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*Article*

# Phonemic Awareness as a Solution to Speech Anxiety

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**Abstract:** People of all ages and skill levels can benefit from phonemic awareness activities due to their accessibility and adaptability. People can improve their pronunciation and communicate more clearly and confidently by developing their capacity to perceive and manipulate sounds. This combined emphasis on improving speech and reducing anxiety draws attention to the many benefits of incorporating phonemic awareness interventions into speech therapy plans and educational courses. The aim of this article review is to gather and collect relevant literature that solidifies the idea that phonemic awareness is one of the solutions to speech anxiety problems. Through the consistent practice of diverse phonemic exercises, people can become less sensitive to the anxiety-inducing elements of verbal communication, thus cultivating a sense of mastery and control over their speech. Through gradual exposure, people can gradually develop resilience and confidence, which is an essential component in the effective management of speech anxiety. In order to enable people to overcome speech anxiety, this conclusion emphasizes the importance of including phonemic awareness interventions within educational and therapeutic settings.

**Keywords:** anxiety; glossophobia; phonemic awareness; public speaking; speech anxiety

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**Rationale:**

Speech anxiety may be alleviated by phonemic awareness, which is the capacity to identify and control the sounds in uttered words. This is especially true in therapeutic and educational settings. One of the main justifications for this strategy is that phonemic awareness makes it easier for people to comprehend the phonetic components of speech more deeply, which can boost their confidence when speaking in general. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) assert that phonemic awareness is a necessary precondition for reading and language ability and that mastering it might boost one's confidence while speaking orally. People can develop a more tangible grasp of speech mechanics by concentrating on the sounds that make up words, which may help them feel less nervous when speaking.

The fact that phonemic awareness helps with articulation and pronunciation is another reason it might reduce speech anxiety. Strong phonemic awareness abilities help people distinguish between similar sounds, which improves speech clarity and accuracy, according to research by Adams (1990). This clarity can help reduce speech anxiety caused by the typical concern of mispronouncing words. As speakers improve at making the right sounds, they might feel more assured of their capacity to communicate clearly, which would lessen their general worry when speaking.

Further, phonemic awareness training frequently includes exercises that encourage speaking and active listening in a safe setting, which can help learners become less sensitive to the pressures of public speaking over time. Yopp and Yopp (2000) state that in order to complete phonemic awareness activities, participants must pay close attention to sound patterns and vocalize them repeatedly. Over time, anxiety can be reduced by helping learners become more at ease with speaking in public and with their own voices through practice and frequent exposure. Learners can practice in a safe environment free from the worry of failing or receiving negative feedback right away because these activities are structured and encouraging. At various stages of the learning process, parents and instructors can both benefit positively from them in order to foster meaningful and practical language acquisition and progress (Genelza, 2022).

Likewise, phonemic awareness has been connected to reduced speech anxiety by enhancing general language fluency. People who are fluent in their language are less likely to hesitate or stumble over words, which might make them feel anxious when speaking. The premise that phonemic awareness is essential to reading fluency development, which in turn supports verbal fluency, is supported by research conducted by Stanovich (1986). Speech anxiety may lessen as people become more proficient speakers through improved phonemic awareness because they feel more capable and ready to express their ideas succinctly and coherently.

Finally, by using phonemic awareness to focus cognitively on the technical parts of communication, anxiety can be reduced by refocusing attention from the emotional aspects of speaking. People can divert their attention from the task of precisely making sounds to the fear of failure or judgment by focusing on the mechanics of sound generation and manipulation. This cognitive shift offers a real, manageable component of speaking to focus on, which can be especially helpful for people who suffer from high levels of speech anxiety. The cognitive advantages of phonemic awareness training are highlighted by research by Ehri et al. (2001), which shows how it can improve attention and lower anxiety by giving people who are trying to get better at speaking a clear, skill-based focus. With this, the aim of this article review is to gather and collect relevant literature that solidifies the idea that phonemic awareness is one of the solutions to speech anxiety problems.

### *What is Speech Anxiety?*

Glossophobia, another name for speech anxiety, is a common concern that impacts a large percentage of people. This anxiety includes a variety of anxieties about being judged by others and performing well in public in addition to the act of speaking itself. This dread can range significantly in intensity from a moderate case of anxiousness to crippling terror that prevents one from speaking clearly (McCroskey, 1970).

The dread or anxiety connected with public speaking is known as speech anxiety, sometimes known as glossophobia. A considerable percentage of people suffer with this illness, which can cause anything from moderate anxiety to crippling panic. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 73% of people suffer from speech anxiety to some extent (NIMH, 2017). It is typified by psychological and physiological reactions like anxiety of being poorly judged and pessimistic thinking, as well as physiological reactions such as elevated heart rate, sweating, and shaking.

