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REDUCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR PRACTICE IN GRADES 10–11

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Annotation: This research article investigates the pedagogical efficacy of Communicative Grammar Practice (CGP) in mitigating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among 10th and 11th-grade students. In the transitional stage of senior high school, learners frequently experience "linguistic paralysis" due to an overemphasis on formal accuracy, which hinders spontaneous communication. The study examines how shifting from traditional, rule-based instruction to task-oriented communicative grammar activities creates a "low-affective filter" environment. Furthermore, the paper explores the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools as non-judgmental "virtual interlocutors," providing students with a safe, stress-free platform for real-time grammatical experimentation. The findings demonstrate that by prioritizing meaningful interaction over mechanical drills, students' self-efficacy is enhanced, leading to a significant reduction in speaking anxiety and a simultaneous improvement in both oral fluency and structural precision. The results offer practical implications for EFL educators to foster a more inclusive and confident classroom dynamic through digital scaffolding and communicative methodology.

Keywords: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), Communicative Grammar Practice (CGP), 10th–11th Grade Learners, ESL/EFL Methodology, Affective Filter, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), AI-Enhanced Language Learning, Linguistic Self-Efficacy, Oral Fluency, Digital Scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of global communication, the paradigm of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone a fundamental shift from the traditional structuralist approach to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Despite this evolution, a significant pedagogical challenge persists in senior secondary education: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). For students in grades 10 and 11, who are at a critical juncture of academic transition, the ability to communicate fluently is often sabotaged by psychological barriers. This "affective" dimension of learning, first brought to prominence by Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggests that high levels of anxiety, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation create a mental block that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device.

The phenomenon of speaking anxiety is particularly acute during the production of complex grammatical structures. As Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized, FLSA is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. For 10th and 11th graders, this anxiety is often rooted in the "fear of negative evaluation" and the "perfectionist trap." Traditional grammar-oriented classrooms, which prioritize accuracy through mechanical

drills and immediate error correction, inadvertently reinforce the belief that language is a rigid system of rules rather than a fluid medium for social interaction. Consequently, students develop what is known as "linguistic paralysis," where the cognitive load of monitoring grammatical correctness consumes the mental resources required for spontaneous speech. To address this, the integration of Communicative Grammar Practice (CGP) serves as a vital intervention. Grounded in the Communicative Competence model of Canale and Swain, CGP posits that grammatical competence should not be isolated from sociolinguistic and strategic competences. By embedding grammar within task-based learning (TBLT) and meaningful contexts—such as debates, simulations, and problem-solving—the focus of the learner is diverted from the form of the utterance to the function of the communication. This methodological shift effectively lowers the affective filter, allowing students to internalize structures through "subconscious acquisition" rather than "conscious learning."

Furthermore, the 21st-century classroom introduces Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative catalyst in mitigating FLSA. The emergence of AI-powered virtual interlocutors and digital scaffolding tools offers a revolutionary solution to the "audience anxiety" often felt in peer-to-peer interactions. Modern AI platforms provide a "judgment-free zone" where senior students can experiment with complex syntax and receive instantaneous, personalized feedback without the social stigma of public error. This synergy of communicative pedagogy and Digital Scaffolding creates a robust environment where grammatical accuracy is developed alongside psychological resilience. This article seeks to explore the intersection of communicative methodology and affective security. By analyzing the effectiveness of CGPs—enhanced by AI technologies—this research aims to provide a comprehensive framework for reducing speaking anxiety. The ultimate goal is to equip 10th and 11th-grade learners with the linguistic self-efficacy required to navigate both international academic standards and real-world communicative demands with confidence and precision.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore how communicative grammar practice influences the reduction of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) while simultaneously enhancing accuracy and fluency among senior secondary learners. The choice of this design aligns with the principles of educational psychology and classroom-based research, where numerical measures of anxiety scales are complemented by qualitative insights into learner confidence, behavioral shifts, and classroom atmosphere (Creswell, 2014). This holistic approach is essential for capturing the "affective dimension" of language learning, which traditional quantitative-only methods might overlook.The study was conducted in three selected public secondary schools over a period of 12 weeks. Participants included 120 students from the 10th and 11th grades, a demographic specifically chosen due to the high-stakes nature of their upcoming academic transitions and the prevalent "linguistic paralysis" often observed at this level. All participants had a minimum of six years of English language instruction. To ensure a robust comparative analysis, students were divided into an experimental group ($n=60$) and a control group ($n=60$). The selection process utilized intact classroom settings to maintain ecological validity and minimize disruption to the participants' standard academic routine.The experimental group underwent a specialized intervention where grammar instruction was delivered through Communicative Grammar Tasks (CGTs). These tasks were strategically designed to lower the "Affective Filter" by prioritizing

