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SPEAKING ANXIETY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. Foreign language speaking anxiety is widely recognized as a major factor that negatively affects learners' oral performance and participation in language classrooms. Despite extensive international research on this topic, limited attention has been given to speaking anxiety in the context of foreign language learning in Kazakhstan. The present study aims to explore the nature of speaking anxiety and to identify the factors that contribute to and reduce anxiety among foreign language learners. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study involved students from a university department of foreign languages studying Chinese, English, German, and Turkish. Data were collected through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and semi-structured phenomenological interviews consisting of ten open-ended questions. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that most students perceive speaking anxiety as a significant barrier to effective language learning, particularly during oral activities. Key anxiety-inducing factors include fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation by peers, public correction by teachers, low self-confidence, and limited language proficiency. Conversely, supportive teacher attitudes, constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and increased speaking practice were identified as important anxiety-reducing factors. Students reported physical, emotional, and behavioral manifestations of anxiety, such as nervousness, embarrassment, and avoidance of speaking tasks. Differences in anxiety levels were also observed across languages, with Chinese reported as the most anxiety-provoking and English as the least. The study underscores the importance of creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment to enhance students' speaking confidence and communicative competence.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, speaking anxiety, oral communication, qualitative study, foreign language learning, classroom environment, learner perceptions.

Introduction

Many studies emphasize that speaking anxiety can hinder foreign language achievement and production. In the scientific literature, the term «speaking anxiety» is used to describe a special state

of excitement that occurs in students during oral communication in a foreign language. Researchers note that it includes the fear of making a mistake, getting a negative assessment, feeling awkward in front of others, and lack of confidence in their knowledge. The element of learning languages and anxiety has not been discovered in Kazakhstan. The aim of the study is to identify those factors, which may lead to speaking anxiety by utilizing qualitative method.

Literature review

In the works [1], [2] It is emphasized that this anxiety is associated precisely with situations of oral speech and manifests itself more strongly than the usual educational excitement.

The findings [3] demonstrated that students had a moderate-to-serious level of FLSA, that they thought web-based language learning may reduce their speaking anxiety, and that they had a favorable opinion of the learning websites. According to the interviews, speaking in front of ASR-based websites made students feel less nervous than speaking in front of their peers or other individuals. Future research should examine how learners' speaking abilities actually improve over a longer time period in order to assess the true efficacy of ASR-based learning websites.

The concept of «speaking competence» usually describes a student's ability to express thoughts aloud, build sentences correctly, select appropriate vocabulary, and keep up a conversation. Many authors note that a high level of anxiety significantly reduces the quality of oral speech: students begin to speak less confidently, more slowly, and more often avoid participating in discussions [4].

The relevance of the topic is confirmed by a large number of studies examining the factors influencing anxiety. International students experience stress due to the language barrier, cultural differences, and fear of being misunderstood and made to seem ridiculous. Other works emphasize the role of personality characteristics, self-esteem, and motivation for language learners. [5], [6], [7]. Researchers agree that students suffering from anxiety, despite their level of language proficiency, are more likely to avoid communication, do not participate in discussions, are afraid of speaking, and generally demonstrate a lower level of oral speech. [8]. The article [9] states that students who have anxiety more likely to struggle during conversation. According to [10] students with high level of language can not speak language fluently due to speaking anxiety.

A number of studies identify specific factors that affect the level of anxiety. For example, fear of making mistakes is noted as one of the most powerful factors in many articles, such as [8], [20], [11]. According to article [12], [13], [14] other important reasons include a lack of vocabulary, difficulty pronouncing, low confidence, and negative communication experiences they've had in the past and don't want it to happen again.

In other works [15], [16], [17] the influence of gender, educational context, cultural background, and even teaching style is emphasized. The researchers note that gender differences can affect the level of confidence: female students are more likely to worry about mistakes, while students are more likely to worry about public speaking. In addition, the cultural background determines the students' attitude to mistakes and public speaking. For example, in cultures where a mistake is perceived as a «loss of face», as in my experience of teaching in Kazakhstan, where in some schools students experience much more fear of speaking than writing or exercising, which creates a more passive style of participation in the lesson, which increases anxiety.

