



Exploring the Factors of EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety in the English Classroom: Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, speaking anxiety continues to be a major obstacle to successful language acquisition. This study looks at research trends, contributing factors, and coping mechanisms associated to speaking anxiety in EFL students using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis. The terms "Speaking Anxiety," "EFL Learners," "Foreign Language Anxiety," and "Classroom Anxiety" were used in a methodical search of the Scopus database for articles published between 2016 and 2026. Thematic analysis was used to qualitatively synthesize 30 articles that were chosen from 314 records using the PRISMA method. VOSviewer was used for bibliometric analysis, specifically for overlay visualization and keyword co-occurrence. The results demonstrate that both internal and external factors, such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, insufficient language competency, fear of receiving a poor grade, and unsupportive classroom situations, have an impact on speaking anxiety. Supportive teaching methods, technology-assisted speaking exercises, group learning, consistent speaking practice, and self-control are all effective coping mechanisms. These results emphasize how crucial it is to combine learner-initiated self-regulation with teacher-facilitated support in order to lessen EFL speaking anxiety and enhance communicative competence.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is seen to be the most difficult of the four language skills since it necessitates real-time language processing and psychological strain management. Speaking anxiety, a discomfort, worry, or uneasiness that appears particularly when learners are obliged to generate spoken language in front of others, is a common manifestation of this pressure within EFL situations (Horwitz et al., 1986; Febrianti et al., 2025). Although speaking anxiety is commonly discussed with two closely related categories, foreign language anxiety and readiness to communicate, the three are not synonymous. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a broad affective reaction to learning and utilizing a foreign language in all skill domains, including listening, reading, and speaking. Speaking anxiety, on the other hand, is a more specific and situational manifestation of that larger worry, induced by oral performance duties in particular. Conversely, willingness to communicate, which is best understood as a behavioral outcome that speaking anxiety frequently suppresses rather than as a synonym for anxiety itself, indicates a learner's desire to commence communication when given the opportunity (Macintyre et al., 1998). It's important to make these distinctions clear because a lot of the literature uses the three terms ambiguously, making it harder to pinpoint and compare causes and coping mechanisms.

According to Horwitz, referenced in Sulfiani (2020), speaking anxiety stems from three interconnected factors: test anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Test anxiety makes students perceive speaking assignments as threats rather than learning opportunities; communication apprehension results from students' limited ability to speak in front of professors and classmates; and fear of receiving a poor grade deters active engagement. Even while speaking proficiency is still essential for success in both academic and professional contexts, these anxiety-inducing factors often exacerbate one another, progressively undermining students' self-assurance and willingness to participate in oral communication (Quvanch et al., 2024).

This issue has been mapped in a number of reviews. Paraguas (2025) conducted a systematic literature review of 105 peer-reviewed publications and discovered that speaking anxiety is largely caused by emotional factors like peer pressure and limited fluency, as well as physical factors like an uncomfortable learning environment. In response, the study recommended curriculum and pedagogical reform. After reviewing 20 journal articles, Fitriyanti and Malihah (2024) distinguished between non-linguistic barriers like anxiety, shyness, and low motivation and linguistic barriers like limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation. They noted that the latter were reported more frequently and called for context-sensitive instructional solutions. More recently, Tania et al. (2025) carried out a semi-systematic review of 49 studies published between 2015 and 2025, pointing to collaborative learning, drama-based instruction, and technology-enhanced approaches as promising interventions while identifying fear of negative evaluation, linguistic deficiency, and unsupportive classroom dynamics as recurrent causes.

Taken together, these reviews demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a well-researched and enduring issue, but they each address it separately, concentrating on its prevalence and causes, linguistic versus non-linguistic barriers, or new interventions without making the connection between how the field has evolved over time and the coping mechanisms that students themselves employ. None of the three evaluations looks at learners' coping techniques as a separate focus rather than a secondary mention within more general discussions of causes, nor does it employ bibliometric mapping to track how research interest on this topic has changed. At least three different kinds of gaps remain unfilled as a result. The first is a knowledge gap: no previous review has integrated bibliometric trend analysis with a qualitative synthesis of causes and coping mechanisms in a unified framework, therefore it is still unclear how the conceptual and empirical focus of EFL speaking anxiety research has changed. The second is a methodological gap: current reviews mostly rely on narrative or systematic synthesis without cross-referencing the results with bibliometric visualization tools like VOSviewer, which might identify thematic development trends that manual coding can miss. The third is a practical gap: while previous reviews focus more on identifying reasons than on recording students' active coping mechanisms, little is known about how students really handle speaking anxiety once it manifests in the classroom.

