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ONLINE SPEAKING PRACTICE: A GATEWAY TO ANXIETY REDUCTION FOR EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract
In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward reducing anxiety in English language learning, recognizing that communicative competence is central to achieving overall proficiency. Existing research indicates that supportive learning environments, personalized feedback—especially through online platforms—and the use of digital tools such as virtual courses can help EFL students practice speaking with less pressure while improving accessibility and adaptability. Despite these advantages, there remains limited exploration of how real-time digital speaking practices specifically address speaking-related anxiety. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of online speaking practices on students' anxiety levels and to evaluate the extent to which these practices effectively reduce anxiety in English language learning. This study employed a qualitative approach, and structured interviews were conducted with 19 randomly selected English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The results reveal that online speaking practices can significantly reduce anxiety by providing flexible, self-paced learning environments where students have greater control over their learning conditions. These online settings allow students to build confidence gradually without the immediate pressure commonly associated with face-to-face feedback or classroom interactions. Furthermore, the findings suggest that online speaking tasks encourage students to take more initiative and engage more consistently in speaking activities. Based on these insights, the study recommends adopting a balanced learning approach that integrates both online and in-person speaking opportunities. Such an approach can help manage anxiety while also strengthening students' adaptability and communication abilities for academic, professional, and social contexts. Educators are encouraged to incorporate this blended strategy into language programs to support more comprehensive skill development.

Keywords: Anxiety reduction, language proficiency, online teaching, speaking practice

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies highlight strategies to reduce anxiety in English learning, especially as proficiency now requires communicative competence. EFL learners frequently experience speaking apprehension, impacting their confidence and progress. With the rise of online learning, understanding how digital platforms support anxiety reduction in EFL is vital. Online speaking practices offer promising ways for learners to gain confidence while avoiding the anxiety tied to traditional, in-person tasks. Reducing anxiety supports effective communication and language acquisition, and online platforms, by creating flexible and less intimidating spaces, may encourage better speaking experiences (Hawes & Arya, 2023; Kawa, 2023).

Current research highlights the effectiveness of supportive environments and tailored feedback in reducing language anxiety, especially through online platforms where EFL students can practice speaking without immediate pressure (Forgie et al., 2024; Le, 2023; Wang, 2023; Zulfikar, 2023). Digital tools, like

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online courses, improve accessibility and foster adaptability in learning (McGreal, 2020). Despite progress, limited research exists on how digital speaking tasks specifically address speaking-related anxiety in real-time contexts. This study aims to dig into deeper a perspective by focusing on the effects of online speaking practices as a specialized approach to reducing speaking-specific anxiety among EFL students. Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate how online speaking practices impact students' anxiety levels and to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices in reducing anxiety.

This research contributes to the field of English language teaching by offering insights into the potential of online speaking practices as effective tools for managing speaking-related anxiety among EFL learners. By exploring the dynamics of online speaking activities and their impact on students' confidence, this study provides educators and language program designers with evidence-based guidance on integrating digital platforms into language curricula. The findings aim to contribute to a broader understanding of how digital methods can supplement traditional language teaching, ultimately equipping EFL learners with the skills and self-assurance needed for successful language acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The effectiveness of online speaking practices in reducing anxiety and enhancing engagement has gained prominence in language education. Studies show that structured online interactions can help create supportive learning environments critical for language development, as students report lowered anxiety and increased positivity toward online speaking activities (Abuhussein et al., 2023; You, 2024). However, excessive reliance on online platforms may limit in-person communication skills, potentially affecting real-world interactions. Moreover, technological tools, such as video-based behavioral skills training (Laske et al., 2024) and virtual reality (VR)-based instruction (Chen, 2024), have further enhanced online speaking practice by offering immersive, simulated environments, which help mitigate public speaking anxiety. Additionally, innovative tools like robot-avatar systems (Najima et al., 2021) and online simulation games (Yang et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024) foster interactive learning experiences, especially for high-anxiety students. Despite these advances, challenges such as unequal technology access persist, indicating a need for equitable resource distribution. Overall, online speaking practices and technological tools have emerged as effective means of reducing language anxiety and fostering engagement, yet limitations like over-reliance on virtual platforms and unequal access underscore the need for balanced and equitable approaches.

