

## Teachers' Strategies to Alleviate Speaking Anxiety and Foster Willingness to Communicate among EFL High School Students

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### Abstract

This research paper delves into the origins of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking anxiety in Moroccan high school students and offers potential remedies to reduce or prevent its occurrence, with a particular emphasis on encouraging a willingness to speak. The study involved 37 high school teachers who completed a questionnaire regarding their strategies to mitigate speaking anxiety and promote communication willingness among Moroccan EFL high school students. The data was collected and analyzed using SPSS. The findings reveal that anxiety stems from various factors, including linguistic issues (such as limited vocabulary, grammar challenges, and fluency), personal factors (such as learner personality and motivation), and teacher-related factors (including feedback quality and classroom activities). Moreover, the research suggests that teachers should prioritize strategies like providing positive feedback, offering praise, and incorporating collaborative work or task-based learning to reduce students' EFL speaking anxiety. Additionally, teacher participants proposed additional strategies focused on a variety of activities and methods to foster a welcoming classroom atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Communication, Speaking anxiety, Students, Teachers, Willingness.

### Citation

Khoudri, I. (2024). Teachers' strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety and foster willingness to communicate among efl high school students. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 11(2), 236-249. <https://doi.org/10.52380/ijcer.2024.11.2.608>

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Received              | 15.01.2024  |
| Accepted              | 27.04.2024  |
| Publication           | 15.06.2024  |
| Peer-Review           | Double anonymized - Double Blind  |
| Plagiarism Checks     | Yes – iThenticate   |
| Conflicts of Interest | The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.   |
| Complaints            | <a href="mailto:ijceroffice@gmail.com">ijceroffice@gmail.com</a>  |
| Grant Support         | The author acknowledges that she received no external funding in support of this research.                      |
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## Introduction

The challenge of communicating in English as a non-native language has been a notable hurdle for many Moroccan students over the years. It's important to note that Arabic and French have traditionally been the main languages of instruction in Moroccan educational institutions. While English is introduced in middle school, it remains a source of anxiety for many high school students when it comes to speaking the language (Buckner 2011). This is because they view English neither as their native tongue nor as something taught from a young age. Usually, a language is learned to express ideas and thoughts when the need arises. Nonetheless, the lack of opportunities to practice speaking within and outside the classroom, coupled with a negative classroom atmosphere, adverse feedback, sensitivity to peer evaluation, or even ridicule, all contribute to difficulties for learners and impact their future participation in similar scenarios.

Due to increased stress, negative feelings, and a lack of confidence in their ability to explain oneself clearly, language learners who internalize a higher degree of speaking anxiety in a foreign language are more likely to have limited communication (Wijaya, 2023). The role of teachers in shaping the learning process is of paramount importance. The relationship established with students, the employed methods, strategies, and classroom activities collectively influence and mold learners' attitudes towards language acquisition and usage. Teachers often lament students' apparent laziness and lack of confidence. However, it's worth noting that some students are not inherently lazy but rather disengaged due to unstimulating tasks or teaching methods that do not align with their learning preferences. Furthermore, diminished self-confidence isn't solely a characteristic of students; it can be induced by the learning environment, which encompasses both peers and teachers.

A stringent teacher who does not tolerate mistakes restricts students' opportunities for self-expression, while the experience of mockery from classmates diminishes the likelihood of active participation in classroom activities. In reality, a majority of high school students endure these challenges in silence, hesitating to voice their struggles with spoken English. Some teachers are cognizant of the difficulties students face and either seek remedies or display apathy. Conversely, certain teachers might remain oblivious to the high levels of apprehension their students' experience, resulting in a lack of proactive efforts from their end. Similarly, Mulyono et al. (2019) acknowledged that uncontrolled anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language can have a negative impact on EFL learners' speaking abilities, achievement, and current motivation levels, which can then affect how well they communicate effectively moving ahead.

In the current world, the ability to speak becomes a crucial skill that second language learners must thoroughly grasp. Proficiency in speaking can significantly impact learners' future involvement in the professional sector (Wijaya, 2023). Put differently, people who are proficient in expressing themselves in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) will discover that their chances of success in professional settings are increased due to their self-confidence while using it. Certainly, teachers hold a pivotal role, particularly in motivating students to employ language communicatively, given the heightened demand for English usage across various domains and contexts. Regrettably, research concerning the participation of teachers and their strategies to address speaking anxiety within high school classrooms remains scarce and has not received the attention it warrants particularly in Morocco, especially when compared to studies conducted in higher education settings. Also, most teachers' contributions focus on only the causes while their lack of research on which best strategy worked for decreasing students' anxiety and improving students' communicative skills. Consequently, this study aims to explore the best strategies employed by teachers to mitigate speaking anxiety and foster a proactive willingness to communicate within the classroom.