To address these gaps, this study combines a Systematic Literature Review with a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer, focusing on three aspects in a single framework: the developmental trends of research on EFL speaking anxiety, the factors that contribute to it, and the coping strategies used by learners. Unlike previous reviews that focus on these aspects separately, this study combines bibliometric evidence of research trends with a qualitative synthesis of causes

and coping mechanisms to provide a more complete picture of how the field has evolved and where learner-centered coping strategies fit in. Based on this rationale, the study addresses three research questions: (1) What are the current trends in the literature on English-speaking anxiety among EFL students in the classroom? (2) What factors contribute to English-speaking anxiety among EFL students in the classroom? (3) What strategies do students use to cope with these challenges?

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it adds to the current body of information by combining bibliometric trends with qualitative insights into learners' lived experiences of anxiety, which has been notably absent in previous studies. Practically, its findings are meant to assist educators, curriculum designers, and legislators in developing teaching practices that are more responsive to students' emotional needs. This study intends to help both teachers and students develop more confident and successful oral communication in EFL classrooms by understanding not just what causes speaking anxiety, but also how learners actively navigate it.

METHODS

The method employed in this study is the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This approach represents one of the primary means of conducting research synthesis, which not only aims to gather scientific evidence relevant to the research question but also contributes to strengthening the development of empirically based practice (Kitchenham et al., 2009). Specifically, the SLR in this study is aimed at tracing and identifying the research processes of studies on speaking anxiety. In its implementation, the SLR encompasses a series of systematic stages, ranging from the formulation of a search protocol, the determination of research topics, the arrangement of research procedures, and the selection and screening of studies, to the extraction and synthesis of data (Kraus et al., 2020).

The data collection process in this systematic review follows the guidelines outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) developed by Page et al. (2021) and employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The literature search was conducted using the primary database Scopus. Using a combination of keywords: Speaking Anxiety, EFL Learners, Foreign Language Anxiety, Classroom Anxiety, restricted exclusively to journal articles. The publication timeframe in this study was limited to the last ten years, spanning from 2016 to 2026.

The literature search was conducted in the Scopus database on 12 May 2026. The complete search string was: TITLE-ABS-KEY (Speaking Anxiety , EFL Learners , Foreign Language Anxiety , Classroom Anxiety) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Anxiety") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Efl Learners") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Speaking Anxiety") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Efl") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Classroom Anxiety")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all")) AND PUBYEAR > 2016 AND PUBYEAR < 2026.

Screening was divided into three stages: title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. Duplicate or irrelevant records, non-article papers, non-English studies, and those that did not match the access conditions were also excluded. The completed trials were then stored for data extraction. Each study's relevance, clarity of research design, appropriateness of presented data, and consistency between research objectives, methods, and conclusions were all assessed during the quality assessment process. Studies meeting these criteria were included in the synthesis. For thematic analysis, the findings from the included studies were coded for recurring factors and coping mechanisms. Similar codes were organized into larger themes, and their frequency were noted. A study was counted once for each theme expressly described in its findings, therefore categories were not mutually exclusive.

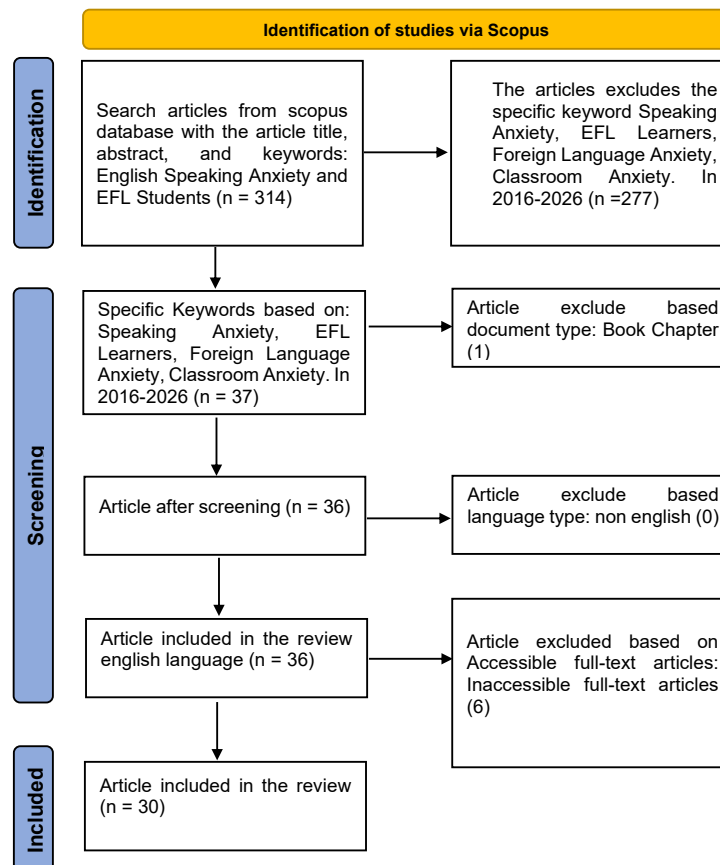
Each identified article was carefully screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1 to ensure its suitability and relevance to the research objectives. In managing references, the authors used Zotero as an automated bibliography management tool, while the Scopus Website was used to search for journal articles indexed in Scopus. This entire procedure was applied to ensure that the data collected met the scientific standards and research criteria predetermined in this study. The outcomes of the literature search as visualized in the PRISMA diagram in Table 2, reflect the systematic literature selection process carried out in this study.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Empirical research articles	Book, Book chapters, and non-empirical publications
Studies discussing Speaking Anxiety, EFL Learners, Foreign Language Anxiety, Classroom Anxiety	Studies that are not relevant to the research topic to be studied
Articles published between 2016 and 2026 and written in English	Articles published 2016 and/or not written in English
Accessible full-text articles	Inaccessible full-text articles

