

## Workplace Communication and English Language Anxiety: A Systematic Review

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article History</i>                      Received:                      Revised:                      Published:</p> <p><i>Keywords</i>                      English Language Anxiety (ELA), workplace communication.</p>	<p><i>English Language Anxiety (ELA) presents a significant psychological barrier impacting employee communication, confidence, and performance across diverse multicultural workplaces. This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical research from 2010 to 2025 to examine the causes, manifestations, organizational impacts, and intervention strategies related to ELA in professional contexts. Findings identify core psychological factors such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and perceived linguistic inadequacy as primary contributors to ELA, leading to avoidance behaviors, reduced participation, and lowered organizational productivity. The review underscores the necessity of holistic interventions that combine language training with psychological support, inclusive organizational policies, empathetic leadership, and continuous professional development. Implicitly, ELA is framed as a structural issue embedded within educational, cultural, and organizational systems, requiring systemic efforts to foster psychologically safe and inclusive communication environments. This comprehensive analysis offers evidence-based recommendations for organizations aiming to mitigate ELA, enhance cross-cultural communication efficacy, and leverage linguistic diversity as a strategic advantage in globalized sectors.</i></p>

INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<p>Riwayat Artikel                      Diterima:                      Direvisi                      Dipublikasikan:</p> <p>Kata Kunci                      Kecemasan Bahasa Inggris (ELA), komunikasi di tempat kerja.</p>	<p>Kecemasan berbahasa Inggris (ELA) merupakan hambatan psikologis yang signifikan yang berdampak pada komunikasi, kepercayaan diri, dan kinerja karyawan di berbagai tempat kerja multikultural. Tinjauan literatur sistematis ini mensintesis penelitian empiris dari tahun 2010 hingga 2025 untuk memeriksa penyebab, manifestasi, dampak organisasi, dan strategi intervensi yang terkait dengan ELA dalam konteks profesional. Temuan mengidentifikasi faktor psikologis inti seperti ketakutan komunikasi, ketakutan akan evaluasi negatif, kecemasan ujian, dan ketidakmampuan linguistik yang dirasakan sebagai kontributor utama ELA, yang mengarah pada perilaku penghindaran, berkurangnya partisipasi, dan menurunnya produktivitas organisasi. Kajian ini menggarisbawahi perlunya intervensi holistik yang menggabungkan pelatihan bahasa dengan dukungan psikologis, kebijakan organisasi yang inklusif, kepemimpinan yang berempati, dan pengembangan profesional yang berkelanjutan. Secara implisit, ELA dibingkai sebagai masalah struktural yang tertanam dalam sistem pendidikan, budaya, dan organisasi, yang membutuhkan upaya sistemik untuk menumbuhkan lingkungan komunikasi yang aman secara psikologis dan inklusif. Analisis komprehensif ini menawarkan rekomendasi berbasis bukti untuk organisasi yang bertujuan untuk mengurangi ELA, meningkatkan keefektifan komunikasi lintas budaya, dan memanfaatkan keragaman bahasa sebagai keunggulan strategis di sektor-sektor global.</p>

## Introduction

In the contemporary globalized economy, effective communication within the workplace has become a cornerstone of organizational success, international collaboration, and professional development. English, as the predominant lingua franca, plays an indispensable role across various sectors, including healthcare, hospitality, engineering, education, and corporate business. It facilitates cross cultural exchanges, enhances global partnerships, and supports international mobility. However, despite its widespread use and importance, many employees face significant psychological hurdles that hinder their ability to communicate confidently and competently in English. One of the most pervasive and insidious of these barriers is *English Language Anxiety* (ELA), a form of speech related apprehension that hampers an individual's willingness and ability to partake fully in workplace communication and may negatively influence organizational performance.