Adapting teaching practices for online formats has been equally crucial. For instance, the loss of nonverbal communication cues in online classes (Al Ghaithi & Behforouz, 2024) calls for strategies that replicate in-person interactions, such as video breakout rooms. Additionally, online assessment methods for speaking skills (Benitez-Correa et al., 2024) and adaptations for emergency teaching (Kusuma, 2022) highlight the need for robust teacher training. Moreover, exploring motivations behind learners' engagement in online platforms reveals insights for enhancing online education (Khotimah et al., 2024; Manurung et al., 2023). Curricular adaptations specifically tailored for online formats have also proven beneficial, as students often need targeted preparation to manage the distinct

dynamics of online versus face-to-face settings (Linardopoulos, 2024; Ye et al., 2024; Aramaki, 2024). Furthermore, support systems are essential, as teacher and peer encouragement significantly boosts motivation (Markus et al., 2024; Solhi, 2024). However, intricate instructional designs like Picture-in-Picture lectures can overwhelm less experienced learners (Chen et al., 2024), indicating that feedback mechanisms and manageable cognitive loads are crucial for sustained student progress (Laske & DiGennaro Reed, 2022). Thus, adapting teaching methods and curricula for online contexts, coupled with specific support systems, is essential for effective language learning. Nonetheless, the success of these approaches depends on adequate teacher training and careful consideration of learners' unique needs in virtual environments.

Efforts to reduce anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning focus on emotional support and personalized strategies, such as creating safe environments, incorporating learners' first language (L1), and interactive online activities (Zarei et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2024). However, these strategies may overlook systemic issues like institutional demands, which can also contribute to anxiety. Additionally, non-competitive environments and mentorship have proven beneficial, particularly for Saudi EFL learners, with Aldubaikhi (2023) and Toyama (2019) demonstrating that mentorship and reflective self-talk effectively reduce anxiety. These strategies often benefit self-aware students, though scaling them in large classrooms is challenging. Thus, combining personalized mentorship with classroom-wide practices could foster inclusivity, ensuring all students gain from anxiety reduction efforts. While personalized strategies and mentorship are effective in alleviating anxiety, addressing systemic factors and scaling these approaches to larger settings are essential to ensure broader applicability and inclusivity in EFL learning.

Group-based interventions, such as Group Dynamic Assessment (G-DA) and drama-based activities, further help reduce anxiety through collaboration, although cultural adaptation may be necessary in individualistic settings (Kao, 2024; Wirag, 2024). Additionally, personality traits play a significant role in EFL anxiety, with research showing that openness and extroversion lower anxiety, while neuroticism and public speaking fears heighten it (Qin & Li, 2024; Liu, 2024). Moafa (2024) challenges the inverse relationship between motivation and anxiety, noting that Saudi learners can experience both simultaneously due to factors like confidence and cultural background. Moreover, online learning environments often amplify anxiety through reduced social interaction, underscoring the need for supportive course design (Tauchid et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Kao, 2024). Finally, integrating language with content learning, such as through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), has shown promise in reducing anxiety more effectively than English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), though public speaking anxiety remains a challenge (López-Medina et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). While various approaches—such as group-based interventions, personalized learning strategies, and integrated language-content models—show potential in reducing EFL anxiety, it is evident that a multifaceted strategy, considering cultural, personality, and learning environment factors, is necessary. Future research should focus on how these different elements can be combined and tailored to specific learner needs and contexts to create more inclusive, effective solutions for anxiety reduction across diverse educational settings.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach to explore students' perspectives on online speaking practices, capturing detailed insights that quantitative methods might miss. A structured interview with 19 students allowed for in-depth expression of their attitudes, focusing on the depth of responses rather than statistical representation. Open-ended questions were used to uncover not only students' opinions but also the motivations behind them, providing a comprehensive view of factors influencing their perceptions of online speaking practices.

Participants

This research, conducted in the third semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, involved 19 randomly selected students from an English Education program at a private university in Indonesia, all of whom provided informed consent. By focusing on EFL students within this unique academic context, the study aimed to capture diverse perspectives on the challenges of learning English in Indonesia, adding insights that may inform EFL education both locally and globally.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through structured interviews designed to explore students' attitudes toward online speaking practices in depth. Conducted with 19 students from the English Education program at a private university in Indonesia, the interview process involved informing students about the study's purpose, obtaining their consent, and conducting structured interviews with open-ended questions in a flexible, comfortable setting—either in person or online—allowing students to share detailed perspectives on their experiences with online speaking practices.