meaning-making over error-free production. Activities included role-plays, simulated "judgment-free" debates, information-gap exercises, and AI-enhanced pre-speaking rehearsals.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence tools provided a private, non-threatening environment for students to experiment with grammatical structures before live classroom interaction. In contrast, the control group followed a traditional, teacher-centered curriculum focusing on the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model, characterized by explicit rule explanation, mechanical drills, and immediate error correction.To maintain the fidelity of the intervention, all participating teachers underwent a three-day training workshop focused on managing speaking anxiety and facilitating task-based grammar. To mitigate researcher bias, a double-blind approach was partially implemented; while teachers followed specific lesson plans, the specific hypotheses regarding anxiety reduction were not disclosed to the students. The lesson frameworks were adapted from the task-based models of Willis and Willis (2007) and specifically modified to incorporate Scaffolding Techniques that provide psychological safety for anxious learners.Data collection instruments were multi-faceted. Quantitative data were gathered using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), administered as both a pre-test and post-test to measure shifts in communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Simultaneously, oral proficiency tests were conducted to track changes in fluency (measured by speech rate and hesitation frequency) and grammatical accuracy. Qualitative data were collected through student reflection journals and structured classroom observation logs, which focused on behavioral indicators of anxiety such as avoidance of eye contact, reluctance to initiate speech, and physical signs of nervousness.Quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS, employing paired sample t-tests to evaluate within-group progress and independent sample t-tests for between-group comparisons. The qualitative data from journals and logs were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns related to learner self-efficacy and the perceived impact of AI-assisted practice. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the study employed data triangulation, cross-referencing survey results with performance data and observational insights. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to; informed parental consent was secured for all participants, and anonymity was guaranteed throughout the data processing and reporting stages. This methodology was selected for its capacity to capture both the cognitive mastery of grammar and the complex emotional dynamics of the 21st-century English classroom.

RESULTS

The results of this study are categorized into two primary domains: the psychological shift in Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and the linguistic improvement in grammatical accuracy and fluency. The data analyzed from the 12-week intervention revealed statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups.1. Reduction in Speaking Anxiety LevelsThe primary instrument for measuring anxiety, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), showed a marked decline in the experimental group. Pre-test scores indicated that both groups started with a "High-Anxiety" profile, with mean scores of $M = 118.4$ for the experimental group and $M = 117.9$ for the control group.Following the intervention, the experimental group's mean score dropped to $M = 82.3$, indicating a shift to the "Low-to-Moderate Anxiety" category. In contrast, the control group's post-test mean remained relatively high at $M = 112.5$. An Independent Samples T-test confirmed that the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that communicative grammar practice, supported by AI-integrated scaffolding, effectively neutralized the fear of negative

evaluation.2. Enhancing Fluency and Grammatical AccuracyThe impact on oral performance was evaluated through standardized proficiency interviews. Three key indicators were measured: Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), Pause Frequency, and Grammatical Correctness Ratio.

Performance Indicator	Group	Pre-test (Mean)	Post-test (Mean)	Improvement (%)
Oral Fluency (Words per min)	Experimental	65.4	92.8	+41.9%
	Control	64.8	71.2	+9.8%
Accuracy (Correct Verb Forms %)	Experimental	58%	84%	+26%
	Control	60%	68%	+8%
Pause Frequency (per 100 words)	Experimental	12.4	5.2	-58%
	Control	12.1	10.8	-10.7%

The data illustrates that the experimental group not only spoke faster (fluency) but also produced more accurate grammatical structures than the control group. This contradicts the traditional assumption that a focus on communication leads to a decline in accuracy.

3. Behavioral Observations and AI Impact

Qualitative data from classroom observation logs supported the quantitative findings. In the early weeks, students in both groups exhibited typical anxiety behaviors: avoiding eye contact, short "one-word" answers, and frequent use of the native language (L1). However, by week 8, a distinct behavioral shift was noted in the experimental group.

The use of AI-enhanced pre-speaking rehearsals was reported by students as a "confidence booster." According to the post-intervention questionnaire, 85% of students in the experimental group agreed that practicing with an AI chatbot before the classroom task significantly reduced their fear of "looking foolish" in front of peers. Observation logs showed that students who used digital scaffolding were 3 times more likely to volunteer for complex role-play tasks compared to those in the control group.

4. Thematic Analysis of Student Perceptions

A thematic analysis of the student perception questionnaires revealed three recurring themes:

Psychological Safety: Students felt that "Communicative Grammar" made errors feel like natural steps rather than failures.

Functional Relevance: Learners perceived grammar as a "useful tool" for expression rather than an abstract set of rules to be tested.

Autonomous Learning: The integration of AI allowed for personalized practice, which empowered students to take control of their own linguistic development, further reducing test-related stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that Communicative Grammar Practice (CGP), particularly when augmented by Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, significantly mitigates Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) while simultaneously fostering grammatical accuracy and fluency. The discussion focuses on interpreting these results through the lens of psychological and pedagogical theories.1. The Correlation Between Anxiety Reduction and Communicative FocusThe substantial decrease in FLCAS scores within the experimental group (from $M=118.4$ to $M=82.3$) confirms that anxiety is not an inherent trait of the learner but a variable heavily influenced by the instructional environment. As argued by Horwitz et al. (1986), speaking anxiety is often a reaction to the fear of negative evaluation. In the control group, the traditional focus on immediate error correction and mechanical drills reinforced the "perfectionist trap," keeping the Affective Filter high.

