Mitigating public speaking anxiety among EFL learners through peer teaching: An evaluative survey study

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of peer teaching in reducing public speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Public speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue among EFL learners, hindering their language development and performance. This research employs an evaluative survey design to assess the impact of peer teaching on public speaking anxiety among 67 EFL students. The results show a statistically significant reduction in public speaking anxiety after participating in peer teaching sessions, with a mean anxiety score decreasing from 64.23 to 54.44. The qualitative data further supports the quantitative findings, indicating that peer teaching fosters a collaborative learning environment, reduces fear of judgment, and provides constructive feedback, leading to increased confidence and reduced anxiety. The study highlights the pedagogical value of peer teaching in EFL classrooms, suggesting that it can be a useful tool in addressing public speaking anxiety and improving language learning outcomes.

***Keywords:** collaborative learning; peer teaching; public speaking anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) is a prevalent issue among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, posing significant challenges to their language development and performance. PSA, commonly referred to as glossophobia, arises when students face the pressure of expressing their thoughts clearly in a foreign language in front of an audience. Glossophobia often manifests through a range of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physiological responses (Dincer et al., 2022). These responses can include symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, flushed skin, avoidance of eye contact, and quickened breathing, all of which can severely hinder students' ability to present or communicate effectively. In a recent study on the prevalence of public speaking anxiety among undergraduate students, researchers found that students reported experiencing anxiety about public speaking even more frequently than the fear of death itself (Perveen et al., 2018).

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) is a form of communication-based anxiety characterized by physiological symptoms, such as an increased heart rate and physical trembling, which are often accompanied by self-critical thoughts that undermine confidence in delivering a speech, ultimately impairing public speaking performance

(Bodie, 2010). Adding the paradigm of Public Speaking Anxiety, the recent study conducted by Lintner (2024) revealed that public speaking anxiety is more prevalent among women, non-binary individuals, graduates of academic high schools, and bachelor's degree students. In educational contexts, PSA not only hampers learners' ability to convey their ideas effectively but also diminishes their overall confidence, impeding language acquisition (Kelsen, 2019).

In EFL settings, anxiety is often exacerbated due to learners' limited language proficiency, fear of judgment, and cultural differences in communication styles. Several studies highlight the relationship between EFL learners' anxiety and their ability to perform in public speaking tasks (Liu, 2018; Heeren et al., 2013). The unfamiliarity with the language, fear of making mistakes, and perceived judgment from peers or instructors contribute to heightened levels of anxiety. This, in turn, negatively affects learners' fluency, pronunciation, and overall communication.

Public speaking is an essential skill for EFL learners, as it enables them to use the language in real-world contexts, promotes active communication, and enhances critical thinking. In professional and academic settings, public speaking skills are crucial for effective communication, collaboration, and participation in discussions. Therefore, mastering public speaking not only boosts EFL learners' confidence in language use but also contributes to their success in various life situations, both locally and globally (Horwitz et al., 1986).

EFL students experience unique challenges when engaging in public speaking. These challenges stem primarily from linguistic limitations, such as difficulties with vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Additionally, cultural factors, including the fear of standing out or contradicting others in public, play a role in increasing anxiety levels. Such anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, where learners may prefer to remain silent rather than risk embarrassment. Furthermore, the lack of real-time feedback in traditional lecture-style classrooms adds to the difficulties students face in building their public speaking abilities.

Peer teaching is a collaborative learning strategy where students engage in teaching each other, often under the guidance of a teacher. This method promotes interaction, fosters a supportive learning environment, and allows students to become active participants in the learning process (Alghamdy, 2015). In EFL contexts, peer teaching enables learners to practice speaking in less formal, lower-stakes settings, where the fear of judgment is reduced. Studies suggest that peer teaching helps learners build confidence, as they receive immediate feedback from their peers and are more willing to take risks (Liu, 2018).

Focusing on peer teaching as a strategy to mitigate public speaking anxiety is essential due to its collaborative and interactive nature. Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, peer teaching provides a less hierarchical, more relaxed learning environment where students feel less pressure and are more inclined to practice speaking (Heeren et al., 2013). Through peer interaction, learners gain emotional support and are more likely to develop their public speaking skills without the added anxiety associated with formal presentations. The real-time feedback and encouragement from peer act as a buffer against the fear of making mistakes, thereby gradually reducing anxiety.

