

## English speaking anxiety among English-major tertiary students in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The study explored the English-speaking anxiety of trainee teachers in the colleges of education in Ghana. It aimed at unravelling the causes of the speaking anxiety in the learners and proffering strategies to mitigate the causes of the speaking anxiety. For that purpose, qualitative data were collected from 30 English-major students who attend a college of education in the Western North region of Ghana using semi-structured interviews as the data collection instrument. The data were analyzed using inductive coding data analysis procedures and techniques, where the dominant patterns and themes emerging from the data were grouped and examined. The results showed that the major causes of speaking anxiety are inferiority complex, fear of committing mistakes, spontaneity and the lack of preparation, fear of negative evaluation from tutors and peers, limited knowledge and vocabulary in the language and self-criticism. The participants also indicated the strategies that can curb the problem, including creating a learner-friendly and less formal classroom environment, peer assessment, encouraging the use of more speaking activities in the classroom, positive evaluative feedback and resignation and avoidance. In line with these findings, the study recommended that future research could employ a quantitative approach to produce a more generalizable outcome.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the four macro language competencies [1], [2]. The other three are listening, reading, and writing [2]. In fact, speaking is argued to be the most important skill to master in language learning since it is extensively needed and used in all spheres of life, from the academic to the professional [3], [4]. Therefore, not surprising that, the focus of language teaching methods in the recent decades has gradually shifted to communicative language teaching (CLT), where the practice, use, speaking and communicative competence of language have become the major focus [5]. However, the teaching and learning of speaking skills is faced with the problem of speaking anxiety. According to Yasmin *et al.* [6], speaking anxiety is basically said to be the hesitation or the fear one feels when speaking a target language. It is the belief that one is not able to speak appropriately in the target language [7]. Indeed, speaking anxiety is generally argued to be the unpleasant emotions associated with the speaking of usually a second language

[8], [9]. In-class speaking anxiety, in this study, is considered to be the nervousness a student feels when asked to speak in the classroom, either in front of the colleagues in the form of oral presentation or responding to a question.

The most frequently cited English-speaking problem of English as a second language or known as ESL learners is speaking anxiety [2]. This justifies why speaking anxiety has probably become one of the most topical scholarly issues investigated in studies on the factors affecting the learning of second language [10]. Speaking anxiety is a major hurdle in students' language achievement and its debilitating effects on language acquisition should not be underestimated [6], [11]. In consonance, Zetterkvist [12] believed that speaking anxiety is able to prevent learners from attaining academic achievement and success in future professional contexts. Learners' academic achievements are negatively affected by speaking anxiety because learners who are terribly anxious are more likely to avoid active participation in classroom activities [13], [14]. Thus, it is recommended that language teachers and relevant stakeholders should be interested in learning more about the causes of speaking anxiety in students and the teaching methods and approaches that can help to, if not eliminate completely, reduce speaking anxiety among learners [15].

## 2. REVIEW OF EXISTING STUDIES ON SPEAKING ANXIETY

A review of existing studies on speaking anxiety confirms that language scholars have always found speaking anxiety an important issue in language learning. Hence, a considerable number of studies has been conducted, predominantly, to unravel the causes of speaking anxiety and proffer appropriate strategies to curb the problem [16], [17]. For instance, Hussein [13] surveyed, sampled, and discussed 25 journal articles on speaking anxiety published in the last decade. The research confirmed that the major subject prevalent in the body of research on speaking anxiety is the causes and solutions to speaking anxiety. Corroborating the outcomes of the 25 studies, Hussein [13] discovered that the major causes of English-speaking anxiety are the fear of negative evaluation, preparedness, audience familiarity, topic familiarity, cultural factors, teacher's influence, affective factors, test anxiety and personality factors. On the strategies to curb the problem, Hussein [13] discovered that adequate preparation, conducive classroom atmosphere, relaxation, role play and simulation are the major arguments of the 25 articles.

In addition, Kenoh's study [2] sought to unravel the causes of speaking and the solutions. The outcome of the qualitative study revealed that speaking anxiety is caused by nervousness, fear of committing mistakes, lack of preparation and high expectations from audience. The pre-service teachers who served as participants for the study talked about how they coped with speaking anxiety by mentioning preparation of outline, practicing before the speech event and self-confidence. In separate but similar studies [12], [18], [19] reiterated that communication apprehension, lack of motivation, fear of negative evaluation and negative self-conceptions are the major causes of speaking anxiety in ESL learners and admit that both teachers and learners should take part in contributing to eliminating speaking anxiety.

