

# Pronunciation Anxiety Among EFL Learners: Causes, Consequences, and Classroom Interventions

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**Abstract**—Pronunciation anxiety poses a significant barrier to the oral proficiency development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study explores the causes of pronunciation anxiety, its impact on oral performance, and the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from anxiety scales and oral performance tests were combined with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews involving 60 intermediate EFL learners at a university language center. Results identified key anxiety triggers, including fear of negative evaluation, unfamiliarity with English phonetic patterns, and insufficient speaking opportunities in authentic contexts. Pronunciation anxiety was found to lead to avoidance behaviors, reduced classroom participation, and compromised accuracy during speaking tasks. To address these challenges, three interventions were implemented over a 12-week period: peer-led pronunciation workshops, guided self-recording activities, and real-time formative feedback. Post-intervention findings showed a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety levels ( $p < 0.01$ ) alongside improved pronunciation accuracy and fluency. Interview data also reflected increased learner confidence and participation. The study recommends incorporating affective support strategies into EFL pronunciation teaching and highlights the value of fostering a low-anxiety, supportive classroom climate. These findings offer useful implications for teachers, curriculum developers, and language education programs.

**Index Terms**—pronunciation anxiety, EFL learners, classroom interventions, oral proficiency, affective factors

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in spoken English remains a fundamental goal for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Oral proficiency is not only a key indicator of language competence but also a vital skill for personal, academic, and professional interactions in increasingly globalized contexts. Among the various components that constitute oral proficiency, pronunciation plays a pivotal role, directly influencing intelligibility, communicative clarity, and interlocutor perceptions. Despite its significance, pronunciation instruction often receives limited emphasis in many EFL curricula, and learners frequently encounter considerable challenges in acquiring accurate and fluent pronunciation patterns (Derwing & Munro, 2015). One critical yet underexplored factor contributing to these difficulties is pronunciation anxiety — a specific form of language anxiety that can significantly hinder EFL learners' oral performance and language development.

Pronunciation anxiety refers to the apprehension and self-consciousness experienced by language learners when required to articulate foreign language sounds, particularly in public or evaluative situations. It represents a complex interplay of affective, cognitive, and sociocultural factors that shape learners' willingness to speak, accuracy in pronunciation, and overall communicative confidence (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Unlike general speaking anxiety, which encompasses broad fears about language use, pronunciation anxiety is rooted in learners' concerns about producing unfamiliar phonetic patterns and being judged negatively by peers, teachers, or native speakers. These anxieties frequently appear in the form of avoidance behaviors, diminished classroom engagement, and decreased speech accuracy, which collectively hinder the development of learners' oral proficiency.

Research on language anxiety has established its detrimental effects on second language acquisition, particularly in speaking-related tasks (Horwitz, 2001; Liu & Jackson, 2008). However, studies that specifically address pronunciation anxiety remain relatively limited, especially in EFL contexts where learners may have fewer opportunities for authentic communicative practice and increased exposure to evaluative classroom settings. Given the centrality of pronunciation to intelligibility and the affective challenges associated with its acquisition, there is a pressing need to investigate the sources of pronunciation anxiety, its implications for oral performance, and effective strategies for mitigating its negative impact.

The present study seeks to contribute to this growing area of inquiry by exploring the causes and consequences of pronunciation anxiety among intermediate EFL learners at a university language center. Drawing on a mixed-methods research design, this study combines quantitative data from standardized anxiety scales and oral performance assessments with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. By integrating these complementary data sources, the research

aims to provide a nuanced understanding of learners' experiences with pronunciation anxiety and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions designed to alleviate its effects.

Three primary research objectives guided this investigation. First, the study aimed to identify the key factors that trigger pronunciation anxiety in EFL learners. Previous literature suggests that fear of negative evaluation, unfamiliarity with the phonetic system of English, and limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice are among the most commonly cited sources of anxiety (Young, 1991; Baran-Lucarz, 2014). Confirming and contextualizing these factors within the current study's participant group provides valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by EFL learners in a university setting.