It can also be added that the teaching style directly affects students' perception of their own competence. Teachers who often interrupt students' speech, give harsh criticism or focus mainly on mistakes, increase the level of anxiety. On the contrary, a supportive style, the use of pair work, gentle correction and the creation of a safe atmosphere significantly reduce the feeling of fear and promote more active speaking. Therefore, as a future teacher, I believe that we should not frighten students, but help them develop all aspects of the language they are learning. After all, if we put pressure on students, they will develop a sense of pressure, like Chinese students, who, according to research [18], [19], often experience additional pressure due to a tradition of academic rigor and a learning style that makes mistakes «shameful» rather than a natural part of the process that is corrected later in learning a language.

At the level of teaching methods, much attention is paid to how the learning environment either reduces or increases anxiety. So, research [20], They show that a supportive atmosphere, a

variety of activities and a reduction in pressure on correctness increase confidence. At the same time, excessive error correction, lack of interaction, and teacher-centricity increase stress [21]. Of course, this does not mean that mistakes cannot be corrected at all, but it emphasizes that doing it in a rough manner is also unacceptable. I think we need to find a balance in which the teacher listens to the student's speech to the end without interrupting – this is very important. And after the student has finished, it is worthwhile to work on the mistakes, but not in the «you said it wrong» format, but gently suggest how to express the same words or sentences more correctly and naturally [21].

Further research in the field of foreign language anxiety focuses on the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying speaking difficulties. Several studies emphasize that anxiety interferes with working memory, making it harder for learners to retrieve vocabulary and apply grammatical rules during oral communication [21]. As a result, students may know the correct forms but fail to produce them in spontaneous speech, which further reinforces their fear of speaking.

Another important area of research examines the relationship between anxiety and classroom assessment. Oral exams, presentations, and spontaneous questioning are often identified as the most anxiety-provoking tasks for language learners. According to Horwitz et al. [22], evaluative situations increase students' fear of negative evaluation, which leads to avoidance strategies such as silence or minimal responses. This suggests that assessment methods play a crucial role in shaping learners' emotional experiences and their willingness to communicate.

Recent studies also highlight the role of peer interaction in reducing speaking anxiety. Pair and group work allow students to practice oral speech in a less threatening environment, as attention is shifted away from individual performance and shared among participants [22]. Collaborative tasks promote mutual support and help learners perceive mistakes as a natural part of communication rather than personal failure. This is especially important for students with low self-confidence or limited speaking experience.

In addition, technological tools are increasingly discussed as a means of lowering anxiety. Some researchers note that digital platforms, virtual classrooms, and simulated speaking environments reduce the fear associated with face-to-face communication [23]. These tools allow learners to rehearse speech, receive delayed feedback, and control the pace of interaction, which can significantly improve confidence. Virtual environments, in particular, create a sense of psychological distance that helps students focus on content rather than fear of evaluation.

Another strand of research explores the connection between emotional regulation strategies and speaking anxiety. Mindfulness-based approaches and relaxation techniques have been shown to reduce stress and improve learners' emotional resilience [24]. Students who are able to manage their anxiety demonstrate higher levels of engagement and are more willing to participate in oral activities. This indicates that addressing emotional factors is as important as developing linguistic competence.

The study [25] also demonstrates that speaking anxiety is not a problem that schools prioritize. This could be because speaking anxiety is viewed as a social difficulty rather than a language teaching issue. However, speaking worried pupils struggle more than other students to achieve the educational objectives because oral proficiency is a significant component of the English course at the Swedish upper secondary school. It's critical to aim for a welcoming environment in the classroom where all students can feel at ease and inspired to speak up in order to promote speaking.

