

Grammar-Related Speaking Anxiety among Bangladeshi Secondary School ESL Learners

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Abstract: *This study attempts to investigate the prevalence of grammar-related speaking anxiety among Bangladeshi secondary school ESL learners. In many secondary classrooms in Bangladesh, teachers place excessive emphasis on grammatical accuracy. Consequently, students often experience anxiety while speaking English, particularly regarding whether their spoken language is grammatically correct both inside and outside the classroom. The study aims to explore the levels of anxiety related to grammatical errors that discourage secondary ESL students from speaking. Furthermore, the study examines the core reasons for teachers' excessive insistence on grammatical accuracy rather than oral participation. The researcher adopted a mixed-method research design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches and collected data from urban and rural secondary school ESL learners in Bangladesh using a structured survey. The questionnaire was administered to both urban and rural students to measure their levels of speaking anxiety influenced by teachers' focus on grammatical accuracy. The findings show that most students experience nervousness during English speaking, resulting in moderate to high anxiety levels due to fear of making grammar mistakes and frequent teacher corrections. A notable positive relationship was observed between teachers' focus on grammatical accuracy and students' anxiety levels, and rural students reported higher anxiety compared to their urban peers. The results highlight the necessity of providing more opportunities for spontaneous speaking, reducing continuous correction of grammatical errors, and building students' confidence in oral communication.*

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, grammar-related speaking anxiety, ESL learners, secondary school students, Bangladesh, grammatical accuracy, oral communication, teacher correction.

INTRODUCTION

According to Stephen Krashen (1982), anxiety, fear, stress, and embarrassment raise ESL learners' affective filters, which prevent natural language acquisition. In the Bangladeshi context, teachers' early focus on grammar and frequent correction of errors shifts learners away from meaningful communication, creating fear of making mistakes and increasing anxiety levels. Misconceptions often develop in students' minds that only through grammatical accuracy they can participate properly in oral communication. As a result, students concentrate heavily on grammar from the primary to secondary levels, limiting their opportunities for oral practice. Grammar constitutes a central component of the English curriculum in Bangladesh, and to achieve good marks, students are expected to perform well in it. Institutional authorities and parents place importance on academic results, which reinforces teachers' focus on grammar in classroom instruction. According to Noam Chomsky (1965),

humans are born with an innate capacity to acquire language through Universal Grammar. This suggests that learners can develop linguistic competence even without constant focus on grammatical rules. In Bangladeshi secondary ESL classrooms, overemphasis on grammar may hinder students' natural language development, limiting their spontaneous speech and potentially increasing speaking anxiety. Consequently, students often struggle to demonstrate their oral communication skills. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the extent of grammar-related speaking anxiety experienced by ESL learners at the secondary levels in Bangladesh. The study also aims to examine the impact of teachers' emphasis on grammar and their tendency to correct grammatical errors during students' oral participation. In addition, it seeks to compare the levels of speaking anxiety between urban and rural students and to explore learners' misconceptions regarding grammar and communication. This study intends to provide insights for teachers and policymakers on how to balance grammar instruction with opportunities for oral communication, ultimately helping to improve speaking confidence among Bangladeshi ESL learners.

Study objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the level of grammar-related speaking anxiety among secondary-level ESL learners in both urban and rural contexts in Bangladesh.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the key factors contributing to grammar-related speaking anxiety among secondary ESL learners.
2. To examine the impact of teachers' emphasis on grammatical accuracy on students' speaking anxiety.
3. To compare the levels of speaking anxiety between urban and rural learners.
4. To propose practical strategies to reduce speaking anxiety and promote natural oral communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In many Bangladeshi ESL classrooms, teachers often assume that, since English is not learners' native language, a strong emphasis on grammar instruction is the most effective way to develop speaking ability. However, research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) challenges this assumption and highlights the importance of communicative input, interaction, and output in language learning. Stephen Krashen (1982), through the Input Hypothesis, argues that learners acquire a second language primarily through exposure to comprehensible and meaningful input rather than through explicit grammar instruction. Language acquisition occurs naturally when learners engage in authentic communication, with listening and speaking activities preceding formal grammar learning. Similarly, Rod Ellis (2008) emphasizes that second language proficiency develops largely through communicative use of language, suggesting that grammar instruction should act as a supportive tool to refine learners' accuracy after sufficient engagement in meaningful communication. Additionally, Michael Long (1996), through the Interaction Hypothesis, highlights the crucial role of interaction in language development, arguing that negotiation of meaning during authentic communication allows learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and gradually internalize grammatical structures. Studies conducted in countries such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Colombia have reported similar patterns, where excessive emphasis on grammatical accuracy in English classrooms reduces learners' confidence and discourages spontaneous oral communication. In contrast, communicative language teaching approaches and interactive speaking activities have been found to improve learners' oral proficiency, fluency, and motivation (Herazo, 2010; Nakatani, 2010; Zohairy,

2014).

Grammar-based speaking anxiety is a persistent challenge among secondary ESL learners in Bangladesh and is influenced by several interconnected factors. First, students' confidence often decreases when delivering speeches in class because they feel their sentences must be grammatically perfect. Fear of errors and possible ridicule from peers discourages participation, reflecting Elaine K. Horwitz's (1991) concept of Foreign Language Anxiety, where fear of negative evaluation reduces

learners' willingness to communicate. Second, examinations remain a major priority, and grammatical knowledge plays a central role in English assessments. As a result, students focus more on accuracy than communicative competence, carefully constructing sentences according to grammatical rules, which restricts spontaneity and the natural flow of speech.

Another contributing factor is learners' linguistic background. Most students are native Bengali speakers and often translate their ideas from Bengali into English in order to maintain grammatical correctness. This conscious translation process slows communication and may reduce motivation to practice speaking. Furthermore, from primary to secondary education, learners are typically exposed to grammar-focused instruction rather than authentic communicative practice. Although students may become familiar with grammatical rules, they often develop hesitation and fear when attempting to speak English in real-life situations. Differences between rural and urban educational environments also influence speaking confidence, as rural learners frequently have fewer opportunities for practice and limited access to additional learning resources compared with their urban counterparts.