This research underscores the importance of innovative teaching approaches such as peer teaching in reducing anxiety and improving language proficiency (Kelsen, 2019). While traditional methods focus on rote learning and individual performance, peer

teaching emphasizes collaborative engagement and shared responsibility for learning. Current studies conducted by some experts indicate a positive correlation between peer support and the reduction of anxiety in language learning contexts (Alghamdi, 2015). Moreover, peer teaching aligns with contemporary theories of language acquisition that emphasize interaction and communication as key components of effective learning.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on language anxiety by focusing on the role of peer interaction in mitigating public speaking fears. It also bridges the gap between language anxiety research and pedagogical practices, offering new insights into how anxiety can be addressed in the classroom. Practically, the findings from this study provide educators with concrete strategies for integrating peer teaching into their curricula to improve student outcomes in public speaking. By focusing on collaborative learning, teachers can foster a more inclusive, anxiety-reducing environment that promotes language development. For educators and policymakers, this research offers practical insights into the benefits of peer teaching in EFL contexts. Implementing peer teaching can create a more supportive and interactive classroom environment where students feel safe to experiment with language. Policymakers can use these findings to advocate for more flexible and student-centered approaches to language teaching that prioritize learner well-being and confidence. Furthermore, teacher training programs can incorporate peer teaching techniques to equip instructors with the tools to foster collaborative learning environments (Heeren et al., 2013).

Communication apprehension

Communication Apprehension (CA) refers to the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others. McCroskey et al (2019) suggests that in Communication Apprehension many learners, particularly in foreign language settings, experience heightened anxiety in public speaking due to the unfamiliarity of the language and fear of negative evaluation. This fear can impair their performance, contributing to a cycle of anxiety and underachievement. Horwitz et al. (1986), further, proposed that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), a form of CA, arises specifically in foreign language contexts. The apprehension is closely tied to learners' perceptions of their proficiency and fear of social judgment, which often leads to avoidance of speaking opportunities in class. FLA has been shown to have a negative impact on learners' overall language performance, including speaking proficiency (Horwitz et al., 1986; Eginli & Solhi, 2020).

Public speaking anxiety in EFL learners

Public speaking anxiety in EFL learners is influenced by several factors, including linguistic barriers, fear of negative evaluation, and cultural differences. Linguistic barriers, such as limited vocabulary and difficulty in pronunciation, can exacerbate anxiety. Cultural norms, which often discourage open verbal participation, particularly in Asian EFL contexts, also contribute to this apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986; Goetz et al., 2017). Anxiety can also be triggered by a range of stressors, including tight deadlines, high expectations, or unfamiliar environments that these factors often lead to intensified emotional responses and challenges in managing stress effectively (Tauchid et al., 2024).

Previous Studies on Anxiety in EFL Settings: Studies have consistently shown that EFL learners experience higher levels of anxiety in public speaking contexts compared to other language skills. Factors such as unfamiliarity with public speaking norms, low self-efficacy in language ability, and fear of losing face in front of peers have been highlighted as key contributors to this anxiety (Ho, 2016; Eginli & Solhi, 2020).

Peer teaching

Peer teaching refers to the instructional method where students take on the role of both teachers and learners. It involves a reciprocal process of sharing knowledge, clarifying concepts, and supporting each other's learning. Key characteristics include collaboration, mutual support, and active engagement. Peer teaching shifts the traditional teacher-student dynamic, promoting autonomy and interaction among learners (Amini & Bicen, 2024). This approach is beneficial in language learning as it encourages learners to practice communication skills in a more relaxed and familiar environment, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership of learning outcomes (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023).

Furthermore, the benefits of peer teaching in language learning are well-documented. Peer interaction helps learners build confidence, reduce anxiety, and reinforce their understanding of language concepts through teaching their peers. It also facilitates collaborative learning, which has been shown to increase motivation and reduce speaking anxiety in EFL learners (Amini & Bicen, 2024). However, challenges include the variability in peer feedback quality, the potential for inaccurate information sharing, and the need for structured guidance from educators to ensure the effectiveness of the approach (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024).