In this study, bibliometric analysis was strengthened by applying the Visualization of Similarities (VOS) mapping technique in VOSviewer. Scopus was selected as the primary data source in this study due to its more comprehensive literature coverage compared to other indexing databases. Documents related to the research topic were collected through the Scopus website. then screened and processed using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. Once the data had been successfully gathered, the next stage involved conducting systematic data extraction. From the overall set of journal articles, the researchers selected articles based on thematic relevance and article quality. The application of these selection criteria was intended to ensure that the articles used could support the data interpretation and synthesis of findings, with a view to drawing valid conclusions and addressing the analytical questions formulated. The article extraction process is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

At the identification stage, 314 documents were retrieved from the Scopus database through a search using article titles, abstracts, and the keywords English Speaking Anxiety and EFL Students. At the screening stage, specific keyword criteria were applied, including Speaking Anxiety, EFL Learners, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Classroom Anxiety, within the publication period of 2016–2026, narrowing the results to 37 documents that met the criteria, while the remaining 277 documents were excluded for not containing the specified keywords. At the eligibility step, the 37 articles that passed screening were further analyzed based on document type and language. One article was excluded because it was a book chapter, while no articles were excluded because of language, leaving 36 English-language articles. Finally, six articles were excluded because they were Articles with inaccessible full texts due to access limitations, leaving 30 articles for the systematic literature review.

Table 3. Inclusion Result Articles

Author (Year)	Country	Results
Obaid et al. (2022)	Iran	Relationship among classroom environment, anxiety, and willingness to communicate. Improved classroom settings lowered students' foreign language anxiety. Reduced anxiety boosted learners' willingness to communicate in English.
Ren et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Language evaluation anxiety negatively affected oral English performance. Students with higher anxiety showed lower self-appraisal ability. Self-appraisal ability partially mediated anxiety's effect on speaking performance.
Boustani (2019)	Tunisia	Most students relied on their native language to learn English vocabulary. Translation strategies boosted learners' confidence in speaking activities. Learners feel more confident during speaking activities.
Abdullah et al. (2021)	Oman	The flipped classroom model significantly reduced students' speaking anxiety. Students became more confident and active in speaking activities. Interactive and supportive classroom environments improved speaking performance.
Alsakaker (2025)	Saudi Arabia	Humor significantly reduced EFL learners' speaking anxiety. Students felt more relaxed and comfortable during speaking activities. Humor increased classroom participation and communication confidence
Khoudri (2024)	Morocco	Speaking anxiety stemmed from linguistic, personal, and teacher-related factors. Positive feedback and praise reduced students' speaking anxiety. Collaborative and task-based learning boosted students' willingness to communicate.
Almathkuri (2025)	Saudi Arabia	Fear of mistakes, anxiety, and shyness lowered students' classroom participation. Cultural beliefs and unequal participation hindered willingness to communicate. Peer activities and teachers' error tolerance encouraged more active speaking.
Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan (2017)	Iran	Speaking anxiety arose from learner-classroom environment interactions. Cognitive, affective, motivational, and linguistic factors shaped anxiety levels. Anxiety fluctuated dynamically across different classroom situations and experiences.
Ye et al. (2026)	China	SVVR significantly lowered communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. SVVR students outperformed the control group in speaking test scores. SVVR provided a psychologically safe and engaging speaking practice environment.
Juríková (2025)	Slovakia	Most students experienced moderate to high foreign language anxiety.

