Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension and Speaking Anxiety among Undergraduates at the Faculty of Education

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DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.924ILEIID0054

Received: 23 September 2025; Accepted: 30 September 2025; Published: 30 October 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the level of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Communication Apprehension (CA) and Speaking Anxiety (SA) in identifying the paradigms that influence oral engagement for English language among undergraduates from the Science and Mathematics programmes at the Faculty of Education in a public university, Selangor. The study uses WTC heuristic model, CA continuum and Foreign Language Classroom anxiety for the theoretical frameworks where both Communication Apprehension (CA) and Speaking Anxiety (SA) influence the outcome of Willingness to Communicate (WTC). A quantitative research approach and descriptive design was applied where 80 undergraduates were selected as respondents through stratified random sampling. The data collection was conducted using online questionnaires where 61 items were adapted in investigating the level of WTC, CA, and SA among the undergraduates. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics in producing the means and standard deviations for all items in each paradigm. The findings of this study disclosed that the undergraduates had a moderate level of WTC that inclines towards peer-supported tasks but decreases in speaking tasks with significant academic values as well as spontaneous speech. On the other hand, the CA level was moderate but may increase in formal situations while the SA level was high due to the fear of making mistakes and negative feedback. These findings conclude that the undergraduates 'readiness for English oral communication depends on the context or situation. Future research suggests the emphasis on Scaffolding learning, rehearsal and practices, as well as low-stake speaking with simulated practices for increasing undergraduates WTC in oral engagement while minimising CA and SA.

Keywords: (Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, Speaking Anxiety, undergraduates, Faculty of Education)

INTRODUCTION

Second language learners often experience adversities in attaining successful oral engagement regardless of speaking activity engagements in English classrooms. Willingness to Communicate are evident in small groups and supportive interactions, but it can be decreased when learners are required to engage in high-value conversations such as for academic purposes or unplanned conversations which have a significant effect on speaking anxiety that impedes speaking performance (Lee & Chiu, 2023). Furthermore, the main issue is not caused by exposure alone, but also on learners 'readiness and familiarity with the speaking situations.

Although the Malaysian education system aims to prepare learners to possess speaking proficiency from early schooling, most learners still find it difficult to produce accurate and fluent sentences in real-time speech.

Public statistics show that despite most learners are deemed as highly proficient in speaking, it varies across different regions with a constant decrease of speaking performance each year, indicating uneven results (EF Education First, 2024). In practice, learners often hesitate to engage in oral tasks that require high-level sentence productions. Consequently, early exposure towards English language speaking is still not sufficient among learners despite the compulsory practices in classrooms.

In addition, prior research on Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, and speaking anxiety rarely focuses on undergraduates from the Faculties of Education. Recent studies display contextual gaps, particularly the need for specific investigations for effective classroom interactions and operations (Kirkpatrick, Vafadar, & Mohebbi, 2024). Moreover, Malaysian studies tend to survey on undergraduates who do not aim to become future teachers; leaving specific practices in increasing speaking proficiency within classrooms unexplored (Bahadur & Hashim, 2024). Thus, there is a lack focus on understanding how teacher education should align with teaching pedagogies that aligns with the speaking requirements during teaching practicums and school-based interactions.

These issues show that is it not enough to secure proficient speaking abilities among future educators through opportunities for speaking practices and early exposure. Therefore, this study addresses on how WTC, CA, and speaking anxiety take place among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education.

The research objectives for this study are as the following:

1. To determine the level of Willingness to Communicate among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education.
2. To determine the level of Communication Apprehension among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education
3. To determine the level of speaking anxiety among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) heuristic model which evolved from the earlier studies on first language communication and was adjusted to the context of second language usage. WTC conceptualises situational constructs and influencing factors that are both internal and external such as personality and intergroup attitudes, the purpose to communicate, and self-confidence which precede communication behaviours. This model highlights how the learners 'readiness to speak is determined by linguistic competence as well as affective and contextual factors. The Communication Apprehension Continuum Model (Richmond et al., 2013) is examined alongside WTC and the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, 1986) as these paradigms highlight learners 'anxiety as the main inhibitors to communicate.

The Communication Apprehension (CA) Continuum Model (Richmond et al., 2013) focuses on the factors on anxiety to communicate as a spectrum rather than attributes. Individuals experience different degrees of apprehension though different settings such as interpersonal, group meeting, and public speaking situations. The CA model is dynamic and context-based, which highlight situational triggers and trait-like as the affecting factors. Current studies confirm that high CA is significant in reducing classroom participations and oral performance, while it can be reduced by specific interventions such as counselling and structured practices (Alnaeem, 2023; Abdulaal, 2023).