Validity and Reliability

To establish the validity of the interview instrument, a comprehensive validation process was conducted with input from two educational experts. This evaluation aimed to ensure that the interview questions were clear, relevant, and effective in capturing students' attitudes toward online speaking practices. The experts' involvement added a layer of credibility, confirming that the questions accurately targeted the constructs intended for the study. Furthermore, the researchers took several measures to enhance the reliability of the interview. They facilitated participants' voluntary participation and ensured comprehension by administering the interview in Indonesian. After collecting the responses, the researchers summarized the data and requested participants' feedback to verify the accuracy of this summary. These meticulous procedures were crucial in strengthening the reliability of the collected data and ensuring the study's findings were robust.

Data Analysis

To analyze qualitative data from interview transcripts, a systematic approach is essential for organizing the content, identifying key themes, and deriving meaningful insights. The process begins with transcription, where audio interviews are converted into written text, ensuring no important details are missed.

Next, data cleaning and formatting are performed to remove irrelevant content, anonymize personal information, and correct any grammatical errors for clarity. The cleaned data is then coded, assigning labels (or codes) to meaningful sections of the text to categorize ideas or patterns. These codes are grouped into broader, central themes during the theme-generation phase. A thorough review and refinement of these themes follow, ensuring they accurately represent the data and remain distinct from each other. Each theme is clearly defined and named to reflect its core meaning and relevance. The next step involves interpreting the data by analyzing the themes in relation to the research questions. Finally, the findings are reported by presenting the themes. This step-by-step process ensures that the data is analyzed thoroughly and effectively (see Figure 1).

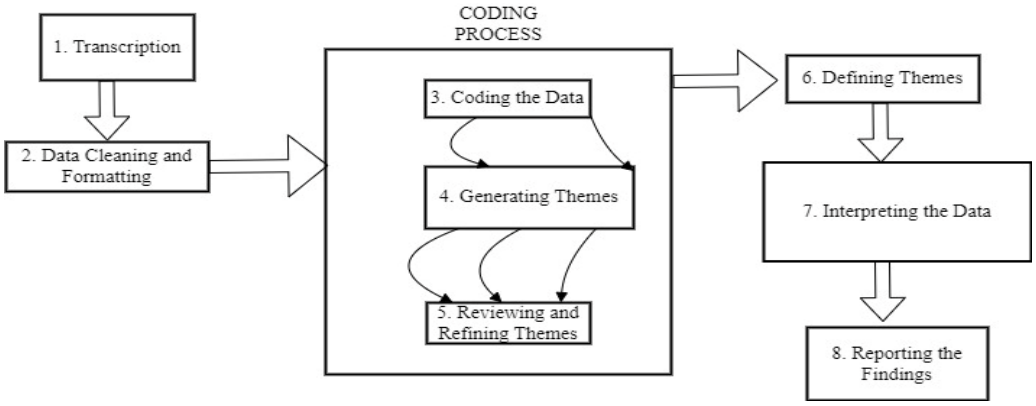


Figure 1. Data Analysis Processes

FINDINGS

The following is dedicated to answering two essential objectives of the study regarding the role of online speaking practices in alleviating student anxiety. First, it explores the impact of online speaking practices on reducing students' anxiety. Second, it addresses effectiveness of online speaking practices in reducing students' anxiety.

The İmpact of Online Speaking Practices on Students' Anxiety

Online speaking practices have shown a notable impact on students' anxiety, particularly in providing flexible and controlled environments that reduce pressure. Students appreciate the flexibility to set their own schedules and control their environments, which allows them to avoid the immediate pressure present in live interactions. By choosing when and where to engage in speaking practices, students create a comfortable setting that minimizes stress.

> P1: "I feel more comfortable with online speaking... work at my own pace."
> P3: "...absence of a live audience reduces my anxiety, allowing me to focus on the content of my speech..."
> P5: "The remote format reduces the pressure of speaking in front of others."
> P8: "The remote format gives me... organize myself better and control my environment."
> P9: "Speaking in front of a camera gives me more confidence because there is a physical distance between me and the audience."
> P11: "Being at home makes me feel more confident... nervousness is reduced."

P12: "...extra time and ability to work at my own pace... alleviates stress."