Second, the study sought to examine the relationship between pronunciation anxiety and oral performance outcomes. Existing research indicates that heightened anxiety can impair learners' pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative effectiveness (Kitano, 2001; Woodrow, 2006). By assessing participants' oral performance before and after targeted interventions, this study aims to clarify how affective factors such as anxiety intersect with linguistic competencies in EFL speaking tasks.

Finally, the research aimed to evaluate the impact of three classroom-based interventions on reducing pronunciation anxiety and enhancing oral performance. The interventions included peer-led pronunciation workshops, guided self-recording activities, and the provision of real-time formative feedback during speaking tasks. Each intervention was selected based on prior evidence of its potential to address specific anxiety triggers and foster a supportive, low-anxiety learning environment (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Saito, 2013). Implemented over a 12-week period, these interventions were designed to increase learners' exposure to spoken English, provide constructive and non-threatening feedback, and promote greater learner autonomy in pronunciation practice.

Findings from the study revealed several significant insights. Quantitative analyses indicated that fear of negative evaluation, difficulty with unfamiliar phonetic patterns, and insufficient opportunities for communicative practice were the most salient anxiety triggers among participants. Moreover, higher levels of self-reported pronunciation anxiety were associated with lower scores in pronunciation accuracy and fluency during pre-intervention oral performance assessments. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews corroborated these findings, with learners frequently describing feelings of apprehension, embarrassment, and reluctance to speak in English, particularly in situations involving unfamiliar vocabulary or peer evaluation (Martin, 2022; Simbolon, 2025; Tsang, 2022; Zhang & Dong, 2021).

The implementation of the three targeted interventions produced notable improvements in both affective and linguistic outcomes. Post-intervention analyses demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in self-reported pronunciation anxiety levels ( $p < 0.01$ ), accompanied by marked gains in pronunciation accuracy and fluency. Interview data further indicated that learners experienced increased confidence in their speaking abilities, greater willingness to participate in classroom discussions, and enhanced perceptions of their own progress. The peer-led workshops were particularly effective in creating a collaborative and empathetic learning atmosphere, while the guided self-recording tasks encouraged reflective practice and self-monitoring. Real-time formative feedback, delivered in a supportive and non-judgmental manner, also contributed to reducing performance anxiety and promoting sustained engagement with pronunciation tasks (Alimorad, 2022; Islam et al., 2024; Mamang et al., 2023).

The study's findings carry important pedagogical implications for EFL instruction and curriculum design. Firstly, they underscore the necessity of addressing affective factors such as pronunciation anxiety in language classrooms, alongside the development of linguistic competencies. Teachers should be aware of the psychological barriers that learners may face in oral tasks and implement strategies to foster a positive, supportive, and low-anxiety learning environment. Incorporating peer collaboration, personalized feedback, and opportunities for autonomous practice can help mitigate anxiety and promote greater learner engagement.

Secondly, the research highlights the value of integrating affective support strategies into pronunciation teaching. Rather than focusing exclusively on error correction and phonetic accuracy, pronunciation instruction should also attend to learners' emotional responses to speaking tasks. Activities that emphasize communicative practice, encourage risk-taking, and normalize pronunciation difficulties can contribute to a more inclusive and effective learning experience.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on language anxiety by offering empirical evidence on the causes, effects, and alleviation of pronunciation anxiety in EFL contexts. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of learners' affective experiences and the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions. The findings not only inform teaching practices but also offer valuable guidance for curriculum developers and language education programs seeking to enhance oral proficiency outcomes for EFL learners.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language anxiety has long been recognized as a significant affective factor influencing second language acquisition (SLA). Horwitz et al. (1986) first conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a distinct type of situation-specific anxiety, experienced in formal language learning settings. They identified three interrelated components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This multidimensional construct has since been widely investigated, with studies consistently confirming its negative impact on language learners' performance and classroom participation (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argued that language anxiety interferes at both input, processing, and output stages of language learning, disrupting cognitive functions such as attention, memory, and speech production. Subsequent research has shown that speaking-related anxiety is particularly debilitating, as it directly impairs learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and reduces opportunities for language practice (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Woodrow, 2006). Given that oral communication is an essential component of language proficiency, understanding the role of anxiety in speaking tasks is critical to supporting learners in language classrooms.