Correspondingly, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz (1986) is the most common tool for measuring language-related anxiety. It examines three primary sections: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This framework highlights how anxiety can limit learners' WTC by limiting cognitive abilities in second language communication. Recent studies affirmed that speaking confidence and

The present study examines the communicative disposition of undergraduates by foregrounding three interrelated constructs—Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Communication Apprehension (CA), and Speaking Anxiety (SA) to delineate patterns for oral proficiency and classroom participations. This study aims to identify how these dimensions operate across instructional contexts in learners' readiness in oral engagements. Empirical investigations among university learners commonly conceptualise WTC as a function

of anxiety, perceived competence, and enjoyment. One study that employed a cross sectional survey design with structural equation modelling among 1,269 Korean EFL learners reported that lower speaking anxiety and higher WTC in online environments (Lee & Chiu, 2023).

Accordingly, a past study on a public speaking course involving 132 undergraduates demonstrated the strongest predictor of WTC and speaking performance (Peng & Wang, 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that affective states, particularly enjoyment and reduced anxiety can supersede proficiency in driving learners‘ readiness to speak, implying that classroom designs should cultivate psychologically safe spaces that normalise making errors in speaking practices.

Longitudinal research suggests that CA is not uniformly stable across its subdomains. A survey of 135 English majors associated better preparation skills with stronger public speaking performance despite possible effects from fear related factors, which was a pattern likely shaped by instrument properties and sample compositions (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). It implies that CA possesses components amenable to targeted support, while underscoring the need for more rigorous, randomised instructions to establish strong efficacy.

Within university cohorts, SA is both prevalent and sensitive to contextual and identity related variables. A mixed method study with 120 EFL undergraduates identified moderate anxiety with recurrent somatic and cognitive symptoms such as trembling, forgetfulness, and fear of negative evaluation, alongside self-initiated coping strategies including practice and relaxation (Quvancha et al., 2024). At the motivational level, a meta-analysis encompassing 26,589 learners documented a strong negative association between foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy, which reveals the roles of anxiety in undermining confidence and constraining opportunities in speech production (Zhou et al., 2023). Thus, SA not only decreases speaking performance but also erodes the motivational resources required for sustained oral engagement in longer term.

In correspondence to this paper which investigates the level of WTC, CA, and SA among undergraduates, the following diagram explains the relationship between the investigated variables:

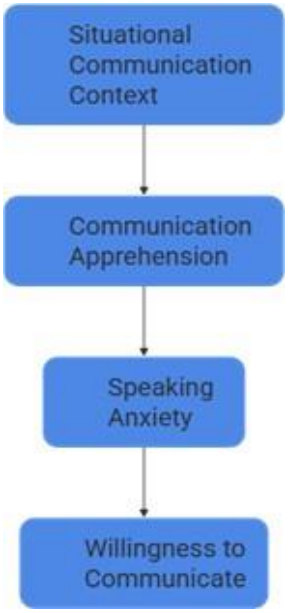

Diagram 1: The Relationships of CA, SA and WTC

METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research approach to measure the level of each variable using descriptive statistics. Quantitative designs are applied in social-science studies in determining the reliability and objectivity of statistical items through organised instruments such as surveys (APA, 2024). The items in measuring Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, and speaking anxiety are structured through organised scales for measuring and comparing the respondents ‘levels. Therefore, this approach offers

structured data collection and statistical interpretation, in determining the patters and levels of these domains among undergraduates. Descriptive design is employed to analyse the data through the summary of percentages, means and standard deviations (Research Connections, 2024).

The questionnaire occupied in this study intended to investigate the level of Willingness to Communicate and Communication Apprehension with speaking anxiety. Three classifications of specific measurements are included in the questionnaire under Section A, Section B, and Section C.

Section A focused on the measurement of Willingness to Communicate in speaking that was adapted from Weaver (2005) as 15 items were formatted according to the context of the study. The items measured the respondents 'willingness to use English language in communicating with others during learning activities during both inside and outside classroom sessions. In addition, the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) instrument designed by McCroskey (1982) was fully adopted in Section B. A total of 24 items in the instrument measured the respondents 'impression regarding the four dimensions of communication. The dimensions were referred as group discussion, meetings, interpersonal conversations and public speaking.

Lastly, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) instrument was embedded in Section C where it was designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). This particular instrument has 33 items that measure the individual 's language anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Only 22 items were retained and adapted according to the context of second language learning and speaking anxiety. The responses of all items were described according to the Likert scale form. The value of numerical figures in the scale of 1, 2, 3, 4, were assigned to Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree. Nonetheless, a reverse scoring was applied for calculating the mean score and standard deviation for the items with negative statements. The reversion led to the changes in the numerical values as; 4 = Totally Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 2 = Agree and 1 = Strongly Agree.

