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Overcoming Speech Anxiety in the Classroom

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Abstract

Speech anxiety is an issue that persists and presents itself innumerably in schools, especially affecting students who learning English either as their second language or as a foreign language. Speaking anxiety may stem from different sources and affect each individual student differently.

The research question that is key to this research is “How can teachers support students who are struggling with speech anxiety?”

The research for this thesis has been done through the use a qualitative interview with two secondary school teachers in Lund. The interview was structured after a semi-structured style to allow for guided questions and openness of any unexpected questions and answers during the interview process.

The results of this research is that that tackling speaking anxiety in the classroom is no easy feat, although, from the literature and interview content it has been made clear that for a teacher to be successful in supporting their students, being prepared for possible difficulties, composed for sudden changes to lesson plans, and ready to adapt assignments where speaking is involved in order to allow students to be most comfortable and given their utmost honest performance while speaking in front of others.

Key words: ESL, face-to-face, web-based speaking, gender differences, performance VS interaction anxiety, positive thinking, NEST, non-NEST, Speaking anxiety, ESL, gender, performance, interaction, native English speaker
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Introduction

Non-native speakers learn English through different means: dialogue, written language, and listening to others speak. One of these means can prove to be more challenging and even hinder development of a learner’s way of communication, namely, spoken English. Specifically, speaking in front of a group of people, also known as public speaking. This issue may arise amongst students in the process of preparing a presentation or a speech, and realizing that they experience anxiety or do not possess enough confidence with their level of spoken English. This in turn can lead to few students exhibiting a tendency to avoid public speaking in any form, or require certain measures and situational control (audience size, speech duration, subject matter) in order to actually speak about a certain subject in front of a group.

The purpose of this research is to investigate why native students of English may experience anxiety with public speaking in the classroom, specifically, what hinders their English-speaking skills during individual presentations. More importantly, investigating how teachers experience speech anxiety in the classroom, and their thoughts about working with speech anxiety.

According to Skolverket (Swedish curriculum) in regards to students striving and performing their best, along with difficulties of speaking anxiety, it states that teachers should overall (throughout the school) “base their work each individual student’s needs, prerequisites, experiences, and thinking” (Skolverket, 2011), “strengthen each student’s self-confidence as well as a will and ability to learn” (Skolverket, 2011). Within the subject of English (within the course English 5), in ‘Production and Interaction’ - which deals with communication and interaction (i.e. speaking and presenting), the content of this should contain “oral and written production and interactions of different types, including formal contexts, where students instruct, tells, summarizes, explains, comments, evaluate, motivate their views, discuss, and argue” (Skolverket, 2011). As well as “processing of their own, others oral and written requests to be able to have variety, clarification, precision, as well as create structure and adapt towards purpose and situation” (Skolverket, 2011). This relates to how teachers interpret speaking anxiety, and how they address it in their teaching.
Previous studies on speaking English in front of others has been researched before and even clarifies new questions and perspectives within the subject. Elmenfi & Gaibani (2016) provide research into the effect of social evaluation of public speaking anxiety of English foreign language learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University in Libya. Their research explains how ‘Public Speaking Anxiety’ (PSA) has become a widespread negative phenomenon amongst EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students within higher-level education environments, which may lead to future decline of adequate English level proficiency. This negative phenomenon, as explained by Elmenfi & Gaibani (2016), leads to a decline in attendance and participation of students during oral presentations or group discussions, while others who attend these oral events instead avoid speaking, or fail to establish connections with their colleagues. Elmenfi & Gaibani (2016) further explain that the emotional and mental state of anxiety plays a key role in preventing students from experiencing positive oral situations, or on a lower scale, speaking in public forums.

Further research on public speaking and anxiety has also been investigated by Yaikhong & Usaha, who focused on contributing a “Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS)”. Their study (taking place in the Thai school system) focused on finding out the level of anxiety in an EFL classroom. Their study explains why several students show traits of agitation when asked to speak in a foreign language, in EFL pedagogical situations (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). Since it is very strenuous for Thai learners to use English fluently, it has become vital to tackle speaking skills, and therefore they have become a vital part of the Thai EFL teaching and learning process (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). They finally noted, “foreign language classroom anxiety has been proven to affect EFL learners’ language performance depending on each individual’s anxiety level in different learning situations” (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). Their study also includes seven aspects that can be used when exploring both levels and factors of anxiety, that have an impact on students studying verbal discourse in English. The aspects included in their study are “English for communication subject; speaking anxiety: listening anxiety; reading anxiety; writing anxiety; teaching-learning anxiety, and teaching media and evaluation anxiety” (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). For this thesis research, focus will only be on speaking anxiety.
Aim and Research Questions
The purpose of this thesis is to look into different areas that are related to spoken English in the classroom: public speaking, language confidence, and anxiety/stress. Additionally, how teachers can support students experiencing speaking anxiety in their classroom.