Online speaking practices ease students' anxiety by allowing them to control their pace and environment. Many students feel more comfortable setting their own schedules, which reduces pressure and helps them focus on content rather than fear of judgment. The remote format also offers autonomy, letting students choose calming settings, like their homes, and speak in front of a camera instead of a live audience, creating a sense of security. This flexibility supports a relaxed, personalized experience, building confidence and reducing anxiety over time. The absence of a live audience is another crucial factor in reducing students' anxiety. Unlike traditional classroom settings, online practices allow students to speak without fear of direct judgment or immediate peer feedback, which significantly reduces performance anxiety. This setting fosters a calmer atmosphere and helps students manage their fear of making mistakes, enabling them to focus more confidently on their speech.

P1: "...most students feel more confident in front of a camera..."

P3: "...absence of a live audience reduces my anxiety, allowing me to focus on the content of my speech..."

P7: "The support provided through online platforms... I feel less nervous compared to face-to-face tasks."

P11: "...you don't have to face people directly, which makes me feel more confident."

P14: "Practicing without immediate feedback... makes it less stressful."

P15: "I don't feel intimidated by anyone, which makes my anxiety levels decrease."

P17: "...feel freer in expressing myself. I have more room to be creative and explore different ways to communicate."

Online speaking practices reduce students' anxiety by removing the pressure of a live audience and in-person feedback. Without direct peer observation, students feel more at ease, able to speak freely in front of a camera, which boosts confidence and helps them manage their fear of mistakes. The lack of immediate judgment allows students to focus on speech quality rather than others' reactions, creating a supportive, low-stress environment. This freedom encourages creative expression, helping students build confidence and refine their communication skills with less anxiety, making the experience both productive and empowering.

Regular online speaking practice helps students gradually reduce their anxiety over time. Through repeated exercises in a stress-minimized environment, students become more familiar with speaking tasks, which enhances their confidence. This continuous exposure allows them to refine their speech skills without the added stress of spontaneous responses, building comfort and ease with public speaking over time.

P8: "...repeated practice in a relaxed environment helps reduce my anxiety..."

P10: "...anxiety naturally decreases as I get more accustomed to the tasks."

P11: "...support provided is flexible, allowing me to work from anywhere... reduces my anxiety."

P12: "...extra time allows me to rehearse my material until I feel comfortable delivering it."
P14: "Gradual exposure to speaking tasks makes me less nervous over time."

Regular online speaking practice helps reduce anxiety by offering repeated, low-stress exposure to speaking tasks in a controlled environment. With consistent practice, students become more comfortable, which builds confidence and ease over time. Online platforms also allow flexible preparation, so students can rehearse until they feel ready, reducing the pressure of spontaneous speaking. However, while online practice helps manage anxiety, it doesn't fully eliminate nervousness in real-world interactions where face-to-face feedback is common. Many students find that combining online and in-person speaking experiences is key, as live practice provides exposure to real-time pressures and audience feedback, building adaptable confidence for professional settings. This balanced approach equips students with versatile communication skills for various contexts.

Effectiveness of Online Speaking Practices in Reducing Students' Anxiety

Online speaking practices have proven effective in helping students manage and reduce anxiety by allowing them greater control over their learning environment and preparation methods. The ability to review and rehearse independently contributes to increased confidence, as students can refine their responses without the immediate pressures of a live audience. This control over the process is a significant factor in reducing anxiety.

P1: "...online speaking practices... I have more preparation time... feel more prepared for the task."
P9: "...the remote format provides a more relaxed atmosphere... feel more at ease..."
P13: "The support and facilities... sufficient to help me manage my anxiety... access to online tools..."
P15: "Facilities provided are sufficient... access to resources helps reduce my anxiety..."
P18: "...extra time to prepare helps me work without the worry of immediate judgment."

The data shows that providing students with control over their environment and preparation time reduces anxiety, allowing them to work at their own pace, rehearse independently, and refine their speech without live audience pressure. In a relaxed, remote setting, students feel less judged, creating a supportive, low-stress atmosphere. Access to online resources further improves this experience by offering tools that allow comfortable, paced practice. This flexibility fosters confidence and offers a structured, judgment-free approach to building speaking skills effectively.

Another effective element of online speaking practices is the reduction of performance anxiety due to the lack of immediate feedback or judgment from peers or teachers. This absence of direct audience feedback makes tasks feel less intimidating, allowing students to focus on delivering their speech without fear of criticism. The flexibility to perform tasks at their own pace in familiar settings also helps students build confidence gradually.

P3: “I feel more comfortable...work from a relaxed environment without immediate pressure.”
P4: "...absence of a live audience reduces my anxiety, allowing me to focus on the content of my speech..."
P5: "...not feeling watched... reduces my anxiety and fear of receiving negative comments."