To achieve this objective, the researcher aims to address the following questions:

- To what extent do teachers observe indications of anxiety among their students during speaking activities?
- What causes speaking anxiety in an EFL classroom?
- What are the prevalent strategies employed by teachers to alleviate speaking anxiety among their students?

## Literature review

### Foreign language speaking anxiety

Individuals employ language as a means to convey their emotions, thoughts, viewpoints, and wants (Narkulova & Petrosyan, 2023). Language and human emotions and behaviors are closely related. This suggests that language is a means by which we convey our emotions as we go about our everyday quest for knowledge. Every person uses language to express their opinions, desires, and feelings during any type of conversation or dialogue. As foreign language learners, one of the linguistic abilities that they must adeptly acquire is verbal or oral communication, in addition to listening and writing (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). Engaging in activities such as participating in class discussions, responding to questions, voicing opinions, and joining discussions can enhance students' speaking abilities (Rosmayanti et al., 2023). However, Rahmat (2020) pointed out that EFL students are faced with challenges when acquiring effective communication skills such as anxiety. Indeed, the issue of language speaking

anxiety has received a lot of attention in recent years, largely due to the expanding field of learner psychology (Chahrazad & Kamel, 2022). Arnold and Brown (1999) state that anxiety is linked to negative emotions such as restlessness, self-doubt, fear, and tension that hamper learning. According to Melanlioğlu and Demir (2013), speaking anxiety can be evident emotionally, causing sensations of sadness, anger, and fear, while also having physical manifestations like a rapid heartbeat and sweating. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) is a complex psychological phenomenon that many language learners undergo when acquiring proficiency in a foreign language (Bashori, 2022). English has become a necessary skill in modern life; however, it is noteworthy that students regularly run into problems with the availability of adequate educational resources designed to foster their proficiency in the English language. As a result, this circumstance may lead to a failure to develop effective English language abilities. Damayanti and Listyani (2020) claim that the fear of making errors stands as a determinant in hindering the process of engaging in spoken communication within a foreign language context. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety constitutes a sensation of inner restlessness, individually sensed, and marked by a state of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and the conscious recognition of worrisome thoughts. In fact, ordinary or moderate levels of anxiety can manifest when individuals confront novel situations. However, an overwhelming excess of anxiety possesses the capacity to impede an individual's capacity to engage in any form of action. Anxiety is not classified as an illness; rather, it embodies a particular form of behavior aimed at preparing for forthcoming unforeseeable circumstances (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020).

According to MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) research work, there are three categories that make up the concept of anxiety. The first category is trait anxiety, which refers to a person's innate propensity to feel anxious in a variety of situations, sometimes even when there are not any obvious causes for stress. The next category is state anxiety, which appears in reaction to a variety of stressors, including trepidation like the fear of participating in oral readings. The taxonomy also distinguishes situation-specific anxiety, which is anxiety that is triggered by certain contextual conditions or occurrences, such as giving a speech in front of an audience. Therefore, in the context of learning English as a foreign language, the concern about speaking fluency might be described as a manifestation of situation-specific anxiety. In teaching speaking skills to non-speakers of the target language, teachers encounter several challenges. Ur (1996) delineated four prevalent challenges in the context of language acquisition. Firstly, inhibition arises when a speaker is faced with the need to communicate with an audience but is plagued by concerns about potential errors, fear of criticism, or the possibility of losing face, thereby experiencing feelings of shyness. Secondly, the phenomenon of lack of a clue about what to say manifests as students frequently express their frustration over their perceived inability to generate meaningful discourse. Thirdly, the issue of low or lack of participation emerges when certain students in a group sporadically engage in discussions, leaving others with limited opportunities to express themselves, possibly participating for only brief periods. Lastly, the utilization of the mother tongue, or L1, poses a challenge, as students often opt for this familiar linguistic medium due to the perceived ease of communication it offers, especially in group settings where the primary aim is to practice the target language.