The research questions are as follows:

Research Questions:
1. What factors do practicing teachers identify as contributing to speaking anxiety in the Swedish English classroom?
2. How can teachers support students who are struggling with speech anxiety?
1. Concepts and Theoretical Framing

Within the genre of public speaking exists numerous factors affecting the speaker either in a positive or negative manner, although the negative, also known as speaking anxiety, may plague a speaker from their early days of speaking in front of others. Speaking anxiety may stem from one, or several different factors, which may further affect the speaker negatively at the early stages of speaking in front of others, namely, secondary school or even earlier.

In the following section, different causes for speaking anxiety i.e. causes for anxiety, non-English and English speaking teachers, gender, grade level and age, positive thinking, face-to-face and web-based speaking are investigated as to how large of an effect each factor may have on a student.

1.1 Causes of Speaking Anxiety

When examining the causes of anxiety in the field of speaking in front of other individuals, it is important to distinguish the difference of anxiety of speaking in front of a group of individuals, or interacting within a group. These two distinctions are labeled by Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly (2013) as performance anxiety (PA) and interaction anxiety (IA), where performance anxiety is described as “anxiety while being observed or scrutinized by others” (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly, 2013). And interaction anxiety is “anxiety during dyadic and group interactions” (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly, 2013). These two concepts are distinct from each other, though related within the dimensions of social anxiety (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly, 2013).

Moreover, several theorists have suggested that performance anxiety and interaction anxiety are connected to underlying phobias, specific social phobia (SSP) and generalized social phobia (GSP). In support of this supposed correspondence between PA and IA, along with SSP and GSP, performance anxiety appears to elicit several symptoms of panic disorder and other fear disorders (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly 2013). For interaction anxiety, the concept is seen to have a close association to depression in comparison to performance anxiety (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly, 2013), while generalized social phobia show higher levels of distress among individuals compared to specific social phobia (Hook, Valentiner, & Connelly, 2013).
1.2 Non-English and English Speaking Teachers

When looking at speaking anxiety in students at secondary school (and even lower grades), it is vital to consider whether the employed teacher “is a native English-speaking teacher (NEST), or a non-native English-speaking teacher (non-NEST)” working at various English language teaching (ELT) positions in a school, as researched by Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahan (2016), as this may influence students in the classroom. Their study examined the possible impact of the difference of NEST’s and non-NEST’s on students’ foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) (Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahan, 2016), and how both parties (teachers and students) felt about FLSA.

The results were divided into two sections: students’ experience of FLSA, NEST’s and non-NEST’s, and teachers’ views on FLSA. Firstly, the results from Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahah’s (2016) study illustrated three core themes in regards to students experiencing FLSA: difficulty with English, fear of making mistakes (as these could cause reactions i.e. teaching pointing out errors and fellow students teasing) and teachers attitudes in the classroom which originated from students believing that a teacher’s negative attitude towards producing mistakes created a sense of demotivation for students (Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahan, 2016).

From a teacher’s perspective, one of the main causes of FLSA is making mistakes (Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahah, 2016), noting that some students’ low level of language proficiency aggravated their fear of making mistakes when speaking. Additionally, a native English-speaking teacher noticed that students who initially were agitated and nervous when speaking to a native speaker, gained confidence over time as the level of comfort in the classroom increased (Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahah 2016).

In regard to whether there was a difference of impact between NEST’s and non-NEST’s, Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahah’s (2016) results indicate that there was “no significant difference between students’ attitudes towards FLSA they experienced in classes taught by NEST’s and non-NEST’s.”

1.3 Gender

Gender is a vital discussion within the school context, as to determine if there is a difference of possible results between the two genders, and if any action can be taken
for teachers to be more prepared for any possible disparities. In regard to “foreign language speaking anxiety and motivation”, Özturk and Gürbüz (2012) research focused on possible differences between female and male students. By determining any possible discrepancies between the genders, in regards to speaking in front of others, teachers can implement suitable guide and direction to aid male and female students.

Özturk and Gürbüz (2012) reference Krashen (1982) who explains how language is seen as a significant emotional factor of the foreign language learning process. In addition, Krashen’s (1982) study shows how anxiety can impede the process of learning and acquiring a language. Özturk and Gürbüz (2012) further explain that previous research (Horowitz and Cope 1986) has treated foreign language anxiety as separate and distinct experience to language learning.

The question that Özturk and Gürbüz raise is whether gender is a prominent factor in language learning. The results of Özturk and Gürbüz’s (2012) research show that female students demonstrated higher levels of motivation compared to male students. Additionally, female students, according to Özturk and Gürbüz’s (2012) results, experienced more anxiety speaking English, and more worry and anxiety speaking English in the classroom environment. Thereby, gender can play a role within the classroom environment, as Özturk and Gürbüz’s (2012) results show, female students may appear more confident than in foreign language speaking, yet may have a downfall resulting from more anxiety than male students when speaking English in the classroom.