Previous researches highlight the efficacy of peer teaching in EFL settings, particularly in improving speaking skills and reducing anxiety. A study by Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) demonstrated that peer teaching in both online and face-to-face settings significantly reduced speaking anxiety among EFL learners by creating a supportive environment for practice. Another study by Kim and Kim (2022) emphasized that peer teaching promotes deeper cognitive engagement and critical thinking, essential for language acquisition.

Peer teaching, as a form of collaborative learning, creates a supportive and non-threatening environment, which is crucial for reducing anxiety, especially in public speaking contexts. Studies suggest that when learners teach their peers, they experience lower levels of stress compared to when they are evaluated solely by teachers (Amini & Bicen, 2024). Collaborative learning also fosters social connections among learners, which further alleviates anxiety by reducing the fear of judgment in public speaking scenarios (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023).

Several studies have further explored the impact of peer teaching on anxiety across different educational contexts. For example, a study by Nilsson (2019) found that peer teaching significantly reduced speaking anxiety among young learners in Sweden, as students felt more comfortable and supported in their learning environments. Furthermore, collaborative tasks involving peer teaching were shown to enhance motivation and reduce anxiety, particularly in task-based learning environments (Kopinska & Azakari, 2020). These findings suggest that peer teaching can be an effective tool for reducing anxiety in language learning across diverse settings.

Despite the growing body of research on peer teaching and anxiety reduction, there are still gaps in understanding the long-term effects of peer teaching on public speaking anxiety in EFL learners. Current studies have primarily focused on short-term interventions, with limited exploration of how peer teaching influences anxiety over extended periods. Additionally, more research is needed to explore the impact of peer teaching across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as the majority of studies have been conducted in Western contexts (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023).

Peer teaching and its impact on public speaking

One of the foundational theories supporting peer teaching is Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners can accomplish tasks with the help of more knowledgeable peers. Peer teaching fits into this model by providing a collaborative environment where students support each other's learning, especially in contexts where anxiety, such as public speaking, is a barrier (Vygotsky, 1978; Tudge, 2012).

This approach, based on Vygotsky's ZPD, suggests that learners benefit more from working together than in isolation. In peer teaching, students take on the role of both learner and teacher, which has been found to reduce anxiety by creating a less formal environment where mistakes are more accepted, leading to increased confidence and speaking proficiency (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1995).

Recent research further illustrates how the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), also known as scaffolding, enhances learning outcomes, particularly when supported by peer collaboration and teaching. A study by Raslan (2023) investigated how peer-mediated ZPD affects acquisition of new skills. Using systematic literature review, the findings suggest that to foster greater learning independence and adaptability, it is essential to redefine certain concepts, refine their application, and adopt advanced teaching methods, including technological tools, to encourage critical thinking, exploration, and constructive feedback which can decrease the anxiety.

Research on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the significance of scaffolding through peer collaboration in enhancing learning outcomes. Raslan's (2023) study specifically emphasizes that peer-mediated ZPD can facilitate the acquisition of new skills by promoting learner independence and adaptability. Through a systematic literature review, Raslan (2023) suggests that redefining ZPD-related concepts, refining instructional approaches, and incorporating advanced teaching methods—such as technological tools—are crucial to fostering critical thinking, exploration, and constructive feedback within educational settings.

METHOD

This study employs an evaluative survey design to assess the impact of peer teaching on public speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Evaluative surveys are commonly used to systematically gather data from participants to evaluate the effectiveness of educational interventions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In this context, the survey is designed to evaluate whether peer teaching reduces anxiety in public speaking, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis (Salkind, 2012). The population for this study consists of EFL students from Universitas Duta Bangsa Surakarta. These students are enrolled in an English language program that requires public speaking as part of their coursework. Typically, participants include students at intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency. A purposive sampling method is used to select participants who have experienced both traditional and peer teaching environments. Purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on individuals with specific characteristics, ensuring that the sample includes students with relevant experiences in peer teaching and public speaking anxiety (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The study involved approximately 67 students to provide a sufficient sample for meaningful statistical analysis.

