



Cairo University,  
Institute of Educational Studies & Research,  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

# **Oral Fluency, Grammatical Accuracy and their Relationship to EFL Student-teachers' Speaking Anxiety**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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By:

**MAGED MOHAMMED OMAR MOHAMMEDAIN**

**A language Instructor at Port Said Faculty of Kindergarten**

Supervised by:

**DR. ALI AHMED MADKOUR**

Professor of Arabic Language Teaching  
Institute of Educational Studies & Research  
Cairo University

**DR. MOHAMMED ATEF OTAIFY**

Professor of Educational Psychology  
Institute of Educational Studies & Research  
Cairo University

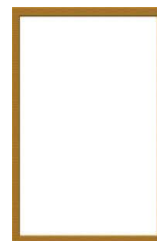
**DR. MUHAMMAD M. ABDEL-LATIF**

Lecturer of English Language Teaching  
Institute of Educational Studies & Research  
Cairo University

**2015**



Institute of Educational Studies



**Name:** Maged Mohammed Omar Mohammedain

**Nationality:** Egyptian

**Date and Place of Birth:** 1/6/1976- Baris, New Valley, Egypt.

**Degree:** Ph.D.

**Specialization:** Department of Curriculum and Instruction

**Supervisor (s):** Dr. Ali Ahmed Madkour  
Dr. Mohammed Atef Otaify  
Dr. Muhammad M. Abdel-Latif

**Title of Thesis:**

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**Abstract:**

The problem of this study was that EFL student-teachers experience speaking anxiety leading them to face a number of problems concerning oral fluency and grammatical accuracy that were hard to be solved. Thus, they needed to recognize the correlation between speaking anxiety and their ability of using the language fluently and accurately to face these problems to be professional teachers. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between speaking anxiety and oral fluency and grammatical accuracy among EFL student-teachers in oral tasks. The sample of this study included (49) participants. Their speech was observed, audio-recorded, transcribed and coded in the light of some temporal measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. A number of instruments were prepared and used to conduct the action research. A speaking anxiety scale and a speaking test were prepared and introduced to the participants. The quantitative analysis of the participants' responses showed that they suffered from "communication apprehension "anxiety. Results also showed that a statistically significant negative correlation between oral proficiency and speaking anxiety among EFL student-teachers. Results of the study, also, indicated that enhancing communication abilities was effective in enhancing the EFL student-teachers practice teaching.

**Keywords:** Language Anxiety, Speaking, Oral Fluency, Grammatical Accuracy, Practice Teaching, Mixed Design, Qualitative and quantitative analysis of data.

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# **CHAPTER ONE:**

# **BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM**

# **Chapter I**

## **Background and Problem**

### **Introduction**

Teachers in the modern EFL classroom often teach through techniques drawn from a variety of approaches. These approaches of Language teaching have changed through the years, having been impacted by shifts in theories of the nature of language and psychology of learning in addition to changes in the kind of proficiency language learners need. As a result, the consensus on a single, universal, optimum approach that guarantee success in learning modern languages does not exist.

The continued developments in approaches to language teaching have raised new issues for discussion. Some of these approaches prioritize form over content and treat language learners as operatives who recite language, rather than employing it as a medium to communicate real-life meanings (Cooper, 2002).

The humanistic approach to language teaching attempts to remedy this imbalance by recognizing the learner as the essential agent in the learning/teaching process. It, according to Cooper (2002: 8), respects language learners as "human beings" and "helps them to exploit their capacity for learning through meaningful experience," and "connects what is in the course material with what is in the learners' minds". In this approach, learning a foreign language is viewed as a self-realization process. Much of the instruction involves pair-work and group-work; peer support and interaction are viewed as necessary for learning. A teaching method which can be illustrative of this approach is Curran's Community Language Learning (1976) which advises teachers to consider their students as "whole persons". This method is often used in the teaching of oral proficiency. It does not use a conventional language syllabus which determines in advance the grammar and vocabulary to be taught, but learners nominate the things they wish to talk about. In this method, particular grammar points, pronunciation patterns, and vocabulary are worked with, based on the language the students have generated.

With regard to the humanistic approach, language learners who lack confidence in their ability to speak successfully often listen in silence while others do the speech. No doubt, speaking is a crucial part of the language learning process that learners should practice and master. It is mainly concerning how to put the ideas into words to make others grasp the message that is conveyed. One of the hottest issues in this context is to instruct students how to converse fluently. To reach this aim, EFL students should also master the use of different words and phrases in oral sentences accurately.

Of primary importance in this study are oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. Regarding oral fluency, it is, generally, a measure of how well and how easily a speaker can communicate ideas clearly in speech. If a speaker pauses appropriately, talks at a reasonable rate, and forms sentences clearly, he is likely to be perceived as more fluent than a speaker who does not. However, it seems that there is no consensus concerning what is understood by the concept. For example, Richards, Platt and Platt (1992: 141- 142) assume that oral fluency describes a level of language proficiency in communication which includes: a) the ability to produce the spoken language with ease; b) the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily with a perfect command of intonation and vocabulary; c) the ability to communicate ideas effectively; d) the ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties. Also, Harris (1999: 81) defines oral fluency as “the ease and speed and flow of speech.”

This emphasis on oral fluency does not mean to neglect grammatical accuracy since appropriate communication cannot be carried out without correct grammar. Lazaraton (2001) states that language teachers are expected to balance a focus on grammatical accuracy and oral fluency. Also, Ellis (2003) highlights the importance of grammatical accuracy in speech situations and suggests that teachers should lay equal importance to both oral fluency and grammar accuracy, as stressing any one only may jeopardize the other.

