

Speaking anxiety in EFL learners: A systematic review of its causes, coping strategies, and pedagogical interventions

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety remains a persistent challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where opportunities for authentic oral communication are limited. The goal of this study is to synthesize contemporary research on the causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners, the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions, and their classroom implications. This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design by analyzing 20 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus-indexed journals published between 2020 and 2025, supported by 27 additional relevant sources. The analysis employed thematic synthesis informed by established theoretical frameworks, including the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Self-Efficacy Theory, Social Constructivism, and Communicative Language Teaching. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is primarily driven by fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, unsupportive classroom environments, linguistic insecurity, and sociocultural norms. The review further reveals that technology-enhanced approaches, drama-based activities, flipped classrooms, digital storytelling, and collaborative learning consistently contribute to anxiety reduction when accompanied by emotional support from teachers. This review contributes to the field by bridging the gap between theoretical perspectives and classroom practices, particularly in underrepresented Southeast Asian EFL contexts. It highlights the importance of emotionally safe, learner-centered, and culturally responsive instructional designs. The study concludes by recommending longitudinal and cross-cultural research to strengthen the sustainable implementation of anxiety-reducing pedagogical interventions in diverse EFL settings.

Keywords: EFL learners; foreign language anxiety; pedagogical interventions; speaking anxiety; systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety is one of the most common emotional problems faced by EFL learners and represents a significant barrier to effective oral communication and classroom participation. This issue is particularly prominent in Asian and Indonesian contexts, where cultural expectations and instructional practices may reduce learners' confidence in using English. Addressing speaking anxiety

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is crucial, as oral communication competence is a primary goal of EFL instruction and a key factor in learners' academic and professional success. Studies have shown that students often feel scared, anxious, and unsure of themselves when they have to speak English in class or in public (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). In the Thai and Indonesian contexts, this anxiety is often linked to limited exposure, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation (Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025). Even with adequate preparation, learners may continue to feel intense apprehension, especially when the tasks are unfamiliar or involve peer judgment (Sukmana et al., 2023).

However, there are several ways to teach that have been suggested to help with this nervousness, like using digital resources like TED Talks, which show real-life, structured examples of how to speak in front of an audience (Liu, 2021). Moreover, innovative evaluation systems like online dynamic assessment have also proven potential in minimizing speaking fear while fostering motivation through individualized feedback and mediated interaction (Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2025). Given the complex nature and diverse causes of speaking anxiety, it is necessary to combine the latest research results to understand both the triggers and the pedagogical practices that effectively reduce this issue in EFL classes.

Speaking anxiety has become one of the most common emotional problems for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, making it hard for them to speak well even with new teaching methods and technology. Research shows time and time again that speaking is the skill that causes the most anxiety, more than reading, writing, or listening (Alsakaker, 2025; Bai & Xian, 2024). Anxiety manifests in various ways such as fear of negative evaluation, avoidance behaviors, and diminished self-confidence, particularly during public speaking or impromptu tasks (Liu, 2018). Emotional factors like fear of being laughed at or judged often override learners' linguistic competence (Alsakaker, 2025), which leads to underperformance and reduced willingness to communicate. These psychological barriers can significantly hinder language acquisition outcomes, even when learners possess adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge (Li et al., 2025).

Several studies have looked into new ways to help people with speaking anxiety. For example, using humor to teach speaking skills was shown to lower anxiety levels a lot, making the classroom a more relaxed place where people were more likely to speak up (Alsakaker, 2025). Similarly, digital storytelling (DST) not only enhances speaking fluency but also promotes self-regulated learning and reduces anxiety through creative, low-stakes production tasks (Bai & Xian, 2024). Interactive learning platforms, like those that use ASR and multimedia storytelling, give students a private space to practice their language skills without being judged by their peers or teachers right away.