Language anxiety, especially in professional contexts, manifests through a complex interplay of psychological and emotional factors, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and self perceived linguistic inadequacy (Lancereau-Forster & Martinez, 2016). Employees experiencing high levels of anxiety often report feeling nervous or self conscious when speaking English, which leads to avoidance of participation, reluctance to engage with foreign colleagues or clients, and a general decline in communicative confidence. Such behaviors adversely affect not only individual career development but also team effectiveness, organizational cohesion, and service quality. For example, in multicultural organizations or sectors that rely heavily on English as the primary mode of communication, language anxiety can create significant barriers to collaboration and innovation.

Empirical research highlights that English speaking anxiety is influenced by various individual and contextual factors. For instance, Suchanat Aunjaroenporn (2020) investigated Thai administrative staff working at an international school in Bangkok, revealing that primary factors including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety significantly contributed to their overall English speaking anxiety. Despite most participants experiencing low levels of communication apprehension, moderate levels of test anxiety and fear of evaluation persisted and hampered effective workplace interactions. Additionally, their anxiety was amplified when speaking with unfamiliar people an issue characteristic of diverse work environments where language skills directly impact the efficiency of communication (Aunjaroenporn, 2020).

The ramifications of such anxiety extend beyond individual discomfort to influence broader organizational dynamics. When employees are anxious about speaking English, they tend to engage less actively in meetings, avoid leadership opportunities, and hesitate to contribute innovative ideas ultimately stalling organizational growth and adaptation (Gonzalez, 2015; Mohamed et al, 2016). In sectors such as hospitality and healthcare, where clear communication is critical for delivering quality services, language anxiety can impair not only employee performance but also customer satisfaction and safety outcomes (Fauzi et al, 2023; Ibrahim & Devesh, 2019). For example, in the hospitality industry, language barriers and anxiety can lead to misunderstandings, decreased confidence among staff, and a decline in customer service standards, thereby affecting organizational reputation and profitability (Damayanti, 2019).

Moreover, research suggests that the origins of language anxiety are multifaceted, often rooted in prior educational experiences, cultural attitudes towards language learning, and self efficacy perceptions. Employees or students who have limited exposure to English or who have experienced negative learning environments tend to develop lower confidence levels, which escalate their anxiety in real world interactions (Lancereau-Forster & Martinez, 2016). These psychological factors are compounded by external barriers, such as organizational culture, managerial support, and the availability of language training, which can either exacerbate or mitigate individual anxiety (Kakepoto et al, 2013).

Addressing English language anxiety requires a multifaceted approach that combines pedagogical strategies, organizational policies, and psychological support mechanisms. Simply providing basic language training is insufficient; instead, creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable

making mistakes and taking linguistic risks is essential. Interventions such as workplace language workshops, confidence building activities, peer support groups, and ongoing professional development have been shown to effectively reduce anxiety and foster more open communication (Horwitz, 1995; Smith & Strong, 2009). Similarly, fostering a culture that values effort and progress rather than perfection encourages employees to participate in conversations without fear of negative judgment.

Furthermore, the role of leadership and organizational climate cannot be overstated. Leaders who demonstrate inclusive, empathetic communication styles and utilize positive interpersonal cues can significantly influence the emotional climate, encouraging greater participation and reducing fear of negative evaluation (Tse & Tjosvold, 2007; Horwitz, 2010). Non verbal communicative strategies, such as gestures and facial expressions, can serve as alternatives to verbal exchanges, providing additional channels for expression that mitigate some effects of language anxiety (Tse & Tjosvold, 2007). Supporting employees through psychological counseling, language coaching, and feedback mechanisms can help build resilience and self efficacy, thereby lowering barriers to effective communication.

In addition, the importance of integrating language development into organizational policies has been emphasized by researchers. Providing access to language training programs, fostering peer interaction, and creating linguistic mentorship opportunities are essential components of organizational strategies aimed at reducing anxiety (Kakepoto et al, 2013). Such initiatives are especially vital in the context of international business and multicultural workplaces, where linguistic diversity inevitably introduces additional layers of complexity and challenge.

