



Reducing EFL Speaking Anxiety via Blended Mentoring: The Role of Rhetorical Modeling

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Abstract: Public speaking anxiety remains a persistent challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, limiting their ability to communicate effectively in academic settings. Although various interventions have been proposed to address this issue, limited attention has been given to integrating rhetorical modeling within a blended mentoring framework that combines cognitive guidance with continuous affective support. This study therefore investigates the potential of blended mentoring enriched with rhetorical modeling to reduce public speaking anxiety among junior secondary EFL students. A pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was employed involving nine students selected through purposive sampling. The intervention consisted of face-to-face mentoring sessions complemented by asynchronous video-based feedback delivered through messaging platforms. Public speaking anxiety was measured using an adapted anxiety scale before and after the intervention, and the data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test. The results revealed a statistically significant reduction in students' anxiety levels ($p < 0.001$), with the mean score decreasing from 78.44 to 64.11. The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.37$) indicated a very large practical effect. These findings provide preliminary evidence that a blended mentoring approach integrating rhetorical modeling may contribute to reducing public speaking anxiety by supporting learners through continuous feedback, guided rehearsal, and structured speech organization. The study contributes to the EFL speaking literature by proposing a process-oriented mentoring framework that integrates rhetorical modeling with blended feedback to simultaneously address the cognitive and affective dimensions of public speaking. Further research employing controlled experimental designs is recommended to confirm these findings.

Keywords: Blended Mentoring, Public Speaking Anxiety, EFL Learners, Rhetorical Modeling, Speaking Performance

Abstrak: Kecemasan berbicara di depan umum (*public speaking anxiety*) masih menjadi tantangan yang signifikan bagi peserta didik English as a Foreign Language (EFL) karena dapat membatasi kemampuan mereka untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif dalam konteks akademik. Meskipun berbagai intervensi telah dikembangkan untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut, masih sedikit penelitian yang mengintegrasikan rhetorical modeling ke dalam kerangka blended mentoring yang mengombinasikan bimbingan kognitif dengan dukungan afektif secara berkelanjutan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji potensi blended mentoring yang diperkaya dengan rhetorical modeling dalam menurunkan tingkat *public speaking anxiety* pada siswa EFL tingkat sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain pra-eksperimental

dengan pendekatan one-group pre-test and post-test yang melibatkan sembilan siswa yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Intervensi dilakukan melalui sesi pendampingan tatap muka yang dipadukan dengan umpan balik berbasis video secara asinkron melalui platform pesan. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan instrumen public speaking anxiety yang telah diadaptasi dan dianalisis menggunakan uji paired-sample t-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya penurunan tingkat kecemasan yang signifikan secara statistik ($p < 0,001$), dengan skor rata-rata menurun dari 78,44 pada pre-test menjadi 64,11 pada post-test. Nilai ukuran efek (Cohen's $d = 2,37$) menunjukkan dampak praktis yang sangat besar. Temuan ini memberikan bukti awal bahwa pendekatan blended mentoring yang mengintegrasikan rhetorical modeling berpotensi menurunkan public speaking anxiety melalui pemberian umpan balik yang berkesinambungan, latihan terbimbing, dan pengorganisasian struktur pidato secara sistematis. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan pembelajaran berbicara dalam konteks EFL dengan menawarkan kerangka pendampingan berbasis proses yang mengintegrasikan rhetorical modeling dan blended feedback untuk mendukung aspek kognitif dan afektif dalam public speaking. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan menggunakan desain eksperimen dengan kelompok kontrol untuk mengonfirmasi temuan ini.

Kata Kunci: Blended Mentoring; Public Speaking Anxiety; Rhetorical Modeling; Performa Speaking; Pembelajaran EFL

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Introduction

Public speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential components of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in academic and performative contexts where learners are expected to express ideas clearly, organize arguments logically, and interact effectively with audiences (Shi et al., 2024; Sunarti, 2024). Unlike conversational speaking, public speaking requires the integration of linguistic accuracy, discourse organization, critical thinking, and delivery skills, making it one of the most demanding productive language abilities (Harmer, 2011; Brown, 2019). Consequently, successful public speaking depends not only on learners' mastery of vocabulary and grammar but also on their confidence, preparedness, and ability to manage psychological pressure during oral performance.

Despite its importance, public speaking remains one of the greatest challenges encountered by EFL learners. A growing body of literature such as Almagsodi (2025) and Sandiana (2025) has identified public speaking anxiety as a major obstacle that inhibits learners' oral participation, fluency, confidence, and overall communication effectiveness (Almagsodi, 2025; Sandiana et al., 2025). Rather than being merely a linguistic problem, public speaking anxiety has increasingly been understood as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and situational factors that interact throughout the learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Learners who experience high anxiety often avoid speaking opportunities, underestimate their communicative abilities, and perform below their actual language competence, ultimately limiting their language development.