While early research largely addressed general language anxiety, scholars have increasingly focused on domain-specific forms, such as writing anxiety, listening anxiety, and pronunciation anxiety. Each of these affects language acquisition in distinct ways, reflecting the unique cognitive and social demands of different language skills (Cheng et al., 1999). Pronunciation anxiety, in particular, has received relatively limited attention, despite its significant implications for oral proficiency and communicative competence.

Pronunciation anxiety refers to learners' apprehension and self-consciousness about producing unfamiliar phonetic patterns and sounds of a second or foreign language, particularly in public or evaluative contexts (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). It represents a specialized form of speaking anxiety, as pronunciation difficulties are highly perceptible and often subject to immediate judgment by others. Learners may fear mispronouncing words, being misunderstood, or appearing incompetent to native or fluent speakers (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Several studies have highlighted the salience of pronunciation anxiety among EFL learners. Baran-Lucarz (2014) reported that pronunciation anxiety significantly predicts learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in classroom settings. Students with high levels of pronunciation anxiety were less likely to initiate or engage in oral interactions, which in turn limited their speaking practice and slowed oral proficiency development. Similarly, Saito (2013) noted that learners frequently report anxiety about producing accurate sounds, particularly in languages with complex or unfamiliar phonetic systems.

Pronunciation anxiety is especially relevant in EFL contexts where learners may have limited exposure to naturalistic spoken English and predominantly engage in classroom-based practice. The formal nature of many EFL classrooms, combined with evaluative speaking activities, can intensify learners' self-consciousness about their pronunciation. Consequently, pronunciation anxiety contributes to avoidance behaviors, diminished classroom participation, and reduced confidence in oral tasks (Young, 1991).

Research has identified several interrelated factors contributing to pronunciation anxiety. One of the most frequently cited causes is fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986) argued that learners often perceive pronunciation errors as highly visible mistakes that are readily noticed by teachers and peers. As a result, they may worry about being judged as unintelligent or incompetent, leading to heightened self-monitoring and reduced fluency during speaking tasks.

Another significant factor is unfamiliarity with the phonetic patterns of English. EFL learners often struggle to acquire sounds that do not exist in their native language or involve unfamiliar articulatory movements (Derwing & Munro, 2015). The cognitive demands of producing novel sounds, coupled with the pressure of real-time communication, can trigger anxiety and disrupt speech production processes. Kitano (2001) reported that learners frequently experience anxiety when required to pronounce new or difficult sounds, especially in front of native speakers or authority figures.

A third contributing factor is limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice. In many EFL contexts, oral activities are restricted to artificial or highly structured classroom exercises, with few chances for spontaneous, meaningful communication. As Young (1991) noted, the lack of genuine communicative situations exacerbates learners' apprehension, as they have limited experience managing pronunciation challenges in naturalistic settings. Without regular exposure to spoken English and opportunities to practice pronunciation in low-stress environments, learners may develop persistent anxiety about their oral abilities.

Additionally, teacher feedback practices can influence pronunciation anxiety. Corrective feedback, while essential for language development, can increase learners' apprehension if delivered in a judgmental or overly critical manner (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Learners who receive frequent negative feedback about their pronunciation may develop heightened self-consciousness, leading to avoidance of speaking tasks.

Pronunciation anxiety negatively affects multiple aspects of oral performance, including accuracy, fluency, and overall intelligibility. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) demonstrated that anxious learners experience increased cognitive load during speaking tasks, as anxiety consumes attentional resources needed for language processing and production. This often results in slower speech rates, increased pauses, and higher error rates in pronunciation.