This journal seeks to explore the nuanced dimensions of English language anxiety within the workplace, examining its causes, manifestations, and outcomes. It aims to synthesize current research and present evidence based interventions that organizations can adopt to reduce psychological barriers, enhance communication efficacy, and foster a culture of inclusiveness and confidence. Recognizing that language anxiety is not merely a personal issue but a systemic organizational challenge is critical for developing comprehensive strategies that support all employees in achieving their full communicative potential.

Understanding and mitigating English language anxiety in professional contexts is paramount for cultivating workplaces characterized by clear, confident, and effective communication. It is through such efforts that organizations can unlock greater employee engagement, improve service quality, enhance cross cultural understanding, and ultimately, achieve sustained competitive advantage in an increasingly interconnected world.

In today's era of globalization, the ability to communicate effectively in the workplace, especially in English as a lingua franca, is key to organizational success and cross cultural collaboration. However, despite the importance of English language use in sectors such as healthcare, education, hospitality and international business, there is a significant psychological barrier in the form of English Language Anxiety (ELA). This anxiety negatively impacts employee participation, confidence and communication effectiveness in the work environment.

ELA arises from various psychological factors such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and perception of language incompetence. Previous studies, such as that conducted by Aunjaroenporn (2020), show that although communication anxiety levels are low, test and evaluation anxiety still hinders work interactions, especially in a multicultural environment.

The impact is not only felt individually, but also organizationally ranging from decreased employee participation in meetings, avoidance of leadership responsibilities, to decreased service quality and customer satisfaction. Factors contributing to ELA involve previous educational experiences, learning culture, perceived self efficacy, and organizational support.

Addressing ELA is not enough with language training, but requires a holistic approach that includes psychological support, inclusive organizational policies, ongoing training and empathic leadership. By creating a psychologically safe and supportive work environment for language development, organizations can encourage active participation, improve the quality of communication and reduce psychological barriers.

Through a review of previous research, this journal aims to comprehensively explore the dimensions of English language anxiety in the workplace, and offer evidence based intervention strategies that organizations can adopt to effectively improve cross cultural communication.

**Method**

The study used a systematic literature review (SLR) method to explore English Language Anxiety (ELA) in the workplace. This involved a structured search of academic databases using specific keywords related to ELA, workplace communication, and intervention strategies, focusing on empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select relevant studies in professional and multicultural contexts. The researchers manually analyzed the selected articles to identify key concepts such as causes, manifestations, impacts, and interventions of ELA. The use of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies in the review allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and the development of evidence based recommendations for addressing ELA in organizational settings.

**Search Terms**

In conducting the systematic literature review on English language anxiety in the workplace, the researcher used a variety of search terms that reflected the psychological, social and organizational dimensions of the phenomenon. Some of the main search terms used include "English Language Anxiety", "English Speaking Anxiety", and "Language Anxiety", which directly represent the core of the issue under review. In addition, terms such as "Communication Apprehension", "Fear of Negative Evaluation", and "Self perceived Linguistic Inadequacy" were used to explore the underlying emotional and psychological aspects of anxiety. In an organizational context, terms such as "Workplace Communication", "Organizational Communication", and "Cross Cultural Communication" help highlight the role of multicultural work environments in shaping employees language experiences. To capture intervention efforts, terms such as "Language Training Intervention", "Psychological Support", and "Inclusive Leadership" are also used. The use of Boolean operators such as AND, OR and NOT allowed the researcher to strategically combine and filter these terms, resulting in a relevant, focused and comprehensive literature search in the context of English Language Anxiety in a global work environment.