1.4 Grades, Ages and Gender Disparities
Another important factor when researching speaking anxiety amongst students is to investigate whether this issue exists and potentially persists between different grades, ages, and even gender. Research was carried out by Tugce Mestan (2017), who researched possible speaking anxiety across grades, age groups, as well as the gender of the EFL students.
Mestan (2017) explains that the foundation to their research (language learning) stems from numerous studies pointing at anxiety as the culprit of negative repercussions on language learners’ production and reception skills, as well as the level of anxiety developing as language learners proceed with unrehearsed oral speaking in public. Mestan’s (2017) research led to results explaining that students whose speaking anxiety was due to their self-deprecation, and fear of making a mistake while speaking in front of each other.

In regard to if there exists a discrepancy between speaking anxiety and grade level, Mestan’s (2017) research showed that speaking anxiety increased according to the grade students where in. Furthermore, previous studies (Zhiping, 2013) argued that the fear of being in public, shyness, and fear of speaking inaccurately affected students in a negative way, effectively hampering their oral speaking skills.

1.5 Positive Thinking

Another study that researches on performance in front of others look into whether positive thinking in anticipation of a performance situation is better itself in contrast to distraction. Such research can be adapted onto different fields of research, such as the field of speaking anxiety and the performance that takes place.

Vassilopoulos, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, and Tziouma (2017) research focused on understanding how various cognitive coping strategies in response to stress affect social anxiety in young adolescents, and how it could shape intervention strategies for students who experience difficulties with managing anxious feelings related to an impending performance situation.

The results from Vassilopoulos, et. al. (2017) displayed several outcomes. Firstly, that social anxiety was associated with more negative prediction of personal appearance pessimistic thoughts in relation to an oncoming performance. Secondly, relating to distraction, positive anticipatory thinking led to an elevated state of anxiety with more pessimistic thoughts and predictions of personal appearance (Vassilopoulos, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, & Tziouma, 2017).
1.6 Face-to-Face and Web-based Speaking

Alternative discussion to be presented within the field of public speaking and related anxieties is the comparison of face-to-face and web-based speeches and possible discrepancies between these two speaking methods. Research by Campbell and Larsson (2013) investigated whether or not students inhibit different levels of anxiety between giving a speech to a group of people face-to-face in a classroom setting, to a speech given to an audience (on a projected screen) into a camera with web-based technology.

The results showed that near half of the students in the study experienced more anxiety when giving a speech face-to-face in a classroom setting, and that a little over a third of the students experienced more anxiety in web-based speech setting (Campbell & Larsson 2013). Such results presented by Campbell and Larsson allows for further research and studies to investigate whether using face-to-face or web-based speeches in a classroom setting can give different results by students, along with how they fare with any presented symptoms of anxiety from speaking.
2. Method
Initially, I will consider literature and research that focuses on speaking issues within the English language amongst non-English speaking students. With this literature I will also conduct interviews with two secondary-school teachers, investigating their experiences with speaking anxiety in their classrooms, as well as their possible solutions to speaking anxiety issues with students. Additionally, I will investigate the kind of issues that students exhibit in regard to speaking in different situations, and what research has concluded in what schools and educators can do in order to improve on speaking skills of students. This secondary research would provide explanation for the possible anxiety and stress that student’s experience in relation to speaking in different forums at school, and how these factors can hinder their English-speaking skills. Lastly, I will focus on research literature that discusses the solutions provided by educators and teachers on how to combat such issues in the classroom, and how to build confidence with public speaking amongst students.

Participants
The participants chosen for the interview section for this work both worked at a secondary school in Lund, and both have worked at the same school for the past few years. Both participants had English as a common subject, although participant A taught religion as their secondary subject, and participant B taught philosophy.

Method Choice Conducting Research
I then continue on with my investigation with the method of interviewing teachers in regard to how they experience public speaking. The interviews will focus on experience, which will then delve into how firstly teachers experience students with reluctance to public speaking, and their ways of combating this reluctance. Finally, the experience of students would look into their mindset in regard to speaking publicly, how anxious or stressed they may be, and if other factors may influence their reactions to public speaking in English.
These method approaches will stem from Alvehus *Skriva uppsats med kvalitativ metod* and Brymans *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* and their research into investigating and researching content for a thesis. Alvehus (2013) and Bryman (2011)
explain as to how different approaches into research can be done, along with how and why different methods are performed in different manners.

**Choosing a Qualitative Research Method**

Furthermore, the interview styles I will adopt when interviewing will the “formal interview” method, as described in *Doing Qualitative Research In Education Settings* by Hatch (2002), as the interview will be both ‘structured’ and ‘semi-structured’. The sense of structure will stem from me, the interviewer, leading the interview, planning it, recording it, and have leading questions (Hatch, 2007). The sense of semi-structure comes from any scenario that arises during the interview, outside of the guiding questions, that allows for following the leads of the participant and areas that I may want to probe further in with unprepared questions (Hatch, 2007). Along with having a formal interview style, my interview will also inhibit a ‘standardized interview’, in which the interview itself will “contain predetermined questions, asked in the same order, using the same words, to all informants” (Hatch, 2007).