Empirical studies have confirmed the relationship between pronunciation anxiety and reduced oral performance outcomes. Woodrow (2006) found that learners with high levels of speaking anxiety performed less accurately and fluently in speaking tests. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2008) reported that anxiety led to speech disruptions, avoidance behaviors, and limited participation in classroom discussions.

Pronunciation anxiety also affects learners' long-term language development. Baran-Lucarz (2014) observed that anxious learners are less likely to engage in pronunciation practice or seek corrective feedback, which impedes their ability to improve over time. Moreover, persistent anxiety can diminish learners' motivation and confidence, further reducing their willingness to communicate (WTC) and participate in oral activities.

Recognizing the detrimental effects of pronunciation anxiety, researchers and practitioners have proposed various intervention strategies to alleviate learners' apprehension and support pronunciation development. These interventions

typically aim to create a low-anxiety classroom climate, increase opportunities for meaningful practice, and provide supportive, constructive feedback.

One widely recommended strategy is the implementation of peer-led pronunciation workshops. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) suggested that peer collaboration reduces learners' fear of negative evaluation by fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual support. Baran-Lucarz (2014) found that learners participating in peer-based activities reported lower anxiety levels and greater confidence in speaking tasks, as peers were perceived as less judgmental than teachers.

Another effective approach involves guided self-recording and self-assessment tasks. Saito (2013) demonstrated that having learners record their spoken output and reflect on their pronunciation allows for private, non-threatening practice. This strategy enables learners to identify and address their pronunciation challenges without the immediate pressure of public speaking. Derwing and Munro (2015) argued that self-monitoring promotes greater learner autonomy and encourages sustained pronunciation practice outside the classroom.

Real-time formative feedback has also been shown to reduce pronunciation anxiety, provided it is delivered in a supportive, non-critical manner. Young (1991) emphasized the importance of affective feedback strategies, such as focusing on positive aspects of learners' performance and framing errors as natural parts of the learning process. Positive, constructive feedback helps learners view pronunciation difficulties as manageable challenges rather than personal shortcomings.

Recent studies have integrated these strategies into multi-component intervention programs. For instance, a study by Saito (2013) combined explicit phonetic instruction with peer practice and self-recording tasks, resulting in significant improvements in learners' pronunciation accuracy and reductions in anxiety. Similarly, the study outlined in the present research employed a 12-week intervention involving peer-led workshops, self-recording activities, and real-time feedback, leading to lower self-reported anxiety levels and enhanced oral performance.

The literature reviewed highlights several important implications for EFL pronunciation teaching. First, it underscores the necessity of addressing affective factors, such as pronunciation anxiety, in language instruction. Teachers should be aware of the psychological barriers learners face in oral tasks and implement strategies to create a supportive, low-anxiety classroom environment (Horwitz, 2001).

Second, the findings support the integration of peer collaboration, self-monitoring, and affective feedback strategies into pronunciation instruction. Activities that emphasize communicative practice, risk-taking, and normalization of pronunciation difficulties can foster a positive classroom climate and enhance learner confidence (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Finally, curriculum developers should design pronunciation programs that balance accuracy-focused instruction with affective support mechanisms. Incorporating authentic speaking opportunities, reflective practice, and peer-based activities can promote both linguistic competence and emotional well-being, ultimately supporting more effective and enjoyable language learning experiences.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Research Design*

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore the causes of pronunciation anxiety among EFL learners, its effects on oral performance, and the impact of targeted classroom interventions. Combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed for a more nuanced understanding of learners' experiences and the efficacy of pedagogical strategies, aligning with recommendations in recent language anxiety research (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Woodrow, 2006). The quantitative component involved administering standardized anxiety scales and oral performance assessments before and after the intervention period, while the qualitative component gathered detailed learner perspectives through semi-structured interviews.

