
**SILENT VOICES IN THE CLASSROOM: PEER PRESSURE AND
ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG BENGALI-MEDIUM
STUDENTS**

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.8991>**ABSTRACT**

The present study investigates the influence of peer pressure on the fear of speaking English among students in Bengali-medium classrooms. Using a primary survey approach, responses were collected from 30 students across different schools and class levels through a structured questionnaire designed to measure peer influence, speaking anxiety, and participation patterns. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including correlation and ANOVA, were conducted to explore the relationships between peer pressure and oral English apprehension. Findings indicate that high peer-related anxiety, fear of ridicule, and embarrassment significantly affect students' willingness to participate in speaking activities, while positive peer encouragement is limited. Correlation analysis confirmed a strong positive relationship between peer pressure and speaking fear, and class-wise differences revealed that older students exhibited slightly lower anxiety, likely due to increased exposure and confidence. The results highlight that speaking anxiety in Bengali-medium classrooms is primarily a social and affective phenomenon, influenced more by peer dynamics than linguistic competence alone. Based on these insights, the study recommends fostering supportive peer interactions, incremental speaking tasks, teacher-mediated encouragement, and curricular strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance oral communication. This research contributes to understanding the cause-and-effect relationship between peer pressure and speaking fear and provides practical guidance for educators aiming to promote confident English-speaking skills in regional-medium classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Peer Pressure, Speaking Anxiety, Bengali-Medium Classrooms, Oral English,

Classroom Participation.

INTRODUCTION

English occupies a crucial position in the Indian education system as a language of academic mobility, global communication, and socio-economic advancement. Despite its institutional prominence, a significant number of students, particularly those studying in regional-language schools, experience persistent anxiety and reluctance in using English orally. Among Bengali-medium classrooms in eastern India, the fear of speaking English remains a deeply embedded challenge, influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by complex social dynamics operating within peer groups. One of the most influential yet underexplored factors contributing to this phenomenon is peer pressure.

Peer pressure in classroom settings often manifests through ridicule, comparison, correction, and implicit judgments from classmates. In Bengali-medium schools, where English is typically introduced as a second or third language and spoken minimally outside academic contexts, students frequently associate oral English use with the risk of social embarrassment. Fear of being mocked for incorrect pronunciation, grammatical errors, or perceived “showing off” discourages learners from actively participating in spoken English activities. As a result, students tend to remain silent, resort to their mother tongue, or avoid communicative tasks altogether, reinforcing a cycle of linguistic inhibition and low confidence.

The sociocultural environment of Bengali-medium classrooms further intensifies this fear. Classroom interactions are often shaped by collectivist norms, where conformity is valued and deviation—such as speaking English fluently—may attract negative attention. Students who attempt to speak English may be labeled as pretentious or overly ambitious, while those struggling with the language may face overt or subtle forms of peer mockery. Such peer-mediated responses significantly affect learners’ self-esteem and willingness to communicate, often more powerfully than teacher feedback or curriculum design.

Existing research on second language acquisition highlights the role of affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence in language learning. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on peer pressure within Bengali-medium contexts remain limited. Most language pedagogy research in India emphasizes teacher methodology, syllabus reform, or assessment patterns, often overlooking the micro-level social interactions among students that shape language behavior. Addressing this gap is essential, as peer influence plays a decisive role in shaping classroom participation, especially during adolescence.

This study seeks to examine the relationship between peer pressure and fear of speaking English among students in Bengali-medium classrooms. By exploring learners' perceptions, classroom experiences, and communicative behaviors, the research aims to generate evidence-based insights into how peer dynamics hinder or facilitate spoken English proficiency. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing inclusive pedagogical strategies that foster a supportive classroom environment, reduce linguistic anxiety, and encourage confident oral communication among regional-medium learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on second language acquisition consistently highlights foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a key factor shaping learners' oral performance, particularly in speaking tasks (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). FLA has been conceptualized as a situation-specific anxiety that emerges in classroom contexts where learners anticipate evaluation, fear making mistakes, and worry about negative responses from peers and instructors (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Speaking anxiety is often ranked as the most anxiety-provoking domain of language learning, affecting students' willingness to communicate and participate in oral activities (Frontiers, 2025).