For the method section for this research, a qualitative interview was conducted as to obtain first hand information and experience pertaining to how students at secondary level of school experience speaking and the possible connected anxieties that come with this action. By utilizing the method of a qualitative interview, my aim is to gather information from experienced and knowledgeable teachers who have witnessed first-hand instances of students speaking at different forums, the difficulties that can surface during such moments.

For the interview section of this research, I contacted two teachers to whom I had been assigned to during my internship with my education, and both obliged to the interview offer. Both teachers are of Swedish descent and have taught English for several years as one of their secondary level subjects. Other subject’s that the two-interviewed teachers teach are either religion or philosophy.

**Implementing a Qualitative Interview**

According to Kvale (2007) in regard to implementing a qualitative interview, the reason for this choice is to acquire both a factual and meaning level from the participant, listening to their descriptions and explanations of their meanings, and between the lines of the subject. Furthermore, using a qualitative interview, according
to Kvale (2007) is to seek qualitative knowledge that is expressed in normal language, seeking the aspects of the participant’s life perspective.

**Method and Process of Interviewing**

According to Nunan (1992) and his work *Research Methods in Language Learning*, he goes into detail at how the process of interviewing has been used as a tool in gathering first hand information within an area of knowledge. Nunan (1992) further explains the difference of adopting a structured or a semi-structured approach to the interview. The first of which process (structured interview), the agenda for the interview is predetermined by the interviewer, who works through their predetermined list of questions (Nunan, 1992). While a semi-structured interview allows for flexibility during the interview process, giving advantages such as a degree of power and control for the interviewee during the process, as well as access into another person’s perspective and experience of life (Nunan, 1992).

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviewing**

Bell (2005) explains both the advantages and disadvantages of conducting an interview when gathering first hand information when writing a research project. Starting off with the major advantage of using an interview, Bell (2005) states simply “adaptability”, and by this Bell (2005) explains that an experienced interviewer can probe for responses, investigate possible motives, feelings, in contrast to using a questionnaire where such features are not directly available. Bell (2005) further explains that any responses given during an interview can be further developed and even clarified immediately during the process, rather than returned to at a later time when using a questionnaire. The disadvantages of using of the interview process is that it is time-consuming, both the process of the interview as well as the possible transcription and listening for information and patterns from the recording of the interview afterwards (Bell, 2005).

**2.1 Ethics of Interview**

The ethical perspective of this interview method was explained to each participant prior to starting with the interview. According to Steinar (2007) there are key factors that must be made apparent for the participant regarding the interview itself, the ethics, and other considerations.
Firstly and importantly, I explained what the aim and objective of this research and the reason for choosing to interview individuals within the education field and their experience with student’s public speaking. Secondly, that the participant has the choice to stop the interview at any point and ask questions regarding the content of the questions. Thirdly, who will have access to the research, interview recording, and transcription, and that the participant has the option of requesting any or all of the research at any time if they choose to do so. Fourth and lastly, the participant has the option of remaining confidential through the research process, wherein data is privatized as to avoid identification.

Such information given to the participant is regarded as informed consent (Steinar 2007), wherein the participant has understood the purpose of the research and agreed to the benefits and risks of continuing the research through interview process.
3. Results and Discussion

For this section of the thesis, the information gathered from the interview of two teachers of English at the secondary level will be divided into subsections that previously have been introduced and explored. In the following section, each area will be cordoned off by each reason for anxiety when speaking in front of others (i.e. NEST’S, performance and interaction, etc.), explaining their role in this question, along with relevant connections from the provided background, as well as the content from the interviews with two teacher (experiences and answers). Each area will explain how social speaking anxiety can be seen through literature, as well as from first hand accounts from interviewed educators.

3.1 NEST’s and Non-NEST’s

In regards to Han, Tanrıöver, and Sahan’s (2016) study into speaking and students in secondary school, and whether the employed teacher’s origin (whether they were a NEST or non-NEST within English language teaching) had any impact on the students anxiety with foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). Firstly, both teachers were non NEST’s and of Swedish origin, speaking both Swedish and English in the classroom environment, though primarily English in the classroom.

Participant A expressed that she heard from her students that they feel that speaking “in another language (i.e. English) in front of others in a classroom setting is more difficult” than speaking in their native language, as well as experiencing a difference between speaking the two languages. Also, participant A explains that she tends to begin on a low level with speaking assignments in her classes, and then raises the difficulty level in accordance to the English courses her students are taking. Further on expressing the importance of speaking with her students, and thoroughly explain any future speaking assignments. This is due to her having observed her students become extremely more nervous during the speaking assignment, even reacting when anxious, as she puts it with “different actions that they do, things that they don’t realize themselves. This has led her to put away pen and paper and just listen to her students speak, although, missing the opportunity to directly write down feedback, and as she puts it, “for better or worse”.
In regard to FLSA, as explained by Han, Tanriöver, and Sahan (2016), participant A explains that from her observation during her lessons, there have been clear signs of students experiencing anxiety and/or stress. Signs, as participant A explains, such as tapping the surface of table vigorously with one or numerous fingers (so called ‘temporary ticks’), producing additional words when speaking, also known as ‘filler words’, mostly in Swedish (i.e. ‘alltså’) along with not realizing they are adding these ‘filler words’. Although, participant A explains this is just one part of FLSA out of the three. Han, Tanriöver, and Sahan (2016) mention, it is still likely that her students experience forms of FLSA, possibly the anxiety of committing mistakes, along with the difficulty of speaking another language.

