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THE IMPACT OF PEER SUPPORT ON REDUCING FEAR OF SPEAKING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT:
	Fear of speaking, particularly in academic and professional settings, is a widespread issue that significantly hinders personal growth and performance. This article examines the role of peer support in alleviating speaking anxiety. By analyzing existing literature and implementing a qualitative research approach, the study reveals that peer support fosters a sense of belonging, builds confidence, and reduces fear of judgment. The findings emphasize the importance of creating collaborative environments where individuals feel encouraged to express themselves. This paper provides actionable insights for educators and facilitators to implement peer-driven strategies for reducing speaking anxiety.

INTRODUCTION. Fear of speaking, often referred to as communication apprehension or gloss phobia, is a common issue that affects individuals across all stages of life. It is particularly prevalent in academic and professional environments, where the ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently is often a critical measure of success. Fear of speaking goes beyond simple nervousness—it can manifest as a deeply rooted psychological barrier that significantly impedes personal growth, academic achievement, and career advancement. In educational contexts, this fear is frequently observed in activities such as class presentations, group discussions, or public speaking tasks, where students struggle to express themselves effectively. The causes of speaking anxiety are multifaceted and may include fear of judgment, past negative experiences, low self-esteem, and unfamiliarity with the topic or audience. Additionally, cultural and linguistic factors can exacerbate this anxiety, particularly among non-native speakers or individuals from cultures that place a high emphasis on public performance. The impact of this fear is far-reaching, often leading to avoidance behaviors, decreased participation, and a lack of engagement in learning environments. Over time, these patterns can create a vicious cycle, where the fear of speaking becomes reinforced, further limiting opportunities for personal and professional development.

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Peer support has emerged as a promising approach to addressing speaking anxiety. Unlike traditional teacher-centered methods, peer support focuses on collaboration, empathy, and shared experiences to help individuals overcome their fears. Peer groups create a safe and non-judgmental environment where participants feel encouraged to practice speaking and receive constructive feedback. This dynamic not only reduces anxiety but also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual respect among group members. Research suggests that peer interactions can significantly enhance confidence, motivation, and oral communication skills, making it a highly effective strategy for alleviating speaking-related fears. The significance of peer support lies in its ability to transform an anxiety-inducing experience into an opportunity for growth and empowerment. In a peer-supported environment, individuals are more likely to take risks, challenge themselves, and develop resilience against fear of speaking. This approach aligns with modern educational practices that prioritize student-centered learning, collaboration, and emotional well-being. Moreover, the benefits of peer support extend beyond the individual, contributing to a positive and inclusive learning environment that values diversity and mutual encouragement.

This article explores the impact of peer support on reducing fear of speaking, drawing insights from existing literature and original research. It highlights the psychological, social, and pedagogical dimensions of peer support, providing a comprehensive understanding of its role in overcoming speaking anxiety. The study also offers practical recommendations for educators and institutions to implement peer-driven strategies, emphasizing the importance of creating supportive and anxiety-free learning spaces. By examining the transformative potential of peer support, this article aims to inspire educators, students, and policymakers to adopt innovative approaches for addressing speaking anxiety and fostering confident communication.

Literal Review and methodology. Speaking anxiety, also known as glossophobia, affects a significant percentage of the population. According to **Horwitz et al.** (1986), communication apprehension can lead to avoidance behaviors, reduced participation, and even academic underachievement. Research by **MacIntyre and Gardner** (1991) further highlights the detrimental impact of speaking anxiety on language learning, as it inhibits oral communication skills. Peer support involves collaboration, encouragement, and shared experiences among individuals with similar challenges. According to **Vygotsky's** (1978) sociocultural theory, learning is a social process that thrives in interactive environments. Peer support aligns with this principle, offering a platform for individuals to engage in meaningful communication while reducing the fear of judgment. Studies by **Topping** (2005) indicate that peer-assisted learning fosters confidence and self-efficacy, both of which are essential for overcoming speaking anxiety. Similarly, a study by **Liu and Jackson** (2008) found that students who engaged in peer discussions reported lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of oral proficiency.   Practical

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applications of peer support include group discussions, peer feedback sessions, and collaborative projects. These activities provide individuals with opportunities to practice speaking in a non-threatening environment. Research by **Dörnyei** (2001) suggests that peer collaboration not only reduces anxiety but also enhances motivation and language acquisition.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the impact of peer support on reducing fear of speaking. The study involved **30** participants aged **18–25**, selected from various academic disciplines. Participants were divided into small groups to engage in peer-led activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and peer feedback sessions.

Data Collection and Analysis. Data was collected over a 6-week period through audio-recorded interviews and observational notes. Participants were asked about their experiences with peer support, changes in their confidence levels, and overall perceptions of the approach. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. *Ethical Considerations*. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The research adhered to ethical guidelines for human subject research. *Findings and Discussion.* The findings revealed that peer support significantly reduced speaking anxiety among participants. Key themes identified include.

1. Sense of Belonging: Participants reported feeling more comfortable speaking in a group where they felt accepted and understood. **2. Increased Confidence:** Regular peer interactions helped participants build self-assurance in their speaking abilities. **3. Constructive Feedback:** Receiving feedback from peers was perceived as less intimidating than teacher feedback, making it easier to accept and implement suggestions. **4. Reduced Fear of Judgment**: The non-hierarchical nature of peer groups created a safe space for participants to express themselves without fear of criticism.These findings align with previous research, reinforcing the idea that peer support is a powerful tool for reducing fear of speaking.

Conclusion and recommendations. The findings of this study emphasize the transformative role of peer support in addressing fear of speaking, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Fear of speaking is a significant barrier that not only limits individuals' ability to communicate but also affects their self-esteem, academic performance, and career prospects. By fostering a supportive environment through peer collaboration, individuals are empowered to overcome this challenge, paving the way for improved communication skills and personal development. Peer support addresses multiple dimensions of speaking anxiety. It creates a safe space where individuals feel a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. This is particularly important in reducing the fear of judgment, a key factor that exacerbates speaking anxiety. Regular interactions with peers help individuals build confidence in their abilities and allow them to practice

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communication in a low-pressure setting. Furthermore, constructive feedback from peers is perceived as less intimidating than traditional teacher feedback, making it easier for individuals to accept and act on suggestions. The impact of peer support extends beyond individual growth; it also contributes to a positive group dynamic. Peer-led activities, such as group discussions, role-playing, and collaborative projects, foster a culture of empathy and encouragement. This collective effort not only alleviates anxiety but also enhances overall group cohesion and productivity. By engaging in peer support, individuals develop essential soft skills, such as teamwork, active listening, and constructive communication, which are critical for success in both academic and professional settings. From an educational perspective, the incorporation of peer support into teaching methodologies offers a practical and effective solution for reducing speaking anxiety. Educators can play a pivotal role by designing peer-driven activities that encourage collaboration and mutual support.

These activities should be tailored to the needs of the learners, taking into account factors such as cultural background, language proficiency, and individual comfort levels. Looking ahead, there is significant potential for further research on the long-term effects of peer support in reducing speaking anxiety. Future studies could explore its application in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as its effectiveness in online learning environments. Additionally, integrating technology, such as virtual reality or AI-powered language tools, with peer support could open new avenues for addressing speaking anxiety in innovative ways. In conclusion, peer support is a powerful tool for transforming fear of speaking into an opportunity for growth and self-improvement. By leveraging the power of collaboration, empathy, and mutual encouragement, individuals can overcome their fears and become confident communicators. For educators, institutions, and policymakers, embracing peer support is a step toward creating inclusive, supportive, and anxiety-free learning environments that empower individuals to reach their full potential.

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