Recent studies have added a lot of new creative strategies to the teaching toolbox, along with humor, DST, and ASR-based methods. For example, the use of synchronous virtual flipped classrooms (SVFC) has shown two benefits: it improves students' speaking skills and lowers their anxiety levels when they speak online at the same time (Muluk et al., 2025). In the

same way, action research that uses drama-based interventions has shown how role-playing activities can help students get over their fear of speaking and improve their ability to communicate through embodied learning experiences (Dimililer & Atamtürk, 2019). Flipped instruction models in both face-to-face and online settings have also proven effective in fostering engagement and reducing language-related fear by creating a more autonomous learning environment (Ay Kaya & Yangin Ersanli, 2025; Muluk et al., 2025). Interestingly, AI-powered chat tools like ChatGPT have recently become more popular because they help students feel more confident in their speaking skills and less anxious by giving them instant, judgment-free feedback in personalized speaking simulations (Celik et al., 2025). These findings collectively indicate a significant shift toward student-centered, psychologically supportive practices in EFL speaking instruction.

Even with these improvements, the literature still has some gaps. First, a lot of research is still limited to specific classrooms or short-term interventions (Alsakaker, 2025; Liu, 2018). Second, while the efficacy of interventions like DST and ASR has been individually studied, the complex interplay between anxiety, learner strategies, and contextual factors is still underexplored (Li et al., 2025; Liu, 2018). Furthermore, much of the existing literature is quantitative in nature, lacking rich qualitative data to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of anxious learners (Bai & Xian, 2024; Li et al., 2025). There is a growing need for systematic reviews that bring together new patterns, causes, ways to deal with speaking anxiety, and their implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

This growing concern has attracted increasing academic attention; however, most existing review studies have examined foreign language anxiety in general or focused on isolated variables and specific instructional contexts. In contrast, few systematic reviews have specifically synthesized recent empirical evidence on speaking anxiety in EFL settings by simultaneously addressing its causes, coping strategies, and pedagogical interventions, particularly in underrepresented Asian contexts. Previous reviews have largely discussed language anxiety broadly, without employing comprehensive systematic review frameworks that highlight classroom-based implications.

To address the identified research gap, this systematic literature review aims to examine the causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners, analyze the strategies and instructional interventions used to reduce it, and highlight key pedagogical implications for EFL teaching. To guide this investigation, the following research questions are formulated:

- R.Q.1. What are the primary causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners as reported in recent studies?
- R.Q.2. What strategies and instructional interventions have been employed to reduce EFL speaking anxiety, and how are these implemented?
- R.Q.3. What pedagogical implications and recommendations have emerged from research on EFL speaking anxiety?

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METHOD

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was used as the primary research design in this study. SLR is a transparent, systematic, and reproducible literature review technique used to find, assess, and summarize results from pertinent studies on a given subject (Kitchenham, 2004). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, SLRs are designed to minimize bias through rigorous, well-documented search, selection, and analysis procedures (Siddaway et al., 2025). This study employed a qualitative research design based on a Systematic Literature Review. The data sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved from Scopus-indexed journals published between 2020 and 2025. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and pedagogical implications related to EFL speaking anxiety.

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The evidence-based practice paradigm, which maintains that decisions about education or pedagogy should be based on methodically compiled research findings, serves as the theoretical foundation for the SLR process used in this study. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model's tenets are in line with this framework (Moher et al., 2010), which guides the reporting of literature selection and inclusion in systematic reviews.

Furthermore, the technique integrates thematic synthesis as a basic analytical strategy. Thematic synthesis enables researchers to go beyond the collection of data by identifying patterns, themes, and implications across studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This is particularly appropriate for research problems involving affective variables such as language anxiety, which are complex, context-dependent, and often reported in mixed-method designs.

This study employed the SLR approach to systematically analyze, compare, and synthesize data from recent empirical research on speaking anxiety in EFL learners. The objective is to delineate the existing research landscape while offering a comprehensive knowledge of the underlying reasons, coping mechanisms, and educational consequences related to this well-documented issue. The study sought to guarantee methodological integrity and scholarly relevance by adhering to recognized SLR norms and incorporating foundational concepts from educational psychology and applied linguistics.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

All articles were collected from the Scopus database, given its reliability in presenting articles of reputable international journals. The keywords used in the search are:

"Speaking Anxiety" AND "EFL"

A preliminary search produced a total of 115 items. The selection process involved reviewing the title and abstract, with a publication restriction

from 2015 to 2025. Fifty articles deemed relevant were retrieved at this stage based on the inclusion criteria. Twenty publications published between 2020 and 2025 were chosen for comprehensive analysis, while the remaining thirty served as supplementary references and contextual support. Table 1 below delineates the selection method undertaken.

