

# Breaking the Silence: Leveraging AI-Driven Gamification to Reduce Speaking Anxiety in A1 EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Speaking anxiety is widely recognized as a major constraint on oral participation among beginner (A1) EFL learners, frequently resulting in avoidance, limited interaction, and slow development of basic communicative competence. This study investigates the pedagogical potential of AI-driven gamification to reduce speaking anxiety by creating a low-stakes, supportive environment for oral practice. The intervention integrates voice-enabled AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT voice and character-based chatbot platforms) into short, game-like speaking tasks in which learners interact with fictional characters to complete simple communicative missions. By shifting practice away from peer observation and teacher-fronted performance, the design aims to encourage repeated rehearsal, increase willingness to speak, and strengthen confidence in producing routine A1-level dialogues. The study adopts a qualitative research design implemented over eight weeks with 30 A1 learners in an EFL classroom context. Data was collected through structured classroom observations, learner reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in learners' emotional responses, participation behaviors, and perceived self-efficacy in speaking. The study contributes practical insights into how AI-mediated role-play and gamified interaction can support affective engagement and oral development at the earliest stages of language learning.

**Keywords:** Anxiety; Artificial Intelligence; Chatbot; Gamification; Speaking