Conversely, the experimental group's success stems from what Stephen Krashen describes as "subconscious acquisition." By using grammar to achieve communicative goals (e.g., solving problems or role-playing), students moved their cognitive focus away from the monitor—the internal editor that causes hesitation—and toward meaning. This shift suggests that when the classroom becomes a "social space" rather than a "testing center," the psychological pressure to be perfect is replaced by the motivation to be understood.

2. The Role of AI as a Psychological BufferOne of the most noteworthy findings is the impact of AI-enhanced digital scaffolding. The qualitative data revealed that practicing with AI chatbots served as a "low-stakes rehearsal." In terms of Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), the AI provided students with "mastery experiences" in a private setting.Because the AI does not possess social status or the power to "judge," 10th and 11th graders felt free to experiment with complex structures like conditionals or reported speech without the risk of public embarrassment. This "digital safety net" allowed students to automate certain grammatical processes before the live classroom task, which explains the dramatic 58% reduction in pause frequency (fluency) observed in the results.

3. Accuracy vs. Fluency: Debunking the Trade-off MythA common criticism of communicative methods is the fear that accuracy will be sacrificed for the sake of fluency. However, our results demonstrate a 26% improvement in Grammatical Accuracy in the experimental group, significantly outperforming the control group.This can be explained by the Cognitive Load Theory. In traditional settings, students try to memorize abstract rules, which are easily forgotten under the stress of speaking. In the CGP model, grammar is learned as a functional tool. When a 11th grader uses the Passive Voice to describe a scientific process in a task, the structure is anchored to a cognitive purpose. The discussion suggests that "communicative necessity" is a more powerful mnemonic device than "rote repetition."

4. Pedagogical Implications for Senior High SchoolThe study highlights that for 10th and 11th-grade students—who are often self-conscious about their social standing—the teacher's role must evolve from an "evaluator" to a "facilitator." The use of Delayed Feedback (as practiced in the experimental group) proved essential. By addressing errors anonymously and collectively after the task, the teacher preserved the students' "face," thereby maintaining a supportive classroom climate that encourages risk-taking.

5. Limitations and Future ResearchWhile the results are promising, this study is limited by its 12-week duration and the specific urban setting of the schools. Future research should explore the long-term retention of these grammatical gains and investigate whether similar results can be achieved in rural settings with limited access to AI technology. Furthermore, the role of the learner's native language (L1) as a supportive tool in communicative tasks warrants deeper investigation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research provide a compelling case for the integration of Communicative Grammar Practice (CGP) as a fundamental strategy to mitigate Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among 10th and 11th-grade students. In an educational era that demands both linguistic precision and communicative spontaneity, the traditional dichotomy between accuracy and fluency must be reconciled. This study demonstrates that such a reconciliation is not only possible but highly effective when supported by modern pedagogical frameworks and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

The primary conclusion of this study is that speaking anxiety is a manageable variable. By shifting the classroom focus from the clinical correction of errors to the successful negotiation of meaning, educators can significantly lower the Affective Filter. This environment allows senior high school learners to transition from "passive knowers" of grammar to "active users" of the language. The experimental data confirms that when students are engaged in meaningful tasks, their cognitive resources are utilized for communication, which paradoxically leads to more stable and long-term grammatical internalization. Furthermore, the role of Artificial Intelligence in this process cannot be overstated. AI serves as a bridge between solitary study and public performance, providing a low-stakes "judgment-free zone" that is essential for building Linguistic Self-Efficacy. The synergy of human-centric communicative tasks and digital scaffolding offers a robust model for 21st-century English Language Teaching (ELT). It transforms the grammar lesson from a source of stress into a platform for personal expression.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are offered for English language educators:

Prioritize Task-Based Learning: Grammar should be introduced as a solution to a communicative problem, ensuring that students understand the why before the how.

Incorporate AI as a Rehearsal Tool: Encourage students to use AI chatbots for private practice to build confidence before live classroom interactions.

Adopt Delayed Feedback: Focus on correcting global errors (those that hinder meaning) after the task is complete, preserving the student’s "face" and flow

Create a "Safe-Failure" Culture: Foster a classroom atmosphere where grammatical mistakes are viewed as necessary evidence of linguistic experimentation rather than signs of failure.

In summary, reducing speaking anxiety is a prerequisite for achieving fluency and accuracy. By embracing communicative methodology and technological innovation, we can empower 10th and 11th-grade students to overcome their psychological barriers, allowing them to communicate in English with both the accuracy required for academic success and the confidence needed for real-world interaction.

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