		Female students reported higher anxiety levels than males. Main anxiety causes included fear of negative evaluation, low proficiency, and teacher-related factors.
Quvanch et al. (2024)	Afghanistan	Speaking anxiety stemmed from low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and limited real-life English practice. Cultural influences and lack of family support also contributed to speaking anxiety. Students eased anxiety through authentic practice, social support, and continuous language training.
Stolvoort et al. (2024)	Netherlands	Later English instruction start age positively impacted vocabulary and grammar achievement. Anxiety negatively affected learners' English performance. Informal English exposure outside the classroom did not significantly improve outcomes.
Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2024)	Poland	Foreign language anxiety fluctuated more strongly than enjoyment during speaking tasks. Speaking errors and communication difficulties triggered anxiety. Emotion regulation strategies helped learners manage anxiety and sustain enjoyment.
Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025)	Iran	Online dynamic assessment significantly increased learners' motivation. Students showed lower levels of speaking anxiety after the treatment. Learners became more willing to communicate and take risks in speaking.
Ebadi et al. (2025)	Iran	AI-powered speaking tasks improved learners' speaking performance. Speaking anxiety decreased significantly in the experimental group. Learners reported higher motivation and engagement through AI interaction.
Alshewiter et al. (2026)	Jordan	Teacher immediacy created a more supportive classroom climate. Higher learner engagement increased speaking participation. Positive classroom environments reduced anxiety and encouraged students to speak more
Glomo-Narzoles, D. T., & Glomo-Palermo, D. T. (2021)	Philippines	Female students showed higher speaking anxiety than male students. Working students showed greater English speaking confidence than non-working students. A significant relationship existed between speaking anxiety and students' attitudes toward English.
Banani, S. A. (2025)	Iraq	Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation were the main anxiety sources. Female students experienced higher speaking anxiety than male students. AI-based learning tools were recommended to reduce anxiety and enhance speaking practice.
Eyu, E., Liu, W., & Li, Y. (2025)	England	Linguistic insecurity and fear of negative evaluation triggered students' anxiety. Cultural and educational backgrounds shaped students' reluctance to ask questions. Learners coped through self-talk, peer rehearsal, and body language control.
Tang, J. et al. (2026)	South Korea	Speaking self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of willingness to communicate with GenAI. Learning grit directly and indirectly boosted communication willingness. Speaking anxiety had less influence than self-efficacy and grit.
Albogami, A., & Algethami, G. (2022)	Saudi Arabia	WhatsApp enhanced students' English speaking performance. Learners showed greater motivation and more positive attitudes toward speaking English. WhatsApp reduced anxiety and fear of making mistakes in speaking.
Alqarni (2021)	Saudi	Online learning boosted students' willingness to communicate more than face-

	Arabia	to-face classes. Foreign language classroom enjoyment positively influenced communication willingness. Speaking anxiety undermined students' confidence and participation.
Yousif (2025)	Saudi Arabia	Fear of negative evaluation and unfamiliar English sounds triggered pronunciation anxiety. Pronunciation anxiety lowered classroom participation and speaking accuracy. Classroom interventions enhanced learners' confidence, fluency, and reduced anxiety.
Ölmezer-Öztürk et al. (2021)	Turkey	Mini-speeches and presentations significantly reduced speaking anxiety. Scaffolded feedback increased students' self-confidence in speaking English. More speaking opportunities helped learners become less anxious.
Elov et al. (2025)	Uzbekistan	ICALA reduced students' foreign language anxiety and shyness during speaking exams. AI-based assessment increased learner autonomy and enjoyment. Supportive online assessment environments improved students' confidence in speaking English.
Demirbag et al. (2016)	Turkey	Positive classroom atmosphere enhanced students' critical thinking disposition. No significant differences were found based on gender or age. The placebo group showed the greatest improvement in critical thinking development.
Fatima et al. (2020)	Malaysia	Affective factors such as L2 self-confidence and speaking anxiety accounted for 33% of learners' WTC. Personality traits like openness and extraversion significantly boosted students' L2 WTC. A positive classroom environment encouraged learners to communicate more actively in English.
Chernigovtseva et al. (2026)	Kazakhstan	Differentiated Instruction significantly improved students' English proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing. Students showed greater motivation, confidence, and participation after DI implementation. DI reduced language anxiety and supported inclusive learning across different proficiency levels.
Ding (2024)	England	HiVR created enjoyable and authentic experiences that boosted learner engagement. Many students felt less anxious speaking English in virtual reality environments. However, reduced anxiety in HiVR did not significantly transfer to real-life speaking situations.
Al-Saidat et al. (2023)	Jordan	Anxiety undermined students' willingness to communicate in English classrooms. Fear of mistakes, criticism, and negative teacher evaluation raised students' anxiety levels. A supportive and anxiety-free classroom atmosphere enhanced students' participation and communication.

