

**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE CLASSROOM TO FOSTER LINGUISTIC
COMPETENCE: REDUCING FEAR OF MISTAKES IN B1–C1 LEARNERS****Ergashev Doniyor Dovronovich,**

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E-mail: ergashevdonik2005@gmail.com**Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of psychological safety in fostering linguistic competence among adult learners at CEFR levels B1 to C1. Despite possessing adequate grammatical knowledge, many learners refrain from speaking due to fear of errors, peer judgment, or embarrassment—a phenomenon known as foreign language anxiety. Drawing on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, the study proposes a pedagogical framework centered on error normalization, non-judgmental feedback, anonymous speaking tasks, and collaborative learning structures. The analysis demonstrates that when classrooms are intentionally designed as psychologically safe spaces, learners exhibit greater willingness to take linguistic risks, leading to improved fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic appropriateness.

Keywords

psychological safety, linguistic competence, fear of mistakes, affective filter, self-efficacy, foreign language anxiety, B1–C1

In second language acquisition, cognitive ability is rarely the primary barrier to proficiency. More often, it is emotional and psychological factors—particularly the fear of making mistakes—that inhibit learners from engaging fully in communicative activities¹. This is especially pronounced among adult learners at the B1–C1 levels, who possess sufficient linguistic knowledge but hesitate to use it in real-time interaction. They understand grammar rules, recognize vocabulary, and can read complex texts, yet remain silent in class, fearing mispronunciation, grammatical slips, or social embarrassment.

This phenomenon is not merely shyness; it is a well-documented construct in applied linguistics: foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)². Horwitz et al. identified FLCA as a distinct form of anxiety that interferes with language performance, even among highly motivated students.

¹ Dewaele, J.-M. (2013). *Emotions in Multiple Languages* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

² Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>

When anxiety is high, the affective filter—a mental barrier proposed by Krashen—rises, blocking comprehensible input from converting into acquired competence³.

Therefore, fostering linguistic competence at intermediate and advanced levels requires more than linguistic instruction—it demands emotional scaffolding. This thesis argues that psychological safety—a shared belief that the classroom is a space where one can speak, err, and learn without shame—is a prerequisite for linguistic growth.

Psychological safety originates in organizational psychology but has profound implications for education⁴. In language learning, it manifests as a classroom culture where:

- Errors are treated as natural stages of learning, not failures;
- Feedback is constructive and private, not public criticism;
- Peer interactions are supportive, not competitive.

This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that low anxiety, high motivation, and self-confidence facilitate language acquisition³. When learners feel safe, their affective filter lowers, allowing input to be internalized.

Similarly, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory emphasizes that learners must believe in their capacity to succeed⁵. A psychologically safe environment nurtures this belief by providing opportunities for mastery experiences (e.g., successfully completing a speaking task), vicarious learning (seeing peers succeed), and verbal encouragement.

Moreover, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underscores that learning occurs through social interaction⁶. But such interaction is only possible if learners feel safe to participate. Silence, therefore, is not absence of knowledge—it is absence of safety.

To cultivate psychological safety, the following strategies are proposed:

1. Error Normalization Culture

³ Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

⁴ Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>

⁵ Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.

⁶ Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

Teachers should explicitly state: “Mistakes are expected, respected, inspected, and corrected.” Sharing stories of famous polyglots’ early errors helps destigmatize imperfection.

2. Anonymous Speaking Tasks

Using voice recorders, AI apps (e.g., Speaking app), or written-to-spoken conversions allows learners to practice without face-to-face exposure. Later, recordings can be reviewed privately with the teacher.

3. Non-Judgmental Feedback Protocols

Instead of saying “That’s wrong,” use: “Interesting! Let’s see how a native speaker might say it.” Focus on communication success, not grammatical perfection.

4. Collaborative Structures

Pair and group work reduce the spotlight effect. Roles like “idea generator,” “language checker,” and “presenter” distribute responsibility and reduce individual pressure.

5. Self-Assessment and Reflection

Learners track their own progress using CEFR “can-do” statements. This shifts focus from external judgment to personal growth.

These strategies do not eliminate errors—they reframe them as data, not deficits.

This approach directly supports the theory and methodology of education by prioritizing the learner as a whole person, not just a cognitive processor; integrating psychological-pedagogical principles into language teaching; promoting competency-based outcomes through emotionally supportive design and encouraging teacher reflection on classroom climate.

Critically, psychological safety is not about lowering standards—it is about raising confidence so learners can meet those standards.

To sum up, linguistic competence at B1–C1 levels cannot be achieved through grammar drills alone. It requires a classroom environment where vulnerability is honored and risk-taking is rewarded. By intentionally designing psychologically safe spaces, educators transform anxiety into agency, silence into speech, and hesitation into fluency. This humanistic, evidence-based approach represents a necessary evolution in language pedagogy—one that aligns fully with the ethical and methodological imperatives of modern educational science.

References

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