Table 1. SLR Article Selection Process

Selection Stage	Jumlah Artikel
Initial search results in Scopus	115
Selected by title and abstract (2015–2025)	50
Relevant articles filtered (2020–2025)	35
Main article in-depth review	20
Additional articles as supporting references	30

Articles were included in the analysis if they fit the following conditions: focus on speaking anxiety in the context of EFL learning, be written in English, be published in Scopus-indexed journals, and include empirical data both quantitative, qualitative, and combined. Articles that simply addressed generic language anxiety, did not provide empirical evidence, or focused on ESL or non-EFL multilingual situations, were removed from the primary analysis.

Data extraction was carried out using a framework-based form from Booth et al. (2021), which included information such as author name, year, country, study objectives, methodology, participants, key findings related to causes, treatment strategies, and pedagogical implications of speaking anxiety. Data collection was done manually and re-validated by a second reviewer to improve reliability.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the thematic synthesis approach as described by Thomas and Harden (2008). Three primary processes were executed: first, coding pertinent qualitative data; second, categorizing into descriptive themes; and finally, formulating analytical themes that address research objectives. The quantitative data in the examined article was studied narratively and integrated with qualitative data to create a thorough understanding.

To maintain the validity and repeatability of the procedure, methodological measures followed the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2010) and systematic quality standards as recommended by Kitchenham (2004).

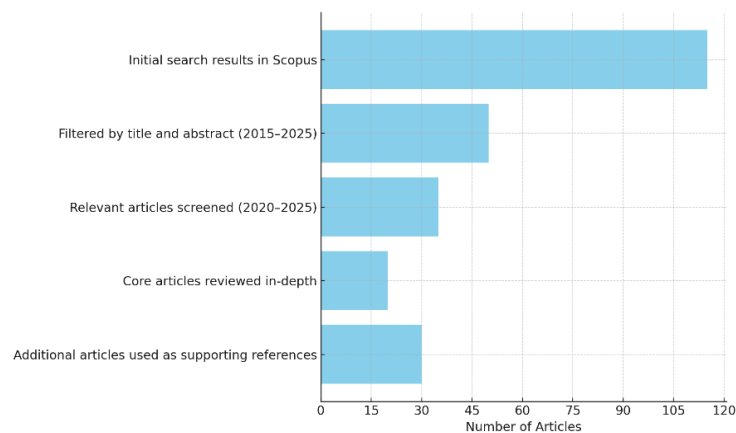


Figure 1. Article Selection Flow Chart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Reviewed Studies

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) assessed 20 peer-reviewed journal publications published between 2020 and 2025, concentrating on speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations. All selected papers were indexed in the Scopus database and met the inclusion criteria, including relevance to speaking anxiety, EFL learner demographic, and methodological transparency. The search procedure initially returned 115 research, which were filtered down to 50, and eventually 20 publications were selected for in-depth thematic synthesis.

The studies came from varied geographical regions, with a notable presence from Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, China, and the Philippines. A range of research approaches were applied, including quantitative surveys, mixed methods, experimental designs, qualitative interviews, and document analysis. Participant demographics spanned from undergraduate students to pre-service teachers, across both online and face-to-face learning environments. The tables below summarize the key characteristics of the 20 studies included in this review.

Table 2. Profile of Reviewed Articles

No	Author(s) and Year	Method	Participants	Focus	Key Findings
1	Muengnak-in & Narathakoon (2024)	Mixed Methods	Thai high school students	Speaking anxiety and attitudes	Communication apprehension common; attitudes influence anxiety
2	Quvanch et al. (2024)	Mixed Methods	Afghan EFL undergraduates	Levels, causes, and coping strategies	Moderate anxiety; various coping strategies used
3	Chen (2024)	Quantitative	Chinese undergraduates	Expectancy-value beliefs and FLSA	Expectancy-value beliefs predict proficiency and anxiety
4	Mouhoubi-Messadh &	Qualitative	Algerian undergradu	Role of teachers in	Supportive teaching reduces anxiety