Recent empirical evidence further confirms the prevalence of this issue. A study by Ajiza et al. (2024) involving 113 EFL students from four Indonesian universities found that speaking anxiety remained consistently high and was influenced by internal factors such as fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence, as well as external factors including classroom atmosphere and evaluation pressure (Ajiza et al., 2024). Likewise, Yulian & Ruhama (2020) and Azhari et al., (2026) reported that secondary-school EFL learners frequently experienced moderate to high levels of foreign language speaking anxiety due to limited speaking practice, fear of negative evaluation, insufficient linguistic proficiency, and social scrutiny during classroom presentations (Azhari et al., 2026; Yulian & Ruhama, 2020). These findings indicate that speaking anxiety cannot be adequately addressed through language instruction alone, but requires pedagogical interventions capable of supporting both learners' cognitive preparation and affective well-being.

Various instructional approaches have therefore been proposed to alleviate speaking anxiety. Hung (2016) have demonstrated that digital feedback and technology-mediated learning environments can enhance learners' opportunities for practice, reflection, and self-paced improvement, particularly through asynchronous learning platforms (Hung, 2016). Similarly, Hrastinski (2019) has been shown that blended learning is to increase instructional flexibility and learner engagement by combining face-to-face interaction with online learning environments (Hrastinski, 2019). From an affective perspective, mentoring and supportive teacher-student interactions have also been associated with increased confidence and reduced communication apprehension (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Although these studies have reported positive outcomes, they generally examine digital feedback, blended learning, or mentoring as separate pedagogical interventions. Consequently, existing evidence provides only a partial understanding of how cognitive guidance and affective support may work together to reduce public speaking anxiety.

Another instructional approach that has received increasing attention is rhetorical modeling. Drawing upon genre-based pedagogy, rhetorical modeling enables learners to observe, analyze, and imitate effective discourse structures before producing their own spoken texts (Hyland, 2019). Through structured examples, learners become familiar with how speeches are organized, how arguments are logically developed, and how transitions, evidence, and conclusions are effectively presented. Such explicit modeling not only improves discourse organization but also provides learners with a clearer mental framework for planning and delivering speeches.

The potential contribution of rhetorical modeling to anxiety reduction can be explained through Cognitive Load Theory proposed by Paas et al. (2004). The theory suggests that learning becomes more effective when instructional designs reduce unnecessary cognitive load, allowing learners to allocate greater working-memory resources to meaningful task performance (Paas et al., 2004). In public speaking contexts, rhetorical modeling provides learners with ready-made organizational frameworks that reduce the cognitive demands associated with generating ideas and structuring discourse simultaneously during speech delivery. As learners become more familiar with rhetorical patterns, they can devote greater attention to pronunciation, audience interaction, and delivery, thereby reducing the cognitive burden that often contributes to speaking anxiety.

This explanation is further supported by Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), which argues that learners' confidence increases when they perceive themselves as adequately prepared to perform a task. Continuous guidance, repeated rehearsal, and successful speaking experiences strengthen learners' perceived capability, which subsequently reduces anxiety and promotes more confident performance.

Although previous studies have independently demonstrated the benefits of digital feedback, mentoring, blended learning, and rhetorical instruction, several important limitations remain. First, most investigations focus on improving speaking performance, fluency, or language achievement, while relatively few explicitly examine public speaking anxiety as the primary outcome. Second, rhetorical modeling has predominantly been investigated as a strategy for improving discourse organization and writing quality rather than as a cognitive scaffold for reducing speaking anxiety. Third, previous studies generally examine digital feedback and face-to-face mentoring separately, leaving limited understanding of how both forms of support can be systematically integrated within a single instructional framework. Consequently, the interaction between cognitive support provided through rhetorical modeling and affective support provided through continuous mentoring remains underexplored in EFL public speaking research.

To address these gaps, the present study proposes a blended mentoring framework that integrates asynchronous digital feedback, face-to-face mentoring, and rhetorical modeling into a single process-oriented instructional intervention. Unlike previous approaches that primarily emphasize instructional delivery or isolated speaking practice, this framework combines iterative feedback, guided rehearsal, and explicit rhetorical guidance to simultaneously strengthen learners' cognitive preparedness and affective confidence. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the potential of blended mentoring enriched with rhetorical modeling to reduce public speaking anxiety among junior secondary EFL learners. By integrating cognitive and affective dimensions within a continuous mentoring process, this study seeks to provide preliminary empirical evidence for a more holistic approach to supporting EFL public speaking while extending current understanding of anxiety reduction beyond conventional speaking instruction.