Bibliometric Analysis of Research Trends

To answer the first study question, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed with VOSviewer. The improved network representation in Figure 1 depicts a dense and highly interconnected study sector. The terms that appear most prominently and centrally are speaking anxiety, anxiety, EFL learners, speaking skills, foreign language anxiety, language anxiety, and willingness to communicate. Their strong correlations suggest that research on EFL speaking anxiety is intimately related to speaking performance, language proficiency, classroom experiences, and learners' willingness to communicate. The map also displays multiple interconnected theme

clusters, indicating that the topic has evolved along psychological, linguistic, pedagogical, and technological dimensions.

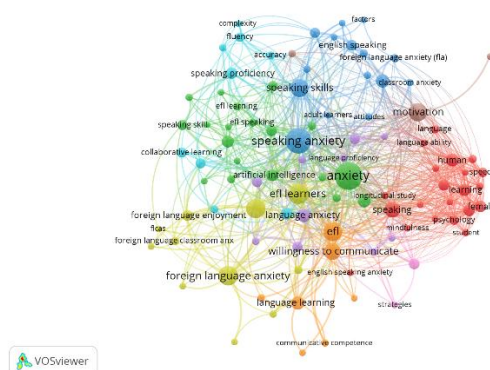


Figure 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Network Visualization

The overlay representation in Figure 2 provides a temporal dimension to the keyword analysis. The color scale runs from older publications in blue tones to more modern publications in yellow tones. Foreign language anxiety and foreign language are examples of earlier-oriented phrases, whereas variables, motivation, female, learning, and speech are represented by warmer hues, indicating a stronger link with more recent publications. Core terms such as speaking anxiety, anxiety, and EFL learners are apparent across the map, demonstrating that they stay relevant throughout the dataset's coverage span.

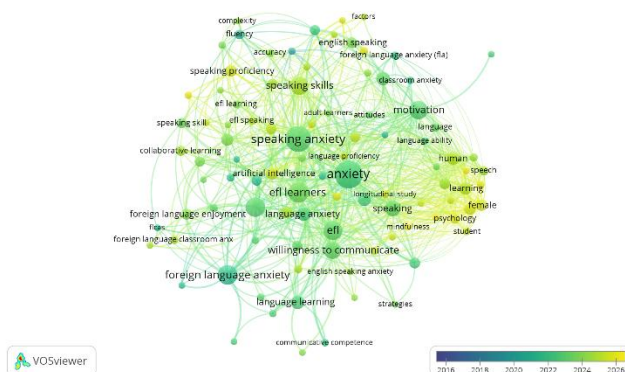


Figure 2 Overlay Visualization of Keyword Occurrence by Average Publication Year

Factors Contributing to English Speaking Anxiety among EFL Students in the Classroom

Following the PRISMA criteria, the systematic search generated 314 results from the Scopus database. After screening and eligibility assessment, 30 studies were selected for the review. The thematic synthesis identified two broad dimensions of speaking anxiety: internal factors (psychological, affective, and linguistic conditions) and external factors (classroom environments, teacher and peer interactions, pedagogical practices, and sociocultural contexts). Table 4 highlights the frequency of significant factors reported in the included studies.

Table 4. Frequency of Major Factors Reported Across the Included Studies

Major factor	Studies (n)	Percentage of 30 studies	Authors
Fear of negative evaluation / criticism	9	30.0%	Ren et al. (2025); Ye et al. (2026); Juríková (2025); Quvanch et al. (2024); Banani (2025); Eyu et al. (2025); Yousif (2025); Al-Saidat et al. (2023);