Finally, although English is officially presented as a communicative subject in the Bangladeshi curriculum, classroom practices often remain largely grammar-oriented. Teachers tend to emphasize grammatical correctness and frequently interrupt speaking activities to correct errors, which may discourage learners from expressing their ideas freely. Similar classroom tendencies have also been

observed in several ESL contexts internationally, where excessive focus on grammatical accuracy limits opportunities for spontaneous communication. Consequently, such instructional practices can contribute to speaking anxiety and hinder the development of communicative competence among Bangladeshi secondary ESL learners. Although extensive empirical research has been conducted worldwide in the field of Second Language Acquisition, there remains a lack of sufficient context-specific studies in Bangladesh. Existing research on speaking anxiety in Bangladesh has predominantly focused on university-level learners (Rahman et al., 2024; Yasmin et al., 2024), with limited attention given to secondary-level students. Furthermore, prior studies have identified factors such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of exposure, and socio-cultural influences (Rahman et al., 2024), but they do not adequately examine the role of classroom practices, particularly teacher behavior and grammar-focused instruction. In addition, research in Bangladesh has largely examined anxiety at the tertiary level (Ahmad et al., 2024) and has often focused on other skills such as writing (Khatami et al., 2025), while paying little attention to speaking anxiety at the secondary level. Therefore, a comprehensive, context-specific investigation is needed to explore how multiple contextual factors influence speaking anxiety among secondary-level ESL learners in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design to investigate grammar-related speaking anxiety among secondary-level ESL learners in Bangladesh. In addition, a qualitative approach was incorporated to support the quantitative method and provide deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale. The questionnaire was administered to students from both urban and rural secondary schools. Qualitative data were also gathered through interviews and open-ended responses.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Percentages were calculated, and the findings were presented through bar charts and pie charts to illustrate students' responses clearly. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative findings. This quantitative approach enabled the researcher to measure the level of speaking anxiety and examine the impact of teachers' emphasis on grammatical accuracy. The qualitative approach further enriched the study by providing detailed explanations of learners' experiences and perspectives.

Research Design

For representing the findings clearly to the readers, the researcher used the mixed-method research design, namely quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), mixed-method research blends both quantitative and qualitative designs together, which provides a clear understanding of a research problem. Therefore, the mixed-method design was considered appropriate for exploring grammar-related speaking anxiety among Bangladeshi secondary school ESL learners.

Participants

The participants of this study comprised both teachers and students from urban and rural secondary schools in Bangladesh. A total of 15 teachers participated in the study, of whom 9 were male (60%) and 6 were female (40%).

In addition, 95 students participated in the research. Among them, 55 students were from urban schools, including 35 males (63.64%) and 20 females (36.36%). The remaining 40 students were from rural schools, comprising 26 males (65%) and 14 females (35%).

All participants voluntarily took part in the study and provided relevant data through the research instruments.

Research Instruments

Instruments are very important for data collection in research. In this study, the researcher used several instruments, including printed Likert-scale questionnaires, open-ended questions, interviews, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire methods to collect data effectively. These instruments helped the researcher gain a clear understanding of grammar-related speaking anxiety among Bangladeshi secondary school ESL learners. In addition, a tape recorder and a computer were used to record, store, and organize the collected data properly.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher developed a structured set of questions to collect relevant data. These questions were printed, with sufficient space provided after each item where necessary to allow participants to give detailed responses. A total of 15 teachers participated in the study by completing the questionnaire individually. For students, different approaches were adopted based on their location. In urban areas, 55 students were provided with printed questionnaires and responded in written form. In rural areas, 40 students were given a Likert-scale-based questionnaire, where they indicated their responses by selecting options such as —Agree,|| —Neutral,|| or —Disagree.|| This format was used to help rural students express their opinions more easily and effectively.

Overall, this procedure enabled the researcher to collect data from a total of 110 participants (15 teachers and 95 students) in a systematic and organized manner, while also considering contextual differences between urban and rural settings.

Findings

Regarding the topic of grammar-related speaking anxiety among secondary ESL learners in Bangladesh, the researcher collected significant information from both teachers and students of a selected secondary school. When teachers were asked about the reasons for their strong emphasis on grammar and their frequent correction of grammatical errors in the classroom, they explained several pedagogical and practical considerations. Their responses revealed different perspectives on the role of grammar in developing students' speaking ability. The key findings from the teachers' responses are presented below.

Responses of the Teachers

Many teachers consider a large classroom a significant barrier to students' oral participation. In Bangladesh, a typical classroom often contains 55 to 60 students, which makes proper classroom management a major challenge for teachers. In such settings, organizing activities that encourage speaking—such as English debates, instant oral speeches, oral dialogues, and quizzes—can help create opportunities for students to participate orally and practice their language skills.

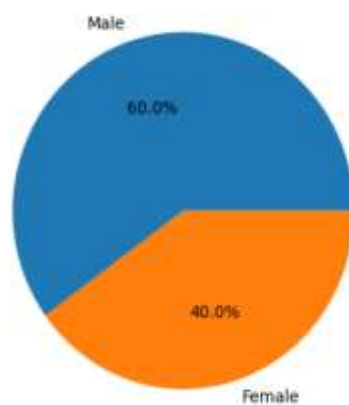
Despite these possibilities, many teachers believe that arranging oral participation is more difficult than teaching grammar in a large class. Grammar instruction can be managed more easily because it usually involves explaining grammatical structures and assigning written exercises, which require less monitoring of individual performance. In contrast, communicative activities demand more time, organization, and supervision to ensure that all students remain enga

Furthermore, some teachers argue that communicative activities such as debates, dialogues, and oral speeches may be ineffective without grammatical accuracy. They worry that if students speak without sufficient knowledge of grammar, they may develop incorrect language habits and their communication attempts may lose effectiveness. Many secondary school teachers do not implement a proper teaching plan. An effective teaching plan involves careful time management, presenting selected topics through interactive oral sessions, encouraging learners to speak in English, and providing constructive feedback without interrupting. A competent teacher should enhance learners' overall comprehension and language skills. However, in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, many teachers lack proficiency in communicative English teaching. As a result, they primarily focus on delivering preset grammatical rules to ESL learners rather than fostering practical communication abilities.

