

Helping Students

FIND THEIR VOICE

How Scaffolding Reduces Communicative Barriers in English Classrooms



Why Students Stay Silent

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

A situation-specific form of anxiety that occurs only in the foreign language classroom and can interfere with communication, learning, and language production.

(Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986)

STUDENTS EXPERIENCE ANXIETY WHEN SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Findings from Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986)
– the original study on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

49%



"I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class."

33%



"I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class."

28%



"I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students."

47%



"of anxious learners disagree with the statement 'I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.'"

Percentages indicate the proportion of students who agreed with the statements (or disagreed in the last item).

Emotional Barriers

• fear of making mistakes

"I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make."

• fear of negative evaluation

"I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language."

• speaking in front of classmates

"I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students."

• low confidence

"I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class."

Cognitive Barriers

- limited vocabulary
- pronunciation difficulties
- insufficient language proficiency
- lack of speaking practice

THE CONSEQUENCES



Silence

Students choose not to speak.



Short answers

Students give minimal responses.



Avoidance of interaction

Students withdraw from speaking opportunities.



Reduced willingness to communicate

Students become less willing to speak in the future.



Scaffolding Supports Communication

WHAT IS SCAFFOLDING?

Refers to temporary support that enables learners to perform tasks they could not yet do independently.

→ support in a targeted way, which is gradually withdrawn as learners gain competence

Key principles

- ✓ Challenge + support
- ✓ Interaction and participation
- ✓ Gradual release of support
- ✓ Focus on language and content
- ✓ Individual needs in mind

(Mercator-Institut, 2023)

Emotional

Goal: Reduce anxiety and create a sense of safety.

- building a culture of appreciation and acceptance of mistakes
- alternative ways of participation (e.g. writing answers, pair work)
- positive and constructive feedback
- reading aloud as a less threatening form of speaking

→ learners develop trust in their language competence
→ they feel safe enough to take communicative risks

Interactional

Goal: Develop language together.

- Think-Pair-Share
- group jigsaw
- small group work
- collaborative scaffolding (students support each other in finding words and expressing ideas)

→ learners negotiate meaning together
→ they support each other in using language and solving communicative problems

Lingusitic-Cognitive

Goal: Make linguistic demands visible and manageable

- word banks
- chunks / set phrases
- sentence starters
- frameworks / sentence frames
- model texts and examples

→ support is gradually faded as learners gain independence
→ learners can focus on communication instead of language retrieval

Example from Practice

Case Study: Cooperative Scaffolding

SETTING

Secondary EFL classroom
Three-person groups

TASK

Collaborative role-play

SCAFFOLDS

Language chunks
Support cards
Peer interaction
Collaborative problem solving

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- students jointly negotiated formulations
- all group members contributed
- learners supported one another during communication
- scaffolding emerged through both materials and interaction

CONCLUSION

Cooperative learning created opportunities to overcome communicative barriers and increased learners' participation.

* Useful *
expressions

Let's go
by bus.

We could ...
What about ...
How about ...

Teacher Toolkit: Practical Strategies



BEFORE SPEAKING

- predictable routines reduce anxiety
- provide sentence starters and useful expressions
- explain the task and set success criteria



DURING SPEAKING

- encourage students to pause and take a breath before answering
- use pair or group work to lower pressure
- peer reminders like "Take your time" help students regulate anxiety



AFTER SPEAKING

- replace cold calling with voluntary sharing
- highlight successful language "I heard someone say..."
- celebrate communication, not just accuracy
- give face-saving, constructive feedback

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Consequences of Effective Scaffolding



REDUCED
ANXIETY AND
FEAR



MORE
PARTICIPATION AND
INTERACTION



STRONGER
LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT



GREATER CONFIDENCE
AND ACADEMIC
SUCCESS

"When I'm in my Spanish class I just freeze! I can't think of a thing when my teacher calls on me."

(Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 125)