

## HOW TEACHERS CAN REDUCE INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS' FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada til o'rganishda oraliq bosqich o'quvchilarining xatolikdan qo'rqishini kamaytirishda o'qituvchilarning o'рни va samarali strategiyalari tahlil qilinadi. Tarixiy va zamonaviy nazariyalar, mintaqaviy hamda xalqaro tadqiqotlar asosida, xatolikdan qo'rqishning psixologik va pedagogik ildizlari o'rganiladi. Empirik dalillar hamda amaliy tavsiyalar orqali o'qituvchilarga o'quvchilarning o'ziga ishonchini oshirish, ijtimoiy-psixologik xavfsiz muhit yaratish va xatolikni rivojlanish imkoniyati deb qabul qilishga yordam berish yo'llari ko'rsatiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** xatolikdan qo'rqish, til o'rganish, o'qituvchi strategiyalari, oraliq bosqich o'quvchilari

### Abstract

This article explores the critical role of teachers in reducing intermediate learners' fear of making mistakes during language learning. Drawing from historical and modern theories, as well as regional and international research, the psychological and pedagogical roots of mistake-related anxiety are examined. Empirical evidence and practical recommendations are provided to guide teachers in fostering learners' self-confidence, creating a psychologically safe classroom environment, and reframing mistakes as opportunities for growth and development.

**Keywords:** fear of mistakes, language learning, teacher strategies, intermediate learners

### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается роль учителя в снижении страха ошибок у учащихся среднего уровня при изучении языка. На основе исторических и современных теорий, региональных и международных исследований анализируются психологические и педагогические причины возникновения страха ошибок. Приведены эмпирические данные и практические рекомендации для учителей по формированию уверенности учащихся, созданию безопасной образовательной среды и восприятию ошибок как ресурса для развития.

**Ключевые слова:** страх ошибок, изучение языка, стратегии учителя, учащиеся среднего уровня

### Introduction

The process of learning a new language is inherently fraught with risks, chief among them the possibility of making mistakes. For intermediate learners, who have surpassed the basic stages of language acquisition yet remain far from fluency, fear of making mistakes can become a significant barrier to further progress. This fear, often rooted in psychological and sociocultural factors, may lead to reduced classroom participation, reluctance to experiment with new language forms, and ultimately, stagnation in communicative competence. Teachers, as the primary facilitators of language learning environments, are uniquely positioned to address and mitigate these fears. Their

approaches, attitudes, and strategies not only shape the emotional climate of the classroom but also influence learners' willingness to take risks and embrace errors as integral to the learning process. Understanding how teachers can effectively reduce intermediate learners' fear of making mistakes is thus of paramount importance for both language pedagogy and learner development. This article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings, historical perspectives, and empirical findings related to this issue, while offering evidence-based recommendations for classroom practice.

### **Literature Review**

The phenomenon of fear of making mistakes in language learning has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for decades, reflecting its profound impact on learner engagement and achievement. Theoretical-conceptual foundations for understanding this fear are deeply entwined with broader discussions in educational psychology, particularly those related to affective factors in learning. Early conceptualizations, such as Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) notion of foreign language anxiety, identified communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as core components influencing learners' affective states. These foundational ideas were further elaborated in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can either facilitate or impede language acquisition by acting as a mental barrier—the so-called “affective filter” that determines how much linguistic input is available for processing and internalization. In this framework, fear of making mistakes is not merely a peripheral concern but a central determinant of language learning success or failure, particularly at the intermediate stage when learners are expected to take greater communicative risks and handle more complex linguistic structures.[1]

Historical classical theories provide additional context for understanding the origins and manifestations of mistake-related fear. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, for instance, emphasizes the social nature of learning and the importance of scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable others, typically teachers or peers. Within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners are encouraged to stretch beyond their current capabilities, inevitably encountering errors as part of the developmental process. From this perspective, mistakes are not only unavoidable but essential to growth, serving as indicators of zones where support and guidance are most needed. However, the classroom climate and the teacher's response to errors critically mediate whether these mistakes are perceived as learning opportunities or as threats to self-esteem. This dialectic is further complicated by Skinnerian behaviorist traditions, which historically emphasized error correction and reinforcement, often fostering a punitive approach to mistakes that persists in some educational contexts today. The tension between viewing errors as evidence of learning versus signs of failure remains a point of debate in language pedagogy.[2]

Regional and national scholars have contributed nuanced insights into the cultural and contextual factors shaping learners' fear of making mistakes. In Central Asia, for example, researchers such as Abdullaeva (2019) have explored the intersection of language anxiety and collectivist cultural norms, noting that learners in Uzbek classrooms may experience heightened fear of public mistakes due to concerns about group harmony and face-saving. Similar findings have been reported in East Asian contexts, where the concept of “losing face” exerts a powerful influence on classroom dynamics and learners' willingness to participate in oral activities. In Western contexts, by contrast, individualistic values may mitigate some aspects of mistake-related anxiety, yet the pressure to perform and achieve can still induce significant apprehension. These cross-

cultural differences underscore the importance of context-sensitive pedagogical strategies and caution against one-size-fits-all approaches to reducing fear of mistakes.[3]