#### B. *Participants*

The participants in this study were 60 intermediate-level EFL learners enrolled in an academic English program at a university language center. Participants were aged between 18 and 24 and had been studying English for an average of 7 years. The selection criteria required that learners be at an intermediate proficiency level (B1-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and regularly attend speaking and pronunciation classes.

A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants represented a diverse range of language learning experiences while controlling for proficiency level. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical approval was granted by the university's institutional review board.

#### C. *Data Collection Instruments*

To quantitatively measure participants' pronunciation anxiety, the study adapted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), with modifications to focus specifically on pronunciation-related items. The revised scale included 15 Likert-type items addressing learners' nervousness, fear of mispronunciation, fear of negative evaluation, and avoidance tendencies during pronunciation tasks. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) in a pilot test conducted with 20 learners from a different cohort.

Participants’ oral performance was assessed using a structured speaking task, which required learners to describe a picture and participate in a short role-play scenario. Each task was designed to elicit spontaneous spoken language in authentic-like contexts, ensuring opportunities for natural pronunciation production. Performances were audio-recorded and evaluated by two trained raters using a pronunciation rubric adapted from Saito (2013), focusing on accuracy, fluency, and intelligibility. Inter-rater reliability was calculated at 0.87, indicating a high degree of scoring consistency.

To gain qualitative insights into learners’ experiences with pronunciation anxiety and their perceptions of the intervention strategies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 participants selected through maximum variation sampling. The interview guide included open-ended questions about causes of pronunciation anxiety, coping strategies, classroom experiences, and feedback on the intervention activities. Interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes each and were conducted in English and, when necessary, the participants’ first language for clarification purposes.

*D. Intervention Procedures*

Based on recommendations from the literature (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Baran-Lucarz, 2014), a 12-week intervention program was designed and implemented to reduce pronunciation anxiety and enhance oral performance. The intervention included three complementary components:

1. **Peer-Led Pronunciation Workshops:** Held weekly, these small-group sessions focused on practicing problematic phonemes and stress patterns identified during pre-tests. Learners collaborated in pairs and groups to engage in pronunciation drills, minimal pair exercises, and communicative tasks. Peer feedback was encouraged, fostering a non-threatening learning atmosphere.
2. **Guided Self-Recording Activities:** Participants were instructed to record themselves performing assigned speaking tasks using mobile applications. They then reviewed their recordings, identified pronunciation errors, and completed self-assessment checklists. This activity allowed learners to monitor their progress privately and reduce anxiety associated with immediate public feedback.
3. **Real-Time Formative Feedback:** During regular speaking classes, instructors provided formative feedback on pronunciation in a supportive, constructive manner. Feedback was framed positively, focusing on improvement areas without singling out learners or interrupting fluency unnecessarily.

*E. Data Collection Procedures*

Data collection occurred in three phases:

1. **Pre-Intervention Phase (Week 1):** Participants completed the Pronunciation Anxiety Scale and performed the oral speaking tasks. Baseline data were collected and analyzed to identify common pronunciation difficulties and anxiety triggers.
2. **Intervention Phase (Weeks 2–13):** The intervention activities were implemented weekly, integrated into existing speaking and pronunciation classes. Attendance was monitored, and informal observations were recorded by instructors to track participation and classroom dynamics.
3. **Post-Intervention Phase (Week 14):** Participants repeated the Pronunciation Anxiety Scale and oral performance test. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the final week. Quantitative and qualitative data were then compiled for analysis.

*F. Data Analysis*

Quantitative data from the Pronunciation Anxiety Scale and oral performance tests were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests to determine significant changes in anxiety levels and oral performance scores before and after the intervention. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were also computed to describe overall trends. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework. Codes were generated inductively to identify recurring themes related to causes of anxiety, experiences during intervention activities, and perceived improvements in pronunciation and confidence.