Teachers reported that both parents and school authorities play a limited role in promoting the practice of communicative processes. According to them, parents and school authorities mainly emphasize the school curriculum and examination syllabus. Both groups expect only good academic results from students. Parents are generally careless about the development of students' speaking skills. Since grammar is included in the school curriculum, parents often pressure teachers to focus on grammar learning. In rural areas, many parents are illiterate and remain unaware of effective language learning methods. As a result, grammar becomes a dominant component of teaching ESL learners in rural schools. Consequently, learners fall behind in developing communicative competence and participate less in communication activities.

The study involved 15 English teachers from both urban and rural secondary schools. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to obtain insights from teachers directly engaged in English language teaching. Among them, nine were male and six were female

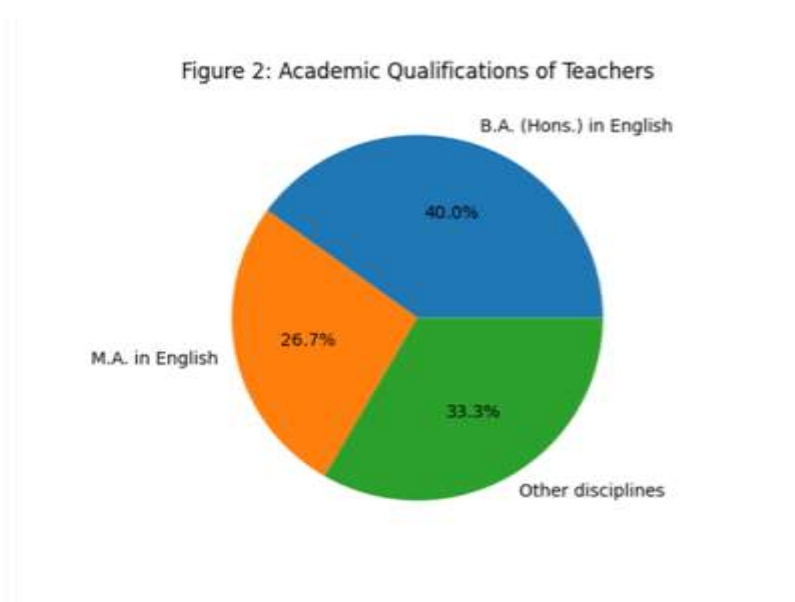
Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Teachers



Regarding academic qualifications, six teachers held a B.A. (Hons.) in English, four had completed an M.A. in English, and five teachers came from other academic disciplines. Professional training is considered essential for effective teaching practice. Among the participants, nine teachers had completed a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), two held a Master of Education (M.Ed.), while four teachers did not possess any professional teaching qualification.



The variation in academic and professional backgrounds appears to influence instructional practices. Data obtained from teacher interviews and classroom observations indicate that some teachers tend to rely heavily on grammar-focused instruction rather than communicative activities. This approach may limit students' opportunities to practice spoken English, which can contribute to learners' hesitation and uncertainty in using English for communication in the classroom



Students' Opinion

The data collected from 55 students (35 male and 20 female) in an urban secondary school reveal important insights into their attitudes toward English speaking. Based on the learners' responses, it was found that the majority of students feel hesitant to speak in English due to fear of making grammatical mistakes.

Most learners reported that they worry about using incorrect grammar while speaking, which creates anxiety and reduces their confidence. As a result, they tend to avoid participating in English speaking activities in the classroom. The findings further reveal that many students believe that spontaneous speaking largely depends on having strong knowledge of grammatical structures. According to the learners, insufficient knowledge of grammar reduces their confidence and discourages them from participating in oral communication.

As a result, although students learn grammar in a theoretical manner, they often fail to apply it effectively in real-life speaking situations. This gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use makes it difficult for them to communicate fluently in English.

Many students reported that although they gather the courage to speak in English in the classroom, frequent grammatical correction by the teacher interrupts their spontaneity. As students often perceive their teacher as an authority figure, constant correction can create nervousness and reduce their confidence. Consequently, they begin to feel that their grammatical knowledge is inadequate.

However, some learners acknowledge that proper knowledge of grammar is essential for accurate English speaking. They believe that focusing on grammatical correctness helps improve language proficiency. At the same time, a number of students expressed that excessive pressure to produce grammatically perfect sentences slows down their speech, limits idea generation, and increases anxiety.

Most students reported that they tend to remain silent and avoid participating in oral communication. They feel that if they produce grammatically incorrect sentences while speaking, their classmates may ridicule them, which increases their anxiety. This fear gradually discourages them from taking part in classroom interaction.

Moreover, many learners stated that they do not attempt to speak in English outside the classroom due to fear of public scolding and embarrassment. Such negative expectations further inhibit their

willingness to communicate orally .The learners reported that opportunities for speaking practice in the classroom are very limited. Activities such as oral presentations, peer dialogues, impromptu speeches, quizzes, and chorus speaking are rarely conducted. Moreover, since these speaking activities are not included in the formal examination system, both teachers and students tend to overlook their importance.

Instead, grammar is given primary emphasis, as it plays a significant role in examinations. Consequently, no dedicated class periods are arranged for developing English speaking skills. Due to this lack of practice, students often feel nervous and anxious when they face situations that require them to speak in English, which negatively affects their confidence and performance.

Most learners in Bangladesh reported that they rely heavily on memorizing grammatical structures and vocabulary. When attempting to speak in English, they consciously translate sentences from Bengali into English using these memorized forms. This process makes their speech slow and unnatural.

As a result, learners struggle to produce spontaneous communication. They often hesitate or stop speaking mid-sentence because they cannot quickly recall the correct structures or vocabulary. This lack of fluency prevents them from expressing their thoughts and feelings effectively. Consequently, feeling frustrated and discouraged, many learners revert to using their native language instead of continuing in English.

Some students reported that they feel fear and nervousness when speaking in English. Although they have knowledge of grammatical structures, they lack sufficient speaking practice. As a result, they often believe that they will not be able to express their ideas effectively. When asked to introduce themselves or participate in discussions, they tend to feel anxious, show low confidence, and remain reluctant to engage in oral communication.