### **Factors Causing Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety**

Horwitz et al. (1986) asserted that the onset of anxiety can be attributed to three distinct catalysts: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. First, communication apprehension encompasses a sense of unease or discomfort associated with engaging in language communication owing to one's limited proficiency in the language. Second, fear of negative evaluation, a greater concern about how one is regarded by others is a sign of anxiety brought on by the fear of negative judgments by others. There is a pervasive propensity among foreign language learners to assume that others would evaluate them critically when they introduce themselves. This projection frequently includes the idea that any evaluation, particularly one that focuses on linguistic mistakes in oral expression, can potentially hamper their language learning. Third, in test anxiety, in a variety of test situations, students frequently experience increased pressure and anxiety. It stems from a fear of failing, particularly when speaking orally. A strong fear of failure may make it difficult for anxious pupils to properly engage in their language learning process in foreign language classes. Therefore, individuals might not see the process of learning a language as a positive way to improve their communication abilities (Zabidin et al., 2023). In a parallel vein, Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) articulated that the magnitude of speaking anxiety is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Internal factors encompass stage fright, where the fear of speaking or performing in front of a crowd triggers a sense of apprehension on stage. Another factor is the absence of self-assurance, linked to deficiencies in the second language (L2), restricted vocabulary skills, struggles with phonetic enunciation, and challenges with grammatical structures. These aspects collectively lead to diminished self-confidence and markedly influence students' academic progress. Additionally, shyness plays a role, as individuals exhibiting shyness often encounter elevated anxiety when tasked with using the target language. Moreover, Damayanti and Listyani (2020) contend that students who experience elevated levels of anxiety throughout the learning journey tend to receive subpar grades. Thus, the anxiety associated with speaking directly

correlates with oral performance and speaking accomplishments. Furthermore, among the external influences, certain factors stand out, including language-related aspects such as limited vocabulary, lack of fluency, inadequate expression, and uncertainty about word usage. Grammar also plays a role, with challenges in sentence structure and grammar errors. Additionally, pronunciation can be an issue, involving either mispronunciation of words or a lack of precision. The presence of peers can also contribute, as the fear of being ridiculed or mocked for language use can further amplify these difficulties. Based on the view of Abrar et al. (2018), certain students are concerned about potential judgment or criticism from their teachers. This apprehension can erode their self-confidence and lead them to believe that it impacts how they are perceived by others. Consequently, it is plausible to suggest that tutors can inadvertently contribute to students' anxiety by providing detrimental and unconstructive feedback. In a corresponding manner, findings from Gearing (2019) research emphasize that the classroom environment, teaching methodology, and the value attributed to the target language collectively contributes to dissuading students from acquiring language skills. Consequently, it becomes crucial for educators to acknowledge the far-reaching influence of their classroom practices, which encompass teaching approaches, tactics, and activities conducted during lessons. These factors significantly influence students' apprehension towards speaking the language and influence their likelihood of engaging in future language opportunities. Kristie (2018) asserts that students who suffer from a dearth of motivation and self-assurance display a reluctance to engage in communication and consequently struggle to attain proficiency in speaking skills. Consequently, there is an immediate necessity to explore strategies to aid students in becoming more willing to actively engage in classroom communication.

### **Strategies for Students' Willingness to Communicate**

According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in second-language acquisition was characterized as a readiness to participate in conversation at a specific time with specific people, using a second language. They discovered that second language WTC alters depending on the conversational partner, changes over time, and varies in different settings (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023). Fundamentally, the inherent unpredictability of WTC stems from the intricate interplay of various environmental, psychological, and linguistic components. WTC demonstrates a complex connection with individual personality traits, the dynamics within groups, speaking skill level, and attitudes between different groups. Previous studies (Amiryousefi 2018; Cao 2014; Peng, 2014) have shown that teachers, among other contextual factors, have a major impact on how willing students are to communicate (WTC). Teachers can help their students through providing needed support and guidance, putting off correction of mistakes, and providing students enough time to think before speaking (Zarrinabadi, 2014). Besides, engaging with teachers in interactions is recognized as a crucial avenue for enhancing learners' perceived ability to communicate effectively (Peng, 2014). A positive classroom atmosphere promotes a greater WTC and mitigate feelings of anxiety (Khajavy et al., 2018). Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) believe that instead of explicit corrective feedback, teachers who provide implicit feedback to their students help improve their ability to use the second language (L2) and their WTC. Muslem et al. (2019) contend that in order for L2 speaking learning environments to be effective, a culture of consistent positive feedback, praise, and a welcoming environment must be fostered. This method seeks to the greatest extent feasible to increase learners' proficiency, confidence, and motivation in learning the target language. According to the finding of Zarrinabadi et al. (2023) praising effort led to the development of growth mindsets, a higher WTC, enhanced perception of communication proficiency, and a reduction in anxiety. Harmer (1991) proposes three strategies that teachers can utilize to motivate students to engage in communication: using prompts to assist students in their thinking process rather than letting them struggle, employing teacher animation to aid students in conveying their intended information, and offering feedback, particularly constructive feedback, at appropriate moments and in effective ways. Wijaya (2023) asserts that two strategies can alleviate foreign language speaking anxiety which is incorporating innovative L2 speaking learning activities and creating enjoyable L2 speaking learning environments. Narkulova and Petrosyan (2023) suggest that in order to diminish adverse effects and foster a relaxed teaching atmosphere, teachers should incorporate a diverse range of activities. These activities include games, role-playing, collaborative group work, and task-based language teaching, with an emphasis on communicative and collaborative learning approaches. In this context, teachers adopt roles as moderators and facilitators. Various researchers have also put forth teaching methods to alleviate students' anxiety related to speaking, promoting their use of the target language. Having students involved in tangible and interactive learning resources in the presence of heterogeneous learners in order to practice the second language speaking skills (Ningsih et al., 2018). Storytelling enables students to gain greater emphasis on the correctness of speech, smoothness of expression, tone, intonation, body language, and facial expressions during speaking activities (Wijaya, 2023). Drama's main aim is to entertain, thus, EFL learners notably enhance their L2 communication skills by regularly presenting effective speech in front of many viewers (ibid). Educational technology is a way to enable students to develop soft skills (Ellah & Azmi, 2023; Bashori et al., 2022). In the 21st century, EFL learners find it equally important to cultivate both soft skills and hard skills (Ellah & Azmi, 2023). All of these strategies contribute either directly or indirectly in decreasing students' anxiety, while they boost their self-confidence and positively influence their academic performance.