Various opinions are expressed about the underlying relationship between these two components of language acquisition: oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. It seems they are nearly related activities. In communication, if someone made mistakes in his pronunciation, grammar or words spelling, it will lead to misunderstanding and tedium to others. Larsen-Freeman (1986: 129) states that "in communicative language teaching, students' success is determined as much by their oral fluency as it is by their grammatical accuracy". Also, Swan (1998) mentions that knowing how to build and use grammatical structures makes it feasible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Besides, Ellis (2003: 112) underlines the importance of both oral fluency and grammatical accuracy stating that the aim of any speaking activity in the EFL classroom is to develop a pattern of language interaction which is fluent and accurate as close as possible to that is used by competent performers in the first language. Therefore, the students' ability of using the language in communication fluently and accurately should be developed.

However, the reality is that developing oral fluency and grammatical accuracy continues to be frustrating and stressful for most EFL students. They are often cited by students as their most embarrassment-producing experience which drives them to avoid using difficult words or structures, and use some simpler words or structures instead in their speech. Their activities are often associated with feelings of discomfort, fear and anxiety. Thus, after many years of learning, the majority of EFL students may be neither fluent nor accurate English speakers. They can hardly use the English Language to communicate with others not only in lectures and learning environments, but also outside the lectures.

This problem has been widely observed by many researchers. Yang & Gai (2010) reports that some EFL learners who perform well in English lessons still find themselves at a loss in the situations that require them to interact orally with other speakers. Besides, they find themselves unable to retrieve a word, to use or comprehend an idiomatic expression, or to grasp a topic; consequently, communication breaks down. Also, Young (1991: 429) found that many students feel less comfortable when they speak a foreign language in public. Similarly, Ur (1991, p.121) pointed out that EFL students avoid speaking tasks being afraid of making mistakes in front of the class or being the attention of the class when they speak.

In the recent studies of the humanistic approach to language teaching, this problem has been widely discussed. Arnold (1999) mentions that a broad understanding of affect is essential to guide and improve the teaching and learning of the foreign language. One of the affective variables which significantly influence EFL speech is the multi-faceted construct called Foreign Language Anxiety. It appears as one of the most outstanding individual learner differences variable that can predict or rather explain differential success in L2 learning. Generally, Anxiety is defined as the "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness with an arousal of the nervous system" (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). Language Anxiety is defined as a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to using a foreign or second language for communication in the language classroom (Young, 1991).

One commonly reported aspect causing foreign language anxiety is the act of speaking. Speaking anxiety is a considerable anxiety-provoking experience where anxiety hampers language learners' oral expression of a group or in front of a public. Sarason (1984) viewed speaking anxiety as self-preoccupation over the inability to speak and respond adequately. Young (1986) found a negative correlation of anxiety with performance in speaking and writing tasks. Also, Price (1991: 25) found that the oral skills are the most frustrating experience among foreign language learners; speaking, namely, is the greatest source of anxiety in her study. In addition, Krashen, Terrell and Omaggio (1999) judged speaking as more anxiety-producing than reading, writing or listening. Koch and Terrell (2002: 113) reported that speaking oriented- activities received higher anxiety ratings by language learners than any other in-class activities.

Consistent with these studies, every student in an English teacher education program is expected to do practice teaching. Practice teaching serves as the pre-service teacher's initiation into the real-life world of the school. Empirical findings support the notion that a high level of language anxiety among student teachers may be tied to various negative consequences such as class control problems and classroom disruptions. Preece (1979: 18) found a correlation between student teacher anxiety and class control problems. Hart (1987: 16) also reported a positive correlation between student teacher anxiety and classroom disruptions. Therefore speaking anxiety appears to be a relevant characteristic of student teachers.

In line with these fore-mentioned studies, without an adequate study of the role of speaking anxiety among EFL student-teachers, difficulties in oral fluency and grammatical accuracy may be rooted and students may be reluctant to join oral activities and may, in turn, experience a sense of failure. Relatively few studies looked at the nature of speaking anxiety and its correlation to oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. The present study tries to fill in this research gap by exploring the relationship among oral fluency, grammatical accuracy and speaking anxiety among Egyptian EFL student- teachers.

## **1.2 Context of the Problem**

Speaking anxiety has been shown to affect the students EFL oral attainments (e.g. Gardner, Day & MacIntyre, 1992; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Krashen, 1982). However, little research focused on the precise nature of speaking anxiety that affects English student-teachers performance in the assigned oral tasks. Many scholars documented the need to more comprehensive studies in nature that looks at this issue from a variety of perspectives. For instance, Ohata (2005), considering teachers' role and the particular social context they create in the classroom interviewed seven experienced EFL teachers to investigate this phenomenon. Also, Shams, (2006:14) views that “even without empirical proof, the mere awareness of foreign language anxiety, even on an intuitive level, is testimony enough to its existence and worthy of fuller investigation”. Without such comprehensive view of speaking anxiety, EFL teachers cannot build confidence in student’s ability to pursue and complete English oral tasks.

## **1.3 Problem of the Study**

Ordinarily when we think of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy, we think of speaking and natural language use (Kawaguchi, 2005; Taylor, 2004). They are a vital part of speaking the target language. They are mutually influential. Grammatical accuracy brings oral fluency and fluency brings further grammatical accuracy.

However, previous studies revealed that EFL students often express a feeling of stress, nervousness or anxiety claiming to have a 'mental block' against speaking English fluently and accurately. Ali & Ammar (2005) investigated the relationship