This study collected data from 80 undergraduates at the Faculty of Education in a public university, Selangor. The respondents were from Science and Mathematics Education programmes as they came from various semesters. The number of respondents is correspondent with the samplings in similar studies. For instance, Muftah (2023) surveyed 70 undergraduates to investigate the relationship between Communication Apprehension and self- perceived competence, while Zhang (2024) analysed data from 71 English majors to explore WTC and speaking anxiety. Both studies were able to provide valid and reliable data analysis through such number of samplings.

A random stratified sampling is used in this study to ensure that the subgroups of the selected respondents within the Faculty of Education are proportionally represented. In order to reduce sampling bias and ensuring diversity across data, prior studies employed stratified random sampling (Abtatan et al., 2025; Cantong & Escandallo, 2026). In this study, the respondents were stratified by programme and semester level, and they were randomly selected from each category. The data was collected over a period of three months through an online survey using Google Forms.

Afterwards, the collected data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis to calculate means and standard deviations for each item in determining the average mean for each variable**.** The following table shows the utilisation of the research objectives and method of analysis:

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	**METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**
1. To determine the level of Willingness to Communicate among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education.	Descriptive Statistic: The mean score of each item with the average mean score and standard deviation of each investigated variable were calculated
2. To determine the level of Communication Apprehension among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education	Descriptive Statistic: The mean score of each item with the average mean score and standard deviation of each investigated variable were calculated

3. To determine the level of speaking anxiety among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education.	Descriptive Statistic: The mean score of each item with the average mean score and standard deviation of each investigated variable were calculated

Table 1: Research Objectives and Method of Data Analysis

This study employed Cronbach's Alpha for reliability in determining the internal consistency. With values above 0.70, it measures whether the items in each construct are closely related or not (Ahmad et al., 2024; Ockert, 2019). Hence, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct in investigating internal consistency, ensuring that the adapted items in each section of the questionnaire are reliable in measuring the variables.

Since most of the items of the instruments found in the questionnaire were adapted and adopted from previous research, a pilot study was conducted in ensuring the validity and reliability of the items. The study was carried out in assuring that the instrument was appropriate for the use of data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to 30 undergraduates from the Science and Mathematics programmes at the Faculty of Education. After the data was collected, the Cronbach's Alpha was conducted for internal consistency.

No.	Variable	No. of Item	Item Deleted	Cronbach' s Alpha Score
1	Willingness to Communicate	15	-	.933
2	Communication Apprehension	24	-	.897
3	Speaking Anxiety	22	-	.913

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha

As portrayed in Table 2, all three variables occupied more than 0.70 of Cronbach's Alpha score. The 15 items for Willingness to Communicate acquired .933 Cronbach's Alpha score, followed with 24 items for Communication Apprehension that had .897 Cronbach's Alpha score while 22 items for Speaking Anxiety acquired .913 Cronbach's Alpha score. Therefore, the indication of high correlation in the results concluded that all items used in the instruments were reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the average mean score will be enumerated as the overall level for Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, and speaking anxiety among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education. The level for each variable are determined based the specifications from previous research.

Willingness to Communicate

In terms of data interpretation procedure, Basöz and Erten (2018) mentioned that for the exploration of the respondents 'level of Willingness to Communicate, the specification was; 1.00-2.33 (low), 2.34-3.67 (moderate), 3.68-5.00 (high). On the other hand, Akkakoson (2016) and Kavanoz (2017) mentioned that the level specifications for Communication Apprehension and Speaking Anxiety were; 1.00-1.80 (very low), 1.81-2.60 (low), 2.61-3.40

(moderate), 3.41-4.20 (high), 4.21-5.00 (very high).

NO	ITEM	N	M	SD
1	I am willing to present my arguments in English to the rest of my class	80	2.78	.279
2	I am willing to give a presentation in English in front of the class	80	3.12	.603