Almathkuri (2025)			
Classroom, teacher, or learning-environment factors	9	30.0%	Obaid et al. (2022); Khoudri (2024); Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan (2017); Juríková (2025); Alshewiter et al. (2026); Al-Saidat et al. (2023); Almathkuri (2025); Fatima et al. (2020); Alqarni (2021)
Limited language proficiency / linguistic insecurity	7	23.3%	Khoudri (2024); Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan (2017); Juríková (2025); Quvanch et al. (2024); Eyu et al. (2025); Yousif (2025); Stolvoort et al. (2024)
Fear of mistakes / errors	5	16.7%	Almathkuri (2025); Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2024); Albogami & Algethami (2022); Al-Saidat et al. (2023); Yousif (2025)
Low self-confidence / self-efficacy	3	10.0%	Quvanch et al. (2024); Alqarni (2021); Fatima et al. (2020)
Shyness / personality-related factors	3	10.0%	Khoudri (2024); Almathkuri (2025); Elov et al. (2025)
Cultural / social pressure	3	10.0%	Almathkuri (2025); Quvanch et al. (2024); Eyu et al. (2025)
Limited authentic speaking practice	2	6.7%	Quvanch et al. (2024); Stolvoort et al. (2024)

Speaking anxiety was frequently caused by internal variables in the evaluated literature. The most commonly stated internal themes included shyness, poor self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, insufficient language skills, and emotional or personality-related stresses. Anxiety was consistently linked to learners' challenges with vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation; on the other hand, fear of mistakes and low self-esteem decreased participation. Numerous investigations have also shown physical and cognitive symptoms, such as trembling, perspiration, forgetfulness, trouble focusing, and negative thoughts (Quvanch et al., 2024; Juríková, 2025; Alsakaker, 2025).

Classroom, teacher, peer, and sociocultural settings were the most important external factors. The most common issue, which appeared in nine studies (30.0%), was fear of unfavorable assessment or criticism. Nine research (30.0%) also observed factors relating to classrooms and teachers, such as unsupportive classroom environments, teacher-centered practices, harsh corrective feedback, and uncomfortable interactional situations. According to Obaid et al. (2022), Almathkuri (2025), and Quvanch et al. (2024), cultural or societal constraints, such as fear of public humiliation and face-saving concerns, and a lack of opportunity for actual English practice were other recurrent external factors.

Coping Strategies for English Speaking Anxiety

To answer the third study question, the coping techniques described in the included studies were divided into two categories: recurring pedagogical and learner-initiated. The frequency synthesis reveals that supportive classroom and teacher practices were the most commonly reported category, followed by technology-assisted speaking practice, collaborative or peer engagement, regular speaking practice, and self-regulation or emotion-regulation tactics. Table 5 shows the frequency of the key coping techniques among the 30 research examined.

Table 5. Frequency of Major Coping Strategies Reported Across the Included Studies

Major Coping Strategy	Studies (n)	Percentage of 30 studies	Authors
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Supportive classroom / teacher practices	10	33.3%	Obaid et al. (2022); Abdullah et al. (2020); Alsakaker (2025); Khoudri (2024); Almathkuri (2025); Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan (2017); Juriková (2025); Alshewiter et al. (2026); Elov et al. (2025); Yousif (2025)
Technology-assisted speaking practice	9	30.0%	Ye et al. (2026); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Ebadi et al. (2025); Banani (2025); Albogami & Algethami (2022); Alqarni (2021); Elov et al. (2025); Ding (2024); Tang et al. (2026)
Collaborative / peer / small-group practice	6	20.0%	Abdullah et al. (2020); Khoudri (2024); Almathkuri (2025); Quvanch et al. (2024); Eyu et al. (2025); Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan (2017)
Self-regulation / emotion regulation	5	16.7%	Ren et al. (2025); Quvanch et al. (2024); Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2024); Eyu et al. (2025); Fatima et al. (2020)
Regular / authentic speaking practice	4	13.3%	Ren et al. (2025); Boustani (2019); Ye et al. (2026); Quvanch et al. (2024)
Positive / constructive feedback	3	10.0%	Boustani (2019); Khoudri (2024); Ölmezer-Öztürk & Öztürk (2021)
Alternative instructional models	3	10.0%	Abdullah et al. (2020); Khoudri (2024); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025)
Error tolerance / reframing mistakes	2	6.7%	Almathkuri (2025); Alsakaker (2025)

The most commonly reported educational technique was to provide a supportive and stress-free classroom environment. According to Khoudri (2024), positive comments, praise, group projects, and task-based learning help lessen speaking fear, but Almathkuri (2025) discovered that teacher acceptance of mistakes and peer or small-group engagement can boost students' readiness to communicate. The Flipped Classroom Model also lowered speaking anxiety by providing more preparation time and chances for collaborative speaking practice (Abdullah et al., 2021). Supportive classroom climates were also reported in research on teacher immediacy, online assessment, and classroom interventions (Alshewiter et al., 2026; Elov et al., 2025; Yousif, 2025).