It is evident that the removal of immediate feedback and peer judgment lessens performance anxiety, allowing students to concentrate on their speech content without worrying about reactions. In a more relaxed environment, students feel free from being watched, which reduces self-consciousness and encourages open expression without fear of critique. The option to practice at their own pace in comfortable settings helps them gradually build confidence. Familiar, non-intimidating environments enable students to refine their delivery without real-time scrutiny, making this approach effective for reducing anxiety and boosting self-assurance.

Online speaking practices also promote confidence-building over time by offering students tools and flexibility that foster a sense of personal progress. For instance, students report that the freedom to experiment and express themselves creatively boosts their comfort and self-assurance. This ability to personalize and rehearse independently empowers students, enabling them to manage their anxiety more effectively.

P9: "I can practice... in a comfortable setting... reduces social pressure."
P12: "...having access to online resources and feedback allows me to improve... manage my anxiety better."
P13: "Support from teachers and classmates... helps reduce my anxiety."
P18: "…editing tasks…improves skills…reduces anxiety…confidence in speaking and technical abilities."

From the excerpts data above, it is emphasized that online speaking practices help build students' confidence by offering tools and flexibility that support personal growth. Practicing in comfortable, low-pressure settings allows students to tackle speaking tasks without fear of judgment, steadily increasing self-assurance. Access to online resources and feedback helps students refine skills and address areas for improvement independently, providing a sense of control. This supportive environment, with teacher guidance and peer encouragement, enables students to manage anxiety effectively. The option to rehearse and edit tasks strengthens their skills and confidence as they track their own progress. This personalized, creative practice builds resilience, making online speaking a powerful tool for confidence and anxiety management.

While online speaking practices are largely effective, a few students feel that in-person speaking is essential for building certain types of confidence needed in real-world interactions. Although online formats provide valuable tools to ease anxiety, some students believe that exposure to live, face-to-face settings may better prepare them for professional environments. This suggests that while online speaking practices are beneficial for initial confidence and anxiety management, combining these practices with in-person interactions may offer a balanced approach.

P6: "...sometimes the lack of immediate feedback... can be unsettling."
P13: "I prefer new challenges... speaking in front of an audience helps... trains me to be more professional... face-to-face speaking practices... help me build more confidence in real-time interactions."
P18: "...fifty-fifty situation... Remote tasks can reduce anxiety, but face-to-face tasks build confidence."

The results indicate that online speaking practices provide low-pressure opportunities for students to build confidence and reduce anxiety, allowing for structured skill development without the demands of face-to-face interactions. While virtual platforms are valuable for foundational practice, some students find that in-person speaking is essential for building confidence in real-world settings. Live interactions offer immediate feedback, spontaneity, and engagement with real-time reactions, fostering professionalism and adaptability that virtual settings can't fully match. A hybrid approach, blending online and in-person practice, may balance these benefits, helping students become confident, versatile communicators ready for diverse real-life scenarios.

DISCUSSION

The İmpact of Online Speaking Practices on Students' Anxiety

Findings highlight the impact of online speaking practices in reducing student anxiety. These practices offer flexible environments that allow students to control their learning conditions, helping them manage performance pressure. The discussion will explore the benefits of online formats in alleviating anxiety, such as reducing fear from immediate feedback, and how consistent practice contributes to gradual confidence-building. It will also address potential limitations, particularly in terms of developing real-world communication skills when relying solely on online speaking practices.

First, the finding that online speaking practices reduce anxiety by allowing students greater control over their schedules and environments reflects established research emphasizing the role of flexibility and structured online interactions in creating supportive learning environments. Studies by Abuhussein et al. (2023) and You (2024) indicate that structured online formats can lower anxiety by letting students dictate their pace and setting, which cultivates a more comfortable and manageable learning atmosphere. Additionally, Linardopoulos (2024), Ye et al. (2024), and Aramaki (2024) emphasize the importance of curricular adaptations in online formats to meet the unique demands of virtual learning, suggesting that flexible schedules and environmental control are indeed vital components in reducing student anxiety. However, some research highlights potential limitations; Laske and DiGennaro Reed (2022) note that certain instructional methods, such as complex lecture formats, may overwhelm students and necessitate manageable cognitive loads for less experienced learners. This suggests that while flexible scheduling and environmental control benefit many students, careful design and moderation are essential to avoid unintended stress.