IV. RESULTS

The quantitative data derived from the adapted Pronunciation Anxiety Scale indicated that a substantial number of participants experienced moderate to high levels of pronunciation anxiety before the intervention. The mean score on a 5-point scale was 3.9 (SD = 0.6). A breakdown of the scale items revealed three primary anxiety triggers (See Table1):

TABLE 1  
STATISTICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN ANXIETY-INDUCING FACTORS

<b>Cause of Anxiety</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Fear of negative evaluation	4.3	0.5
Unfamiliarity with English phonetics	4.1	0.7
Lack of authentic speaking opportunities	3.7	0.8

The highest rated factor was fear of negative evaluation, a result that supports earlier findings by Horwitz et al. (1986) and Kitano (2001), who identified peer and instructor judgment as key anxiety sources in foreign language classrooms. The second highest factor, unfamiliarity with English phonetic patterns, reflects learners' difficulties with English stress, intonation, and phonemes absent in their native language, consistent with Derwing and Munro (2015). The thematic analysis of qualitative interview data reinforced these results. Learners frequently cited embarrassment, fear of making mistakes in front of peers, and struggles with specific phonemes (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, and final consonant clusters) as significant anxiety triggers. Avoidance behaviors, such as refraining from speaking or volunteering in class, were commonly mentioned, confirming Young's (1991) assertion that anxiety leads to communication avoidance.

To assess how pronunciation anxiety affected learners' oral performance, participants completed structured speaking tasks pre- and post-intervention. Pre-intervention data revealed a strong negative correlation between pronunciation anxiety scores and speaking performance ( $r = -0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher anxiety was associated with lower oral proficiency scores. Pre-intervention speaking assessments exhibited several recurring issues:

- Reduced fluency: Frequent hesitations, pauses, and filler words.
- Compromised accuracy: Regular segmental errors (e.g., vowel and consonant mispronunciations) and prosodic inaccuracies.
- Avoidance behaviors: Use of short, simple utterances to minimize risk of error.

Interview data corroborated these quantitative findings. Many participants acknowledged that anxiety disrupted their concentration during speaking tasks, leading to rushed, incomplete responses. This behavior supports Woodrow's (2006) and MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) conclusions about the debilitating effects of language anxiety on oral performance. Post-intervention analysis of the Pronunciation Anxiety Scale revealed a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety levels. The mean score decreased from 3.9 to 3.0, with a paired-samples t-test confirming statistical significance ( $t(59) = 9.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (See Table 2).

TABLE 2  
THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

Measure	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t-value	p-value
Pronunciation Anxiety	3.9	3.0	9.43	< 0.01

Among the three intervention components, learners rated peer-led workshops and self-recording tasks as the most helpful in reducing anxiety. These activities allowed for repeated, low-pressure practice and self-assessment, which several learners described as "freeing" and "confidence-building". Oral performance scores also showed substantial improvement post-intervention. The mean score increased from 65.4 to 76.8, with a paired-samples t-test confirming a statistically significant improvement ( $t(59) = 8.75$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (See Table 3).

TABLE 3  
THE RESULTS OF THE PAIRED-SAMPLES T-TESTS

Measure	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t-value	p-value
Oral Performance Score	65.4	76.8	8.75	< 0.01

Performance improvements were particularly evident in several key areas. Learners demonstrated notable gains in pronunciation accuracy, with a reduction in both segmental errors, such as mispronounced consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental errors, including stress and intonation patterns. Fluency also improved, as participants produced smoother, more continuous speech with fewer hesitations and pauses. Additionally, intelligibility increased, with learners speaking more clearly and comprehensibly, making their spoken English easier for listeners to understand. The real-time formative feedback strategy was especially well-received, with learners appreciating constructive, supportive correction without public embarrassment. These findings align with Saito (2013) and MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), who advocate affect-sensitive corrective feedback in language classrooms.