Regardless of the considerable number of studies on speaking anxiety, investigations into the speaking anxiety situation of the students in the college of education context of Ghana is minimal, if any. For instance, the study of Kankam and Boateng [20] focused on speech-related anxiety among communication students of a university in Ghana. Their study emphasized the role of lecturers in curbing speech anxiety among the communication students. Using questionnaire as the principal instrument and sampling 40 participants, the outcome of the study revealed that, even though the students are trained to become professional communicators (largely in English), their poor reading habits, obsession with pidgin language, overuse of the mother tongue or L1 and the fear of making mistakes are the major causes of English deficiency and anxiety.

In a similar study, Dansieh, Owusu, and Seidu [21] investigated English speaking anxiety among the students of Secretaryship and Management Studies in a Ghanaian university. Engaging 46 student participants, the study revealed that low self-confidence, lack of public speaking experiences, timidity, fear of making mistakes and inadequate preparation are the major causes of glossophobia (fear of public speaking). The study confirmed that speaking English language is a dreaded experience for the students. Also, a study by Lomotey [22] focused on Spanish speaking anxiety among Ghanaian undergraduate students and confirmed that majority of the learners had foreign language classroom anxiety. The study also revealed there was a close negative relationship between speaking anxiety and academic performance.

Despite the growing body of research on speaking anxiety, it is clear that speaking anxiety among college of education students remains a prominent concern. Knowledge on the prevailing English-speaking situation among teacher-trainees in Ghana is conspicuously limited due to the minimal focus of studies on such context. Hence, this study would fill the knowledge gap on speaking anxiety, from the perspective of undergraduate English-major trainee teachers in Ghana. This qualitative study purposes to examine the factors that cause in-class English speaking anxiety among the English-major teacher-trainees and reveals, from the perspective of the learners, the measures that they adopt or they think should be adopted to mitigate

their speaking anxiety. The outcome of the study will create awareness of both learners and teachers of the teaching and learning strategies to adopt in the English as a second language or L2 classroom [23]. To achieve its purpose, the study seeks to answer the following questions: i) What are the factors that cause English speaking anxiety among the college of education English-major students? and ii) What strategies can be adopted to overcome the English-speaking anxiety of the college of education English-major students?

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, to provide a comprehensive examination and description of the subjective experiences, opinions, feelings, and actions of the English-major students regarding their English language speaking anxiety, the descriptive qualitative approach is adopted [12], [24]. The participants for the study were the English major students of a college of education in the Western North region of Ghana. The participants were chosen from different levels. In all, 30 students, 10 each from second year (where specializations start) to final year, were engaged for the study. Each level has an average of 18 students; hence, selecting 10 from each class was considered ideal and representative of the population [25].

The sampling technique used for the selection of the participants was the purposive sampling technique. The participants were purposefully sampled because the researchers needed people who have sufficient information and experiences on the subject of English speaking-anxiety. Hence, teacher-trainees specializing in English Language who would later become professional English language teachers where speaking would be indispensable in their line of work come across as an ideal group for the project.

The data were obtained through a semi-structured interview adapted from previous studies [25], [26]. The semi-structured interview is used as the data collection instrument for the study consistent with the argument of several researchers [27], [28], that it gives researchers a better chance to investigate and obtain more details about a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants. Each interview lasted a period of 15-20 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the researchers themselves in line with Ibrahim and Hamad's argument [28] that researchers have better understanding of their own work and the goals of their project; hence, they are better placed to conduct interviews and solicit data in a manner that falls perfectly in line with the research objectives.