The absence of a live audience and immediate feedback in online speaking practices contributes significantly to anxiety reduction, allowing students to perform without fear of judgment. This aligns with the findings of Laske et al.

(2024) and Chen (2024) on VR-based and video-based tools, which simulate real-life speaking scenarios but within a safe, judgment-free environment, thus mitigating public speaking anxiety. Moreover, immersive and simulation-based tools like those created by Najima et al. (2021) and Yang et al. (2024) provide controlled exposure to speaking activities, particularly benefiting students with high anxiety by minimizing the impact of real-time peer evaluation. Nevertheless, Al Ghaithi and Behforouz (2024) caution that while the absence of immediate feedback can reduce anxiety, it may also limit students' development of spontaneous speaking skills and comfort in handling real-time feedback, which are crucial for real-world interactions. This implies that while judgment-free settings offer initial anxiety relief, supplementary in-person or immediate-feedback experiences may be necessary to support comprehensive skill development.

The gradual confidence-building from continuous, low-stress exposure in online speaking practices is similarly validated by studies emphasizing sustained, anxiety-managed engagement as effective in boosting student confidence. Research by Zarei et al. (2024) and Arifin et al. (2024) highlights how ongoing exposure to personalized, low-stress environments, such as through interactive online activities, can help students build self-assurance over time. Additionally, group-based approaches like Group Dynamic Assessment (G-DA) and drama-based activities (Kao, 2024; Wirag, 2024) underscore the benefit of collaborative, anxiety-reducing exercises in fostering gradual comfort with language use. However, the literature also identifies important limitations. For instance, studies on personality traits by Qin and Li (2024) and Liu (2024) reveal that students with high levels of neuroticism or public-speaking fear may require more intensive or tailored interventions, as they might experience heightened anxiety even within supportive online environments. This underscores that while continuous exposure builds confidence for many, highly anxious or introverted students may still need additional, personalized support mechanisms to fully benefit from such practices.

Finally, the potential limitation of relying solely on online speaking practices to reduce anxiety is a recurring theme across the literature. Abuhussein et al. (2023) and You (2024) caution that excessive dependence on online platforms might hinder the development of in-person communication skills, which are essential for real-world and professional interactions. Similarly, Al Ghaithi and Behforouz (2024) argue that the lack of nonverbal cues in virtual environments can impede students' ability to interpret and respond to body language, a critical skill in live interactions. Studies on technologically advanced tools, such as VR and robot-avatar systems, also suggest that while immersive environments offer anxiety-reducing benefits, they may not fully replace the dynamics of face-to-face communication. The literature collectively underscores the need for a balanced approach, integrating online and in-person speaking practices to prepare students for a wider range of communication settings.

Effectiveness of Online Speaking Practices in Reducing Students' Anxiety

The growing prevalence of online speaking practices in language education has transformed approaches to managing student anxiety, offering unique advantages in creating a flexible, learner-centered environment. Research increasingly highlights the potential of online platforms to reduce performance anxiety by allowing students to rehearse independently, at their own pace, and in a

familiar setting—an approach particularly suited to learners who may feel apprehensive in traditional classroom scenarios. These practices, supported by advances in virtual learning tools, provide opportunities to build confidence gradually, without the immediate pressures and judgments of live audiences. However, while online environments can reduce anxiety, they also raise questions about how effectively these skills translate to real-world, in-person interactions.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the effectiveness of online speaking practices in reducing anxiety by providing a controlled, self-paced learning environment. Studies by Abuhussein et al. (2023) and You (2024) show that structured online environments contribute to language acquisition by lowering anxiety and increasing positivity among students. This study's findings, which emphasize the benefit of independent rehearsal, are further supported by research highlighting immersive technology tools such as VR and video-based training that help reduce public speaking anxiety without the pressure of live feedback (Chen, 2024; Laske et al., 2024). Interactive platforms like online games and robot-avatar systems have also been found to be beneficial, especially for high-anxiety students (Yang et al., 2024; Najima et al., 2021). However, while these studies provide compelling evidence of online methods' advantages, they often overlook possible drawbacks of reducing real-time feedback, which could limit the development of adaptive communication skills. This suggests the need for future research examining how these tools can be optimized to support spontaneous communication skills alongside anxiety reduction.

