustaining or exacerbating anxiety.

Physical and Psychological Manifestations

Beyond attitudinal responses, the study documented students' physical and psychological symptoms of anxiety during oral tasks. These somatic manifestations represent the physiological dimension of Foreign Language Anxiety, as conceptualised by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014).

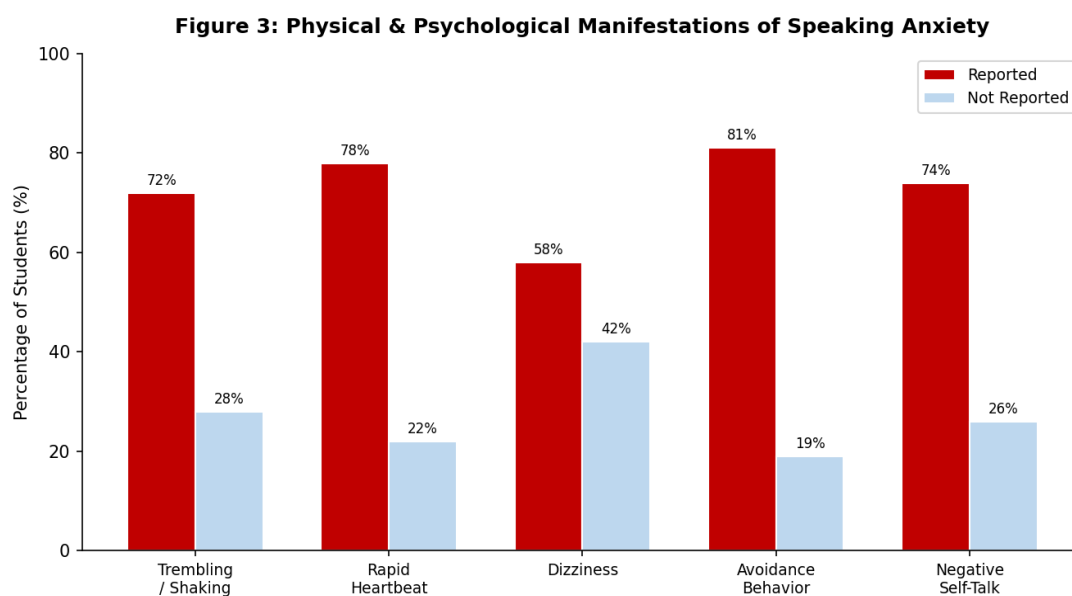


Figure 3: Reported Physical and Psychological Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety (n = 120)

Figure 3 shows that avoidance behaviour had the highest reported rate (81%), indicating that a large majority of students actively withdraw from speaking opportunities when anxious. Rapid heartbeat (78%) and trembling/shaking (72%) were also widely reported, confirming that anxiety has tangible physiological consequences. Dizziness was the least reported symptom (58%), though this still represents more than half the sample.

These findings corroborate the established view that FLA is not merely a cognitive or emotional phenomenon but involves physiological responses that can impede oral performance and reduce willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, 2007; Gregersen, MacIntyre & Meza, 2014).

Self-Efficacy Perceptions

Self-efficacy: defined as a student's belief in their ability to perform speaking tasks successfully emerged as a critical predictor of anxiety. The data indicate a strongly skewed distribution, with the majority of students reporting low self-efficacy beliefs.

Figure 5: Distribution of Self-Efficacy Perceptions Among Students

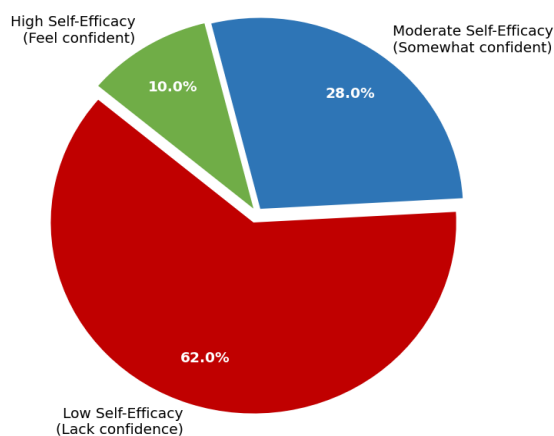


Figure 5: Distribution of Self-Efficacy Perceptions among Students (n = 120)

As shown in Figure 5, 62% of students reported low self-efficacy, perceiving themselves as significantly less proficient than their peers. Only 10% reported high self-efficacy. This aligns closely with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which posits that low self-efficacy beliefs reinforce avoidance behaviour, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of anxiety and underperformance. The perception that peers are more proficient even when this is not objectively the case further diminishes students' confidence and reinforces withdrawal from speaking activities (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

Remedies and Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

Research Question 2 explored students' perceptions of effective interventions. Figure 4 presents the mean scores assigned to five key remedies and strategies.