All the four researchers all English language lecturers in various tertiary institutions in Ghana, with a minimum qualification of research master's degree in English and Linguistics. Also, all of them are currently PhD candidates in the language. Their experiences in English language both as lecturers and students became useful in structuring the questions and soliciting the data the interview questions (semi-structured interview questions): i) What made you decide to pursue English language as a specialty?; ii) Which of the language skills do you find challenging?; iii) How often do you use speaking in your line of studies?; iv) How important is English to your studies and work?; v) Do you encounter problems speaking English, what are some of these problems?; vi) Do you feel anxious when speaking your native language?; vii) Do you feel anxious when speaking English/second language?; viii) How significant is speaking anxiety a problem to your language learning; ix) How is speaking in your language different from speaking a second language?; x) What personal strategies have you put in place in mitigate your speaking anxiety?; and xi) What do you think should the school or your teachers do to help you overcome your speaking anxiety?

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis [20], [24], [29]. By this, the interview data were interpreted through inductive coding data analysis procedures and techniques [15]. Relevant excerpts of the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed after the entire tape had undergone several listening sessions. Later, initial codes were generated based on the research questions. As the researchers continued to immerse themselves in the data and review the codes, more general labels and sub-labels were generated. With this, the themes were named, described, and used to explain the phenomenon under investigation, which is the causes of English-speaking anxiety in the classroom and the strategies to mitigate it [24].

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, answers to the two research questions are presented and discussed. The section is divided into two sub-sections, in correspondence with the two research questions. The first sub-section, which responds to the research question 1, examines the causes of the speaking anxiety among the learners and the second sub-section, which responds to the research question 2, examines the strategies that could best be adopted to overcome the anxiety problem in learners. The answers to the research questions are based on the analysis of the data that were collected from the interview. The responses to the questions are presented and discussed in the form of themes developed from the data and each theme is supported with relevant excerpts and transcriptions of the interview.

#### 4.1. Research question 1: What are the factors that cause English speaking anxiety among the college of education English-major students?

This section presents the findings on the factors that are responsible for the English language speaking anxiety. These findings are grouped and categorized into six thematic areas. The six thematic areas are: i) Inferiority complex and nervousness; ii) Fear of committing mistakes; iii) Spontaneity and lack of preparation and practice; iv) Fear of negative evaluation and feedback; v) Limited knowledge and vocabulary; as well as vi) Perfectionism and self-criticism.

##### 4.1.1. Inferiority complex and nervousness

Inferiority complex and nervousness are major causes of speaking anxiety in learners [30]. Consistent with previous study [30], the data reveal that some of the students have speaking anxiety due to the feeling of unworthiness or inferiority in the classroom. In their minds, some students believe that their colleagues are 'better' than them; hence, when it comes to the speaking and fluency in English, such 'better' colleagues are the 'appropriate' people to engage. Such students who feel inferior in the classroom would ordinarily dissociate themselves from activities that would require speaking and fluency in English. Such students would usually take the backstage during group presentations and allow the 'better' colleagues to make group presentations in the classroom. A student remarked:

*“As for me, I know I'm not good in English so I don't worry myself speaking it. I always allow my colleagues who are better speakers to speak.” (P7)*

Another student opined:

*“I always run from group presentations. I allow the 'good' students to be group leaders and make presentations on behalf of the group.” (P15)*

It is clear from the positions of the students that they believe some of their colleagues are 'better' speakers than them. Due to that, they are not comfortable taking the front stage in speaking or using English. The data further reveals why some students feel inferior. There were two factors came out prominently: first, results from the basic education certificate examination (BECE); and second, social status of one's home. It is realized that students who obtained poor grades in the BECE usually feel inferior to their colleagues who obtained good grades.

Basic education certificate examination is the examination written by all final year basic school students in the country based on which results the students are posted to the various senior high schools of the country. While aggregate 6 is considered the best result, aggregate 30 and above are considered average to poor. Hence, a student who obtains, for example, aggregate 35 feels inferior to a colleague who obtains aggregate 8. Secondly, students who come from poor homes or backgrounds feel inferior to those from rich homes. In fact, some of the 'rich' students, sometimes, support their 'poor' colleagues in terms of food, books, footwear, and other materials. Such rich students are therefore naturally seen as leaders and usually take the center stage in the speaking of English while the poor one's coil back.