According to [26] Linguistic anxiety could be used to predict speaking performance. When speaking in English, the anxious learner often fared worse than the native speaker, especially in vocabulary and comprehension. This study suggests that instruction is necessary for pupils who are really concerned about language. Teachers can give students the opportunity to talk freely in English by assigning simple, engaging, varied, and enjoyable oral assignments.

Anxiety related to public speaking is a very common disease that causes excessive physiological and psychological reaction. Most people with SAD have it, and there is strong evidence that it might be a different kind of SAD. It can be treated, especially with the use of contemporary technology like virtual worlds and online cognitive-behavioral self-help programs. [27]

Overall, the literature suggests that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by cognitive, emotional, social, and pedagogical factors. Effective reduction of anxiety requires an

integrated approach that combines supportive teaching practices, thoughtful assessment, interactive learning environments, and attention to students' emotional well-being. These findings highlight the need for teachers to adopt learner-centered strategies that foster confidence and encourage active oral communication.

Materials and Methods

The aim of the study was to make a qualitative exploration of how speaking anxiety work, what factors causes speaking anxiety for students who learn foreign languages.

This study utilized qualitative study tradition. Participants were foreign language learners. Attention was focused on learner's experience.

In an effort to comprehend the phenomenon and provide answers to these fundamental research issues, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to record the students' own voices and analyze their words and beliefs:

1. Do students think that worry prevents them from learning a language?
2. What elements do students think cause anxiety?
3. What elements do students think could lessen anxiety?
4. How do students show signs of anxiety?
5. Do students think any of the three languages under investigation cause more concern than the others?

Students from department of foreign languages (Chines, English, German, and Turkish) were interviewed by utilizing a set of 10 question which were developed to hit the aim of the study as well as answering 5 research questions. Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was completed by participants before the phenomenological interview. This series of questions, which were designed to elicit replies without restricting or obstructing the respondents, was used in accordance with a standard interview guide.

- 1) Could you please explain how you feel about your foreign language course?
- 2) Tell me what aspects of your foreign language course you find most enjoyable.
- 3) Could you tell me what causes you the greatest discomfort in your foreign language class?
- 4) Do you think you're doing well in your language studies? In other words, do you have confidence in your skills?
- 5) Could you tell me about any other concerns you have regarding your foreign language class and how you handle them?
- 6) If you make mistakes, how do you think your classmates will respond?
- 7) Do you actively look for a solution or do you just worry when you're in a stressful situation?
- 8) Have your teachers influenced how you feel about your foreign language studies, either positively or negatively?
- 9) Do you have any suggestions for reducing the stress of the foreign language course?
- 10) How do you feel now that this problem has been resolved?

Answers were taken and analyzed. The recorded answers were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The interview transcriptions were examined using fundamental categories derived from the interview questions: anxiety-causing variables, anxiety-reducing factors, anxiety manifestations, student awareness of anxiety, and most anxiety-inducing language.

Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the interview data revealed several recurring themes related to foreign language speaking anxiety. These themes were organized in accordance with the research questions and the predefined analytical categories: students' perceptions of anxiety, anxiety-causing factors, anxiety-reducing factors, manifestations of anxiety, and differences among foreign languages.

Most participants reported that anxiety negatively affected their ability to learn and use a foreign language, particularly in speaking activities. Students stated that worry and nervousness often interfered with their concentration, memory, and willingness to participate in class. Several participants explained that even when they were well prepared, anxiety caused them to forget vocabulary or grammatical structures during speaking tasks. A small number of students, however,

believed that a moderate level of anxiety motivated them to study harder, although excessive anxiety was viewed as harmful.

Analysis of the interview responses indicated that multiple factors contributed to students' speaking anxiety. The most frequently mentioned sources of anxiety included fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation by classmates, and being corrected publicly by teachers. Students also expressed discomfort when speaking in front of the class, particularly during oral exams or presentations.