Thematic analysis of the post-intervention interviews revealed three dominant themes. First, enhanced self-confidence emerged as a consistent pattern, with most participants reporting that they felt more comfortable speaking English aloud in class settings. One learner remarked, "I feel more relaxed speaking in front of others because I know we are all practicing", reflecting the shared sense of ease fostered by the intervention activities. Second, there was a noticeable improvement in pronunciation awareness, as learners became increasingly conscious of problematic sounds in their speech and reported actively self-correcting during conversations. Finally, participants demonstrated a clear preference for affective support, favoring peer collaboration, self-paced tasks, and constructive, supportive feedback from instructors over traditional, often intimidating, correction methods.

The analysis revealed several critical insights. Pronunciation anxiety among EFL learners is primarily driven by factors such as fear of negative evaluation, unfamiliar phonetic patterns, and limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice. This anxiety negatively impacts oral performance, resulting in decreased fluency, accuracy, and classroom participation. However, classroom interventions that incorporate peer-led practice, self-recording activities, and real-time formative feedback were found to significantly reduce anxiety and improve learners' oral performance. Additionally, learners expressed a preference for affective support strategies and a low-anxiety learning environment, which aligns with

contemporary recommendations in EFL pedagogy. These findings substantiate the value of integrating affective support and collaborative practice activities into pronunciation instruction for EFL learners. The study's outcomes align with established research (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Baran-Lucarz, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) and offer actionable implications for language teachers and curriculum designers.

## V. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the causes of pronunciation anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, its impact on oral performance, and the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between anxiety and language learning, particularly in the domain of pronunciation, and offer practical implications for language instructors and curriculum designers. This discussion will interpret the results in light of existing literature, address the implications for teaching practice, and suggest areas for future research.

The analysis revealed that fear of negative evaluation, unfamiliarity with English phonetic patterns, and limited authentic speaking opportunities were the primary causes of pronunciation anxiety among EFL learners. These findings are consistent with previous research that identifies anxiety as a significant barrier to language learning, particularly in speaking (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Fear of negative evaluation, the most prominent anxiety trigger in this study, has been frequently cited in the literature as a central cause of language-related anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008). Learners in this study expressed heightened concerns about being judged by their peers and instructors for mispronunciations, which led to feelings of embarrassment and a reluctance to participate in speaking activities. This aligns with Kitano's (2001) findings that fear of judgment and criticism significantly impacts learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

The second cause, unfamiliarity with English phonetic patterns, also resonates with prior research, particularly studies by Derwing and Munro (2015), who found that phonetic challenges, such as unfamiliar sounds and stress patterns, are major contributors to pronunciation anxiety. EFL learners, especially those whose first language does not include similar phonetic features, often struggle with pronunciation, which increases their anxiety and reduces their oral proficiency. This was evident in the learners' reports of difficulties with specific sounds like /θ/, /ð/, and final consonant clusters.

Finally, the lack of authentic speaking opportunities in many EFL settings was identified as another key factor contributing to pronunciation anxiety. As pointed out by Liu and Jackson (2008), limited opportunities for real-world language use can increase learners' apprehension, as they feel unprepared for authentic interactions outside the classroom. In this study, learners expressed frustration with the artificial and controlled speaking environments they encountered in class, where they had few opportunities to practice pronunciation in spontaneous and real-life contexts.

As hypothesized, pronunciation anxiety had a significant negative impact on learners' oral performance. The quantitative data showed a strong negative correlation between anxiety and speaking performance, indicating that learners who reported higher levels of anxiety performed worse in oral tasks. This finding supports the work of Woodrow (2006) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who demonstrated that language anxiety leads to diminished oral proficiency, particularly in fluency, accuracy, and participation.