Participant B firstly explains that when he presents an assignment for their class, he explains to them that “no one is forced to present their presentation or speech in front of a larger crowd (i.e. majority of classmates) than what a student would feel comfortable with.” Additionally, participant B lays out his system of gaining confidence with his students, which is that he “tries to establish a relation with them where they feel that they can ask anything of him anything, and let him know if anything is difficult and such, and if they wonder about doing an assignment differently”, such as decreasing amount of students listening to their speech.

3.2 Performance Anxiety and Interaction Anxiety
The impact of performance anxiety and interaction anxiety was asked during the interview, a study by Hook, Valentiner, and Connelly (2013), who investigated the origin and impacts of these two concepts amongst students in a classroom. Participant A, in being asked whether the anxiety her students experienced stemmed from performing in front of others or from speaking a secondary language, responding that it was “purely performance” anxiety that her students experienced. Also, participant A expressed that it was an easier feat for her students to speak in front of others if either they were alone (with only the teacher listening) or a few students out of the whole class listened, further explaining that she could personally see her students commit to trying their best when they were more comfortable in a more controlled classroom setting, in contrast to being overly anxious with a larger audience.

Participant B responded similarly to participant A explains, “it’s likely performance,
though it could also be a lot else, for example language proficiency”. Additionally, he believed that language proficiency was also a factor in his students experiencing anxiety when speaking. Further clarifying that language proficiency anxiety possibly stems from feeling insecure of not knowing the correct way of saying a phrase, mispronouncing a word, as well as overall anxieties of making a fool out of yourself, or saying a sentence wrong due to a mistake with vocabulary or grammar. Finally, participant B commented that anxieties about speaking do exist in both Swedish and English, though that English was more difficult, likely due to the English language being a second language for most students.

3.3 Gender
An interesting factor to look at when discussing speaking anxiety is whether the difference of gender can determine the level of anxiety of students in the classroom. In the study of Özturk and Gürbüz (2012), whose results illustrated that female students experienced more anxiety in comparison to male students, to which participant A and B show some agreement to participant A explains that, when asked if her students would like to present to different class variations (i.e. class size, groups, gender) it is the female students who primarily express a want for presenting only for the other female students in class, and not the male students. Additionally, participant A further comments “it’s always the girls, in that case, that wish to present their work with the suggestion ‘the girls first and the boys afterwards’, but you get that question from the girls and once in a while from the boys”. This is possibly done to gather more control over possible anxieties in relation to speaking in front of others or having less time to prepare. This can be explained by Özturk and Gürbüz (2012) who concluded that that female students were more motivated than male students, which may lead to them expressing their thoughts and opinions more frequently in attempting to acquire higher grades and more control of their schoolwork. Also, Özturk and Gürbüz (2012) explain that female students experience more anxiety while speaking English in the classroom, which may explain participant A receiving questions about class size when a speaking assignment is given.

Participant B expressed a somewhat similar understanding of gender differences and anxieties when speaking in front of others. He states that there is not really a difference between female and male students in regard to anxiety, that instead it is
more likely that the male students will improvise any speeches or presentations, and on the other hand that the female students will be a bit more prepared. Participant B finally commented that the differences aren’t likely to be genetic, but instead adapted from the gender structured we are forced into through culture, school, and academics, more or less subconsciously. According to Özturk and Gürbüz (2012), as participant B mentioned about his male students, male students from the study were less motivated than female students, which may lead to less time spent preparing for speaking assignments and time is given to attempt to improvise instead.

3.4 Grade Level, Ages, and Gender
Since both participants teach English at the secondary school level, the study by Mestan (2017) is vital as it investigates whether the issue of speaking anxiety amongst students exists and persists between different grades, ages, and ever gender. The results of their study showed that speaking anxiety increased according to the grade students where in, with possible increased anxiety stemming from being more in public, shyness, and fear of speaking incorrectly in front of other students. There wasn’t any direct question in the interview correlating to whether the participants had witnessed their students experiencing more anxiety over the course of having taught them, which is possibly due to the participants only teaching a class of students for two years, and a handful for three. Although, an additional question was presented to participant A, asked to whether she witnessed any difference in her teaching career in students experiencing difficulty or anxiety when speaking in front of others. Her response was “no, it’s always been like this, since I started working here. There’s always been a few students in each class (with difficulties), and then in other classes there aren’t any visible issues”. Participant B’s response can explain the level of anxiety about speaking that may appear for some her students when speaking assignments are given, as Mestan (2017) explains from their study that students experienced more speaking anxiety each consecutive grade. This may explain that by the time participant B’s students have reached the secondary school level, they may already be experiencing a high level of speaking anxiety.