Figure 4: Effectiveness of Remedies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

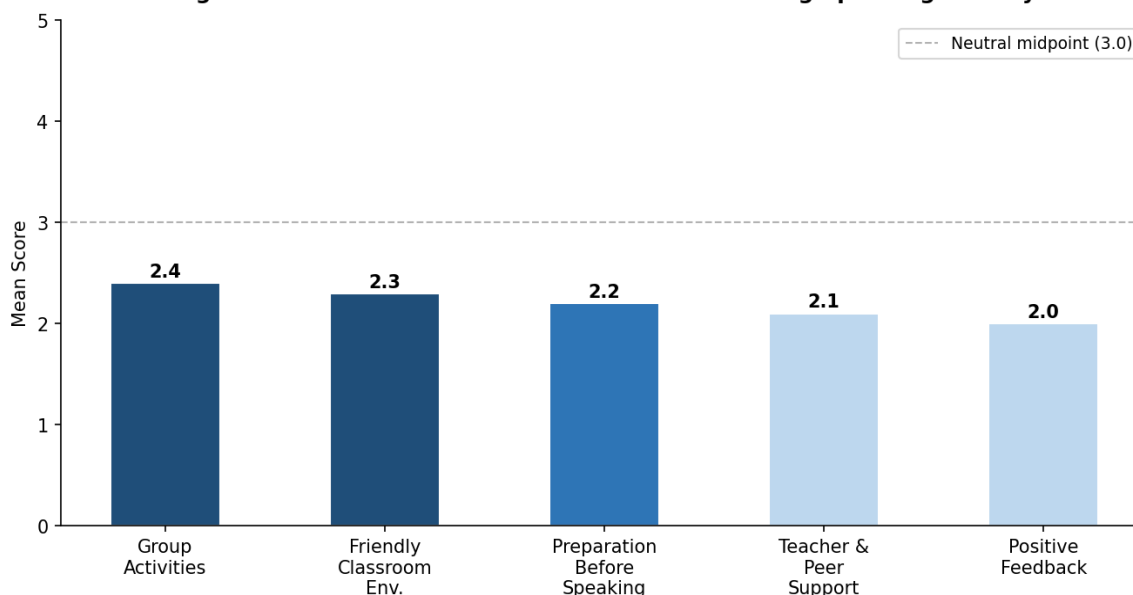


Figure 4: Mean Scores for Remedies/Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety (n = 120)

Although mean scores for all strategies remained below the neutral threshold of 3.0, notable differences emerged in their relative effectiveness. Group activities (Mean = 2.4) and a friendly classroom environment (Mean = 2.3) received the highest ratings, suggesting that collaborative and affectively safe contexts offer meaningful, if limited, relief from anxiety. Preparation before speaking tasks (Mean = 2.2) and lecturer and peer support (Mean = 2.1) were also positively rated, while positive feedback (Mean = 2.0) scored lowest reflecting students' reported experience of insufficient reinforcement in current classroom practice.

These findings are consistent with Oxford's (1999) taxonomy of language learning strategies and with Raja's (2017) emphasis on the role of constructive feedback and peer interaction in developing oral confidence.

Statistical Summary

Table 2 below provides a consolidated descriptive statistics summary for all variables measured in the study.

| Variable / Item | Mean | Std. Dev. | Interpretation |
|--|------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Lack of confidence in speaking English | 1.80 | 0.61 | Very Low Confidence |
| Lecturer and peer support available | 2.10 | 0.73 | Low – Insufficient Support |



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| Preparation before speaking tasks helps | 2.20 | 0.68 | Low – Marginally Helpful |
| Friendly classroom environment | 2.30 | 0.71 | Low – Slightly Positive |
| Confidence during group activities | 2.40 | 0.77 | Low – Best Performing Strategy |
| Fear of making mistakes | 4.42 | 0.58 | High Anxiety Indicator |
| Embarrassment / peer ridicule | 4.35 | 0.63 | High Anxiety Indicator |
| Pressure to prepare extensively | 4.28 | 0.66 | High Anxiety Indicator |
| Fear of negative evaluation | 4.38 | 0.60 | High Anxiety Indicator |

Note: Items with mean > 3.5 indicate strong agreement with anxiety-inducing factors; items with mean < 2.5 reflect low perceived efficacy of supports or remedies.