## Method

### Participants

The study involved 37 high school teachers from Morocco who work in public schools. The participants included both males and females, as well as novice and experienced teachers. These teachers are situated in the Taounat region, which was chosen due to the fact that most of its students come from rural backgrounds and have limited proficiency in learning foreign languages. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of their parents lack education and are unable to provide substantial support in their language learning endeavors.

### Instrument

In this research, a quantitative approach was employed to investigate the methods employed by educators to enhance the confidence and openness in communication skills of Moroccan high school students. The research design utilized in this study is descriptive, aiming to provide a comprehensive insight into the subject matter. To collect relevant data, a well-structured questionnaire was developed, drawing inspiration from prior research findings. Participants were provided with access to this questionnaire through various online channels, including email and WhatsApp. This approach was adopted to efficiently gather valuable data, making use of a variety of digital communication platforms for accessibility and convenience.

### Data Analysis

The data collected was subsequently analyzed using SPSS version 25, a commonly employed statistical software program for evaluating quantitative data. This rigorous analysis process helped in gaining insights into the strategies employed by teachers and their effectiveness in reducing students' speaking anxiety while promoting communication openness among Moroccan high school students.

## Results

In this section, we present the results of our investigation concerning the sources of students' speaking anxiety and effective strategies to alleviate students speaking anxiety using a questionnaire developed by the researchers.

Table 1. Teachers' years of experience in teaching English

|       |              | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1-3          | 27        | 73,0    | 73,0          | 73,0               |
|       | 4-6          | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 83,8               |
|       | over 6 years | 6         | 16,2    | 16,2          | 100,0              |
|       | Total        | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Table 1 depicts teachers' years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. 73% of them have been teaching English for 1-3 years, 10.8% have been teaching it for 4-6 years, while 16.2% have taught it for 6 years or more.

Table 2. Students encounter difficulties when they communicate in English

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Yes   | 36        | 97,3    | 97,3          | 97,3               |
|       | Maybe | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 100,0              |
|       | Total | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Table 2 represents teachers' observations of students facing difficulties when using English communicatively. The results show that no teacher chose "No" as an option, while the majority (97%) selected "Yes," and only 2.7% opted for "Maybe."

Table 3. Problems students encounter when they speak English

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes)  | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 10,8               |
|       | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes), Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words)  | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 18,9               |
|       | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes), Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words), Rare or no active participation                               | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 21,6               |
|       | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes), Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words), Rare or no active participation, The use of the mother tongue | 9         | 24,3    | 24,3          | 45,9               |
|       | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes), Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words), The use of the mother tongue                                  | 7         | 18,9    | 18,9          | 64,9               |
|       | Inhibition (Ss' worries about making mistakes), Rare or no active participation, The use of the mother tongue   | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 67,6               |
|       | Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words)  | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 73,0               |
|       | Nothing to say (Students struggling to find words), The use of the mother tongue  | 6         | 16,2    | 16,2          | 89,2               |
|       | Rare or no active participation   | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 94,6               |
|       | Rare or no active participation, The use of the mother tongue   | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 97,3               |
|       | The use of the mother tongue  | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 100,0              |
|       | Total   | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Based on Table 3, English teachers were asked to identify the problems students encounter when speaking English. The results demonstrate that 24.32% of teachers chose inhibition, having nothing to say, rare or no active participation, and the use of the mother tongue. 18.92% opted for having nothing to say, the use of the mother tongue, and inhibition (students worry about making mistakes). 16.2% chose having nothing to say and the use of the mother tongue, while 10.8% opted for inhibition. 8.1% chose inhibition and having nothing to say, and 5.4% selected having nothing to say, while another 5.4% chose rare or no active participation. Additionally, 2.7% chose the use of the mother tongue, and another 2.7% selected rare or no active participation along with the use of the mother tongue. Another 2.7% of the participants chose inhibition, rare or no active participation, and the use of the mother tongue, while 2.7% of teachers chose inhibition, having nothing to say, and rare or no active participation.