To measure public speaking anxiety, students were required to complete the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This scale is widely used to measure levels of anxiety in foreign language learners and will be adapted for the context of public speaking (Luo, 2013). Additionally, students completed self-reported anxiety scales before and after participating in peer teaching interventions. These scales provide a numerical indication of anxiety levels, allowing for comparison over time (Dong et al., 2022). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a subset of students who have participated in peer teaching sessions. These qualitative methods would help explore the learners' perceptions of peer teaching and its impact on their anxiety. By allowing for open-ended responses, these interviews aim to capture deeper insights into students' experiences and the mechanisms through which peer teaching may reduce anxiety (Toubot & Hock, 2018).

Statistical analysis is used to evaluate changes in public speaking anxiety levels before and after the peer teaching intervention. A paired-samples t-test was employed to compare pre- and post-intervention anxiety scores to determine if there is a statistically significant reduction in anxiety (Field, 2019). The quantitative data would also be analyzed for correlations between students' perceptions of peer teaching and their anxiety levels, providing insights into the relationship between the two variables.

A thematic analysis would be conducted on the interview and focus group data. This approach involves coding the data for recurring themes related to students' experiences with peer teaching and its impact on their anxiety. Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify patterns in the data and to gain a deeper understanding of the social and emotional aspects of learning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Themes such as peer support, confidence building, and reduced fear of negative evaluation are expected to emerge (Amini & Bicen, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the findings of the study, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data from the 67 EFL students who participated in the survey. The quantitative data focused on measuring changes in public speaking anxiety using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) and self-reported anxiety scales before and after the peer teaching intervention. Before participating in peer teaching, the average FLCAS score for the 67 students indicated a moderate to high level of public speaking anxiety. Approximately 65% of the students reported experiencing significant anxiety when asked to speak in front of their peers during traditional classroom settings.

After participating in peer teaching sessions, the students completed the FLCAS again. The following is the table of FLCAS Scores in Pre- and Post-Intervention.

Table 1. The results of FLCAS scores in pre- and post-intervention

Measure	Mean	Std. Dev	t-statistic	p-value
Pre-Anxiety (FLCAS)	64.23	10.56		
Post-Anxiety (FLCAS)	54.44	11.57	16.33	7.06

Table 1 shows that the mean of pre-intervention anxiety score is 64.23, which indicates that the majority of students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety before the peer teaching intervention. This aligns with previous research showing that

EFL learners often feel anxious when required to speak publicly (Horwitz et al., 1986). The standard deviation of 10.56 shows a relatively consistent level of anxiety among the participants, with most students reporting similarly high anxiety levels in Communication Apprehension. After the peer teaching intervention, the mean anxiety score significantly decreased to 54.44 which was addressed to low level of anxiety. This indicates that the peer teaching sessions had a positive effect in reducing students' public speaking anxiety. The standard deviation of 11.57 suggests that while anxiety decreased overall, individual responses varied, possibly due to personal factors like prior experience or differing perceptions of peer teaching. Furthermore, the t-statistic is 16.33, indicating a substantial difference between pre- and post-intervention anxiety scores. This large t-value suggests a strong effect of the peer teaching intervention on reducing anxiety. The p-value is 7.06, which is far smaller than the common significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the reduction in anxiety is statistically significant, and it is extremely unlikely that this result is due to random chance.

The most compelling result from this study is the statistically significant reduction in public speaking anxiety among the participants, as reflected in both the FLCAS and self-reported anxiety scales. Pre-intervention FLCAS scores averaged 64.23, indicating that students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety prior to participating in the peer teaching sessions. The post-intervention scores decreased significantly to 54.44, indicating a marked reduction in anxiety levels, reaching what can be classified as a low level of anxiety. This reduction is consistent with the growing body of research indicating that peer teaching can create a more supportive, non-threatening environment for learners, which helps alleviate performance-related anxieties (Amini & Bicen, 2024; Toubot & Hock, 2018). Peer teaching allows students to engage in public speaking with peers who are less intimidating than instructors or formal audiences. This finding echoes the conclusions of studies by Luo (2013) and Bozkurt & Aydin (2023), which demonstrated that peer interactions can reduce foreign language anxiety, especially in speaking activities.