	Khalidi (2022)		ates	FLSA	
5	Sukmana et al. (2023)	Experimental	Indonesian EFL university students	Cue cards, fluency, accuracy, and anxiety	Cue cards enhance fluency and reduce anxiety
6	Bashori et al. (2023)	Experimental	Indonesian EFL students	ASR-based websites and anxiety	ASR lowers anxiety and boosts vocabulary/enjoyment
7	Surani et al. (2025)	Mixed Methods	Indonesian university students	E-learning & speaking anxiety	Technology improved speaking and reduced anxiety
8	Glomo-Narzoles & Glomo-Palermo (2021)	Mixed Methods	Philippine EFL learners	Attitude and anxiety	Positive attitude lowers anxiety
9	Huang (2024)	Experimental	Taiwanese university students	VR scaffolding and speaking anxiety	VR scaffolding reduces anxiety and increases confidence
10	Cancino & Cabello (2024)	Quantitative	Chilean EFL learners	Speaking anxiety and self-efficacy	High anxiety observed; no correlation with computer self-efficacy
11	Alamri & Qasem (2023)	Quantitative	Saudi students and teachers	Gender perceptions and speaking anxiety	Female students perceived higher anxiety levels
12	Arifin et al. (2023)	Qualitative	Indonesian pre-service teachers	Strategies in post-COVID learning	Classroom practice and peer collaboration reduce anxiety
13	Hasibuan et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Indonesian university students	Public speaking anxiety in online learning	Fear of judgment and lack of feedback increase anxiety
14	Alq (2024)	Quantitative	Saudi university students	Speaking anxiety in online vs face-to-face learning	Higher anxiety found in online settings
15	Alaqeel & Altalhab (2020)	Quantitative	Saudi EFL students	Levels and causes of anxiety	Fear of making mistakes is the major cause
16	Ölmez & İltir (2025)	Quantitative	Turkish university students	Predictors of speaking anxiety	Communication apprehension is the strongest predictor
17	Al-Saidat et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Jordanian university students	Anxiety and willingness to communicate	High anxiety correlates with low WTC
18	Wijaya (2022)	Systematic Review	Indonesian EFL	Strategies to overcome	Enjoyable tasks, exposure, and

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			learners (20 studies)	FLSA	collaboration reduce anxiety
19	Tauchid (2025)	Experimenta 1	Indonesian university students	Peer and teacher support in online classes	Support improves speaking confidence
20	Oteir & Al-Otaibi (2021)	Quantitative	Saudi EFL students	Socio-economic status and anxiety	Low SES associated with higher speaking anxiety

These studies collectively demonstrate that speaking anxiety remains a key obstacle to oral language proficiency among EFL learners and is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors rather than a single cause. Self-efficacy influences learners’ confidence to speak, while socio-emotional support from teachers and peers can either mitigate or intensify anxiety levels. Teaching techniques and learner beliefs further interact with these affective factors by determining how safe and meaningful speaking activities are perceived. In addition, contextual conditions such as online learning environments may amplify or reduce speaking anxiety depending on the level of interaction, feedback, and collaborative support provided. Together, these interconnected factors significantly affect learners’ willingness to communicate, fluency development, and overall oral proficiency in EFL contexts. This synthesis indicates that addressing speaking anxiety requires integrated pedagogical approaches that simultaneously consider affective, instructional, and contextual dimensions.

The methodological variety allowed for rich triangulation of findings—while quantitative studies often validate levels and causes of anxiety through standardized scales, qualitative and mixed-method studies provide contextual depth, highlighting lived experiences and behavioral responses of learners facing language anxiety. This review lays the framework for detailed study in the following sections categorized by research questions.

Thematic Synthesis of Research Findings

Causes of Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learners (RQ1)

The analysis of 20 analyzed research identified five reoccurring sources of speaking anxiety among EFL learners. These explanations, consistently identified across geographical and educational contexts, underline the emotive, social, linguistic, and cultural elements of foreign language speaking apprehension. The following themes emerged:

1. Fear of Negative Evaluation

This was the most commonly cited factor, appearing in 17 of the analyzed articles. Learners showed anxiety coming from fear of making mistakes and being judged poorly by peers or teachers, particularly in public speaking or oral assessment scenarios (Alamri & Qasem, 2024;

Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025). This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which asserts that negative emotional states such as fear and embarrassment can hinder second language acquisition by elevating the affective filter (Krashen, 1985).