**Key concepts and examples of search terms**

No	Key Concept	Short Description	Search Term Category / Keyword Example
1	English Language Anxiety (ELA)	English language anxiety that hinders employee communication in the work environment.	"English language anxiety", "workplace communication anxiety", "English speaking anxiety at work"
2	Psychological Factors Causing ELA	Factors such as communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and perceived lack of language competence.	"communication apprehension", "fear of negative evaluation", "language test anxiety", "language incompetence anxiety"
3	Impact of ELA on the Organization	The negative effects of ELA on employee participation, leadership, and organizational service quality.	"impact of language anxiety on organizational performance", "English anxiety and workplace productivity", "language anxiety effects on teamwork"
4	Intervention and Support Strategies	Holistic approaches such as language training, psychological support, inclusive policies, and empathic leadership.	"intervention strategies for language anxiety", "language training workplace", "psychological support language anxiety", "inclusive communication policies"

No	Key Concept	Short Description	Search Term Category / Keyword Example
5	Organizational Policy Development	Integration of language training and support in organizational policies to reduce language anxiety.	"organizational language policy", "language development workplace policies", "linguistic mentorship in organizations"

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Types of Studies	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Empirical Quantitative Studies	Quantitative studies that measure ELA levels, causal factors, and impact in the work environment	Studies that only measure anxiety in non professional contexts (e.g. elementary schools)
2. Empirical Qualitative Studies	Qualitative studies that examine experiences, perceptions and coping related to ELA in the workplace	Studies that focus on non English language anxiety or non workplace contexts
3. Mixed Methods Studies	Studies that integrate quantitative and qualitative data on ELA in organizations and employees	Studies without empirical data section (only narrative review without primary data)
4. Systematic Reviews and Meta analyses	Systematic reviews and meta analyses that address interventions, effects and causes of ELA in the work environment	Non systematic reviews, opinions, editorials without clear methodology
5. Case Studies and Organizational Reports	Case studies on the implementation of ELA reduction strategies and their impact on organizational communication	Reports that do not have valid data or in depth analysis
6. Theses and Dissertations	Theses, theses relevant to the topic of ELA and workplace communication	Unfinished or incomplete research
7. Psychological and Educational Research	Psychological or educational studies that examine aspects of anxiety related to English in the workplace	Psychological studies that focus on generalized anxiety with no direct link to English at work

The inclusion criteria focused on studies addressing English Language Anxiety (ELA) within professional and multicultural workplace contexts, published between 2010 and 2025, and employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods that provide empirical data on causes, impacts, and intervention strategies. Relevant sectors included education, healthcare, international business, and hospitality. Excluded were studies unrelated to professional settings, such as those focusing on children's language learning, non English language anxiety, generalized anxiety without specific links to English, articles lacking empirical data, incomplete research, and sources without full text access. This selection ensured that only high quality, workplace relevant studies were analyzed.

### Search Strategy

The search approach focused on locating relevant literature about English Language Anxiety (ELA) specifically within workplace settings. This involved using targeted keywords related to language anxiety in professional environments, such as "English language anxiety," "communication in the workplace," and "cross cultural communication challenges." Searches were conducted across multiple reliable academic databases and included filtering studies published from 2010 to 2025 that presented empirical evidence on ELA in diverse organizational contexts. To ensure comprehensiveness, the strategy also involved reviewing bibliographies of

selected works to identify additional pertinent studies, guaranteeing a well rounded collection of sources addressing ELA in the work environment.

**Method for Identifying Concepts**

The method for identifying concepts involved a thorough manual analysis of each selected article’s introduction, literature review, findings, and discussion sections to note key elements related to English Language Anxiety (ELA) in the workplace. These concepts were then examined to explore relationships and grouped into categories such as causes of anxiety (e.g., communication anxiety, fear of negative judgment, lack of self confidence), manifestations of ELA at work, its impact on performance and organizations, and intervention strategies. This manual, in depth approach ensured an accurate contextual understanding and allowed the authors to build a conceptual framework based on recurring patterns and meanings across studies, forming the basis for thematic analysis and evidence based intervention recommendations.