##### 4.1.2. Fear of committing mistakes

The data reveal that the fear of committing mistakes is one of the causes of speaking anxiety among learners. This finding is consistent with the argument of Batiha, Noor, and Mustaffa [31] who believed that the fear of committing mistakes is the primary or major cause of speaking anxiety. Similarly, Hussein [13] contended that adult learners (such as high school students) are often concerned about 'losing face' upon the wrong use of the language; hence, could have some speaking anxiety. Some of the participants emphasized that:

*“English is not my native language so I know errors are bound to occur when I'm speaking it. To avoid committing mistakes and losing my little respect in class, I avoid speaking it.” (P24)*

Indeed, Hashempour and Aida [32] argued that when learners commit mistakes in speaking, the negative emotions that come with the mistake such as shame, tension and embarrassment often deter them from speaking. A participant shares his story of the fear of mistakes.

*“English has many rules, which I have not been able to gain sufficient mastery over them. It is obvious that when I attempt speaking it, I will commit several mistakes which will affect my self-confidence. Due to this, I feel uncomfortable anytime I have to speak English.” (P11)*

It is indicative from the responses of the participants that, they are conscious of the complexities of a non-native language. Hence, some more meticulousness is required if one can speak the language with perfection. The respondents explain that English has several grammatical rules which need to be complied with. The structure, sentence patterns, paragraph formation, spellings, punctuations, and several other aspects of the language are governed by important conventions which any user of the language should learn [33]. The participants admit that they have not fully absorbed all the rules, so they are bound to make mistakes and to avoid these mistakes, they abstain from speaking.

#### 4.1.3. Spontaneity and lack of preparation and practice

Speaking anxiety is caused by the lack of preparation [2]. The data reveal that when a speaker has not conditioned himself or his/her mind and made sufficient preparations about a subject matter, they become 'afraid' and uncomfortable to speak. A participant had this to say:

*“Sometimes, teachers come to class and call a student to make an impromptu presentation on a given topic in class. Such situations create speaker anxiety.”* (P6)

Usually, adequate preparations and broad consultations are needed before one can master a particular subject [2]. When people have sufficient resource on their hands, they are able to speak and discuss issues with confidence knowing very well that their facts and figures are intact. As part of preparation, practice is equally important. It is one thing to have knowledge about a subject and another thing to speak or present it skillfully to the understanding of an intended audience. It is possible for one to have sufficient knowledge about an issue and still not be able to articulate it well [34]. This is where practice becomes important. A participant commented that:

*“Regular practice makes one better at something. In our classroom, speaking practice is a limited activity. It is not often done. Hence, learners are supposed to practice it among themselves in their own private spaces. The absence of regular and supervised practice makes it difficult for us to speak the English language comfortably.”* (P1)

#### 4.1.4. Fear of negative evaluation and feedback

Evaluation and feedback are important to teaching and learning [35]. The form and manner in which feedback is given learners on their learning outputs have impacts on the overall teaching and learning process. For instance, a more learner-friendly evaluation and feedback most likely would encourage a learner to be forthcoming and confidently speak or share their ideas on issues while hostile feedback could discourage learners [36]. It is revealed in the data that, the learners' fear of negative evaluation or feedback from their teachers or colleague learners breed speaking anxiety. A respondent emphasized:

*“My language teacher usually verbally attacks speakers who give incorrect responses to questions. This attitude has instilled fear in us; hence, we are unable to comfortably speak in class.”* (P8)

In the study of Jomaa and Jupri [37], it is confirmed that when teachers are hostile towards the learners and create an unfriendly speaking environment for them, the learners are bound to develop speaking anxiety. In the previous excerpt, the respondent indicate that the teacher gives negative feedback, so they are discouraged from speaking 'freely' in the classroom. Another respondent blames her colleagues:

*“My colleagues are fond of mocking anyone who speaks boldly in class. They tag you as ‘too knowing’ and make you feel speaking boldly is a show off. This stifles initiative and makes everyone ‘avoid’ speaking.”* (P26)

This finding in the data is consistent with the findings of Sadighi and Dastpak [38] whose study conducted with Iranian English learners revealed that learners often develop speaking anxiety and get uncomfortable speaking or making a presentation in the classroom due to the possible negative feedback from their colleagues. Similarly, Rahmat *et al.* [39] contend that learners could also develop speaking anxiety when their colleagues tease, mock or laugh at them.