Some limitations of purely online practices suggest that a balanced method may better support real-world readiness. Findings indicating that combining online and in-person activities enhances preparation for real-life settings resonate with concerns from Al Ghaithi & Behforouz (2024) and Kusuma (2022) regarding the difficulty of replicating live communication cues and assessing speaking skills authentically online. While online practice builds comfort, excessive reliance on virtual formats could limit students' ability to handle live audience reactions and dynamic feedback, as noted by Linardopoulos (2024) and Ye et al. (2024). These studies stress the importance of instructional practices that integrate both virtual and real-life experiences. Yet, it remains uncertain how effective this blended approach can be across different educational and cultural contexts.

The progressive approach to learning observed in this study also aligns with literature that advocates gradual confidence-building over time. Research shows that personalized online practices, as well as curriculum adaptations, allow students to improve at their own pace, leading to increased comfort with public speaking (Markus et al., 2024; Solhi, 2024). However, online feedback structures need to be managed carefully to avoid overwhelming learners, especially those less experienced (Chen et al., 2024; Laske & DiGennaro Reed, 2022). While this gradual approach seems to work effectively, it may also risk limiting students' exposure to constructive criticism that is often crucial for improvement in speaking skills.

Similarly, findings here support recent trends in EFL anxiety reduction through safe, individualized learning environments that address students' unique needs (Zarei et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2024). Personalized mentorship and reflective practices, highlighted by Aldubaikhi (2023) and Toyama (2019) as effective anxiety-reduction methods, complement the confidence-building effects of online

practice observed in this study. However, scaling these approaches in large classrooms presents challenges, suggesting a need for systematic support within EFL programs. Despite the strengths of individualized strategies, they risk creating a divide between students who have access to resources and those who do not, underscoring the importance of equitable support mechanisms.

The present findings also connect to research on group-based and culturally adapted approaches to reducing anxiety. For example, G-DA and drama-based activities (Kao, 2024; Wirag, 2024) provide collaborative environments that reduce anxiety, though they may need cultural adjustments for individualistic settings. Personality traits also impact EFL anxiety, as extroversion and openness help reduce anxiety, while neuroticism and fear of public speaking increase it (Qin & Li, 2024; Liu, 2024). Although online environments help many students, they can sometimes increase anxiety due to reduced social interaction, emphasizing the need for well-designed courses that offer support (Tauchid et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Findings in this study that highlight progressive confidence-building through online practice align with these insights, suggesting that approaches that address cultural and personality differences are highly effective. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider that personality and cultural factors may complicate generalized recommendations for online speaking practices.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study are to investigate how online speaking practices impact students' anxiety levels and to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices in reducing anxiety. The study finds that online speaking practices have a positive impact on reducing student anxiety by providing flexible, self-paced environments where students can control their learning conditions. This setup helps alleviate anxiety by minimizing immediate feedback pressures and allowing for gradual confidence-building. The findings also demonstrate that these practices are generally effective in reducing anxiety; however, they have limitations, particularly in preparing students for real-world interactions. Consequently, while online practices successfully lower anxiety levels, a blended approach with in-person speaking experiences may be necessary to fully develop students' communication skills.

This study suggests that while online speaking practices are valuable tools for reducing student anxiety, educational programs should consider integrating both online and in-person speaking experiences to achieve comprehensive communication skill development. The flexibility and control provided by online formats create a supportive environment that helps students gradually build confidence without the immediate pressure of feedback, making it particularly beneficial for those who experience high levels of speaking anxiety. However, the limitations identified indicate that students may not fully acquire the adaptability and spontaneity required in real-world interactions if their practice is limited to online settings. Therefore, educators and curriculum designers should aim for a balanced approach, combining online speaking practice to manage anxiety with in-person opportunities that build essential real-time communication skills, thereby preparing students for a broader range of professional and social scenarios.

Future research should explore how different combinations of online and in-person speaking practices can be optimized to enhance students' communication

skills while minimizing anxiety. It would be valuable to examine the long-term effects of online speaking practices on anxiety reduction and whether these benefits are sustained over time in real-world interactions. Additionally, further studies could investigate how specific online tools, such as virtual reality or AI-driven platforms, compare to traditional in-person settings in terms of preparing students for spontaneous speaking situations. Research could also explore the impact of individual differences, such as personality traits or anxiety levels, on the effectiveness of online speaking practices, providing a more tailored approach to anxiety reduction. Finally, it would be useful to examine how cultural factors influence the success of online speaking practices in diverse educational settings.

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