Furthermore, when they attempt to speak, they focus excessively on grammatical accuracy, which affects their fluency. They are often afraid of making grammatical mistakes, and this fear creates psychological barriers. Such anxiety and lack of confidence discourage them from actively participating in speaking activities.

Most students reported that their teachers do not place sufficient emphasis on speaking practice, nor do they create a supportive environment for developing speaking skills. Activities such as group discussions, presentations, instant picture descriptions, word-building games, and sentence construction exercises are rarely implemented in the classroom.

Some learners noted that when they attempt to speak in English, teachers often interrupt them to correct grammatical errors rather than encouraging their efforts. This discouraging approach tends to lower students' confidence and reduces their willingness to participate in speaking activities.

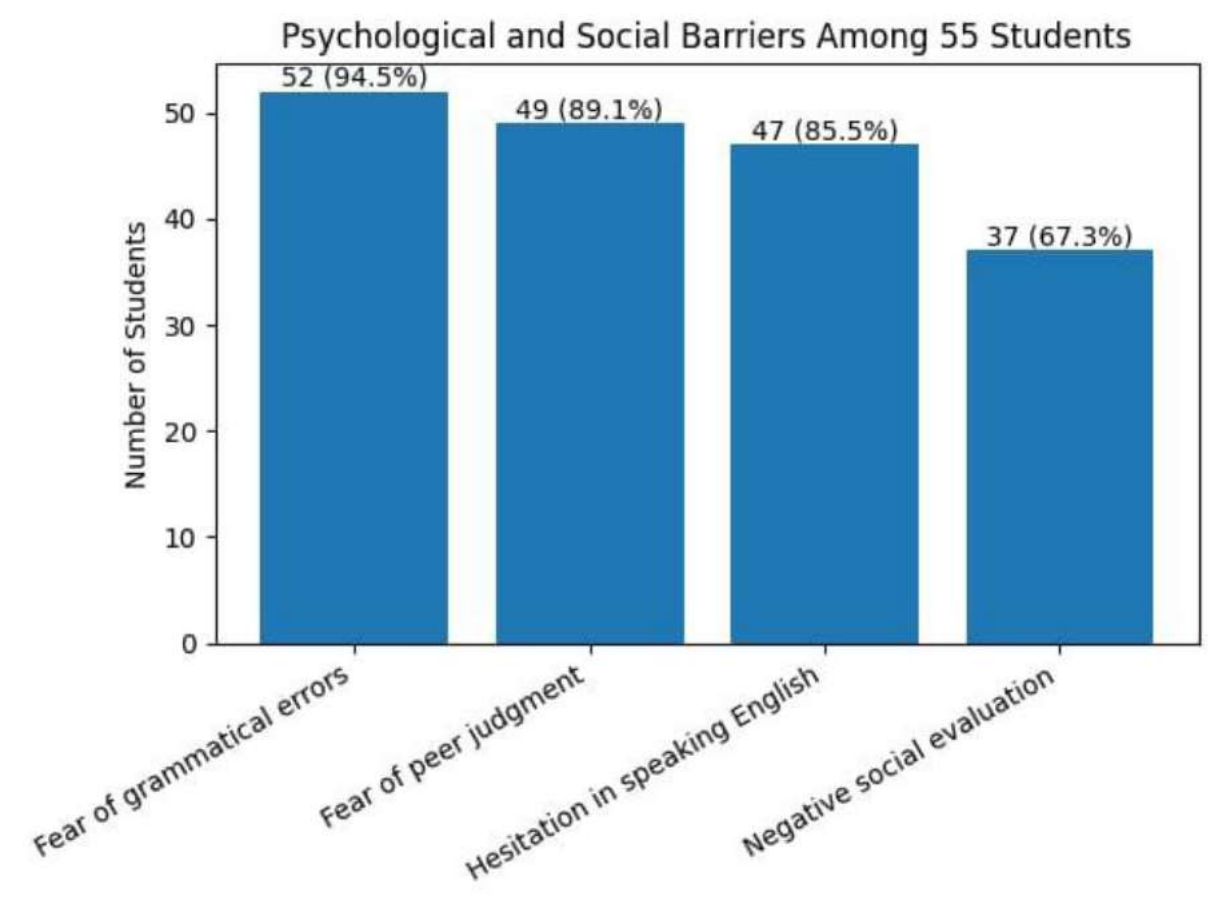
In addition, several students stated that teachers frequently explain grammatical structures in Bengali instead of English. While some learners find this helpful for understanding grammar, others believe that it limits their exposure to English communication.

Students also emphasized that improving speaking skills requires regular engagement with English through activities such as watching English movies, listening to podcasts, reading newspapers, and practicing speaking within the school environment. Therefore, they highlighted the need for resources such as tape recorders, projectors, televisions, and access to satellite channels. They also suggested that specific class periods should be allocated each week for such activities. However, according to the students, school authorities often do not support these initiatives, considering them outside the formal curriculum.

On the other hand, some learners expressed disagreement with teaching grammar entirely in English. They explained that, since they are not accustomed to speaking English from the primary level, a sudden transition to English-only instruction at the secondary level makes comprehension difficult. As a result, they prefer learning grammar through their native language, Bengali.