#### 4.1.5. Limited knowledge and vocabulary

According to Misbah *et al.* [40], lack of vocabulary can cause speaking anxiety in learners. Language is made up of words and lexical items. The number of words one possesses and the ability to use

the appropriate words in the right contexts contribute to the competence and fluency in the language [41]. A learner who possesses more vocabulary and has command over the use of language is more likely to be fluent in it than the learner with limited vocabulary. A participant indicated:

*“For me, I don’t have a lot of vocabulary. Anytime I speak two or three sentences, my mind goes blank. I don’t get new words to express my thoughts. Due to this, I always get jittery anytime I am asked to make a lengthy oral presentation.”* (P19)

Alrabai [42] believes that, sometimes, it is not as if the learners do not possess sufficient vocabulary, rather, they ‘forget’ the right vocabulary to use in the right context. Another participant who acknowledged having limited knowledge in English language opined:

*“I didn’t grow up in an environment where English was used frequently. In my home, the native language was the dominant language. Even in my former school, that is, the basic school, the native language was used very often. In fact, using and speaking English often made one odd in the village. My knowledge in English, especially the rules of grammar, is very limited. Therefore, speaking anxiety often sets in anytime I am called to speak.”* (P23)

It is clear from the excerpt that the participants grew up in the village and that context has some bearing on his competence in English. Agroda [41] contend that learners from low-income backgrounds often do not use English well. From the two excerpts, it is obvious that speaking anxiety could be caused by one’s lack of knowledge and vocabulary in the English language. Vocabulary serves as one of the backbones of every language [43]. The more one’s vocabulary and knowledge in the language, the more he/she is likely to speak with confidence.

#### **4.1.6. Perfectionism and self-criticism**

According to Tekir [15], some learners are generally too hard on themselves. They set high standards for themselves and strive, sometimes beyond what their mental and physical strengths could take them, to achieve the high standards. In their attempt at measuring themselves against high (and sometimes, impossible standards, they end up developing speaking anxiety. Consistent with the finding by Tekir [15], the data for the current study reveal that some of the learners are perfectionist. In their estimation, they must be able to speak a ‘perfect’ L2 or completely avoid speaking. They do not want to make little efforts and gradual progression to perfection. A participant insinuated:

*“It feels offensive to speak poor English. It’s either one must speak a perfect English or shut up. Some of my colleagues are interesting. Even though, they are not good with English, they always want to talk in class. That behavior turns me off.”* (P4)

Similarly, some of the learners measure their abilities in other subject areas and think they must perform equally well in English too. A student who performs very well in mathematics and social studies but does poorly in English had this to say:

*“I perform excellently in Mathematics and Social Studies. In most of the assessments in these subject areas, I usually score grade A. However, with English language, I do not perform well at all. I do not understand. I believe my excellent performance in the other subjects should reflect in English too. This situation affects me a lot, hence, I do not feel comfortable speaking English in and out of class.”* (P12)

It can be observed that, in this section, an attempt has been made to unravel the causes of English-speaking anxiety among the English-major students of the college of education. Excerpts of the data collected from the semi-structured interview are provided to support and give some more clarity to the various causes of speaking anxiety from the perspective of the students.

According to the students, the major causes of speaking anxiety are inferiority complex, fear of committing mistakes, spontaneity and the lack of preparation, fear of negative evaluation from tutors and peers, limited knowledge and vocabulary in the language and self-criticism [2], [13], [15], [32], [35], [38]. This study did not only seek to investigate the problem of speaking anxiety, it also sought to investigate the strategies that are adopted to combat the problem. In the next sub-section, the solutions to the problem are discussed in response to research question 2. Similar to this section, relevant excerpts from the data are quoted to corroborate the major points or themes.

#### 4.2. Research question 2: What strategies can be adopted to overcome the English speaking anxiety of the college of education English-major students?

To overcome speaking anxiety, the respondents made suggestions on different strategies, measures, and techniques that they believe would help to reduce their anxiety in speaking the English language. Soliciting the solutions from the participants themselves is in tandem with the argument that, oftentimes, the best person to suggest solutions to their problems is the one who is personally experiencing or undergoing the problem [24]. It is deemed that such persons have first-hand experience and knowledge about the challenge, have a better understanding of themselves and, hence, can proffer ideas that can help to mitigate their challenges. Engaging the participants, five strategies were thematically identified in the data.