2. Lack of Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy

A lack of conviction in one's own speaking ability was discovered in 15 studies. Learners sometimes doubted their capacity to speak effectively and accurately, leading to performance anxiety (Chen, 2024; Surani et al., 2025). This supports Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, where low perceived competence reduces persistence and increases avoidance behavior in communicative tasks.

3. Classroom Environment and Peer Pressure

The interpersonal dynamics in classroom settings, including perceived criticism from peers, competition, and inflexible teacher roles, contributed to speaking anxiety in 13 research (Arifin et al., 2024; Glomo-Narzoles & Glomo-Palermo, 2021). A lack of psychological safety in the classroom leads students to avoid speaking opportunities.

4. Linguistic Insecurity

This involves vocabulary restrictions, grammatical uncertainty, and pronunciation challenges. Found in 14 research studies, this cause reflects learners' concern of "not knowing what to say" or "saying it wrong" (Bashori et al., 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2022). It reinforces the idea that incomplete linguistic competence can heighten anxiety, particularly when fluency is expected under time constraints.

5. Cultural-Educational Background

Exam-driven systems, teacher-centered pedagogies, and rigid classroom norms in many EFL settings limit spontaneous communication and penalize errors. These cultural characteristics, discovered in 10 studies, indirectly foster quiet and passive learning, notably in Asian and Middle Eastern cultures (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2022; Quvanch et al., 2024).

The identified themes emphasize that speaking anxiety among EFL learners is not founded in a single cause but is rather a complex issue comprising psychological, linguistic, social, and cultural elements. These aspects typically overlap and interact, making the experience of anxiety intensely personal yet generally widespread across varied EFL settings. The table below highlights the key causes of speaking anxiety as found in the 20 examined studies, highlighting the frequency with which each theme appears in the literature.

Table 3. Major Causes of Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learners

Cause of Anxiety	Frequency (out of 20 studies)
Fear of negative evaluation	17
Lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy	15
Classroom environment and peer pressure	13
Linguistic insecurity (e.g., vocabulary gap, grammar mistakes)	14

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Cultural-educational background (e.g., exam-oriented systems)	10
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These findings affirm that effective pedagogical interventions must target not just learners' linguistic competencies but also their emotional readiness, belief systems, and classroom experiences. The prevalence of fear of negative evaluation and low self-efficacy speaks to the significance of building a supportive, non-threatening learning environment where learners feel secure to express themselves. Moreover, cultural and institutional influences need to be acknowledged by educators and legislators to develop more student-centered, communicative learning settings. Understanding these core reasons offers a framework for researching evidence-based treatments to alleviate anxiety, as addressed in the next section.

Strategies and Interventions to Reduce Speaking Anxiety (RQ2)

The review indicated a wide range of pedagogical practices and technological interventions utilized to minimize speaking anxiety among EFL learners. These interventions target both the internal affective states of learners and the external learning environments, such as instructional design and classroom dynamics. Four prominent groups of tactics were identified: technology-assisted interventions, task-based and expressive approaches, psychoeducational and peer-related assistance, and restructured classroom formats such as flipped learning.

1. Use of Technology (ASR, AI tools, Video tasks)
Tools such as Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and AI-powered tutors (e.g., ChatGPT) allow learners to practice speaking in non-threatening, self-paced environments. These tools often provide real-time feedback, which reduces dependence on teacher correction and alleviates performance pressure. Studies by Li et al. (2025) and Bashori et al. (2021) showed that ASR significantly improved fluency and reduced anxiety. Similarly, Surani et al. (2025) found that digital speaking modules helped build learner confidence.
2. Task-Based and Drama-Based Approaches
Speaking exercises anchored on drama, simulation, and role play give low-stakes chances for learners to express themselves creatively. These tactics promote speaking spontaneity, build classroom involvement, and lessen fear of mistakes. Sukmana et al. (2023) and Arifin et al. (2024) reported that drama-based activities enhanced fluency and emotional readiness in speaking situations.
3. Psychoeducation an Peer Support
Interventions combining affective training, peer support, and teacher encouragement proved highly effective in reducing anxiety. Al-Saidat et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of equipping learners with awareness and coping tools to understand their emotional barriers. Peer support, as studied by Tauchid (2025) and Hasibuan et al. (2022), helped reduce judgment-related anxiety and promoted verbal participation.
4. Flipped Classroom and Digital Storytelling (DST)