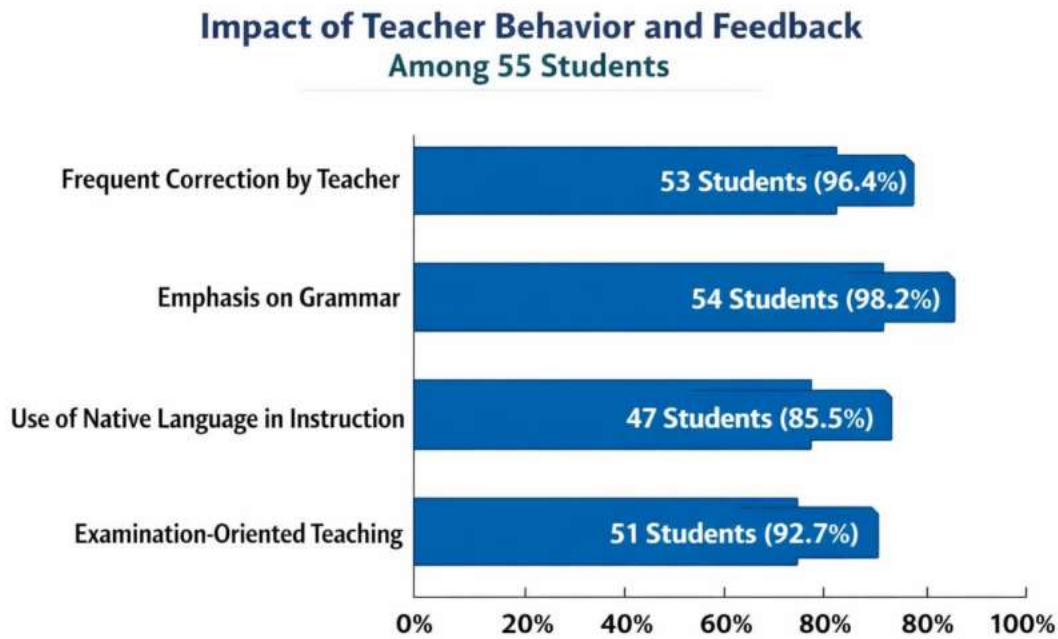
When students were asked why they are unable to speak English fluently, many explained that their textbooks and classroom practices are predominantly focused on grammar and reading skills. As a result, they tend to perceive speaking practice as less important, especially since there is no formal assessment of oral communication at the secondary school level in Bangladesh. Because examinations mainly evaluate grammar and reading, students naturally prioritize these areas over the development of speaking proficiency.

Furthermore, learners reported that the classroom environment is often noisy, which makes spontaneous speaking practice challenging. They also noted that although grammar is considered an essential tool for speaking English, an excessive emphasis on grammatical accuracy creates anxiety among students. This anxiety, in turn, reduces their confidence and discourages active participation in speaking activities.

Figure 4

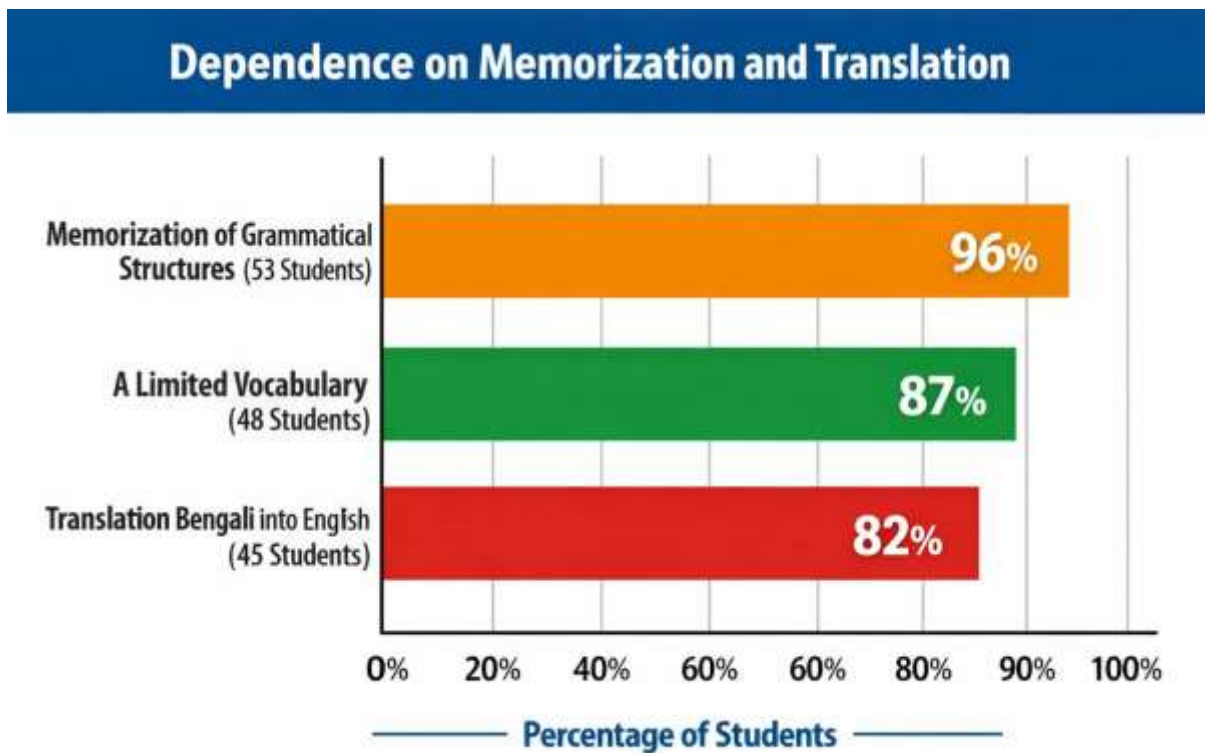
The findings indicate that a variety of psychological and social factors hinder students' ability to speak English. Among the 55 participants, the majority—52 students (94.5%)—identified fear of making grammatical mistakes as a major barrier. Similarly, 49 students (89.1%) reported anxiety about being judged by their peers. Hesitation to speak in English was also highly prevalent, as noted by 47 students (85.5%). In addition, 37 students (67.3%) indicated that negative social evaluation affects their participation in speaking activities. Conversely, a small proportion of students did not report these concerns, representing 3 students (5.5%), 6 students (10.9%), 8 students (14.5%), and 18 students (32.7%) respectively across the four categories.