First, the participants indicated that, if the language classroom is rendered more learner-friendly and less formal, their speaking anxiety will be allayed. Student-centered approach to teaching and learning and the creation of a conducive learning atmosphere where learners are able to participate, contribute and engage in teaching and learning activities without any fear of intimidation is essential to building confidence in the learners which could translate into learners' ability to speak confidently [13]. A participant recounted:

*“A student-friendly learning environment, where mistakes are not overemphasized, harnesses our speaking ability. However, when the language classroom is not conducive and the atmosphere is too tensed, speaking anxiety is enhanced.”* (P25)

Similarly, the respondents argue that a strict 'formal' classroom atmosphere intensifies their speaking anxiety. Obviously, creating a conducive learning environment includes making the classroom atmosphere seem less formal. In fact, Tanveer [44] contends that making the language classroom environment more pleasant and less formal is the most general idea to reduce speaking anxiety among learners. In this respect, a respondent indicated:

*“Some teachers are too formal. They are not friendly. They come to the classroom with straight face and composure. No room is created for learners to have their way with language. The only times learners are invited to speak is when they are to respond strictly to a specific question. This discourages us from speaking freely and confidently.”* (P22)

Second, the participants opined that peer assessment goes a long way to reduce their speaking anxiety. By this, learners make oral presentations and engage in speaking activities with and in front of the colleagues who are to act as a check on them. Peer-learning has always proved to be an effective way of learning [45]. Students are, usually, more confident in front of their peers. The colleagues who serve as a check are also, usually, less formal, and more friendly in their corrective feedback. This kind of learning activity empowers students who otherwise would not speak in class for fear of the 'authority' of the teacher. In a peer assessment system, learners are able to question why their peers have assessed and scored in the manner they have done and solicit further explanations on what went wrong and what could be done rightly. The audacity to make such bold enquiries might be reduced when dealing with the teacher. A participant explained:

*“I would rather a colleague assesses my oral presentations and brings out areas for corrections. With my colleague, I am able to freely ask questions about what informs their assessment and what must be done rightly going forward. I am even able to, sometimes, challenge the score of a peer. However, if the assessor is an 'authority', it gets difficult asking questions and challenging the outcome.”* (P8)

The participants also indicated that peer assessment goes beyond the classroom. Sometimes, peer assessment is done during private studies. In their private studies, the learners put themselves into groups and take turns to make oral presentations in front of the group. After such presentations, their peers assess and give corrective feedback. Some of the participants admit that this strategy has helped them to overcome their speaking anxiety. A participant emphasized:

*“I have a study group and we normally meet in the evenings during preps time to study together. As part of our learning activities, members are invited to make oral presentations in turns and they are assessed. This practice has really helped to reduce my speaking anxiety significantly.”* (P16)

Third, the participants equally elaborated that the language teacher should encourage and use more speaking activities while reducing negative evaluative feedback. One of the causes of speaking anxiety, as exposed in the response to research question one, is negative evaluative feedback [46]. The respondents believe that practice makes perfect. The more one is allowed to practice a skill, the more he/she is likely to grow perfection in it. Therefore, in order for learners to grow more confident in the second language and speak it well, the teacher has to engage them in regular speaking activities in the classroom.

In essence, classroom activities should be dominated by speaking exercises. The language teacher should adopt more practical activities in the classroom that inherently requires a lot of speaking. This finding is consistent with the finding of [40] who argue that practical speaking activities such as role play, or dramatization and simulation activities are able to help the students sharpen their speaking skills. One participant stated that:

*“I believe that practice makes perfect. Therefore, speaking confidence may be built better if students are allowed to engage in a lot of speaking activities.”* (P30)

Another participant, in concurrence with the previous assertion, indicated that:

*“We need more role play and dramatization activities. This will help us to engage in speaking activities and the more we are allowed to engage in such speaking activities, the lesser the tendency of speaking anxiety.”* (P2)