Flipped classroom approaches allow learners to rehearse content at home before performing orally in class. This reduces cognitive load and fosters autonomy. Surani et al. (2025) and Wijaya (2023) documented significant anxiety reduction when learners had more control over input. Digital storytelling (DST), on the other hand, gave learners a creative and expressive outlet, promoting engagement and decreasing pressure to perform live.

The evaluated research revealed a range of empirically validated tactics targeted to lessen EFL learners' speaking anxiety across various circumstances. These interventions cover cognitive, emotive, and technical dimensions—each targeting various components of the learner experience. While some tactics target the internal psychological state of the learner (e.g., self-efficacy, emotional control), others change the educational environment to enhance engagement, safety, and fluency. The following table summarizes these tactics, the studies that utilized them, and the reported results on learners' speaking fear.

Table 4. Strategies and Reported Effects on Speaking Anxiety

No	Strategy/Intervention	Studies Reporting Use	Reported Effects
1	Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)	Wenyi et al. (2023); Bashori et al. (2023)	Improved fluency; reduced anxiety in oral tests
2	ChatGPT and AI Tutors	Wijaya (2022); Özgen & Korkmaz (2025)	Increased self-confidence; reduced pressure from teacher eval.
3	Video tasks and multimedia modules	Surani et al. (2025); Cancino & Cabello (2024)	Improved vocabulary, motivation, and reduced anxiety
4	Drama-based speaking tasks	Sukmana et al. (2023); Arifin et al. (2023)	Built confidence and speaking spontaneity in a safe environment
5	Flipped classroom models	Tauchid (2025); Surani et al. (2025)	Enabled rehearsal and student autonomy; lowered anxiety
6	Digital storytelling (DST)	Glomo-Narzoles & Palermo (2021); Chen & Bai (2025)	Boosted self-expression and engagement; less speaking pressure
7	Peer and teacher support	Alamri & Qasem (2023); Hasibuan et al. (2023)	Reduced fear of judgment; enhanced class participation
8	Psychoeducational workshops	Rakhsha et al. (2023); Al-Saidat et al. (2023)	Helped students understand anxiety; improved coping behavior

The reviewed studies indicate that the effectiveness of techniques for reducing speaking anxiety largely depends on how well interventions are contextually integrated and responsive to learners' needs. Rather than relying on a single approach, successful interventions combine instructional strategies with sensitivity to learners' emotional states, proficiency levels, and learning contexts. Technology-based methods such as ASR tend to be more effective when supported by adequate infrastructure and guided pedagogical use, enabling learners to practice speaking with reduced fear of judgment. In contrast, drama-based activities and peer collaboration are most beneficial

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when embedded within a supportive classroom culture that encourages risk-taking and mutual respect. Overall, these findings suggest that contextually integrated and learner-responsive interventions enhance the impact of diverse techniques by aligning affective support, instructional design, and contextual conditions, thereby more effectively alleviating speaking anxiety among EFL learners.

Pedagogical Implications and Practical Applications (RQ3)

The synthesis of 20 examined papers offers useful insights into how speaking anxiety can be handled not just through discrete interventions but also through thorough educational reorientation. The following considerations emerge as particularly crucial for EFL educators and curriculum developers:

Affective-Supportive Task Design

Task design plays a vital role in influencing learners' emotional responses to speaking. Tasks that are extremely evaluative, time-pressured, or linguistically rigorous often heighten anxiety and diminish speech production. In contrast, affective-supportive tasks, such as drama-based performance, digital storytelling, peer dialogues, and structured practice through flipped models, were proven to generate safer contexts for oral expression (Bai & Xian, 2024; Chen, 2024; Sukmana et al., 2023). These tasks reduce the psychological burden by shifting the focus from correctness to personal meaning-making and communicative intent, aligning with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach.