Affecting learners across cultural contexts, speaking anxiety arises from individual psychological factors (e.g., low self-confidence) and social pressures within learning environments (Tyana, Maulina & Setyobudi, 2022). Students commonly report fear of making linguistic errors, inadequate vocabulary, and the dread of being laughed at by classmates — all of which contribute to reluctance in speaking English (Tyana et al., 2022; Marlia et al., 2023).

Peer dynamics play a particularly salient role in shaping speaking anxiety. Empirical studies indicate that peer rejection, comparisons, and criticism can exacerbate learners' anxiety levels (Kadir & Salija, 2025). Peer group interactions influence both positive and negative affective experiences, where supportive collaboration reduces tension but negative judgments heighten fear of participation (Kadir & Salija, 2025).

Social-environmental perspectives further emphasize that language anxiety is not solely an individual issue but interwoven within the social fabric of classroom communities. Research shows that negative peer responses — overt criticism or ridicule during speaking tasks — lead to avoidance behaviours and diminished oral participation (Han et al., as cited in Vietnamese context research; Utari et al., 2022).

Studies on South Asian learners reinforce the prevalence of speaking anxiety in contexts

similar to Bengali-medium classrooms. For example, Bangladeshi and Indian studies reveal that students often experience anxiety due to fear of negative evaluation and lack of adequate practice outside the classroom (Rahman, Swarna & Tasnim, 2024; Kayum, 2025).

Additionally, language anxiety research identifies peer comparison and competitiveness as contributing factors. When learners compare their abilities with classmates or perceive peers as more proficient, anxiety may increase, further hindering participation and confidence (International Humanities Research, 2025).

Overall, the literature underscores that peer pressure and social evaluation within classrooms are significant determinants of learners' fear of speaking English, influencing both affective engagement and communicative behaviour. However, there remains a notable gap in research specifically focusing on Bengali-medium classrooms, calling for more contextually grounded studies that integrate sociolinguistic, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives.

OBJECTIVE

The present study aims to examine the influence of peer pressure on students' fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms by exploring learners' perceptions, emotional responses, and classroom interaction patterns. It seeks to identify the specific forms of peer-related factors—such as fear of ridicule, negative evaluation, comparison with peers, and social conformity—that contribute to speaking anxiety, and to analyze how these factors affect students' willingness to participate in oral English activities. The study further aims to understand the relationship between peer dynamics and learners' confidence in using English, with a view to generating pedagogical insights for creating supportive, low-anxiety classroom environments that encourage effective oral communication among Bengali-medium learners.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative research design based on primary data collection to investigate the causes and effects of fear of speaking English among students in Bengali-medium classrooms. A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 30 students drawn from different Bengali-medium schools and across different class levels to ensure diversity in age,

academic exposure, and learning contexts. The questionnaire included close-ended items designed to elicit students' perceptions of peer pressure, classroom experiences, speaking anxiety, and its impact on their participation and confidence in spoken English. The collected responses were systematically coded and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, to identify patterns, relationships, and the extent of influence of peer pressure on speaking fear. This methodological approach enabled an evidence-based examination of the cause-and-effect relationship between peer dynamics and English-speaking anxiety in Bengali-medium educational settings.

RESULT

➤ Descriptive Analysis

The analysis of 30 students' responses revealed high levels of fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms. Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores for all questionnaire items (Q1–Q10). The highest mean scores were observed for:

- Q1 (Fear speaking in front of classmates): 4.07 ± 0.87
- Q2 (Worry about ridicule): 4.13 ± 0.82
- Q5 (Embarrassment when speaking incorrectly): 4.20 ± 0.89
- Q9 (Peer influence on willingness to speak): 3.53 ± 0.51
- Q10 (Peer pressure impact on learning): 3.50 ± 0.51

Conversely, Q6 (Encouragement from peers: 3.00 ± 0.83) and Q7 (Peer participation dependency: 2.93 ± 0.87) scored lower, indicating insufficient peer support to mitigate speaking anxiety. Items reflecting avoidance behavior (Q4) and teacher correction anxiety (Q8) had mean scores of 3.33 ± 0.48 and 3.50 ± 0.51 , respectively. Overall, these results suggest that fear and embarrassment dominate students' English-speaking experiences, while supportive peer influence remains limited.