Researchers like Charles Darwin began studying speech anxiety in the early 20th century by observing the body's reactions to dread. According to Darwin's observation in "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals," public speaking anxiety triggers the body's fight-or-flight reaction (Darwin, 1872). This historical background clarifies that speech anxiety is an adaptive natural reaction designed to shield people from perceived threats.

Speech anxiety's physiological effects can be especially upsetting. These symptoms include elevated heart rate, perspiration, dry mouth, and tense muscles (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The fear of speaking in front of an audience can cause these bodily reactions, which are a component of the body's normal stress response. Individuals who are aware of these indicators may be better able to identify and control their anxiety.

Speech anxiety is psychologically characterized by feelings of inadequacy and dread of being negatively judged. According to McCroskey (1970), people who suffer from severe speech anxiety frequently overestimate the possibility of bad things happening and underestimate their capacity to handle them. This cognitive distortion may result in avoidance behaviors, such as people avoiding public speaking situations out of fear of the accompanying anxiety. Because they are using the English language in the classroom, the students need to actively participate in the communicative activities created to improve their speaking performance. In other academic areas, they are also encouraged to use the English language (Genelza, 2021).

Performance can be greatly impacted by speech anxiety. According to research by Ayres and Hopf (1993), people who experience high levels of speech anxiety typically perform worse than people who experience lower levels of anxiety when giving public speeches. The overwhelming

nature of the worry, which can obstruct cognitive functions essential for efficient communication, such as thinking structure and memory recall, is frequently the cause of this performance impairment.

Speech anxiety can develop for a variety of reasons. Beatty et al. (1998) suggest that the involvement of genetic predisposition and environmental factors is mutual. People who have a family history of anxiety disorders, for example, are more prone to suffer from speech anxiety. Furthermore, unpleasant prior experiences with public speaking, like taking harsh criticism, can make one more afraid of speaking in public in the future.

In order to reduce speech anxiety, preparation and practice are essential. According to Lucas (2011), being well-prepared can increase confidence and lower uncertainty. Anxiety can be decreased by rehearsing a speech several times, becoming familiar with the subject matter, and thinking through potential questions. Furthermore, presenters who use visualization techniques—in which they picture themselves succeeding—can feel less nervous and more confident.

There are several methods for dealing with speech anxiety. It has been demonstrated that cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) is very successful. A study by Pertaub, Slater, and Barker (2002) found that CBT assists people in questioning and altering their negative thought patterns as well as creating more useful coping strategies. In CBT for speech anxiety, methods including systematic desensitization—in which patients progressively expose themselves to speaking situations—and relaxation training are frequently employed.

Speech anxiety can also be reduced by being aware of the viewpoint of the audience. Studies conducted by Allen and Bourhis (1996) reveal that presenters frequently exaggerate the level of scrutiny from their listeners. Reducing the pressure speakers feel can be achieved by acknowledging that audiences are generally sympathetic and supportive. Anxiety can be further reduced by establishing a connection with the audience through participatory components and eye contact.

Resolving speech anxiety provides advantages for the long run that go beyond enhancing public speaking abilities. Hamilton (2008) states that people who overcome their fear of public speaking frequently report feeling more confident and self-assured in other spheres of their lives. They become more open to assuming leadership positions and participating in activities that call for clear communication, which advances their growth on both a personal and professional level.

### **Findings and Discussions on Phonemic Awareness as a Solution to Speech Anxiety**

This review discusses the following statements from different reliable articles gathered as the focus of this study:

The development of language and literacy depends heavily on phonemic awareness, or the capacity to identify and work with phonemes. Studies reveal that improving phonemic awareness can dramatically lower speech anxiety, a prevalent problem that impairs people's capacity for efficient communication (Adams, 1990; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Phonemic awareness training can help reduce speech anxiety by enhancing language skills and self-assurance. Speech anxiety frequently results from a lack of trust in one's speaking ability (Blood, 2004).

The association between speech anxiety and phonemic awareness can be explained by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development, which highlights the importance of social contact in the process of cognitive growth. Interactive and interesting exercises are used in phonemic awareness training to improve phonemic awareness while also boosting confidence through uplifting social encounters. As a result, a supportive learning environment is created, which helps lessen speech anxiety (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research has indicated that therapies focusing on phonemic awareness have the potential to decrease speech anxiety. For example, a study conducted in 1988 by Lundberg, Frost, and Petersen revealed that children who were trained in phonemic awareness showed reduced anxiety levels when doing oral activities as opposed to children who were not trained in this area. This shows that phonemic awareness helps people say less when they are afraid to speak, in addition to helping them acquire language.



By assisting people in breaking down words into smaller, more manageable sounds, phonemic awareness helps people produce speech less intimidatingly (Ehri, 2005). Learning the fundamentals of language helps people become more in control of their voice, which lowers the cognitive burden that comes with speaking and, as a result, speech anxiety. This is consistent with the cognitive theory of anxiety, which holds that tasks that become more routine and doable reduce anxiety (Beck & Clark, 1997).