Table 4. Vocabulary as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1     | 20        | 54,1    | 54,1          | 54,1               |
|       | 2     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 62,2               |
|       | 3     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 73,0               |
|       | 4     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 78,4               |
|       | 5     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 86,5               |
|       | 6     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 91,9               |
|       | 8     | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 94,6               |
|       | 9     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |
|       | Total | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Teachers were asked to rank factors contributing to speaking anxiety, and vocabulary was one of these factors. According to Table 4, 54.1% of teachers ranked vocabulary as the first factor, 8.1% as the second, 10.81% as the third, 5.4% as the fourth, 8.1% as the fifth, 5.4% as the sixth, 2.7% as the eighth, and 5.4% as the ninth.

Table 5. Grammar as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 10,8               |
|       | 2 | 11        | 29,7    | 29,7          | 40,5               |
|       | 3 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 51,4               |
|       | 4 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 59,5               |
|       | 5 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 67,6               |
|       | 6 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 75,7               |
|       | 7 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 86,5               |
|       | 8 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 94,6               |
|       | 9 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |
| Total |   | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

According to Table 5, 10.8% of teachers ranked grammar as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety, 29.7% ranked it as the second, another 10.8% ranked it as the third, 8.1% as the fourth, and an additional 8.1% of respondents ranked it as the fifth. Additionally, 8.1% of teachers ranked grammar as the sixth, 10.8% as the seventh, 8.1% as the eighth, and 5.4% as the ninth.

Table 6. Fluency as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 5,4                |
|       | 2 | 6         | 16,2    | 16,2          | 21,6               |
|       | 3 | 10        | 27,0    | 27,0          | 48,6               |
|       | 4 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 59,5               |
|       | 5 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 64,9               |
|       | 6 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 73,0               |
|       | 7 | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 86,5               |
|       | 8 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 94,6               |
|       | 9 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |
| Total |   | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

According to Table 6, 5.4% of teachers ranked fluency as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety, 16.2% as the second factor, 27% as the third, 10.8% as the fourth, 5.4% as the fifth, 8.1% as the sixth, 13.5% as the seventh, 8.1% as the eighth, and 5.4% as the ninth.

Table 7. Motivation as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1 | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 13,5               |
|       | 2 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 24,3               |
|       | 3 | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 35,1               |
|       | 4 | 12        | 32,4    | 32,4          | 67,6               |
|       | 5 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 75,7               |
|       | 6 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 81,1               |
|       | 7 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 89,2               |
|       | 8 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 94,6               |
|       | 9 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |
| Total |   | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

According to Table 7, 13.5% of the respondents chose motivation as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety, 10.8% chose it as the second, 10.8% selected it as the third, 32.4% as the fourth, 8.1% as the fifth, 5.4% of respondents chose it as the sixth, 8.1% ranked it as the seventh, 5.4% ranked it as the eighth, and 5.4% ranked it as the ninth.

Table 8. Learner personality as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 8,1                |
|       | 2     | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 21,6               |
|       | 3     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 29,7               |
|       | 4     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 40,5               |
|       | 5     | 14        | 37,8    | 37,8          | 78,4               |
|       | 6     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 86,5               |
|       | 8     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 91,9               |
|       | 9     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 100,0              |
|       | Total | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Based on Table 8, 8.1% of the respondents chose learner personality as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety, 13.5% ranked it as the second factor, 8.1% ranked it as the third. Learner personality was ranked as the fourth by 10.8% of respondents and as the fifth by 37.8%. Additionally, 37% of respondents ranked it as the sixth, 5.4% ranked it as the eighth, and 8.1% ranked it as the ninth.

Table 9. Teacher's teaching approaches as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1     | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 2,7                |
|       | 3     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 13,5               |
|       | 4     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 24,3               |
|       | 5     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 35,1               |
|       | 6     | 13        | 35,1    | 35,1          | 70,3               |
|       | 7     | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 83,8               |
|       | 8     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 94,6               |
|       | 9     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |
|       | Total | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Table 9 represents 2.7% of respondents who perceive teachers' teaching approaches as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Additionally, 10.8% ranked it as the third, 10.8% as the fourth, and another 10.8% as the fifth. Furthermore, 35.1% ranked it as the sixth, 13.5% as the seventh, 10.8% as the eighth, and 5.4% as the ninth.