Individual learners also employed self-regulated and technologically aided strategies. Quvanch et al. (2024) reported that they practiced speaking frequently, interacted with authentic English content on YouTube and social media, had English-only peer conversations, and used deep breathing techniques. Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2024) emphasized emotion management, whereas Eyu et al. (2025) discussed self-talk, peer rehearsal, and body-language control. Virtual reality, AI-supported speaking tasks, WhatsApp, and intelligent computer-assisted assessment were among the most popular ways (Ye et al., 2026; Ebadi et al., 2025; Albogami & Algethami, 2022; Elov et al., 2025).

Self-appraisal and reflective assessment were also identified as effective internal coping techniques. Ren et al. (2025) discovered that self-appraisal ability moderated the link between language evaluation anxiety and oral English performance. Self-evaluation rubrics and peer-review exercises can thus assist learners acquire more accurate assessments of their speaking abilities while also increasing self-efficacy. Overall, the frequency synthesis suggests that dealing with speaking anxiety necessitates a dual approach that combines teacher-led pedagogical support with student-initiated self-regulation.

Discussion

Recent trends of English-speaking anxiety among EFL students from 2016 to 2026

Between 2016 and 2026, research on English-speaking anxiety among EFL learners increased steadily, with 30 identified papers. Publications increased progressively over time (two in 2020, three in 2021, two in 2022, one in 2023, and four in 2024) until peaking significantly at ten articles in 2025, indicating increased scholarly interest and future expansion in this topic.

In addition to personal characteristics like perfectionism, introversion, and the stigma of making mistakes, this growing body of literature has addressed a wide range of contributing issues, such as fear of negative assessment, low self-confidence, perceived linguistic inadequacy, limited speaking opportunities, and teacher-related factors like excessively corrective feedback and unsupportive classroom environments. In addition to these factors, research has looked at coping mechanisms like as relaxation and positive self-talk, group and pair work, teacher-facilitated low-anxiety classroom environments, and, more recently, technology-assisted therapies. The significant rise in publications between 2024 and 2025 suggests that speaking anxiety is becoming more widely acknowledged as a significant obstacle to communicative competence, necessitating additional multidisciplinary attention.

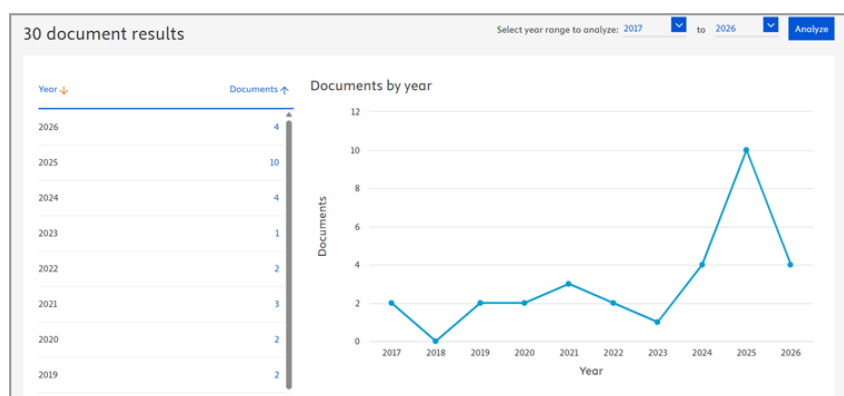


Figure 3 Graph of Research Data by Year of Publication

Factors Contributing to English Speaking Anxiety among EFL Students in the Classroom

The second research question of the study is addressed by the examined papers, which demonstrate that speaking anxiety among EFL students is a multifaceted phenomena influenced by both internal and external variables. Low self-confidence was regularly identified as a major psychological obstacle among internal factors (Quvanch et al., 2024; Almathkuri, 2025), and it frequently endures even when learners have sufficient language proficiency. Juríková (2025) identified anticipation of error as a core source of foreign language anxiety (FLA), consistent with Ren et al. (2025) finding that language evaluation anxiety impaired students' self-appraisal and created a negative feedback loop of underperformance. Anxiety was exacerbated by shyness, introversion, and weak language skills (Khoudri, 2024; Juríková, 2025; Quvanch et al., 2024). According to Eysenck's Attentional Control Theory as cited in Ren et al. (2025), avoidance behaviors (Juríková, 2025) and physical and cognitive symptoms like shaking, perspiration, and trouble focusing (Quvanch et al., 2024) reflect internal affective states that interfere with fluent speech production. Gender-related findings were conflicting: Quvanch et al. (2024) showed no significant gender difference, indicating that cultural context moderates this association, while Juríková (2025) reported higher FLA among female students.