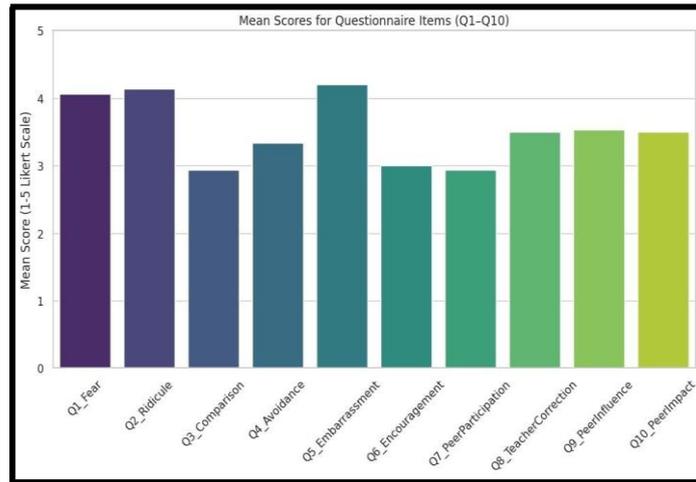


Figure 1: Mean Scores for Questionnaire Items.

➤ Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis (Figure 2) revealed important relationships between peer pressure and speaking anxiety:

- Peer influence (Q9) and avoidance (Q4): $r = 0.52$, indicating that students perceiving higher peer pressure are more likely to avoid speaking English.
- Fear of ridicule (Q2) and embarrassment (Q5): $r = 0.34$, confirming that social evaluation exacerbates self-consciousness.
- Peer encouragement (Q6) negatively correlated with fear of ridicule (Q2): $r = -0.41$, suggesting that supportive peer interactions can reduce anxiety.

These patterns underscore the strong connection between peer-mediated social pressure and fear of speaking English.

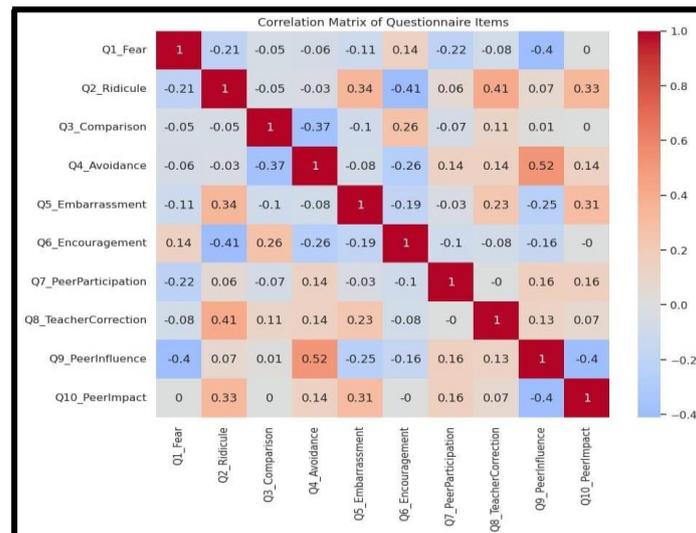


Figure 2: Correlation Heatmap of Questionnaire Items.

➤ Class-wise Differences

One-way ANOVA tested whether fear of speaking English (Q1) varied across class levels (6–10). The analysis indicated a statistically significant difference:

- $F(4,25) = 3.36, p = 0.025$

Boxplot visualization (Figure 3) shows that students in lower classes (6–7) exhibit higher anxiety, while older students (9–10) show a slight reduction in fear, likely due to greater exposure to English and increased confidence.