Fourth, positive evaluative feedback is attested in the data as one of the strategies that can reduce the problem of speaking anxiety in learners. It could be recalled that, one of the causes of speaking anxiety, revealed in the data in response to research question one, is negative evaluative feedback [39]. Obviously, when feedbacks are negative, learners are discouraged from speaking. Some of these negative evaluative feedback could be insults, verbal abuse, physical abuse and punishments. When feedbacks are not negative but rather, encouraging while being corrective, the learners are able to speak comfortably without any fear of being subjected to any punishment. A participant said that:

*“Teachers should not punish us when we speak wrongly or mispronounce words. They must understand that we are learning, hence, corrections are more important to us than punishments. The more we are punished, the less we feel comfortable speaking.”* (P14)

Another participant argues that, not only teachers can give positive corrective feedback. Their colleague students are also expected to refrain from teasing, mocking and emotionally abusing them for committing mistakes. These are all forms of negative evaluative feedback. The respondents opined that:

*“Learners’ speaking anxiety can also be reduced if our own colleagues refrain from mocking and teasing fellows who commit mistakes while speaking. Such practice heightens the learners’ speaking anxiety.”* (P3)

The fifth and final strategy for combating speaking anxiety is resignation and avoidance [13]. Even though language scholars argue that resignation and avoidance are not ideal strategies for combating speaking anxiety, the fact cannot be discounted that students find them as good strategies to mitigate speaking anxiety. According to Hussein [13], resignation and avoidance are characterized by a learner’s hesitance to take concrete steps to ameliorate their language anxiety. Some of these resignation and avoidance strategies are being quiet in the language classroom, not participating in class activities, giving up, sleeping in class, and declining invitations to respond to questions [13]. Some of the participants insinuated:

*“I always avoid speaking in class. I made a class presentation some time ago and the amount of negative feedback I received from the teacher and my colleagues has actually discouraged me from speaking in class. I turn my face away anytime a teacher looks my direction. Sometimes too, I act as if I don’t know the answer to a question asked.”* (P27)

*“I am naturally an introvert. I feel shy speaking in the presence of many people. Due to this, I avoid speaking in class. I do this by, often, either sleeping in class or decline invitations to respond to questions. During class presentations too, I shy away from being the presenter.”* (P19)

In sum, it can be observed that, in this section, an attempt has been made to examine the strategies or factors that could mitigate the problem of English-speaking anxiety among the English-major students of the college of education. Relevant excerpts of the data collected from the semi-structured interview are provided



to support and give some more clarity to the various strategies of combating speaking anxiety from the perspective of the students. According to the students, the strategies include creating a learner-friendly and less formal classroom environment, peer assessment, encouraging the use of more speaking activities in the classroom, positive evaluative feedback and resignation and avoidance [13], [39], [44]–[46].

## 5. CONCLUSION

It must be underscored that (English) speaking anxiety remains one of the most important issues in language teaching and learning in a non-native context like Ghana. This study dealt with the causes of in-class English speaking anxiety among trainee teachers in the college of education in Ghana, using a college in the Western North region as the case study. It also examined the strategies that can be adopted to combat the complex phenomenon of speaking anxiety. Data were collected from 30 English-major students through interviews. The results revealed that some of the causes of speaking anxiety among Ghanaian tertiary students are inferiority complex, fear of committing mistakes, spontaneity and the lack of preparation, fear of negative evaluation from tutors and peers, limited knowledge and vocabulary in the language and self-criticism.

To extend beyond just unravelling the problem, the study also delved into the practical strategies to mitigate the speaking anxiety problem. From the perspective of the learners, some of the strategies include creating a learner-friendly and less formal classroom environment, peer assessment, encouraging the use of more speaking activities in the classroom, positive evaluative feedback and resignation and avoidance. The findings of the study expect to contribute to the understanding of the complex phenomenon of speaking anxiety and provide some useful insights into how English language students and teachers in Ghana, and in similar contexts globally, could effectively handle the problem.

It must be emphasized, however, that, the empirical results presented in the study should be considered in light of some limitations. The responses that are provided the research questions are based on the data gathered through the interview method from only the college of education students specializing in English language. For further and future studies, it is suggested that data should be collected from the language teachers as well, and probably, a comparative analysis of the views of the students and the teachers be done. In addition, different data collection instruments such as questionnaire, observations, documents, and reflective journals could be employed to provide a more diversified data. A future study could also adopt a quantitative approach or a mixed method approach to generate a more generalizable outcome.





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