Teachers as Psychological Facilitators

Several studies emphasized the teacher's role not merely as a language instructor but as a socio-emotional facilitator (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Arifin et al., 2024). Learners are more likely to speak when they perceive the classroom as a non-threatening space where errors are treated as learning opportunities. Teachers can reduce anxiety by:

- Using non-judgmental corrective feedback,
- Encouraging self-reflection,
- Providing praise and encouragement for effort,
- Allowing gradual exposure to public speaking (e.g., from pairs → small groups → class-wide).

This correlates with the Social Constructivist Theory, where learning is considered as socially mediated and anxiety is decreased through scaffolded, collaborative interactions.

Integration of Technology for Individualized Practice

The application of AI and voice-based technologies (e.g., ASR, ChatGPT) is fast revolutionizing EFL speaking instruction. These tools allow kids to practice speech quietly, receive quick feedback, and gain fluency without social danger. In resource-rich schools, adopting such technologies can democratize access to oral practice and lessen performance pressure (Li et al., 2025; Surani et al., 2025). In more modest settings, even recorded audio tasks or low-tech

rehearsal activities can serve similar functions when combined with reflective self-assessment.

Contextual Relevance to Southeast Asian EFL Classrooms

In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, cultural norms of deference, face-saving, and exam-oriented instruction often suppress student speaking confidence (Tauchid, 2025; Wijaya, 2023). Therefore, anxiety-reduction tactics must be designed to meet societal expectations while progressively moving classroom discourse toward openness and risk-taking. Strategies that combine group collaboration, localized content, and non-evaluative tasks have proven more effective than purely cognitive-linguistic drills. Pedagogical interventions must transcend beyond technique and be placed within a framework that emphasizes emotional safety, social engagement, and learner autonomy. This needs a reframing of speaking education as a relational, not merely performance act, where the purpose is to encourage authentic conversation, not just linguistic correctness. These insights offer the basis for building more compassionate and effective speaking education in EFL environments.

Emerging Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the rising quantity of research on EFL speaking anxiety, various limitations and research gaps remain obvious across the examined studies. First, many investigations are localized inside Asian or Middle Eastern contexts, such as Afghanistan (Quvanch et al., 2024), Thailand (Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025), and Saudi Arabia (Alamri & Qasem, 2024), reducing the global generalizability of findings. Future study might benefit from comparing cross-cultural studies to understand how speaking anxiety develops across different educational and social backgrounds.

Second, the majority of studies reviewed were cross-sectional, offering only snapshots of learner anxiety at a specific point in time. As highlighted by Ölmez & İlter (2025), the dynamic and context-dependent nature of anxiety demands for longitudinal approaches that follow changes over time and analyze the durability of therapies. Another major gap concerns the insufficient investigation of individual learner differences, notably in terms of gender, academic level, and competency. Although several studies, such as Alamri & Qasem (2024), have attempted to explore gender-based perceptions, findings remain inconsistent and underexplored across diverse demographics.

Moreover, while proficiency has been identified as a factor influencing anxiety (Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025), it is rarely explored in connection with other learner variables like as socioeconomic position or motivation. Several experts also recognized the necessity for expanding mixed-method studies that include rich qualitative data to capture learner voices and contextual subtleties (Alqarni, 2021; Hasibuan et al., 2022). For instance, many learners' coping methods, such as meditation, peer reassurance, and task repetition, are best comprehended through narratives and reflective perspectives rather than surveys alone.

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Finally, there is growing recognition of the need to examine the role of emergent technologies, such as AI tools and ASR platforms, across varying levels of digital literacy and infrastructure. As noted by Surani et al., (2025), students with low digital literacy may face additional anxiety when learning speaking skills through unfamiliar platforms, a factor underrepresented in current research.

In light of these findings, future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal and multi-site designs across diverse cultural contexts in order to enhance the generalizability of results. Further studies should examine the intersectionality of learner characteristics, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and proficiency level, while also incorporating in-depth qualitative or mixed-method approaches to capture learners' lived experiences of speaking anxiety. In addition, future research should explore the integration of emerging technologies in various EFL settings and investigate the long-term impact and sustainability of anxiety-reducing pedagogical interventions.

These directions are likely to not only increase the theoretical knowledge of EFL speaking anxiety but also inform more inclusive, context-responsive teaching approaches globally.