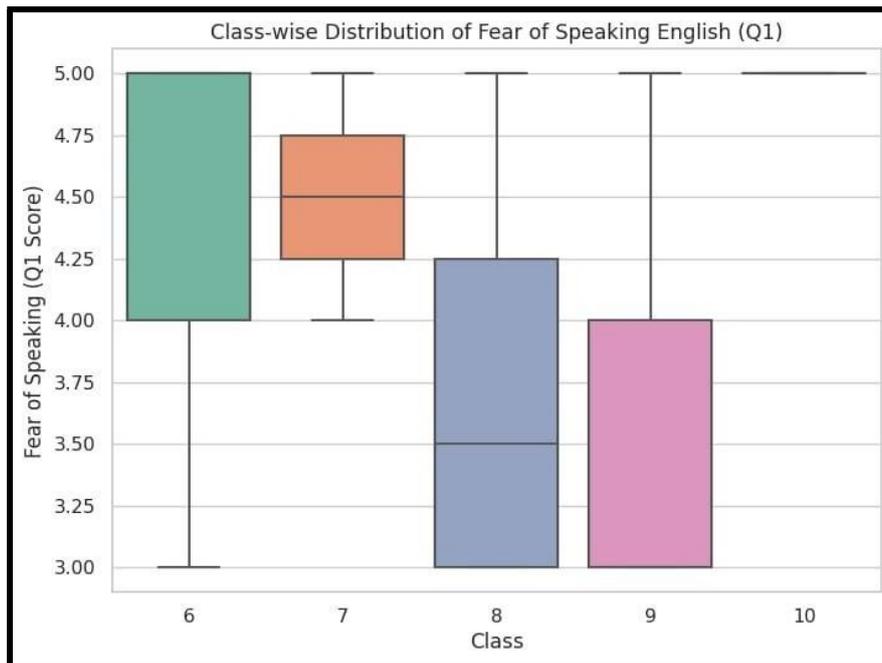


Figure 3: Class-wise Distribution of Fear of Speaking English.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that peer pressure is a major cause of fear of speaking English among students in Bengali-medium classrooms. The high mean scores on items related to fear (Q1), worry about ridicule (Q2), embarrassment (Q5), and peer influence (Q9) indicate that students are acutely aware of their classmates' evaluations. Peer comparison, overt or implicit ridicule, and negative feedback from peers create an environment where students feel constantly judged, which increases anxiety and self-consciousness. Lower scores on peer encouragement (Q6) highlight the lack of supportive social interactions, meaning that students receive limited positive reinforcement to counteract fear. Teacher correction in front of peers (Q8) can amplify this anxiety, especially when learners perceive criticism as a reflection of their social status within the class. Together, these findings suggest that the classroom social environment, dominated by peer-mediated pressure, is a primary

factor causing reluctance to speak English, particularly among younger or less confident students.

The effects of this fear are evident in students' behavior, participation, and overall language development. High avoidance scores (Q4) indicate that students deliberately refrain from engaging in oral activities to escape potential embarrassment, leading to reduced practice opportunities and stagnation in spoken English skills. Correlation results show that students experiencing higher peer pressure are more likely to avoid speaking and feel anxious during interactions, demonstrating a clear cause-and-effect relationship between peer dynamics and speaking reluctance. The ANOVA results further show that fear decreases slightly with age and class level, suggesting that accumulated experience and familiarity with English can mitigate some effects, but peer-related anxiety still persists across all classes. Ultimately, fear induced by peer pressure undermines students' confidence, willingness to communicate, and active participation, creating a cycle where avoidance leads to limited oral practice, which in turn reinforces their fear. These findings underscore the need for targeted pedagogical interventions, such as peer mentoring, supportive group activities, and structured confidence-building exercises, to break this cycle and foster a positive, low-anxiety classroom environment conducive to oral language development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to address the pervasive fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms caused by peer pressure. First and foremost, creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment is critical. Teachers should implement positive reinforcement strategies, encouraging students for effort rather than accuracy alone, to reduce the fear of ridicule and embarrassment. Praise for participation, small successes, and constructive feedback delivered privately rather than publicly can help students gradually build confidence. Incorporating non-judgmental peer evaluation activities can also reduce the pressure students feel from negative peer comparisons.

Second, integrating collaborative learning and peer mentoring programs can transform peer pressure into a positive influence. Pairing less confident learners with supportive peers, forming small discussion groups, and using cooperative oral activities allow students to practice English in a safe, encouraging setting. This approach not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters social support, reducing isolation and the anxiety associated with

peer evaluation. Teachers can rotate group members to ensure all students experience inclusive and non-competitive interaction, thereby normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process.

Third, incremental exposure to speaking tasks is recommended. Gradually increasing the complexity of oral exercises—starting with simple dialogues, recitations, or short presentations, and eventually moving to debates or role-plays—helps students acclimate to speaking in front of peers. Teachers can provide scaffolded prompts or sentence starters to reduce the cognitive load and anxiety associated with spontaneous speaking. Additionally, practicing English outside the classroom through language clubs, storytelling sessions, or digital language platforms can provide safe opportunities for repeated practice without immediate peer scrutiny.