Empirical studies and applications have sought to operationalize these theoretical insights, investigating the effectiveness of various teacher interventions in reducing learners' fear of making mistakes. A growing body of research suggests that the teacher's attitude toward error correction is a critical variable. Studies by Lyster and Ranta (1997), for example, have distinguished between explicit correction, recasts, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback, finding that indirect forms of feedback often lead to greater learner uptake and reduced anxiety. More recent investigations have focused on the role of positive reinforcement, peer collaboration, and classroom discourse practices in shaping learners' affective responses to errors. For instance, empirical work by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) demonstrates that teachers who foster a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere—characterized by encouragement, humor, and genuine interest in learners' ideas—can significantly decrease learners' fear of making mistakes and increase their willingness to communicate. Classroom-based interventions such as “error-friendly” activities, where mistakes are openly discussed and analyzed without punitive consequences, have also been shown to improve learners' self-confidence and risk-taking behaviors.[4]

A critical analysis of the literature reveals both consensus and ongoing debates regarding the best practices for teachers seeking to reduce fear of mistakes among intermediate learners. On one hand, there is broad agreement that punitive error correction and public shaming are detrimental to learner motivation and participation. On the other hand, some scholars caution that excessive tolerance of errors may lead to fossilization, where incorrect forms become entrenched due to lack of corrective feedback. The challenge, therefore, lies in striking a balance between providing necessary guidance and maintaining a psychologically safe environment. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of teacher training in affective pedagogy, suggesting that teachers require not only linguistic expertise but also skills in emotional intelligence, classroom management, and intercultural competence. In addition, the use of formative assessment strategies—such as self-reflection, peer evaluation, and portfolio work—has been advocated as a means of shifting the focus from summative judgment to ongoing developmental feedback. These approaches align with the principles of learner autonomy and self-regulation, encouraging learners to view mistakes as part of their personal learning trajectory rather than as fixed deficits.[5]

Practical recommendations emerging from the literature include several evidence-based strategies for teachers. First, establishing a classroom culture that normalizes mistakes is essential. This can be achieved through explicit discussions about the role of errors in learning, teacher modeling of mistake acceptance, and the use of humor to diffuse tension. Second, teachers are encouraged to adopt a flexible approach to error correction, tailoring their feedback to the individual learner's needs, proficiency level, and emotional state. Third, collaborative learning structures—such as pair work, group projects, and peer feedback—can help distribute the affective burden of mistakes and foster a sense of shared responsibility for learning outcomes. Fourth, integrating activities that focus on process rather than product, such as journal writing or creative tasks, can provide learners with low-stakes opportunities to experiment with language without fear of negative evaluation. Fifth, ongoing professional development for teachers in the areas of affective pedagogy, cultural competence, and reflective practice is vital for sustaining supportive classroom environments.[6]

In sum, the literature indicates that reducing intermediate learners' fear of making mistakes in language learning is a multifaceted challenge requiring a holistic, context-sensitive, and

evidence-informed approach. The interplay of psychological, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors necessitates ongoing reflection and adaptation on the part of teachers, who must balance the demands of linguistic accuracy with the imperative to nurture learners' confidence and autonomy. Future research is needed to further elucidate the mechanisms by which specific teacher behaviors influence learner affect, and to develop scalable interventions that can be adapted across diverse educational settings.

### **Conclusion**

The synthesis of theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives presented in this article underscores the central role that teachers play in mitigating intermediate learners' fear of making mistakes in language learning. The fear of errors, rooted in complex psychological and sociocultural dynamics, poses a considerable barrier to communicative development and learner engagement. Historical and contemporary scholarship, spanning multiple regions and traditions, converges on the view that punitive or judgmental responses to mistakes are counterproductive, while supportive, context-sensitive pedagogical strategies can foster resilience, autonomy, and linguistic growth. Effective teachers are those who create classroom environments where mistakes are normalized and reframed as necessary steps in the learning process, employ a range of error correction techniques tailored to learners' needs, and actively cultivate learners' self-confidence. The empirical evidence further demonstrates that interventions such as collaborative learning, positive reinforcement, and formative assessment contribute to reducing anxiety and enhancing willingness to communicate. Nevertheless, critical debates persist regarding the optimal balance between accuracy and fluency, as well as the risks of error fossilization. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and sensitivity to the cultural and individual differences among learners. Ultimately, by adopting a holistic and evidence-based approach, teachers can empower intermediate learners to overcome their fear of making mistakes and achieve greater success in language acquisition.

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