Discussion

The present systematic review highlights key patterns in the causes of EFL speaking anxiety, the effectiveness of instructional interventions, and their pedagogical implications. Specifically, the discussion emphasizes how affective factors, instructional practices, and contextual conditions interact to influence learners' speaking performance. By addressing the three research questions, this section focuses on (1) the dominant causes of speaking anxiety identified across recent studies, (2) the strategies and pedagogical interventions that have been shown to reduce anxiety, and (3) the practical implications for EFL teaching and learning. The findings not only confirm previous research but also extend existing knowledge by synthesizing recent evidence and identifying emerging trends relevant to contemporary EFL classrooms.

Causes of Speaking Anxiety: Confirmations and Complexities

Many of the evaluated research consistently identify fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence as the most significant sources of speaking anxiety among EFL learners. This finding reaffirms the conclusions of Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi (2022) who noted that students' fear of judgment and linguistic inadequacy often triggers avoidance behaviors in speaking activities.

However, the Afghan-based study by Quvanch et al. (2024) reveals further nuance, suggesting that sociocultural and gender-based expectations also significantly shape anxiety levels. For example, Afghan female students often experience higher anxiety than their male peers due to traditional classroom hierarchies and social expectations. This aligns with similar gendered findings reported by Almudibry (2022) and Alamri & Qasem (2024).

Interestingly, several studies challenge the overgeneralization of anxiety as a purely negative factor. Some moderate levels of anxiety may serve as

motivational stimuli, enhancing learners' awareness and performance (Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Wijaya, 2023).

Effectiveness of Strategies: Technology, Support, and Task-Based Approaches

The solutions described in this review—ranging from ASR tools and e-learning modules to peer collaboration and psychoeducation—are mainly validated by empirical evidence from earlier research. For instance, the integration of ASR and interactive digital modules was proven to lessen anxiety greatly while boosting oral fluency (Bashori et al., 2021; Surani et al., 2025).

This affirms earlier literature emphasizing emotional security as a precondition for language risk-taking and communicative success (Alqarni, 2021; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2022). Contrasts are also evident. While digital interventions are promising, some studies (Bai & Xian, 2024; Surani et al., 2025) highlight their limitations in replicating spontaneous face-to-face speaking tasks, suggesting the need for blended or hybrid approaches.

Pedagogical Implications: From Theory to Regional Practice

The review validates the significance of Social Constructivist theories, especially in constructing emotionally supportive classroom ecosystems. Teachers are urged to act not merely as linguistic facilitators but as psychological scaffolds—as echoed in Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022).

Moreover, studies from Indonesia (Tauchid, 2025; Wijaya, 2023) and Thailand (Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025) explain how contextual modification of support-based and interactive training is crucial to successfully lowering anxiety in Southeast Asian settings. This supports Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, where encouragement and mastering experience lead to better resilience and risk-taking in oral performance.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesized evidence from 20 primary studies and 27 supporting sources to examine the causes of EFL speaking anxiety, the effectiveness of instructional interventions, and their pedagogical implications. The findings confirm that speaking anxiety is consistently influenced by affective and contextual factors, including fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, linguistic insecurity, peer pressure, and exam-oriented educational cultures, underscoring the importance of emotionally supportive learning environments.

The novelty of this review lies in its integrative synthesis of recent empirical studies that simultaneously address causes, coping strategies, and pedagogical interventions, with particular attention to context-sensitive and learner-responsive practices. While previous studies have reported mixed results regarding the effectiveness of individual techniques, this review

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explains such discrepancies by highlighting the role of contextual integration, cultural sensitivity, and instructional support in determining outcomes.

In terms of implications, the findings suggest that EFL instruction should adopt holistic approaches that combine affective awareness, learner autonomy, and supportive classroom conditions. Future research is recommended to conduct longitudinal and cross-context investigations to examine the sustainability and adaptability of anxiety-reducing interventions across diverse EFL settings.

AUTHOR STATEMENT

Dr. Iwan D. Gunawan contributed to the planning and design of the project, did the systematic literature search and data curation, and completed the formal thematic analysis. He designed the methodological framework, led the composition of the initial manuscript, and carried out the review and editing process. He was also responsible for the visualization of outcomes, project administration, and overall supervision of the study process.

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