Table 10. Feedback provided by the teacher as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 2     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 8,1                |
|       | 3     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 13,5               |
|       | 4     | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 18,9               |
|       | 5     | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 32,4               |
|       | 6     | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 43,2               |
|       | 7     | 13        | 35,1    | 35,1          | 78,4               |
|       | 8     | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 91,9               |
|       | 9     | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 100,0              |
|       | Total | 37        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

According to Table 10, 8.1% of respondents ranked feedback provided by the teacher as the second factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Additionally, 5.4% ranked it as the third, another 5.4% ranked it as the fourth, 13.5% ranked it as the fifth, 10.8% ranked it as the sixth, 35.1% ranked it as the seventh, 13.5% ranked it as the eighth, and 8.1% ranked it as the ninth.

Table 11. Classroom activities as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 2 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 5,4                |
|       | 3 | 5         | 13,5    | 13,5          | 18,9               |
|       | 4 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 24,3               |
|       | 5 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 29,7               |
|       | 6 | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 37,8               |
|       | 7 | 6         | 16,2    | 16,2          | 54,1               |
|       | 8 | 15        | 40,5    | 40,5          | 94,6               |
|       | 9 | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 100,0              |



|       |    |       |       |
|-------|----|-------|-------|
| Total | 37 | 100,0 | 100,0 |
|-------|----|-------|-------|

Based on Table 11, 5.4% of respondents ranked classroom activities as the second factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Additionally, 13.5% ranked it as the third factor, another 5.4% ranked it as the fourth, 5.4% ranked it as the fifth, 8.1% ranked it as the sixth, 16.2% ranked it as the seventh, 40.5% ranked it as the eighth, and 5.4% ranked it as the ninth.

Table 12. Lack of self-assurance as a factor contributing to speaking anxiety

|       |    | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1  | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 5,4                |
|       | 2  | 3         | 8,1     | 8,1           | 13,5               |
|       | 3  | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 16,2               |
|       | 4  | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 27,0               |
|       | 5  | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 29,7               |
|       | 6  | 4         | 10,8    | 10,8          | 40,5               |
|       | 7  | 1         | 2,7     | 2,7           | 43,2               |
|       | 8  | 2         | 5,4     | 5,4           | 48,6               |
|       | 9  | 19        | 51,4    | 51,4          | 100,0              |
| Total | 37 | 100,0     | 100,0   |               |                    |

According to Table 12, 5.4% of respondents ranked lack of self-assurance as the first factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Additionally, 8.1% ranked it as the second factor, 2.7% ranked it as the third, 10.8% ranked it as the fourth, 2.7% ranked it as the fifth, 10.8% ranked it as the sixth, 2.7% ranked it as the seventh, 5.4% ranked it as the eighth, and 51.4% ranked it as the ninth.

Table 13. Effective strategies to encourage students' willingness to communicate

|   |  | Responses |         | Pourcentage of observations |
|---|--|-----------|---------|-----------------------------|
|   |  | N         | Percent |                             |
| Strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety and encourage students to use spoken English | Positive classroom atmosphere  | 5         | 13,5%   | 13,5%                       |
|   | Positive feedback and praising   | 16        | 43,2%   | 43,2%                       |
|   | Delayed and implicit correction of errors                                      | 1         | 2,7%    | 2,7%                        |
|   | Teachers' support (such as the use of prompts)                                 | 5         | 13,5%   | 13,5%                       |
|   | Incorporation of activities (such as games, role-playing, drama, storytelling) | 3         | 8,1%    | 8,1%                        |
|   | collaborative work and learning through tasks                                  | 6         | 16,2%   | 16,2%                       |
|   | The use of technology  | 1         | 2,7%    | 2,7%                        |
| Total   | 37   | 100,0%    | 100,0%  |                             |

As demonstrated in table 13, teachers were asked to rank, according to their significance, the effective strategies that help encourage students' willingness to communicate. Results proved that students receiving positive feedback and praising are ranked as the first by 43,2% of the respondents, 13,5% of the participants ranked collaborative work and learning through tasks as the second, then positive classroom atmosphere and teachers' support (such as the use of prompts) were ranked by 13,5% of the participants, followed by incorporation of activities such as games, role-playing, drama, and storytelling ranked by 8,1%, while delayed and implicit correction of errors as well as the use of technology were ranked the last with 2,7% as having less impact on students' encouragement to the use of English language communicatively.

## Discussion

The primary objective of this current investigation is to ascertain whether Moroccan High School students experience anxiety when utilizing English orally. If such anxiety is indeed prevalent, the study seeks to delineate the underlying causal factors and, subsequently, propose viable solutions aimed at mitigating this anxiety within the classroom context while boosting students' willingness to communicate. Based on the results, most teachers, comprising 73% of them, have taught for 1-3 years, indicating that they possess sufficient experience to identify the causes and solutions to the issue of speaking anxiety. Besides, no teacher asserts that students never encounter

difficulties when speaking English. Most, if not all, acknowledge this fact, underscoring that the phenomenon of speaking anxiety represents a significant issue encountered by students within the context of English language classes (Stalnaker, 2023).