Findings

The results are presented in alignment with the study's research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the causes of English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students?

The analysis indicates that a majority of students lack confidence in speaking English (Mean = 1.8). Key factors contributing to anxiety include fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, pressure to prepare, and low self-confidence. The findings suggest that a supportive classroom environment, encouragement from teachers and peers, and increased practice opportunities are essential for alleviating students' anxiety and fostering oral confidence.



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Research Question 2: What are the remedies for overcoming English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students?

The results reveal that overall participation in speaking activities is low, although students report slightly higher confidence when engaging in group activities (Mean = 2.4). Students emphasized the importance of a friendly classroom environment (Mean = 2.3) and support from teachers and peers (Mean = 2.1) in boosting confidence. Additionally, preparation before speaking tasks was identified as a helpful strategy for increasing self-assurance (Mean = 2.2). These findings underscore the need for structured opportunities for practice, positive reinforcement, group interaction, and supportive teaching approaches to enable students to speak English without fear.

Discussion

The data collectively confirm that English-speaking anxiety at Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil is a pervasive, multidimensional phenomenon. The analysis highlights four interlocking dimensions that sustain anxiety in the undergraduate oral communication context:

- **Cognitive-Evaluative Dimension:** Fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation by lecturers and peers constitute the most potent triggers of anxiety. These fears are not irrational; they reflect students' accurate perception of a classroom culture that insufficiently rewards effort and incorrectly equates errors with failure.
- **Physiological Dimension:** The widespread reporting of trembling, rapid heartbeat, and avoidance behaviour confirms that anxiety manifests at a bodily level, creating barriers to participation that cognitive reframing alone cannot overcome.
- **Social-Comparative Dimension:** The tendency to compare oneself unfavourably with peers, combined with limited perceived support from teachers, reinforces low self-efficacy and reduces willingness to communicate; a key predictor of long-term oral language development.
- **Environmental Dimension:** Students reported that group tasks and a friendly classroom environment offered the greatest relative relief. This underscores the critical role of pedagogical design: structured, low-stakes speaking activities embedded in a supportive relational climate can meaningfully reduce anxiety.

Taken together, these dimensions support a holistic model of language anxiety consistent with the theoretical frameworks of Horwitz et al. (1986), Bandura (1997), and MacIntyre (2007). Any intervention strategy must address all four dimensions simultaneously to be effective.



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Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that English-speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudilis deeply embedded in cognitive, physiological, social, and environmental factors. The descriptive statistics reveal a student population with critically low confidence in oral English (Mean = 1.8), widespread somatic symptoms of anxiety, and a strong tendency toward avoidance behaviour. At the same time, the data point toward actionable solutions: structured group learning, teacher support, positive reinforcement, and a friendly classroom climate; all of which, when implemented systematically, have the potential to incrementally rebuild students' oral confidence and reduce anxiety.

Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions over time, and should expand the sample to include other institutions to enhance generalisability.

Recommendations

Based on the analytical findings, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for educators and institutional stakeholders in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil:

- Redesign the affective climate of Communication in English classes by establishing clear norms of mutual respect, normalising errors as part of the learning process, and publicly reframing mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Increase the frequency and structure of collaborative speaking activities (e.g., pair work, group presentations, think-pair-share) to leverage the comparatively higher confidence students exhibit in group contexts (Mean = 2.4).
- Provide regular, constructive, and positive feedback after speaking tasks. Students' low rating of positive feedback (Mean = 2.0) reflects a gap that targeted teacher professional development can address.
- Incorporate explicit instruction in anxiety management strategies, including preparation routines, self-talk techniques, and incremental exposure in public speaking.
- Conduct periodic self-assessment tasks that help students calibrate accurate self-efficacy beliefs, reducing the damaging effects of inaccurate downward social comparison.
- Students must acquaint themselves with speaking English outside the classrooms.

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