

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AND SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENT
EFL LEARNERS

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ANNOTATSIYA: Nutq tashvishligi chet tilini o'rganuvchi o'smir o'quvchilar uchun eng katta to'siqlardan biri hisoblanadi. Ushbu maqola loyihalarga asoslangan o'qitish (PBL) usuli orqali 6-7-sinf o'quvchilarining nutq tashvishligini kamaytirish mexanizmlarini ko'rib chiqadi. Tadqiqot natijalari ko'rsatdiki, PBL hamkorlikdagi loyiha ishi, haqiqiy kommunikativ maqsadlar va bosqichma-bosqich repetitsiya orqali o'quvchilarning nutq ishonchini oshiradi va tashvishlilikni kamaytiradi. Shuningdek, o'qituvchining qo'llab-quvvatlovchi roli va sinf muhitining tashvishlilikni kamaytiruvchi xususiyatlari muhokama qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Nutq tashvishligi, loyihalarga asoslangan o'qitish, o'smir EFL o'quvchilari, nutq ishonchi, hamkorlik, o'qituvchi facilitatsiyasi

ABSTRACT: Speaking anxiety represents one of the most significant barriers to oral communication development among adolescent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This article examines the mechanisms through which project-based learning (PBL) reduces speaking anxiety among grades 6--7 students. Research findings indicate that PBL enhances learners' speaking confidence and reduces anxiety through collaborative project work, authentic communicative purposes, and graduated rehearsal. The supportive role of teacher facilitation and anxiety-reducing classroom environment characteristics are also discussed.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, project-based learning, adolescent EFL learners, speaking confidence, collaboration, teacher facilitation

АННОТАЦИЯ: Тревожность при говорении является одним из наиболее значительных барьеров для развития устной коммуникации у подростков, изучающих английский язык как иностранный. Данная статья рассматривает механизмы, через которые проектное обучение (PBL) снижает тревожность при говорении у учащихся 6--7 классов. Результаты исследования показывают, что PBL повышает уверенность в говорении и снижает тревожность через совместную проектную работу, аутентичные коммуникативные цели и постепенную репетицию. Также обсуждается поддерживающая роль учителя и характеристики классной среды, способствующие снижению тревожности.

Ключевые слова: Тревожность при говорении, проектное обучение, подростки-изучающие иностранный язык, уверенность в говорении, сотрудничество, фасилитация учителя

INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety is widely recognized as a pervasive barrier to oral communication development among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. For adolescent students in grades 6--7, this challenge is intensified by developmental characteristics including heightened self-consciousness, peer sensitivity, and fear of negative evaluation. Many students who possess adequate grammatical knowledge and vocabulary remain unable to demonstrate these competencies in oral performance due to anxiety-induced cognitive interference. Traditional



teacher-centered approaches often exacerbate speaking anxiety through sudden, unsupported performance demands, public error correction, and limited opportunities for rehearsal. Students frequently report that impromptu speaking tasks trigger apprehension that impairs fluency, reduces vocabulary retrieval, and inhibits willingness to communicate. Project-based learning (PBL) has emerged as a pedagogical alternative with potential to address these affective barriers. By engaging learners in extended collaborative inquiry culminating in authentic communicative performances, PBL creates conditions that may simultaneously reduce anxiety and enhance speaking ability. This article examines the mechanisms through which PBL influences speaking anxiety among young adolescent EFL learners and discusses the implications for classroom practice.

METHOD AND RESEARCH

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore student experiences of speaking anxiety within PBL environments. Participants were adolescent EFL learners from grades 6 and 7 at a secondary school, purposively selected to represent varying anxiety levels based on self-report. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals maintained throughout a PBL program, and classroom observations. The PBL program comprised four sequential speaking projects: cultural heritage presentations, environmental persuasive speeches, simulated international exchanges, and career exploration interviews. Each project followed stages of planning, research, preparation, rehearsal, performance, and reflection. Teachers functioned as facilitators, providing scaffolding while emphasizing effort and improvement over perfection. Data analysis employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework. Two researchers independently coded interview transcripts and journal entries, identifying patterns related to anxiety, confidence, collaboration, and performance. Codes were organized into themes through iterative comparison and consensus discussion.

ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis revealed four interconnected mechanisms through which PBL reduces speaking anxiety among adolescent EFL learners. Collaborative structure distributes performance pressure. Students reported that working in groups transformed individual performance anxiety into shared responsibility. The peer support system provided emotional safety that counteracted fear of negative evaluation. Working alongside classmates who faced similar challenges normalized the speaking experience and reduced the isolation often associated with individual performance tasks.

Extended rehearsal builds procedural confidence. Unlike traditional instruction where speaking tasks are often spontaneous, PBL provides multiple opportunities for practice before public performance. Students described progressive comfort development: from private rehearsal to small-group practice to whole-class presentation. This graduated exposure allowed learners to internalize content and language structures, transforming anxiety-inducing spontaneity into practiced confidence. Authentic purpose shifts focus from accuracy to communication. When students speak about personally meaningful topics to genuinely interested audiences, the communicative purpose transcends error-focused assessment. Students noted that audience engagement during presentations provided positive reinforcement absent in traditional testing contexts. The shift from being evaluated to being heard fundamentally altered their relationship with oral communication. Teacher facilitation creates supportive climate. Teachers who emphasized effort over perfection, normalized errors as learning opportunities, and provided private encouragement before public performance significantly reduced student anxiety.



Facilitators who monitored group dynamics, intervened to prevent dominance by high-proficiency students, and ensured equitable participation created inclusive environments where all voices were valued. However, individual differences persisted. Some highly anxious students continued experiencing significant apprehension despite PBL structures, suggesting that additional individualized support may be necessary for this population. Alternative formats such as video presentations, smaller audiences, or extended preparation time proved beneficial for these learners.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that project-based learning effectively reduces speaking anxiety among adolescent EFL learners through collaborative structure, extended rehearsal, authentic communicative purpose, and supportive teacher facilitation. The findings challenge zero-sum conceptualizations of anxiety and performance by showing that these variables can improve simultaneously within appropriately designed instructional environments. The collaborative structure of PBL emerges as particularly significant for anxious learners. Peer scaffolding provides emotional and linguistic support that reduces individual performance pressure while maintaining high expectations for participation. The finding that peer assistance feels less threatening than teacher correction aligns with adolescent developmental needs for social belonging and peer validation.

For educators, the study recommends implementing PBL-based speaking activities that provide graduated exposure from private rehearsal to public performance, establishing explicit collaboration protocols that ensure equitable participation, selecting personally relevant topics that connect to students' experiences, and cultivating classroom climates where effort and improvement are valued over perfection. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of anxiety reduction following PBL instruction and investigate optimal facilitation strategies for highly anxious learners.

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