Teachers were provided with a questionnaire developed by researchers, which included suggested problems that students commonly encounter when using a foreign language for communication. A significant majority of teachers reported that students encounter a variety of issues, including inhibition; specifically, students expressed concerns about making mistakes, experiencing a lack of ideas, having limited opportunities to participate, and the detrimental habit of switching to their native language, all of which hinder their communication progress. In a study conducted by Alim (2023), research findings have identified six distinct forms of behavioral inhibition commonly experienced by students. These findings indicate that students' behaviors, including the utilization of their bilingual or mother tongue, experiencing mental lapses, exhibiting low motivation, demonstrating shyness, lacking confidence, and succumbing to anxiety, collectively impede their proficiency in spoken English. According to Bozkurt and Aydin (2023), the cultivation of oral communication skills may present greater challenges, particularly within conventional classroom settings characterized by limited opportunities for interaction among learners and instructors. Consequently, the establishment of conducive learning environments that facilitate language acquisition and alleviate anxiety becomes imperative. This can be achieved through the creation of scenarios mirroring real-life situations and the integration of authentic instructional materials. Similarly, Aparece and Bacasmot (2023) emphasize that research has revealed that when teachers compel their students to abstain from using their first language (L1) in the process of acquiring a second language (L2), it can have a detrimental impact on their proficiency in learning the target language.

In the questionnaire, teachers were presented with various sources of students' speaking anxiety and were asked to rank them based on their significance and impact on students' anxiety while speaking. The results revealed that one of the most significant sources of speaking anxiety is vocabulary, which received the highest rating among other factors. This is a critical issue because students' limited vocabulary inhibits them, making them more concerned about making mistakes and how they are perceived by others. The fear of being mocked or hesitating due to a lack of competence is a common consequence of this vocabulary challenge. In fact, vocabulary is a crucial skill for students learning English as a second language because it facilitates clear communication, clear writing, and precise word translation. However, pupils frequently have trouble communicating their ideas due to a lack of proper vocabulary, which sporadically results in the misuse of synonyms with different contextual meanings (Amanda, 2023).

Following vocabulary, motivation was ranked slightly lower but still deemed an important factor by a substantial number of teachers. Motivation plays a crucial role in hindering the students' communication process. Students who lack interest in a subject may not fully appreciate what they are learning, even if they receive rewards periodically. Intrinsic motivation, which lasts longer and encourages productivity, is seen as the ideal form of motivation. Enhancing or nurturing students' intrinsic motivation is a task assigned to teachers, who are expected to create a positive and welcoming classroom environment that encourages students to express themselves without fear. According to Mardhatilla et al. (2023), motivating students to actively engage in English learning poses a challenge, making it difficult for them to excel in speaking skills, owing to numerous factors that hinder students' ability to develop their speaking skills. Sari and Melani (2023) claim that motivation is one of them and a detrimental one.

Next in the rankings is grammar, which is essential for conveying the correct message and meaning in communication. Misunderstandings can arise from a lack of understanding, causing communication to deviate from its intended direction. According to a study conducted by Alazeer and Ahmed (2023), lack of grammar makes students nervous when they speak to native speakers rather than comfortable, also in class, students' inaccurate grammar will not enable the teacher to understand what they will say and will evaluate them or make their peers laugh at them. The study suggested that teachers need to analyze problems their students face; also teachers need to understand the different characteristics of students and analyze their problems and try to find solutions, encourage them to be active and confident in practice, making topics clear and encouraging preparation before class.

Learner personality and feedback, whether from teachers or peers, can also contribute to students' anxiety and affect their ability to participate in conversations. This is especially true for teenagers whose personalities are still developing, as negative comments can have a significant impact on their self-esteem and self-concept. The way learners consider their learning aptitude have a great impact on their actions towards learning that language (Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2023).

Fluency, self-assurance, and classroom activities were rated equally in terms of their impact on speaking anxiety. This suggests that students can communicate effectively even without perfect fluency if they are motivated, have

a strong vocabulary and grasp of grammar, possess a personality conducive to communication, and receive appropriate feedback on their performance.

Lastly, teacher approaches to teaching were ranked as the least significant source of speaking anxiety. This implies that the methods and approaches used by teachers in the classroom have a relatively minor impact on students speaking anxiety compared to the other factors mentioned above. According to a study conducted by Irawan et al. (2023), a teacher's teaching effectiveness depends on their mastery of diverse learning techniques and the ability to create individualized lesson plans for students of varying abilities.

Based on empirical research, it is apparent that the provision of appropriate feedback by tutors is imperative within the pedagogical framework. Students who receive constructive and affirmative feedback, coupled with appreciation for their efforts, demonstrate a heightened propensity for academic improvement. Furthermore, such students are more likely to foster the necessary competencies to engage in future opportunities for effective communication.