Figure 5



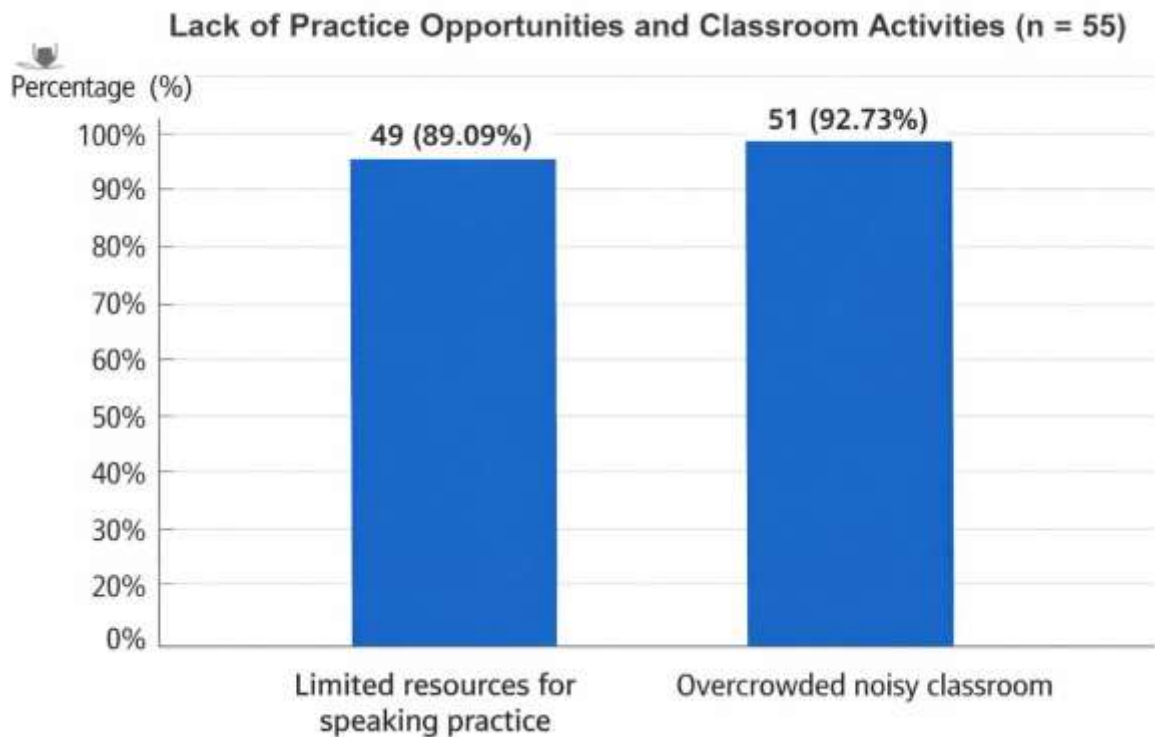
A study on the impact of teacher behavior and feedback was conducted among 55 students. Most students (53; 96.36%) reported that teacher’s frequent correction affects their natural speaking, often making them hesitant to speak spontaneously, while 2 students (3.64%) did not comment. Similarly, 54 students (98.18%) emphasized that grammar-focused instruction prevents their speaking development, with 1 student (1.82%) remaining silent. Regarding the use of the native language in grammar teaching, 47 students (85.45%) expressed their views, whereas 8 students (14.55%) did not comment. Additionally, 51 students (92.73%) noted that examination-oriented teaching emphasizes grammatical accuracy rather than spontaneous communication, with 4 students (7.27%) offering no response.

Figure 6

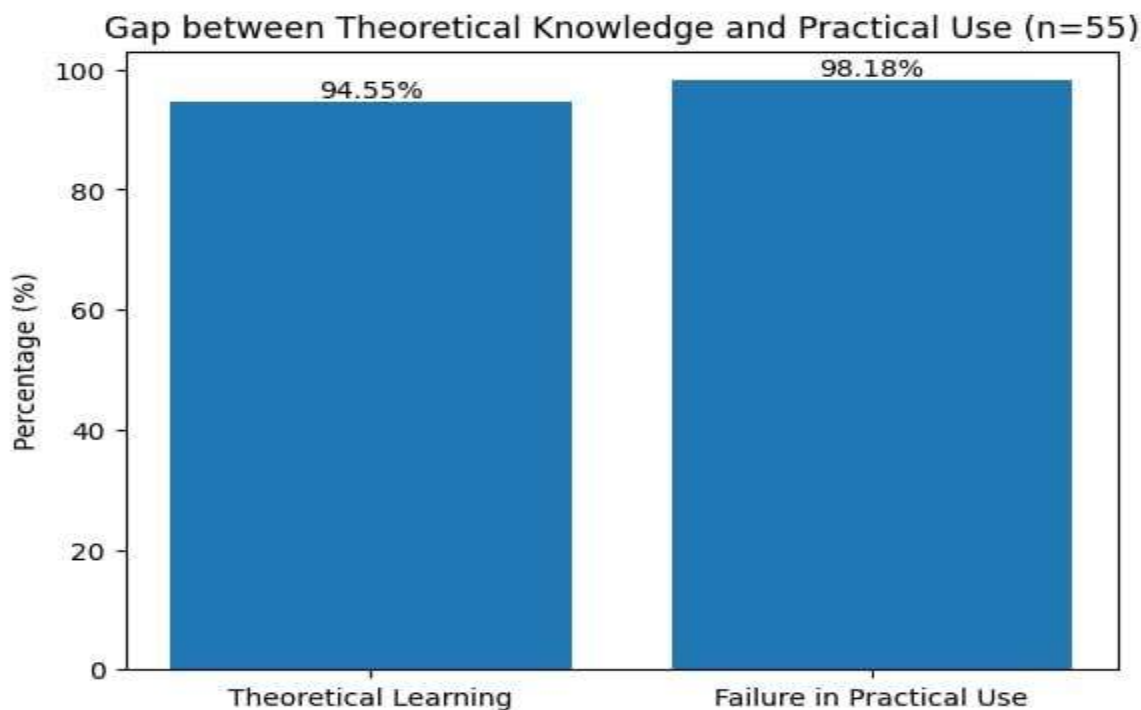


The study on students' dependence on memorization and translation revealed notable patterns among the 55 participants. A vast majority, 53 students (96.36%), reported relying on the memorization of grammatical structures, leaving 2 students (3.64%) who did not comment. Similarly, 48 students (87.27%) indicated that their limited vocabulary hinders effective communication in English, while 7 students (12.73%) provided no comment. Additionally, 45 students (81.82%) admitted to frequently translating from Bengali into English when speaking or writing, with the remaining 10 students (18.18%) offering no comment.