3	I am willing to take part in a discussion in English in a small group/pair	80	3.22	.693
4	I am willing to ask the lecturer in English to repeat what he/she just said	80	3.05	.745
5	I am willing to ask my peers in English about ideas/arguments related to the topic of discussion	80	3.15	.695
6	I am willing to correct a mistake that I notice in what others are saying in English	80	3.15	.858
7	I am willing to modify what I have said in response to an indication of an error	80	3.17	.671
8	I am willing to initiate communication with a stranger in English	80	2.85	.943
9	I am willing to use English to speak with my peers outside of the classroom	80	2.95	.810
10	I am willing to use English to speak with the lecturer outside of the classroom	80	2.97	.886
11	I am willing to participate in an English debate	80	2.20	1.084
12	I am willing to speak in English without preparation in the classroom	80	2.70	.848
13	I am willing to ask my peers in English about the words related to the topic of **DISCUSSION**	80	3.23	.693
14	I am willing to speak in English in public to a group of people	80	2.80	.848
15	I am more willing to speak in English when I know nobody will laugh at me	80	3.08	.854
	Average Score		2.96	0.711

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Willingness to Communicate

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviation for each item that measures WTC. The average mean and standard deviation for all items were also calculated. Table 3.1 includes a summary of the items allocated according to the level of WTC and its contexts. The average mean for WTC level was moderate (M = 2.96, SD = 0.711), with higher willingness in peer-supported and small-group activities would lead to higher willingness while any situations that requires the speakers to participate in public, spontaneous, or competitive contexts. The three highest items were asking peers about words (M = 3.23, SD = 0.693), small-group/pair discussion (M = 3.22, SD = 0.693), and modifying an utterance after an error (M = 3.17, SD = 0.671). The three lowest were debating (M = 2.20, SD = 1.084), unprepared speaking (M = 2.70, SD = 0.848), and presenting arguments to the whole class (M = 2.78, SD = 0.729).

To conclude, the undergraduates 'WTC at the Faculty of Education heavily rely on the context as learners are most ready to engage in oral tasks that focus on collaborative aspects with minimal evaluation or value of the speaking tasks.

WTC- Context	**Item**
High WTC (peer-supported)	—Ask peers about words related to the topic‖ (M = 3.23, SD = 0.693) —Take part in a small group/pair discussion‖ (M = 3.22, SD = 0.693)

	—Modify what I said after an error‖ (M = 3.17, SD = 0.671).
Low WTC (public/spontaneous	—Participate in an English debate‖ (M = 2.20, SD = 1.084) —Speak without preparation in class‖ (M = 2.70, SD = 0.848) —Present arguments to the class‖ (M = 2.78, SD = 0.729).

Table 3.1: WTC Contextual Examples

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

NO	ITEM	N	M	SD
1	I dislike participating in group discussions*	80	3.17	.925
2	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions	80	3.35	.731
3	I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions*	80	2.33	.965
4	I like to get involved in group discussions	80	3.25	.626
5	Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous*	80	2.10	.805
6	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions	80	3.03	.856
7	Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting*	80	1.98	.856
8	Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings	80	2.75	.948
9	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting	80	2.65	.858
10	I am afraid to express myself at meetings*	80	2.32	.759
11	Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable*	80	2.58	.868
12	I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting	80	2.70	.644
13	While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous*	80	2.35	.797
14	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations	80	2.55	.870
15	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations*	80	2.37	.769
16	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations	80	2.83	.708
17	While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very Relaxed	80	2.70	.604
18	I am afraid to speak up in conversations*	80	2.65	.858

19	I have no fear of giving a speech	80	2.37	.862
20	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech*	80	2.25	.703
21	I feel relaxed while giving a speech	80	2.42	.708
22	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech	80	2.22	.763
23	I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence	80	2.62	.769
24	While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know*	80	2.20	.786
	Average Score		2.57	0.764

―Engaging in a group with new people makes me tense*‖ (M = 2.10, SD = 0.805)

―While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know*‖ (M = 2.20, SD = 0.786).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Communication Apprehension

Table 4 indicates 24 CA items where the negative statements were reverse scored as explained in the methodology section. The mean and standard deviation for each item was calculated, including the averages. Table 4.1 includes thecontextual examples of items that range from highest to lowest CA levels. The average mean for CA level was 2.57 (SD = 0.7640, signifying moderate apprehension. Undergraduates reported that they were comfortable in group discussions (M = 3.35, SD = 0.731) and favoured to engage in oral tasks within such setting (M = 3.25, SD = 0.626). However, undergraduates indicated formal or evaluative settings showed greater apprehension towards formal and evaluative settings such as meetings (M = 1.98, SD = 0.856), conversing with new acquaintances (M = 2.10, SD = 0.80) as they would forget their speech due to anxiety (M = 2.20, SD = 0.786).