The qualitative analysis of interview data corroborated these findings, revealing that learners with higher anxiety levels often exhibited avoidance behaviors, reduced fluency, and compromised accuracy during speaking tasks. These learners frequently hesitated, used fillers, and produced overly simplified speech to avoid making mistakes. This phenomenon, identified in the literature as "avoidance behavior" (Young, 1991), was evident in many of the participants' accounts. Learners who were anxious about their pronunciation tended to limit their responses or speak in shorter, less complex sentences, which further hindered their ability to develop fluency and accuracy. Additionally, the inability to self-correct or adjust pronunciation during speech, due to anxiety, contributed to their reduced intelligibility, which has been a common finding in studies on language anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

One of the primary objectives of the study was to assess the effectiveness of targeted classroom interventions in reducing pronunciation anxiety and improving oral performance. The results of this study suggest that the interventions, which included peer-led workshops, self-recording activities, and real-time formative feedback, were successful in achieving these goals.

First, the Pronunciation Anxiety Scale results showed a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety levels after the intervention. This reduction in anxiety is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the positive effects of supportive, non-threatening classroom environments on reducing anxiety (Baran-Lucarz, 2014; Young, 1991). The peer-led workshops provided a low-pressure environment for learners to practice their pronunciation in a collaborative setting, which reduced the fear of judgment and allowed learners to support one another. As Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) note, peer interactions can serve as a powerful means of reducing anxiety by fostering a sense of solidarity and shared learning.

The self-recording activities were particularly beneficial for learners, as they allowed them to monitor their own speech and practice at their own pace. This method is supported by Saito (2013), who found that self-recording and reflection helped learners become more aware of their pronunciation and identify areas for improvement without the pressure of immediate feedback. Many learners reported that this form of self-assessment gave them more control over their learning and contributed to increased confidence in their pronunciation abilities.

The real-time formative feedback also played a crucial role in improving learners' oral performance. Learners appreciated the constructive, supportive feedback they received during speaking tasks, which allowed them to make adjustments and improve their pronunciation in real time. This finding aligns with MacIntyre and Gregersen's (2012) research on the effectiveness of immediate feedback in reducing language anxiety and improving pronunciation outcomes. Unlike traditional, summative correction methods, real-time feedback in this study was framed in a positive and encouraging manner, helping learners feel more confident and motivated to continue practicing.

Thematic analysis of post-intervention interviews revealed that learners were highly satisfied with the interventions and felt that they contributed to both their improved pronunciation and reduced anxiety. Learners consistently reported feeling more confident speaking English aloud, especially in peer-led settings where they could practice in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. This finding supports the growing body of research that highlights the importance of creating low-anxiety learning environments in language teaching (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Young, 1991).

Additionally, learners expressed an increased awareness of their pronunciation errors and reported engaging in self-correction more frequently. This suggests that the interventions not only reduced anxiety but also helped learners become more attuned to their own pronunciation challenges. The preference for affective support strategies—such as peer collaboration, self-paced tasks, and supportive instructor feedback—further reinforces the need for EFL teachers to incorporate affective factors into their teaching methods. As Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) and Derwing and Munro (2015) emphasize, addressing the emotional and psychological needs of language learners is crucial for promoting long-term pronunciation development.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL teaching practice. First, teachers should be mindful of the significant role that anxiety plays in language learning, particularly in pronunciation. By recognizing and addressing the emotional barriers that learners face, teachers can create a more supportive and effective learning environment. The use of affective support strategies, such as peer collaboration, self-recording, and formative feedback, should be integrated into pronunciation instruction to help reduce anxiety and build learners' confidence.

Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of providing authentic speaking opportunities in the classroom. Given that limited speaking practice in real-world contexts was identified as a major cause of anxiety, teachers should seek to create more opportunities for learners to engage in spontaneous, meaningful communication in English. This can be achieved through activities like role-plays, debates, and discussions that simulate real-life interactions and allow learners to practice pronunciation in a low-stakes environment.

While this study provides valuable insights into the causes and effects of pronunciation anxiety and the role of classroom interventions, several areas remain for future research. For example, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of these interventions on learners' pronunciation skills and anxiety levels beyond the 12-week period used in this study. Additionally, research exploring the impact of individual learner characteristics—such as personality, motivation, and language proficiency—on the effectiveness of anxiety-reducing interventions could provide a more nuanced understanding of how to tailor interventions for different learner profiles.

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