**Result**

Aspect	Key Findings	Workplace Impact
<b>Causes of ELA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication apprehension</li> <li>- Fear of negative evaluation</li> <li>- Test anxiety</li> <li>- Low self-perceived English proficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoidance behaviors</li> <li>- Reduced employee participation in communication</li> </ul>
<b>Manifestations of ELA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited active participation in meetings and discussions</li> <li>- Hesitation to take leadership roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decreased communication effectiveness</li> <li>- Reduced team cohesion</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lower individual and team productivity</li> <li>- Decline in service quality and customer satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduced overall organizational performance and competitiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Previous educational experiences</li> <li>- Learning culture and organizational support</li> <li>- Psychological safety in the work environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structural barriers causing employee marginalization</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive language training</li> <li>- Psychological support and peer support systems</li> <li>- Empathetic leadership and inclusive policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced active participation</li> <li>- Increased communication confidence</li> <li>- Psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces</li> </ul>

The systematic literature review conducted on English Language Anxiety (ELA) in workplace settings reveals several explicit findings that shed light on the psychological and organizational dimensions of this phenomenon. The studies show that while overt communication apprehension among employees may be relatively low, other psychological factors such as test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation continue to significantly impede effective workplace communication, particularly in multicultural and international organizational environments,. These factors contribute to employees feeling nervous, self conscious, and hesitant when speaking English, which in turn leads to avoidance behaviors such as refraining from active participation in meetings or collaborative discussions. This reluctance not only affects individual communication confidence but also adversely influences team dynamics, cohesion, and overall service quality within organizations that rely heavily on English as the lingua franca, such as healthcare, hospitality, education, and international business sectors,.

**Explicit Findings:**

A systematic literature review revealed that while understanding of direct communication tends to be limited, significant psychological factors such as test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation persistently hinder effective English communication in a variety of workplace environments. Employees often experience nervousness and self-consciousness during English interactions, leading them to avoid active participation in meetings and collaboration, which undermines individual communicative confidence as well as team cohesion and service quality in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, education, and international business. Explicitly identified psychological contributors include communication apprehension, perceived linguistic incompetence, and previous negative language learning experiences. These factors concretely reduce employee engagement and leadership involvement, thus impairing organizational productivity and effectiveness.

Intervention strategies explicitly involve a holistic and integrative approach that combines language training with psychological support, inclusive organizational policies, empathetic leadership, and ongoing professional development. Evidence supports that creating a psychologically safe environment where employees are encouraged to take linguistic risks and make mistakes fosters communicative trust and reduces anxiety. Specific effective interventions include workplace language workshops, peer support groups, confidence building activities, and mentorship, all of which directly contribute to reducing anxiety and promoting open communication. Leadership is also explicitly recognized for its role in modeling inclusive communication styles and providing positive interpersonal cues that reduce fear of negative evaluation and encourage participation.

**Implicit findings:**

This review implicitly suggests that ELA serves as a structural barrier in multicultural workplaces that can perpetuate inequalities and limit employee inclusion and advancement. The origins of language anxiety are influenced not only by individual psychological factors but also by educational background, cultural attitudes towards language learning, and the level of organizational support provided. Without sufficient organizational intervention, anxious employees may experience marginalization and decreasing opportunities to contribute fully, suggesting that ELA is not just an individual issue but is embedded in systemic organizational dynamics. The implicit recommendation is that language development should be purposefully integrated into organizational culture and policies through comprehensive measures such as access to training, facilitation of peer interactions, and structured mentorship, which serve as systemic enablers of linguistic inclusion and confidence.

Moreover, addressing ELA implicitly requires recognizing it as a multifaceted organizational challenge that intersects with psychological safety, cultural inclusiveness, and leadership practices. Findings suggest that the sustainable resolution of ELA demands an organizational commitment to fostering a supportive communication climate where employees emotional needs are validated and addressed alongside skill development, thus implying important cultural and structural changes beyond individual level interventions. Ultimately, these positions are ELA.

**Discussion**

The systematic review presented highlights that English Language Anxiety (ELA) is a significant psychological barrier disrupting effective communication in the workplace, especially in multicultural and global environments. ELA affects not only individuals but also team performance and overall organizational outcomes.