Table 4.1 includes a summary of the items allocated according to the level of CA and its contexts

NO	ITEM	N	M	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English in the classroom*	80	2.20	.818
2	I am worried about making mistakes when speaking in English*	80	1.80	.644
3	It frightens me when I do not understand what the lecturer is saying in the classroom*	80	1.85	.618
4	I keep thinking that other students are better at speaking English than I am*	80	1.55	.673
5	I worry about the consequences of failing to speak in English*	80	1.65	.695
6	I get so nervous when speaking in English I forget things I know*	80	1.82	.671
7	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English	80	2.45	.810
8	I would not be nervous speaking the English language with strangers*	80	2.63	.832
9	Even if I am well prepared to speak English, I feel anxious about it*	80	2.00	.675
10	I feel confident when I speak in English	80	2.30	.644
11	I am afraid that my lecturer is ready to correct every mistake I make in speaking English*	80	2.65	.828

12	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students*	80	2.20	.683
13	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English during classroom session*	80	2.23	.729
14	I get nervous when I do not understand every word the lecturer says in English*	80	2.12	.753
15	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak the English language*	80	2.13	.753
16	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the English language*	80	2.20	.877
17	I get nervous when the lecturer asks questions in English which I have not prepared in advance	80	1.98	.763
18	I often avoid myself from speaking in English*	80	2.35	.765
19	It would not bother me at all to speak in English language	80	2.68	.823
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I am required to speak in English in front on the class*	80	1.92	.652
21	The more I prepare to speak in English, the more confused I get*	80	2.53	.900
22	I am usually at ease when speaking in English	80	2.52	.811
	Average Score		2.17	0.638

Table 4.1: CA Contextual Examples

SPEAKING ANXIETY

CA-Context	**Item**
High CA (formal/evaluative)	—Comfortable in group discussions‖ (M = 3.35, SD = 0.731) —Like to get involved in group discussions‖ (M = 3.25, SD = 0.626).
Low CA (group discussions)	—Generally nervous to participate in a meeting*‖ (M = 1.98, SD = 0.856)

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Anxiety

Based on Table 5 that lists out 22 items for measuring the undergraduates 'level of speaking anxiety, the average mean level was 2.17, which indicates low speaking anxiety among undergraduates at the Faculty of Education. However, strong anxiety indicators can be identified when the undergraduates felt that their friends could speak better than them (M = 1.55, SD = 0.673), worrying about the consequences of failing to speak (M = 1.65, SD = 0.695), worried about making mistakes (M = 1.80, SD = 0.644). Moreover, the undergraduates reported that their heart would pound when required to speak (M = 1.92, SD = 0.652), indicating physiological response towards speaking anxiety. On the other hand, there was a high indicator the undergraduates would still participate in oral tasks and conversations despite such fear towards speaking as they would not be bothered to speak English (M = 2.68, SD = 0.823). The undergraduates also reported that they were not nervous speaking with strangers (M = 2.63, SD = 0.832). Table 5.1 includes a summary of the items allocated according to the level of SA and its contexts.

CA-Context	**Item**
High SA	_'Others are better at speaking than I am*'' (*M* = 1.55, *SD* = 0.673) _'Worry about failing to speak*‖ (*M* = 1.65, *SD* = 0.695) —Heart pounding when required to speak*‖ (*M* = 1.92, *SD* = 0.652)

Low SA	―Would not be bothered to speak‖ (*M* = 2.68, *SD* = 0.823) ―Not nervous speaking with strangers‖ (*M* = 2.63, *SD* = 0.832)

Table 5.1: SA Contextual Examples

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reinforce the high dependency towards contexts and situations which influence the affective factors such as anxiety and apprehension within the WTC heuristic model (Lee & Chiu, 2023). This strengthens the argument that WTC is not consisted of fixed traits but rather acts as a dynamic model that is influenced by situational factors. Therefore, the results may indicate the need for educators to include collaborative and low-stake speaking tasks to reduce anxiety and apprehension.

This suggestion is aligned with the claim towards structured exposure and supportive feedback in improving oral participation (Quvancha et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a need for mitigation methods such as opportunities for rehearsals and gradual exposure to audience in order to reduce speaking anxiety in formal contexts. This study highlights the needs for integral pedagogical approaches that associate language practices with techniques that foster confidence in reducing anxiety.

On the other hand, future studies should apply mixed-method designs to examine both quantitative and qualitative insights into learners 'about the external affecting factors that lead to speaking anxiety (Bahadur & Hashim, 2024). Moreover, the inclusion of technologies such as mobile devices in speaking activities would improve learners 'fluency, which decrease their speaking anxiety and increase their self-confidence (Güçlü, 2025). Researchers should investigate intervention- based research that focuses on the effectiveness of strategies in reducing speaking anxiety such as peer activities or using digital platforms within authentic classroom settings.

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