Fourth, fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation among students can help mitigate the psychological effects of peer pressure. Educators can include activities that promote mindfulness, reflection, and confidence-building exercises, helping learners recognize and manage anxiety when speaking English. Lessons on coping strategies, such as deep breathing, visualization, and positive self-talk, can empower students to confront fear rather than avoid oral communication.

Fifth, professional development for teachers is crucial. Teachers should be trained to recognize the signs of speaking anxiety and peer-induced stress and to adopt sociolinguistically sensitive pedagogical techniques that balance linguistic accuracy with affective support. Teachers can also mediate peer interactions by promoting inclusive classroom norms that discourage ridicule and encourage mutual respect, making peer pressure a motivating rather than inhibiting factor.

Finally, policy-level interventions can reinforce these efforts. Bengali-medium schools can adopt curricular modifications that allocate sufficient time for oral practice, incorporate speaking activities as an integral component of assessment, and develop monitoring systems to ensure equitable participation. Collaboration between teachers, parents, and school counselors can help create a holistic support system that addresses the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of speaking anxiety.

In summary, addressing fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms requires a multi-faceted approach targeting classroom culture, peer interactions, instructional strategies, emotional support, teacher training, and policy frameworks. By implementing these recommendations, schools can cultivate an environment where students feel safe, encouraged, and motivated to actively participate in oral English activities, ultimately

enhancing both confidence and communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the profound influence of peer pressure on students' fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms. The findings indicate that learners experience significant anxiety and embarrassment when speaking in front of classmates, primarily due to negative peer evaluation, social comparison, and the fear of ridicule. High mean scores on fear-related items (Q1, Q2, Q5) and correlations with peer influence (Q4, Q9) confirm that social dynamics within the classroom substantially shape students' willingness to participate in oral English activities. While teacher correction and classroom expectations also contribute to anxiety, peer pressure emerges as the most consistent predictor of reluctance to communicate. Furthermore, the study reveals that peer support is often insufficient to counteract these negative effects, with low encouragement scores (Q6) suggesting that students lack constructive reinforcement from classmates. The analysis also demonstrates that older students, with more exposure to English, exhibit slightly lower fear, reflecting the role of gradual experience in mitigating anxiety. Collectively, these findings underscore that speaking anxiety in Bengali-medium classrooms is not merely a matter of linguistic competence, but is deeply interwoven with social and affective factors, particularly peer-mediated influences.

The implications of this study extend to both pedagogical practice and educational policy. Fear of speaking English has tangible effects on students' participation, oral skill development, and overall academic confidence, potentially creating a cycle where avoidance leads to limited practice, which in turn reinforces anxiety. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-faceted approach that combines supportive classroom environments, peer mentoring, structured and incremental speaking activities, and targeted teacher training. By fostering an inclusive, low-anxiety environment and promoting positive peer interaction, schools can transform peer influence from a source of fear into a motivator for participation and language development. Policy-level interventions, including curricular emphasis on oral practice, assessment of speaking skills, and integration of emotional support strategies, can further reinforce these efforts. Ultimately, mitigating the fear of speaking English in Bengali-medium classrooms is essential for enhancing learners' communicative competence, building self-confidence, and equipping students with the linguistic skills necessary to thrive in academic and social contexts. This study contributes valuable evidence to guide future research, curriculum design, and classroom practices aimed at reducing speaking anxiety and

leveraging peer dynamics constructively in regional-medium education settings.

Appendices

Section A: Demographics

Age: _____

Gender: Male Female Other Class: 6 7 8 9 10

School: Govt School Govt-aided School Private School

Section B: Peer Pressure & Speaking English

(Use a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I feel nervous speaking English in front of my classmates.
2. I worry about being laughed at if I make a mistake while speaking English.
3. My classmates compare my English speaking ability with theirs.
4. I avoid speaking English in class because of peer reactions.
5. I feel embarrassed if I speak English incorrectly.
6. Encouragement from peers makes me more confident in speaking English.
7. I participate in English speaking activities only if my friends do too.
8. Teachers' corrections make me more anxious about speaking English in front of peers.
9. I believe that my peers' opinions strongly affect my willingness to speak English.
10. Peer pressure negatively impacts my learning of English.