Sources of ELA include psychological factors such as communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self perception of English proficiency. According to Aunjaroenporn (2020), even when

general communication anxiety is low, anxiety related to tests and evaluations can still hamper professional interaction, particularly with foreign colleagues or clients.

Effects of ELA involve avoidance of participation in meetings, reluctance to take leadership roles, and reduced self confidence, which undermine productivity, innovation, and customer service quality. This impact is notably critical in sectors like hospitality and healthcare, where ineffective communication can lower customer satisfaction and even compromise patient safety.

Causes of ELA stem from more than individual traits; prior educational experiences, organizational culture, managerial support, and availability of language training all contribute. Unsupportive learning environments or negative past experiences with English exacerbate anxiety in real workplace interactions.

Approaches to address ELA must be holistic and go beyond basic language training. Effective strategies include:

1. Providing psychological support
2. Empathetic leadership
3. Inclusive organizational policies
4. Confidence building workshops and peer support

Organizations fostering psychologically safe communication environments reduce employees fear of making language mistakes. Open, supportive leadership is crucial for creating positive emotional climates that encourage active participation.

Finally, integrating language development into official policies, providing access to training and linguistic mentors, and cultivating a culture that values effort and progress over linguistic perfection are essential for overcoming ELA and enhancing workplace communication effectiveness.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion of the systematic review underscores the profound impact that English Language Anxiety (ELA) has on workplace communication, employee confidence, and overall organizational performance, especially in multicultural and international contexts. ELA emerges as a multifaceted psychological barrier characterized by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and self perceived linguistic inadequacy. These factors contribute to employees reluctance or avoidance of active participation in meetings, hesitation in taking leadership roles, and diminished communication effectiveness. Consequently, this not only hampers individual professional growth but also undermines team cohesion, organizational service quality, and productivity. Such effects are particularly critical in sectors heavily reliant on English as the lingua franca, including healthcare, hospitality, education, and international business, where miscommunication can lead to compromised service delivery and diminished customer satisfaction.

Importantly, the review reveals that ELA should not be viewed merely as an individual psychological concern but as a systemic issue deeply embedded in organizational culture, educational backgrounds, and broader social contexts. The presence of ELA reflects structural barriers that perpetuate inequalities in employee inclusion and advancement. Organizational factors, such as managerial support, culture, accessibility of language training, and psychological safety, significantly influence the extent to which employees experience and cope with language anxiety. Without intentional organizational intervention, ELA can lead to marginalization of anxious individuals, thereby limiting their opportunities to contribute fully within the workplace. The research therefore advocates recognizing ELA as an organizational challenge that intersects with cultural inclusiveness and leadership practices, rather than solely attributing it to individual language proficiency or personality traits.

Addressing ELA requires developing comprehensive and holistic strategies that go beyond mere language training. Effective interventions should encompass psychological support services, confidence building workshops, peer support systems, and the cultivation of empathetic leadership that actively fosters supportive communication environments. Moreover, organizations need to integrate language development objectives into official policies, including providing continuous access to training, offering linguistic mentorship, and promoting a culture that values effort and progress over linguistic perfection. Such systemic approaches contribute to creating psychologically safe workplaces that encourage active participation, reduce

fear of negative evaluation, and enhance employees linguistic self efficacy. These efforts collectively improve not only individual communication skills but also team dynamics, innovation, and service quality, driving better organizational outcomes.

Ultimately, the review highlights the necessity of viewing English Language Anxiety within a broader organizational and cultural framework. It calls for structural changes that embed language development and emotional support into the fabric of workplace culture and policies. By fostering inclusive communication climates that attend to both skill development and emotional well being, organizations can mitigate the debilitating effects of ELA. This commitment enables employees to engage fully and confidently in workplace communication, leveraging linguistic diversity as a strategic advantage in an increasingly interconnected global economy. Such systemic, evidence based interventions position organizations to unlock greater employee engagement, build stronger cross cultural understanding, and sustain competitive advantage in multicultural professional environments.

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