Lack of self-confidence and insufficient language proficiency were additional factors that increased anxiety. Some participants stated that they compared themselves with more fluent classmates, which heightened feelings of inadequacy. Time pressure, unfamiliar topics, and fast-paced classroom interactions were also reported as anxiety-inducing elements.

Students suggested several factors that could help reduce foreign language anxiety. Supportive and encouraging teacher attitudes were considered one of the most important anxiety-reducing elements. Participants reported feeling more relaxed when teachers allowed mistakes, provided constructive feedback, and created a non-threatening classroom environment.

Peer support was another factor that helped lower anxiety levels. Working in pairs or small groups made students feel less exposed and more confident. Increased practice opportunities, especially in informal speaking activities, were also perceived as helpful in reducing anxiety. Some students mentioned that preparation, self-study, and positive self-talk enabled them to manage their anxiety more effectively.

Participants described a range of physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms associated with speaking anxiety. Common physical symptoms included sweating, trembling, increased heart rate, and difficulty breathing. Emotionally, students reported feelings of fear, embarrassment, and panic. Behaviorally, anxiety manifested in avoidance strategies such as remaining silent, avoiding eye contact, or skipping classes that involved speaking tasks.

When comparing the languages under investigation, students reported varying levels of anxiety depending on the language they were learning. Chinese was frequently identified as the most anxiety-provoking language due to its unfamiliar writing system and pronunciation. German was also described as challenging because of its grammatical complexity. English was generally perceived as less anxiety-inducing, which students attributed to greater exposure and familiarity. Turkish learners reported moderate anxiety, often related to speaking accuracy rather than comprehension.

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to explore foreign language speaking anxiety and identify the factors that contribute to or reduce anxiety among foreign language learners. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is a common and influential factor that can hinder students' participation and performance in foreign language classes. Most students perceived anxiety as an obstacle to effective language learning, particularly in speaking situations.

The results demonstrate that anxiety is caused by a combination of internal factors, such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, and external factors, including classroom practices, peer reactions, and teacher feedback. At the same time, the study highlights the important role of supportive teaching approaches and positive classroom environments in reducing anxiety.

Students exhibited anxiety through physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, which often led to avoidance of speaking opportunities. Additionally, differences in anxiety levels across languages suggest that linguistic distance, familiarity, and exposure play a role in shaping learners' emotional responses.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for foreign language instructors to be aware of students' emotional experiences and to adopt strategies that foster a low-anxiety learning environment. Creating supportive classroom dynamics, encouraging risk-taking, and providing meaningful speaking opportunities may help reduce anxiety and improve students' confidence and communicative competence.

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ШЕТЕЛ ТІЛІН ҮЙРЕНУДЕГІ СӨЙЛЕУ МАЗАСЫЗДЫҒЫ: ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ СТУДЕНТТЕРІНЕ ЖҮРГІЗІЛГЕН САПАЛЫҚ ЗЕРТТЕУ