Figure 7



Among 55 students, 49 (89.09%) reported that limited resources for speaking practice hinder their participation in oral communication, while 51 (92.73%) indicated that an overcrowded and noisy classroom negatively affects their speaking environment. The remaining students, 6 (10.91%) and 4 (7.27%) respectively, did not provide any comments on these issues.

Figure 8

The study on the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use among 55 students revealed notable trends. A large majority, 52 students (94.55%), reported that they are learning grammar in a theoretical manner, while 54 students (98.18%) indicated a failure in applying this knowledge in practical communication. After accounting for these responses, 3 students (5.45%) did not comment on theoretical learning, and 1 student (1.82%) gave no opinion regarding practical use and communication.

Moreover, the researcher collected data from students of selected rural secondary schools using a Likert-scale questionnaire to examine grammar-related speaking anxiety. A total of 40 students from classes VIII to X participated in the study, including 10 students from class VIII, 15 from class IX, and 15 from class X. The data collection was conducted in the school auditorium during the tiffin period, with the support and cooperation of the Headmaster, who facilitated the arrangement.

The students responded to a structured Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of three options: (1) Agree, (2) Neutral, and (3) Disagree. They were asked to indicate their opinions by placing a tick mark next to the appropriate response.

Table 1: Likert-Scale Responses on Grammar-Related Speaking Anxiety among Rural Bangladeshi Secondary School ESL Learners (N = 40)

No.	Statements	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
1	I feel nervous speaking English in class.	34 (85%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)
2	Fear of grammatical mistakes hinders my speaking.	35 (87.5%)	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)
3	Grammar anxiety causes hesitation in speaking.	36 (90%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)
4	I worry that classmates may laugh at my mistakes.	38 (95%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)
5	Frequent correction discourages me from speaking.	37 (92.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)
6	Polite correction increases my confidence.	25 (62.5%)	2 (5%)	13 (32.5%)
7	Teacher correction helps me learn grammar.	30 (75%)	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)
8	Grammar structures make speaking difficult.	33 (82.5%)	2 (5%)	5 (12.5%)
9	I avoid speaking due to fear of incorrect grammar.	36 (90%)	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)
10	Learners value grammar more than speaking.	33 (82.5%)	1 (2.5%)	6 (15%)

11	Classmates encourage grammar over speaking practice.	37 (92.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)
12	I speak more easily without grammar pressure.	38 (95%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)
13	Teacher attitude affects speaking confidence.	24 (60%)	2 (5%)	14 (35%)
14	Fear of teacher correction stops me from speaking.	36 (90%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)
15	ESL learners lack speaking opportunities.	34 (85%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (12.5%)
16	Regular practice reduces speaking anxiety.	34 (85%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (12.5%)
17	Examination pressure increases grammar focus.	36 (90%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)
18	Grammar should be learned before speaking.	31 (77.5%)	1 (2.5%)	8 (20%)
19	Parents emphasize examination-based grammar learning.	35 (87.5%)	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)
20	English should be learned naturally.	38 (95%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
21	I need extra time to think about grammar before speaking English.	35 (87.5%)	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)
22	I lack confidence in speaking English due to weak grammar knowledge.	36 (90%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)

A Comparison of Urban and Rural English Learning Conditions

Urban students are more exposed to English language learning opportunities and tend to prioritize grammatical accuracy when speaking. As a result, they often experience anxiety about whether their language use is grammatically correct. However, they also benefit from access to language institutes and organizations such as the British Council, where English is actively taught and practiced. In addition, educated parents in urban areas often enroll their children in extracurricular language courses after school. On the other hand, rural students do not have access to such opportunities due to the absence of language institutes in rural areas. They are largely dependent on classroom instruction for learning English. However, in many cases, their teachers focus primarily on grammar for examination purposes rather than communicative practice.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of data collected from teachers and students in both urban and rural secondary schools, several significant factors contributing to grammar-related speaking anxiety have been identified. These factors are discussed in the following section.

Teachers' Emphasis on Grammatical Accuracy

One of the foremost reasons for grammar-related speaking anxiety is teachers' strong focus on grammatical accuracy. The researcher asked the teachers why they emphasize grammatical accuracy during students' oral communication. The teachers replied that speaking without grammatical accuracy is inappropriate. Moreover, they believe that, since English is a second language, accurate speaking can only be achieved through proper use of grammar.

Examination-Oriented Teaching

During data collection, the researcher found important information regarding teachers' perspectives on examination-oriented teaching. The teachers reported that they are bound by examination requirements, as both public and internal assessments primarily focus on grammatical structures such as sentence transformation, tag questions, narration, voice, right forms of verbs, connectors, and articles. As a result, teachers prioritize syllabus-based grammar to ensure students achieve good results. However, this strong focus on examination-oriented grammar limits opportunities for natural communication and hinders the development of students' speaking skills.

School Authorities' Emphasis on Curriculum Completion

The teachers informed the researcher that, to maintain the institution's rank, the school authorities give priority to completing the curriculum, and teachers are compelled to complete the specified syllabus. As a result, they emphasize grammar and writing in the classroom. Since oral communication or speaking is not included in the curriculum, it is not given much importance.

Parents' Focus on Grammar over Speaking

The teachers told the researcher that most parents are not conscious about education and show little interest in their children's speaking skills. For them, examination results, which are largely based on grammatical knowledge, or good marks are more important than whether their children are proficient in English communication. In rural areas, many parents are uneducated and unaware of the value of education. They often do not pay adequate attention to their children's learning and, in many cases, prefer that their children contribute to the family income rather than continue their studies. Consequently, parents do not particularly value whether their children are skilled in speaking English.

Limited Use of Modern Teaching Methods

The researcher engaged in discussions with teachers regarding their teaching plans and pedagogical practices. When asked about modern or student-centered approaches—such as topic-based discussion, group presentation, teacher–student interaction, and questioning techniques—some teachers reported that they were not familiar with these methods. Instead, they primarily focused on teaching grammatical structures and instructing students on how to apply them during speaking activities. Moreover, teachers noted that many rural students struggle to understand spoken English; therefore, they often rely on the native language for instruction. This practice, while supportive for comprehension, may limit students' exposure to English and reduce opportunities for developing communicative competence.