Including phonemic awareness instruction in curriculum can be a useful strategy for helping students who struggle with speech anxiety. Students' phonemic abilities and speaking confidence can be enhanced by incorporating activities like blending, segmenting, and rhyming into class activities. Teachers have observed gains in language proficiency and self-worth as a result of these treatments (Stanovich, 2000). The school, administrators, and instructors should involve the students in practice-based assignments and speaking, listening, reading, and writing exercises to increase their exposure to sound-word relationships (Genelza, 2022).

There are more advantages to phonemic awareness than just short-term gains in speaking confidence. Early phonemic awareness training has been linked to long-lasting decreases in speech anxiety and enhanced academic achievement in later years, according to longitudinal research (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). These results emphasize the value of early intervention and its long-term effects on people's capacity for communication as well as their general well-being.

Research has shown that phonemic awareness therapies are beneficial for a variety of populations, including people with speech and language impairments and people from diverse linguistic origins (Gillon, 2004). Activities for phonemic awareness can be made more effective in lowering speech anxiety and enhancing communication skills by being specifically designed to match the needs of these groups.

Even though phonemic awareness has many established advantages, putting such treatments into practice can be difficult, especially in areas with limited resources. Policymakers and educational institutions must invest in and promote the provision of adequate materials and training for educators. To guarantee that every student benefits from phonemic awareness training, individual variances in learning styles and rates of advancement must also be taken into account (Snowling & Hulme, 2005).

To determine the most efficient intervention techniques and to investigate the precise mechanisms by which phonemic awareness lowers speech anxiety, more study is required. Research could look into how technology, like interactive apps and internet resources, can improve training in phonemic awareness. Furthermore, investigating the effects of phonemic awareness training in various contexts and age groups may yield insightful information for wider uses (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

There is strong evidence to support the effectiveness of phonemic awareness as a treatment for speech anxiety. Training in phonemic awareness can greatly lessen speech anxiety and enhance communication skills by improving a person's phonemic skills and speaking confidence. Prioritizing the inclusion of phonemic awareness activities in curricula would help educational institutions and legislators create a welcoming and stress-free learning environment. This method helps with general academic performance as well as personal growth in addition to addressing speech anxiety (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). As a result, the organization needs to make sure that the undergraduate program adequately incorporates the teaching techniques and real-world activities that improve students' proficiency in the English language. Enhancing student control over what is taught in class and producing positive academic outcomes are the results of teaching the curriculum subject and being proficient in the language used for instruction. These factors increase the learner's exposure to and opportunity to understand the material of instruction (Genelza, 2022).

### **Concluding Remarks:**

One possible solution for speech anxiety is phonemic awareness, which provides a comprehensive method of addressing underlying anxieties related to speaking. People can gain more comfort and comprehension of language through focused exercises and activities that emphasize

sound manipulation and recognition. This will boost their confidence when speaking in public. In order to enable people to overcome speech anxiety, this conclusion emphasizes the importance of including phonemic awareness interventions within educational and therapeutic settings.

Furthermore, in a safe and encouraging setting, phonemic awareness interventions offer a structured framework that allows people to progressively expose themselves to speech-related stimuli. Through the consistent practice of diverse phonemic exercises, people can become less sensitive to the anxiety-inducing elements of verbal communication, so cultivating a sense of mastery and control over their speech. Through gradual exposure, people can gradually develop resilience and confidence, which is an essential component in the effective management of speech anxiety.

Also, phonemic awareness has long-term advantages in terms of speech fluency and articulation, going beyond merely lowering fear. People can improve their pronunciation and communicate more clearly and confidently by developing their capacity to perceive and manipulate sounds. This combined emphasis on improving speech and reducing anxiety draws attention to the many benefits of incorporating phonemic awareness interventions into speech therapy plans and educational courses.

Besides, people of all ages and skill levels can benefit from phonemic awareness activities due to their accessibility and adaptability. Phonemic awareness interventions provide a flexible and adaptable way to support people on their journey towards effective communication, whether they are used in adult speech therapy sessions to address ingrained anxiety issues or in early childhood education to lay the groundwork for fluent speech. This inclusiveness highlights how phonemic awareness can be applied universally to treat speech anxiety in a variety of demographic contexts.

Ultimately, phonemic awareness is shown to be a transforming tool in the treatment of speech anxiety, providing a whole strategy to address psychological obstacles as well as speech-related difficulties. Phonemic awareness therapies enable people to communicate verbally with confidence and competence by offering structured chances for skill development and by cultivating a better grasp of language. Therefore, including phonemic awareness into therapeutic and educational settings has great potential to provide people the tools and fortitude they need to get over their fear of speaking in public and succeed in a variety of communication scenarios.

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