External factors centered on classroom environment, teacher behavior, peer dynamics, and sociocultural norms. The fear of unfavorable evaluation from teachers and classmates was the most reported external impact. Ren et al. (2025) discovered that language evaluation anxiety reduced oral performance by 37.5% through self-appraisal ability. Almathkuri (2025) and Juríková (2025) reported that harsh correction, humiliation, and unfair comparisons discouraged participation. Peer-related pressures, such as fear of ridicule and social comparison, also decreased involvement (Almathkuri, 2025; Khoudri, 2024; Quvanch et al., 2024). Anxiety was further increased by unsupportive teaching methods, critical feedback, erratic teacher mood, and large class sizes (Khoudri, 2024; Juríková, 2025; Almathkuri, 2025). These classroom-level stressors were

exacerbated by limited access to real-world practice opportunities (Quvanch et al., 2024). Cultural values also had an impact: face-saving norms exacerbated evaluation anxiety in East Asian contexts (Ren et al., 2025), limited family autonomy affected Afghan students (Quvanch et al., 2024), and modesty and deference to authority discouraged participation among Saudi students (Almathkuri, 2025). These findings highlight the fact that speaking anxiety cannot be fully understood without its sociocultural context.

Their strategies in coping with those challenges

According to the reviewed research, treating speaking anxiety necessitates a dual strategy that combines student-initiated self-regulation with teacher-led techniques. At the educational level, the most often suggested approach was to create a supportive, stress-free classroom. While Almathkuri (2025) demonstrated that teachers' acceptance of mistakes and use of peer and small-group interaction encouraged greater willingness to communicate, Khoudri (2024) found that constructive feedback, appreciation, and task-based group activities significantly reduced anxiety. This effect is particularly relevant in cultural contexts where fear of public humiliation is prominent (Almathkuri, 2025; Quvanch et al., 2024).

In addition to direct classroom interactions, instructional model innovation has proven to be an effective educational technique. According to Abdullah et al. (2021), the Flipped Classroom Model (FCM) effectively reduces speaking anxiety in EFL learners by allowing them to interact with instructional content prior to class, thereby increasing their preparedness and self-assurance. The study discovered a statistically significant decrease in anxiety levels over the twelve-week implementation period because the FCM freed up valuable class time for collaborative speaking practice, which students reported made them feel more enthusiastic and less worried about oral performance. Additionally, Khoudri (2024) showed that implicit and delayed corrective feedback, as opposed to explicit and rapid error correction, is more effective in reducing fear and boosting students' readiness to communicate.

At the individual level, Quvanch et al. (2024) identified learner-initiated strategies among Afghan EFL undergraduates, such as frequent speaking practice, engagement with authentic English media, English-only peer conversation, and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, with exposure to native speakers associated with significant confidence gains. Ren et al. (2025) discovered that self-appraisal ability acts as a psychological buffer, mitigating approximately 37.5% of the negative effect of language evaluation anxiety on oral performance, and that tools such as self-evaluation rubrics, reflective journals, and peer review boost self-efficacy. Finally, Almathkuri (2025) discovered that students who reframed mistakes as normal parts of learning, resembling a growth mindset, were more confident in speaking activities, an attitude that teachers can foster by modeling error tolerance and prioritizing communication over accuracy.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature analysis demonstrates that research on EFL students' speaking anxiety has shifted to a more multidimensional and context-dependent approach. In response to RQ1, the literature from 2016 to 2026 shows growing research attention, with recent studies increasingly connecting speaking anxiety with pedagogical, psychological, and technology-related issues. In response to RQ2, speaking anxiety is shaped by the interaction of internal factors, particularly linguistic insecurity, fear of mistakes, and low confidence, and external factors, especially fear of negative evaluation and classroom or teacher-related conditions. In response to RQ3, effective coping approaches generally combine supportive teacher practices and collaborative learning with learner-initiated strategies such as regular speaking practice, technology-assisted practice, self-regulation, and reflective self-appraisal.

The primary contribution of this work is the integration of bibliometric evidence with a systematic synthesis of contributing elements and coping techniques, resulting in a more linked understanding of how the field has evolved and how anxiety may be addressed at both the classroom and learner levels. Future research should include experimental and mixed-methods studies that assess the efficacy of combined teacher-led and learner-centered interventions in a variety of cultural and educational settings. Further research should look on the long-term impact of technology-assisted practice and self-regulation on both speaking anxiety and communicative ability.

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DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors declare that QuillBot and Grammarly were used as AI-assisted tools during the preparation of this manuscript. These tools were used primarily to improve grammar, spelling, sentence structure, clarity, and overall language quality. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed, revised, and verified by the authors. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and final content of the manuscript.

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