3.5 Positive Thinking
In the study about whether positive thinking in a performance situation by Vassilopoulos, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, and Tziouma (2017), research focuses on
whether positivity can attribute the field of speaking anxiety and the related performance with it. In relation to positivity, participant A expressed that her students feel more at home when more control is put in place, such as the number of people listening, gender-divided presentations, and time-limit on speeches, all which helps elevate symptoms of severe anxiety. This control is explained by Vassilopoulos, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, and Tziouma (2017) whose results about social anxiety, which can be associated to thoughts of negative predictions and thoughts relating to an impending performance task. By allowing students to control class size, participant A has given her students more opportunity and room for positive thinking and less anxiety about a speaking assignment.

With participant B, he explained that, in order to create a positive tone for assignments, he allows numerous moments where students can reflect, discuss, and improve their speeches and/or presentations. Giving the example of an argumentative speech assignment, he gives numerous lessons to which his students can prepare themselves, write drafts, practice their speeches on each other, and finally create key notes or cue cards to which they can use during the speech. Once again, this choice of method to prepare his students is explained by Vassilopoulos, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, and Tziouma (2017) whose study results explain that positive thinking can decrease negative predictions and thoughts of an upcoming performance task.

### 3.6 Face-to-Face and Web-based speaking

Lastly, the study by Campbell and Larsson (2013), which focuses on whether speaking in front of crowd of people, or speaking through the web can cause speaking anxiety, concluded that students experienced more anxiety when giving a speech face-to-face in comparison to a web-based speech setting.

Although participant A was not directly asked about her experience and observations about face-to-face speech and web-based speeches, she did express her thoughts of how some of her students feel much more anxious speaking in front of the whole classroom, leading her to give the options of half-class or small group presentations. This can be partly explained with Campbell and Larsson (2013) study results, which indicate that students experienced more anxiety when giving a speech face-to-face to a group of individuals. On the other hand, participant B spoke about getting asked “do
we have to do it live?” in regard to speaking in front of other students in the class, sparking the question if they can record their presentation instead. This, as participant B explains he “haven’t been in that situation yet, but can consider it if it reaches those extremes of difficulty, but the more important thing is to talk with them.” Such a question from participant B’s students coincides with Campbell and Larsson’s (2013) results about students experiencing less anxiety when given the choice of a speaking assignment given through a web-based approach.
4. Integration of Research and Results

When applying the literature study and my research questions to the content of the participant’s answers, I have come to the conclusion that both participants have a similar agreement on what methods they employ in order to decrease the levels of anxiety their students may experience during speaking assignments in front of others. Firstly, when introducing an assignment that has a speaking component, both teachers give a thorough and well-founded explanation and presentation via Powerpoint outlining the expectations of what is to be done for the assignment, important dates and lesson content, and the amount of times the class will have to practice, and rehearse their speeches before the assignment takes place. More importantly, before starting with a speech or presentation assignment, both participant A and B start on a lower or easier level for their classes, with short impromptu speeches or ‘3-minute talks’ about a certain subject, with some given time for their students to prepare themselves before speaking. Participant A explains “it depends on the assignment itself, what they have to do, like for example the ‘3-minute talk’ where the main thing is that they aren’t given time to prepare.” By doing so, participant A can gauge each student’s ability to speak impromptu and view their reaction to speaking within a small group. Participant B uses “a variety of assignments, for example a short 1-minute speech, where they a whole lesson to prepare themselves.”

By starting off with a more approachable minor assignment, both teachers lay the foundation for their students when they are given tasks for speaking in front of others, and can continue building with this foundation for the duration of the year that they have a class of students. Furthermore, when more difficult speaking assignments are given, both teachers allow their students to control the size of the class that is to listen to their speech, as well as given the option of dividing the class into either only female or male students, thereby decreasing any possible high levels of anxiety that may appear during a speech in front of others. Participant A explains her approach to this, as “I tend to listen to them, listen to how they want to do it… I will present the assignment and start with a whole class presentation, and when I notice that some seem anxious, get worried, I get the question if it is possible for them to present to fewer students, and that isn’t any problem.”
In regard to the students who experience more severe speaking anxiety and require more safeguards to able to speak in front of others (especially of the other gender), both participants had experience with such students. Participant A had the experience of one female students fainting when giving a speech, which prompted participant A to “bring it up during a staff meeting, and she of course has to be careful (in the future), so I had her by myself last week during a presentation” which later on led to receiving help from a speech counselor from the school, as well as decreasing the amount of people she had to speak in front of – only the teacher and the student at first, and then gradually allowing more students to listen to the affected student’s future presentations.

Participant B expressed that “I haven’t found myself in that situation, but I would consider this with an extreme case, but the more important thing is to actually speak with the students” in regards to students feeling anxious about speaking in front of others in the classroom.