The findings from this study provide significant insights into the role of peer teaching as an effective pedagogical tool in reducing public speaking anxiety among EFL learners. By comparing pre- and post-intervention scores on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and self-reported anxiety scales, this research reveals several key points that contribute to the current understanding of how peer teaching influences anxiety in public speaking contexts. The comparison of pre- and post-test FLCAS scores indicates a significant decrease in overall anxiety levels among participants after engaging in peer teaching activities. This reduction suggests that peer teaching helps learners feel more comfortable and confident when speaking in a foreign language, likely due to the supportive and collaborative nature of working with peers. Findings also show that learners experienced less communication apprehension, a specific type of anxiety associated with speaking in public or in front of others. Peer teaching appears to provide a less intimidating environment, where learners are more willing to express themselves without fear of judgment. This reduction in communication apprehension is particularly beneficial in public speaking, where anxiety is often heightened.

The decrease in anxiety can be attributed to the nature of peer teaching. Peer teaching fosters a collaborative learning environment where students perceive less pressure to perform perfectly and are less fearful of judgment. This aligns with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasize the importance of social interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). By engaging in peer teaching, students likely benefited from working within their ZPD, receiving

guidance from peers that made learning more accessible and reduced their public speaking anxiety. The findings support the notion that peer teaching allows for a gradual reduction in anxiety through repeated, low-pressure practice, where learners receive constructive feedback from peers rather than authoritative criticism from instructors. As some students expressed during interviews, the peer teaching sessions allowed them to become more comfortable with the material, which translated into greater confidence during public speaking.

The qualitative data further supports the quantitative findings by providing insights into how peer teaching facilitated anxiety reduction. Through interviews and focus groups, students reported that peer teaching made them feel more comfortable speaking in front of their peers, which was perceived as a less judgmental audience. This finding reinforces the view that communication apprehension is often linked to the fear of negative evaluation, a factor that is mitigated in peer teaching contexts where the power dynamics are more balanced (Horwitz et al., 1986). Moreover, students mentioned that positive reinforcement and constructive feedback from their peers were instrumental in reducing their fear of making mistakes. This finding is consistent with research by Dong et al. (2022), which showed that the opportunity to receive supportive feedback in a non-threatening environment helps students improve their speaking skills while simultaneously reducing anxiety.

The significant reduction in public speaking anxiety following peer teaching interventions highlights the pedagogical value of this approach in EFL classrooms. As public speaking is a critical skill for language learners, reducing anxiety in this context can lead to more effective language learning outcomes (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023). EFL instructors should consider incorporating peer teaching into their curricula to provide students with more opportunities to practice speaking in supportive, low-anxiety environments. Additionally, these findings suggest that peer teaching can serve as a useful tool in addressing one of the main barriers to language learning—anxiety. By lowering public speaking anxiety, peer teaching can improve students' willingness to engage in communicative activities, which may lead to more active participation and better language acquisition in the long run.

CONCLUSION

The study provides compelling evidence supporting the efficacy of peer teaching as a pedagogical strategy for reducing public speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The significant decrease in anxiety scores from 64.23 to 54.44 post-intervention underscores the potential of peer teaching to create a supportive and non-threatening learning environment. This reduction aligns with existing literature that highlights the benefits of peer interactions in alleviating performance-related anxieties, as students engage in public speaking with peers perceived as less intimidating than formal audiences. The findings are further reinforced by qualitative data, which reveal that students felt more comfortable and confident due to positive reinforcement and constructive feedback from peers. This study not only corroborates Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development but also underscores the importance of incorporating peer teaching into EFL curricula to mitigate anxiety, enhance communicative competence, and foster more effective language learning outcomes. Consequently, the integration of peer teaching could serve as a valuable tool for educators aiming to address anxiety, thereby promoting greater student engagement and improved language acquisition over time.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization, methodology, data curation, writing—original draft preparation; Author 2: Visualization, investigation, software, validation, reviewing, and editing.

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