Frequent Grammatical Correction

When asked about their lack of participation in English speaking activities, many students explained that they do make attempts to speak; however, teachers often interrupt them to point out grammatical mistakes. This repeated correction discourages students and gradually reduces their interest in speaking English. Consequently, they tend to withdraw from oral participation in the classroom and avoid interacting with their teachers, even when they have questions. This behavior is largely influenced by a fear of making errors, which increases anxiety and negatively affects their willingness to communicate.

Fear of Peer Evaluation

The findings from data collection indicate that fear of peer judgment plays a significant role in students' reluctance to engage in oral communication. Specifically, when students attempt to speak in English, they become concerned about making grammatical mistakes. They often anticipate that their classmates may ridicule them for these errors. As a result, students feel discouraged and gradually lose confidence in speaking English in the classroom.

Students' Nervousness in Speaking English

During data collection, the researcher maintained a friendly and supportive attitude toward the students in order to explore the underlying reasons for their speaking anxiety. The students reported that they primarily learn English through grammatical structures and rules. However, when they attempt to

speaking in English using these grammatical rules, they struggle to maintain fluency. This is because they tend to focus on constructing grammatically correct sentences while speaking, which interrupts the natural flow of communication. As a result, they become nervous during speaking activities. Moreover, the students expressed hesitation due to their fear of making grammatical mistakes. This constant concern about accuracy further increases their anxiety and discourages them from participating in oral communication.

Avoidance of English in Social and Community Settings

The researcher asked the students whether they practice speaking in English outside the classroom. They reported that they do not speak in English in social programs, family gatherings, birthday

parties, or other community festivals. This is because they feel afraid that when they speak in English, they may make grammatical mistakes, and others may ridicule their speech. As a result, they express unwillingness to engage in oral communication and prefer to use their first language.

Impact of Grammar Memorization on Speaking Fluency and Anxiety

The students informed the researcher that they tend to memorize grammatical structures by following their teachers' instructions, as they believe this helps them achieve accuracy in speaking. However, this method does not assist them in developing fluency. When they attempt to speak naturally, they become anxious about making grammatical mistakes. Some students also reported that they memorize specific grammar items such as voice change, rules of narration, parts of speech, sentence transformation, and tense. They believe that mastery of these grammatical structures contributes to accurate speaking. Nevertheless, an overemphasis on memorization appears to hinder spontaneous communication and increases their speaking anxiety.

Preference for Grammar Instruction over Speaking in Large Classrooms

In relation to oral communication practice, the researcher was informed that several teachers face challenges due to large class sizes, typically consisting of 65–70 students. Within a fixed period, it becomes extremely difficult to ensure the completion of speaking activities such as pair dialogues, individual presentations, and picture-based descriptions for all learners. As a result, many students do not get sufficient opportunities to participate in speaking tasks. Moreover, teachers reported that in such large classrooms, teaching grammatical structures is comparatively easier to manage. Grammar-based instruction allows for whole-class engagement and can be delivered more efficiently within time constraints. However, this focus on grammatical accuracy often comes at the expense of natural language use and communicative practice. Consequently, students may develop knowledge of grammatical rules but fail to apply them effectively in real-life communication

Recommendations for Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Fluency

The researcher proposes several recommendations to improve students' English speaking skills. First, teachers should receive adequate training in modern language teaching methods and be encouraged to adopt communicative approaches in the classroom. They should create a language-oriented environment in which students can speak English without the pressure of strict grammatical accuracy. Rather than focusing excessively on error correction, teachers should promote natural language use and foster students' confidence in speaking. They should also provide regular opportunities for speaking practice and interact with students in English to encourage active participation. Classroom activities such as dialogues, debates, presentations, and role-plays can be incorporated to enhance speaking proficiency. Additionally, teachers should guide students in using appropriate formal and informal expressions and support the development of accurate pronunciation. Furthermore, educational authorities should take necessary measures to support speaking development. Schools should be equipped with essential resources, such as audio-visual aids (e.g., speakers and projectors), and specific time should be allocated for speaking practice within the curriculum. Special training programs, particularly for rural teachers, should be arranged to help them integrate grammar effectively into speaking activities without creating unnecessary pressure on students.

Finally, students should be encouraged to practice speaking English both inside and outside the classroom. They should strive to overcome their fear of making mistakes and build confidence in communication. Even when they make errors or encounter peer ridicule, they should continue practicing consistently. Greater emphasis should be placed on fluency rather than grammatical perfection during speaking activities.

CONCLUSION

Finally, this study seeks to identify the key factors contributing to secondary school students'

grammar-related anxiety in oral communication. The findings reveal that English language teaching in many Bangladeshi classrooms remains largely grammar-focused, with an emphasis on structural accuracy, frequent error correction, and examination-oriented practices. Limited attention to speaking skills, lack of communicative activities in the curriculum, and insufficient teacher training—particularly in rural contexts—further constrain students' opportunities to develop oral proficiency. In addition, external pressures from school authorities and parents to achieve high academic results reinforce a grammar-dominated learning environment. The study also highlights important psychological barriers, including students' fear of making mistakes, anxiety caused by repeated correction, and concern about peer ridicule. These factors collectively reduce students' confidence and willingness to participate in speaking activities. Moreover, the widespread practice of memorizing grammatical structures, rather than using language communicatively, limits the development of fluency among both urban and rural learners. Based on these findings, the study suggests that a shift toward communicative language teaching approaches is essential. If teachers are adequately trained in communicative strategies and create supportive classroom environments that prioritize fluency alongside accuracy, students' anxiety can be significantly reduced. Encouraging regular speaking practice and fostering a positive, non-

threatening atmosphere can gradually build learners' confidence and improve their communicative competence. In conclusion, addressing both pedagogical practices and psychological factors is crucial for reducing grammar-related anxiety and promoting effective English speaking skills among secondary school students.

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