In both cases, both teachers have enough experience to give appropriate and comfortable support to students who struggle with speech anxiety, whether it is an anxiety to do with performance, or to do with language proficiency, they are knowledgeable and prepared enough to give anxious students suitable and controlled classroom settings for them to feel less anxious and more comfortable in speaking in front of others.

The answers provided by both participants even go into the areas of the two sub questions, “what obstacles (i.e. stress, anxiety) exist in the classroom for speaking, and what creates a speaker friendly environment (i.e. confidence) within the classroom), as well as “how can teachers best support and assess English-speaking confidence during individual presentations in the classroom?”

In both cases, both interviewed teachers make it clear that being positive and clear with assignments, along with what control measures (class size, speech time) that can be implemented during speaking assignments, are key elements to limiting anxiety levels amongst their students. The obstacles that the interviewed teachers can identify as problematic is a negative atmosphere within the classroom which can demoralize students in their feelings towards speaking in front of others. As well as having no
foundation of prior minor speaking assignments to which the teachers can gauge how their students fare with speaking in front of others and if they experience normal or higher levels of speaking anxiety. As participant B explains, “I try to establish a relation with them where they feel comfortable with asking me any question, if anything is difficult, or if they can do the assignment in another way”, thereby trying to bridge a positive relation between himself and his students, allowing for honesty and more control for students when deciding on how to present an assignment in front of others.

Both teachers explain that they can see confidence in their students when they don’t exhibit certain movements shown during anxiety such as pen tapping, resorting to ‘filler’ words in Swedish, or forgetting what to say when speaking in front of others. Participant A explains that one way she reduces anxiety for her students is to “put away (pen and paper) all that and just listen to them, which makes them calmer”, which allows them to speak freely without distractions. Other support and assessment in providing confidence is to give their students ample and long enough time to prepare and practices future speaking assignments, allowing their students to be more in control of their speaking and the content of their speeches.
5. Conclusion of Implication

What is clear throughout the results in this thesis is that the issue of speaking anxiety that can plague students does not present itself with one singular reason or cause within a group of students. Speaking anxiety can manifest itself within any speaker of English, whether native or second language speaker, speaking anxiety can prove to hinder advancing speaking in front of others due to several reasons (discussed below). Although, further discussion within an ESL context is that students that are in the process of learning and improving their English as a second language potentially inhibit more anxiety than native speakers. This additional anxiety might stem from performing orally in a new language, elongating distance from the ‘safety’ and familiarity of their native language. This, along with grasping different rules of grammar, language intonation, sentence structures would add to any pre-existing speaking anxiety that students may inhibit in their native language, but exacerbates when speaking a second language during the learning of process of it.

The reasons for speaking anxiety are numerous and vary in different forms, degrees of anxiety, physical, and mental manifestations for every individual in a classroom, which has been explained by both interviewed teachers.

As Mestan’s (2017) study shows, in regard to anxiety manifesting itself differently for students at the secondary level, speaking anxiety increases according the students grade, so for those who have reached their secondary level, they are likely experiencing years of inner speaking anxiety, which then makes it more difficult for students to speak in front of others. When asked about her experience and if she has noticed a difference in a trend of speaking anxiety amongst students, participant A replies, “No, (anxiety) it hasn’t increased, it has always been like that … there’s always a few students in a few classes, and a few other classes there may be none at all.” So at secondary level, participant A has noticed no difference of the number of students who experience anxiety when speaking in front of others.

As young adolescents, performing in front of others, as Hook, Valentiner, and Conelly (2013) explain, brings out more negative thoughts and emotions for students, who then experience higher levels of anxiety when being “observed or scrutinized by
others”. In regards to mental manifestations when anxiety occurs, this is explained by Vassilopoulou, Brouzos, Tsorbatzoudis, and Tziouma’s (2017) study about positive thinking, explaining that social anxiety was associated with “negative predictions of personal appearance and catastrophic thoughts relating to an impending performance task”, which ties into Hook, Valentiner, and Conelly (2013) study, both have a combined discussion that negative thoughts and anxiety grew from being observed, scrutinized, and catastrophic thoughts of speaking in front of others. This may explain what participant A experienced with one specific student who fainted during a Swedish lesson during an oral presentation, from sheer anxiety of speaking in front of others. Participant A’s solution to this was to (as previously mentioned) discuss the issue with other teachers, and let the student present solely to participant A, eventually increasing the number of people during her presentation at future occasions. This experience ties into Hook, Valentiner, and Connelly’s (2013) explanation of negative thoughts and increased anxiety during observation of oneself.

To reiterate the questions at hand, ‘How can teachers support students who are struggling with speech anxiety?’, and ‘What factors do practicing teachers identify as contributing to speaking anxiety in the Swedish English classroom?’ . Numerous solutions from different angles have been explored in this thesis, one such solution simply taking account the method a student may ask for in regards of a speaking assignment. Such a request have both participants been asked by from their students. Both teachers explain that their students can have minor to major difficulty when given a speaking assignment, to which the students may ask for a smaller audience, thereby asking for control of a presentation situation.