Аңдатпа. Шет тілінде сөйлеу уайымы оқушылардың ауызша сөйлеуіне және тілдік сыныптарға қатысуына теріс әсер ететін негізгі фактор ретінде кеңінен танылды. Осы тақырып бойынша ауқымды халықаралық зерттеулерге қарамастан, Қазақстанда шет тілін оқыту контекстінде сөйлеу мазасыздығына шектеулі көңіл бөлінді. Бұл зерттеу сөйлеу уайымы табиғатын зерттеуге және шет тілін үйренушілер арасында уайымды тудыратын және төмендететін факторларды анықтауға бағытталған. Зерттеудің сапалық дизайнын қабылдай отырып, зерттеуге Университеттің шет тілдері кафедрасының Қытай, ағылшын, неміс және түрік тілдерін оқитын студенттері қатысты. Деректер Шет Тіліндегі Сыныптағы Мазасыздық Шкаласы (FLCA) Және он ашық сұрақтан тұратын жартылай құрылымдық феноменологиялық сұхбаттар арқылы жиналды. Сұхбат деректері сөзбе-сөз транскрипцияланып, тақырыптық талдаудан өтті. Нәтижелер оқушылардың көпшілігі сөйлеу мазасыздығын тілді тиімді үйренуге, әсіресе ауызша сөйлеу кезінде айтарлықтай кедергі ретінде қабылдайтынын көрсетеді. Мазасыздықты тудыратын негізгі факторларға қателіктер жіберуден қорқу, құрдастарының теріс бағалауы, мұғалімдердің қоғамдық түзетулері, өзіне деген сенімділіктің төмендігі және тілді меңгерудің шектелуі жатады. Керісінше, мұғалімнің қолдау көрсететін көзқарасы, сындарлы кері байланыс, құрдастарының ынтымақтастығы және сөйлеу тәжірибесінің артуы алаңдаушылықты төмендететін маңызды факторлар ретінде анықталды. Студенттер мазасыздықтың физикалық, эмоционалдық және мінез-құлық көріністері туралы хабарлады, мысалы, жүйке, ұялу және сөйлеу тапсырмаларынан аулақ болу. Уайым деңгейіндегі айырмашылықтар әртүрлі тілдерде де байқалды, Қытай тілі ең көп алаңдаушылық тудыратын, ал ағылшын тілі ең аз алаңдаушылық тудыратын тілдер болып табылады. Зерттеу оқушылардың сөйлеу сенімділігі мен коммуникативті құзыреттілігін арттыру үшін сыныпта қолдау көрсететін және алаңдаушылығы төмен ортаны құрудың маңыздылығын көрсетеді.

Тірек сөздер: Шет тіліндегі мазасыздық, сөйлеу мазасыздығы, ауызша қарым-қатынас, сапалы оқу, шет тілін үйрену, сыныптағы орта, оқушылардың қабылдауы.

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РЕЧЕВАЯ ТРЕВОЖНОСТЬ ПРИ ИЗУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА: КАЧЕСТВЕННОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ СТУДЕНТОВ УНИВЕРСИТЕТОВ КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация. Тревожность при разговоре на иностранном языке широко признана в качестве основного фактора, который негативно влияет на устную речь учащихся и их участие в языковых занятиях. Несмотря на обширные международные исследования по этой теме, тревожности при разговоре в контексте изучения иностранного языка в Казахстане уделяется мало внимания. Целью настоящего исследования является изучение природы речевой тревожности и выявление факторов, которые способствуют возникновению и снижению тревожности у изучающих иностранный язык. В исследовании приняли участие студенты факультета иностранных языков университета, изучающие китайский, английский, немецкий и турецкий языки. Данные были собраны с помощью шкалы тревожности в классе иностранного языка (FLCAS) и полуструктурированных феноменологических интервью, состоящих из десяти открытых вопросов. Данные интервью были расшифрованы дословно и проанализированы тематически. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что

большинство студентов воспринимают беспокойство при разговоре как серьезное препятствие для эффективного изучения языка, особенно во время устных занятий. К ключевым факторам, вызывающим тревогу, относятся боязнь совершить ошибку, негативная оценка со стороны сверстников, публичное исправление со стороны учителей, низкая уверенность в себе и ограниченное владение языком. И наоборот, в качестве важных факторов, снижающих тревогу, были названы поддерживающее отношение учителей, конструктивная обратная связь, сотрудничество со сверстниками и увеличение разговорной практики. Студенты сообщали о физических, эмоциональных и поведенческих проявлениях тревоги, таких как нервозность, смущение и уклонение от выполнения речевых заданий. Различия в уровнях тревожности также наблюдались в зависимости от языка: китайский был назван наиболее тревожным, а английский - наименее. Исследование подчеркивает важность создания благоприятной обстановки в классе с низким уровнем тревожности для повышения уверенности учащихся в разговоре и коммуникативной компетентности.

Ключевые слова: Тревога по поводу иностранного языка, тревога по поводу говорения, устное общение, качественное обучение, изучение иностранного языка, обстановка в классе, восприятие учащегося.

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