In addition to the centrality of feedback, collaborative endeavors and task-based learning methodologies have garnered recognition as efficacious modalities that can significantly augment students' proclivity to communicate proficiently in a foreign language. The practical application and active engagement intrinsic to these approaches are contributory factors. Avakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) discovered that teachers' implicit corrective feedback, rather than explicit corrective feedback, had a positive impact on enhancing learners' second language self-confidence and their willingness to communicate.

Cultivating a positive classroom milieu, wherein teachers endeavor to facilitate students' speech production through various means, including prompts and gestures, emerges as a constructive avenue for promoting foreign language acquisition. In such an environment, students are afforded a sanctuary from apprehension concerning external judgment or potential embarrassment. They receive not only guidance from instructors but also support and assistance from their peers, circumventing any potential ridicule. Consequently, this encourages spontaneous expression, alleviating the need for excessive cognitive deliberation prior to speaking. Moreover, the strategic integration of pedagogical activities serves as a noteworthy catalyst in fomenting students' willingness to engage in English communication across diverse contexts. Subsequently, while other strategies are of supplemental significance, they have been positioned in a subordinate capacity due to their relatively moderate impact on enhancing students' communicative capabilities. These include delayed and implicit error correction mechanisms as well as the incorporation of technological tools within the instructional milieu. Furthermore, within the framework of the questionnaire, participants were prompted to put forward alternative strategies aimed at mitigating students' speaking anxiety and fostering their willingness to participate in oral communication. These suggestions extended beyond the strategies previously outlined, reflecting a rich tapestry of pedagogical insights. Firstly, a cohort of tutors underscored the importance of providing students with clear role models to emulate and unambiguous guidelines to follow during language-related tasks. This guidance was viewed as instrumental in reducing anxiety and bolstering students' confidence in speaking endeavors.

Secondly, the concept of curricular adaptation emerged as a salient theme. Some teachers advocated for modifications to the curriculum itself, suggesting innovative approaches like the adoption of a flipped classroom methodology or the strategic incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance language learning. These changes were perceived as promising avenues to alleviate speaking anxiety.

Another noteworthy proposal centered on class size reduction. A subset of educators emphasized the need to limit class sizes, contending that smaller groups would facilitate the implementation of pair and group work. Such collaborative activities were seen as pivotal in enabling students to practice and improve their spoken language skills with greater ease.

Additionally, a spectrum of creative and student-centered strategies was put forth. These included the introduction of stress-free warm-up activities, an approach that could create a more relaxed atmosphere conducive to speaking. Moreover, there was an emphasis on fostering a culture of tolerance for mistakes, encouraging students to find alternative ways of expression rather than dwelling on correcting every single error.

Furthermore, recommendations extended to immersing students in abundant listening opportunities, engaging them in discussion-based activities, and incorporating hands-on projects designed to promote autonomous learning. These encompassed techniques like case study analysis, jigsaw puzzles, role-playing, exploration of song lyrics, video-based activities, imitation of short movie scenes, and the initiation of debates on pertinent topics. Additionally, students were encouraged to undertake presentations, with an emphasis on moving away from

lecture-based instruction in favor of promoting inquiry-based learning. These diverse pedagogical approaches aimed to stimulate active engagement and confidence in oral communication.

Moreover, participants underscored the value of providing students with ample time for reflection before responding, as well as the utility of offering clear and concise references for revision prior to classroom activities. Additionally, the suggestion was made to select topics based on students' interests, making the learning experience more personally relevant and engaging.

Ultimately, the overarching objective of these multifaceted strategies was to imbue the learning process with meaning by establishing connections between English language topics and learners' daily life challenges and global issues. In this manner, educators sought to cultivate an environment that encourages students to not only overcome speaking anxiety but also to actively embrace the opportunity for meaningful communication in the English language.

## **Conclusion**

This study aims to explore the causes of English-speaking anxiety in Moroccan high school classrooms and propose potential solutions. Using a quantitative research approach, the research assesses the level of speaking anxiety observed by teachers in their students, identifies its sources, and suggests strategies to reduce this anxiety. Given that these students will eventually need to use English in various contexts after graduation, a lack of confidence and proficiency in spoken English could hinder their social and professional integration. This research seeks to understand the problem and offer preventive measures and solutions, recognizing that some teachers might unintentionally contribute to student anxiety. Furthermore, this study encourages further investigation into the topic in different regions or countries. Some of the limitations of this study include challenges in engaging a significant number of teachers and their insufficient training in addressing issues related to speaking anxiety. Additionally, there is a need for broader perspectives from both teachers and students in the study.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank everyone who supported and guided me throughout this research. Special thanks to students who participated in this study.

## **Ethical Approval**

The author affirms that all scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the conduct and writing of this study, and that all sources have been appropriately cited.

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