Such examples and explanations are backed up by the numerous named studies and research provided in the literature background in this thesis, which explain how complex speaking anxiety can manifest itself, as well as how its symptoms and causations can vary from individual to individual.

One important aspect to speaking anxiety amongst students is whether it presents itself as a major issue when students are faced with a situation wherein they are to speak in front of others, and whether this comes from an issue to do with being prepared and given ample amount of time to practice, as expressed by the participants
A and B. Participant A has explained that she gives no time for proper preparation for her ‘3-minute’ impromptu talk, while participant B decides to give his students a lesson’s worth of time to prepare for a similar assignment. Both participants explain that it depends on the assignment at hand, and participant explicitly explains “it depends on how you interpret the course criteria, but I don’t believe that the ability to speak in front of others is a requirement that can aid you in an English course.”

Preparation time can in turn tie back into Hook, Valentiner, and Connelly’s (2013), in a way, the more time for preparation, the better a student may perform, but then again, may increase negative thoughts and anxiety about speaking.

The consequences of the provided results from the various studies and interviews that have taken place are that there exists numerous sources for speaking anxieties amongst students. That any student in a class can possibly experience mild anxieties when speaking in front of others, experience severe anxieties speaking a secondary language, or even experience severe anxieties when speaking in front of others which can result in panic attacks or even fainting when speaking in front of others. As a future teacher of English towards secondary school, it is of vital importance of students who experience varying difficulties when speaking in front of others, whether they give off physical signals of anxiety (tapping a table top) or refuse to speak in front of others. In situations such as these, it becomes important for me to use correct and appropriate ‘tools’ to support and assess students in overcoming their anxieties with simple and careful steps in completing a speaking assignment.

Furthermore, even if I am given time to prepare for students with possible speaking anxiety difficulties, it will be equally important to be comfortable, and prepared to set aside time for students who want more control of their speaking situations (i.e. class size) in order to grant them a more comfortable situation for themselves. This in turn is to provide an environment where students can give their utmost sincere and calmest speech/oral presentation without their anxieties plaguing their actions.

Taking a critical perspective towards the choice of method (interview), the first and foremost critique that can be given is that only two teachers of English at secondary level were interviewed, providing only a small window into how teachers think about their students experiencing speaking anxiety, what support they give, as well as how they work with students with anxiety difficulties. If I were to allow more teachers to
be interviewed, I would have a much larger source with varying content and experience from their teaching career as to how they have worked with speaking anxiety and students of varying anxiety degrees. More importantly, interviewing teachers responsible for modern languages at the secondary level (ex. Swedish, German, Spanish, French) could provide a larger foundation as to if speaking anxiety differs between the different languages, or if there may exist a trend between speaking in another language.

Another critical point to this method is that only teachers were interviewed, gathering only one side for information about students experiencing speaking anxieties. Of course, if this thesis considered the perspective of students experiencing anxiety and how they work around it, then it would be vital to interview students either through direct face-to-face interview, or possibly through the use of a questionnaire to gather more information from students with varying factors (age, gender, experiences).

Finally, as previously mentioned, future research could consider how students fare and work with speaking anxiety, and what they do to work around such difficulties in the classroom environment. Research from a student’s perspective on speaking anxiety would possibly help in bridging an understanding between the teacher and the student in finding appropriate, and effective methods in controlling speaking anxiety. This could in turn aid in minimizing the feelings of anxiety to allow students to fully express themselves in speech, body language, and importantly, self-confidence in the future when speaking in front of others.

Other research possible future research areas could look into what methods could be employed by a teacher to alleviate symptoms, and feelings of anxiety amongst students when speaking assignments are given. By looking at different methods, teachers can then choose the most appropriate method to give to their class that will help the majority when anxious situations occur in the classroom. Even if a method can be applied to the majority of the class, research into aiding those students who experience severe anxiety or reluctance to speak in front of others is equally as important, and only help the teacher more in building their knowledge of supporting their students to overcome their difficulties in speaking in front of others, or other areas of foreign language difficulty.
References


T. Han, A. S. Tanrıöver & S. Ö. Sahan (2016). *EFL Students' and Teachers' Attitudes toward Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety: A Look at NESTs and Non-NESTs


Appendix

Questionnaire (Teacher):

1. What ‘precautions’ (crowd limit, time limit, etc.), do you take when you’re going to introduce an assignment where the students are to speak in front of each other?

2. How do you cope with students who show reluctance to speaking in front a crowd of people?

3. Where do you think students insecurity from speaking in front of others originate from?

4. Do you think that students exhibit different ‘personality’ or ‘oral’ characteristics when speaking? Either personally, or that they take on a ‘characteristic’

5. Do you think it is a speaking, or performance anxiety that students with difficulties exhibit when speaking in the classroom?

6. Have you witnessed any differences when students speak in front of others, in regards to the language they speak in?

7. What other phenomenon, in regards to speaking, have you observed during a speaking assignment?

8. What methods do you employ to try and create more confidence in students when speaking, or control any anxiety that they experience when speaking?

9. Do you have any other questions or thoughts regarding this subject during this interview process?