Method

This study employed a pre-experimental design using a one-group pre-test-post-test approach to examine changes in students' public speaking anxiety following a blended mentoring intervention in an EFL context. This design was selected because the study was intended as an exploratory investigation to obtain preliminary empirical evidence regarding the feasibility and potential effectiveness of the proposed instructional framework before undertaking more rigorous experimental research. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a one-group pre-test-post-test design is appropriate for pilot and exploratory studies where the primary objective is to evaluate change within participants over time rather than establish definitive causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Nevertheless, the absence of a comparison group reduces the study's internal validity because alternative explanations for the observed changes cannot be completely ruled out. The findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence that informs future controlled experimental studies rather than conclusive causal claims.

The participants were nine junior secondary school students (Grades VII and VIII) who voluntarily participated in an extracurricular public speaking mentoring program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) regular attendance throughout the intervention, (2) active participation in both face-to-face and digital mentoring sessions, and (3) completion of both the pre-test and post-test assessments. Although the sample size was relatively small, it is consistent with recommendations for exploratory educational intervention studies and pilot research, where small, homogeneous samples are considered appropriate for evaluating the feasibility of an intervention, refining research procedures, and estimating preliminary effect sizes prior to larger-scale investigations (Hertzog, 2008; Julious, 2005). Consequently, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable to broader EFL populations but rather to provide initial empirical insights that can guide subsequent studies involving larger and more diverse samples. The study was conducted in an intensive coaching setting that emphasized structured speaking practice, guided feedback, and repeated performance rehearsal.

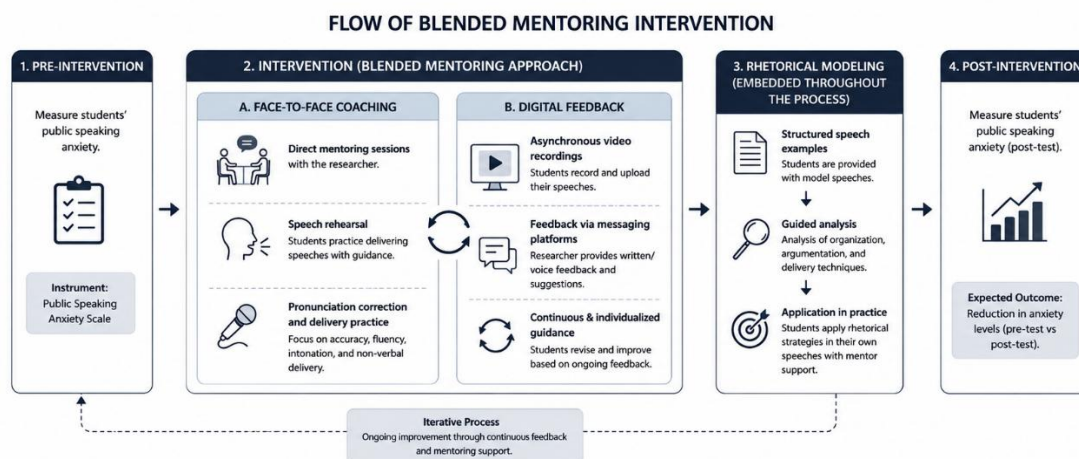


Figure 1. Blended Mentoring Intervention

The intervention consisted of a blended mentoring approach integrating face-to-face coaching and asynchronous digital feedback, adapted from blended learning principles proposed by Hrastinski (2019). Face-to-face mentoring focused on speech rehearsal, pronunciation correction, delivery techniques, and individualized coaching, whereas the digital component involved video-recorded speaking performances accompanied by asynchronous feedback delivered through messaging platforms. Previous research has shown that asynchronous video feedback encourages repeated practice, self-reflection, and learner autonomy by enabling students to revisit feedback multiple times (Hung, 2016). Furthermore, feedback that allows learners sufficient time for reflection promotes deeper cognitive processing and facilitates language development (Ellis, 2008). To strengthen learners' cognitive preparedness, rhetorical modeling was embedded throughout the mentoring process using structured speech exemplars and guided analysis of rhetorical organization, argument development, and delivery strategies adapted from genre-based pedagogy (Hyland, 2019).

Data were collected using an adapted version of the Public Speaking Anxiety Scale developed from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale framework (Horwitz et al., 1986). The instrument was administered before and after the intervention to measure

changes in participants' anxiety levels. Observational field notes were also recorded during mentoring sessions to provide contextual information regarding learners' participation, confidence, and behavioral responses throughout the intervention.

Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize changes in participants' anxiety scores between the pre-test and post-test. Subsequently, a paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to determine whether the observed mean differences were statistically significant. To complement significance testing, Cohen's *d* was calculated to estimate the magnitude of the intervention effect (Cohen, 1988). Considering the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample size, statistical findings were interpreted cautiously, with emphasis placed on estimating the practical potential of the intervention rather than making broad generalizations beyond the study participants.

Results

This section presents the statistical findings on the effect of blended mentoring on students' public speaking anxiety. The analysis focuses on the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores. In addition to the statistical analysis, raw data are also presented to provide a transparent view of individual changes in students' anxiety levels following the intervention.

Table 1

Individual Pre-test and Post-test Anxiety Scores

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test
S1	80	65
S2	75	60
S3	82	66
S4	70	58
S5	85	68
S6	77	63
S7	79	64
S8	81	67
S9	77	62

As shown in Table 1, all participants experienced a decrease in their anxiety scores after the intervention, indicating a consistent pattern of improvement at the individual level. To further examine whether these observed changes were statistically significant, a paired sample *t*-test was conducted. This test was selected because the data consisted of two related measurements (pre-test and post-test) obtained from the same participants, making it appropriate for analyzing within-subject differences (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2020).

The paired sample *t*-test is commonly used to determine whether the mean difference between two related groups is statistically significant, particularly in pre-experimental designs where participants serve as their own control. By comparing the pre-test and post-test scores, this test allows for a more precise evaluation of the intervention effect by controlling for individual variability.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Public Speaking Anxiety Scores

Test	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	9	78.44	6.21
Post-test	9	64.11	5.87

As presented in Table 2, the mean score of students' public speaking anxiety decreased substantially from 78.44 in the pre-test to 64.11 in the post-test, indicating an overall reduction in anxiety following the intervention. The mean anxiety score decreased by 14.33 points from the pre-test to the post-test, indicating a lower level of reported public speaking anxiety following the intervention. In addition, the relatively similar standard deviation values (SD = 6.21 for pre-test and SD = 5.87 for post-test) indicate that the variability among students remained stable, suggesting that the reduction in anxiety occurred consistently across participants rather than being influenced by extreme individual differences.

To determine whether this observed difference was statistically significant and not due to random variation, a paired sample t-test was conducted. This statistical test is appropriate for comparing two related sets of scores obtained from the same participants, allowing for a more accurate evaluation of the intervention effect by accounting for within-subject variability.

Table 3

Paired Sample t-test Results

Variable	t	df	Sig. (p)
Pre-test vs Post-test	7.12	8	< 0.001

The paired sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t(8) = 7.12$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the blended mentoring intervention had a significant effect on reducing students' public speaking anxiety. In statistical terms, the probability that this difference occurred by chance is very low, suggesting that the observed change can be attributed to the intervention rather than random variation. In addition to the quantitative findings, observational notes recorded during the mentoring sessions indicated noticeable behavioral changes among participants throughout the intervention. During the initial sessions, several students appeared hesitant to volunteer, frequently paused while speaking, avoided eye contact, and required repeated prompts before beginning their presentations. As the intervention progressed, most participants demonstrated greater willingness to speak, maintained longer eye contact with the audience, and showed increased fluency during rehearsal activities. Students also responded more actively to mentor feedback and displayed greater confidence when revising and delivering their speeches. These observations are consistent with the quantitative trend showing lower anxiety scores following the intervention, although the observational data were used solely to provide contextual support rather than as an independent source of evidence.

To further evaluate the magnitude of the intervention effect, Cohen's d was calculated as a measure of effect size. Unlike significance testing, which only indicates whether a difference exists, effect size provides information about the practical strength of the intervention (Cohen, 1988). The result showed a large effect size ($d = 2.37$), indicating that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was substantial. According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, an effect size above 0.80 is considered large; therefore, the obtained value

suggests that the blended mentoring intervention had a very strong impact on reducing students' anxiety levels. This implies that the improvement was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful in practical EFL learning contexts.

The substantial decrease in mean scores, supported by both significance testing and effect size analysis, demonstrates that the blended mentoring approach was highly effective in addressing students' affective barriers to public speaking. The combination of descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-test, and effect size analysis consistently indicates a reduction in students' public speaking anxiety following the intervention. Collectively, the descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-test, effect size analysis, and observational findings consistently indicate a reduction in participants' public speaking anxiety following the intervention.

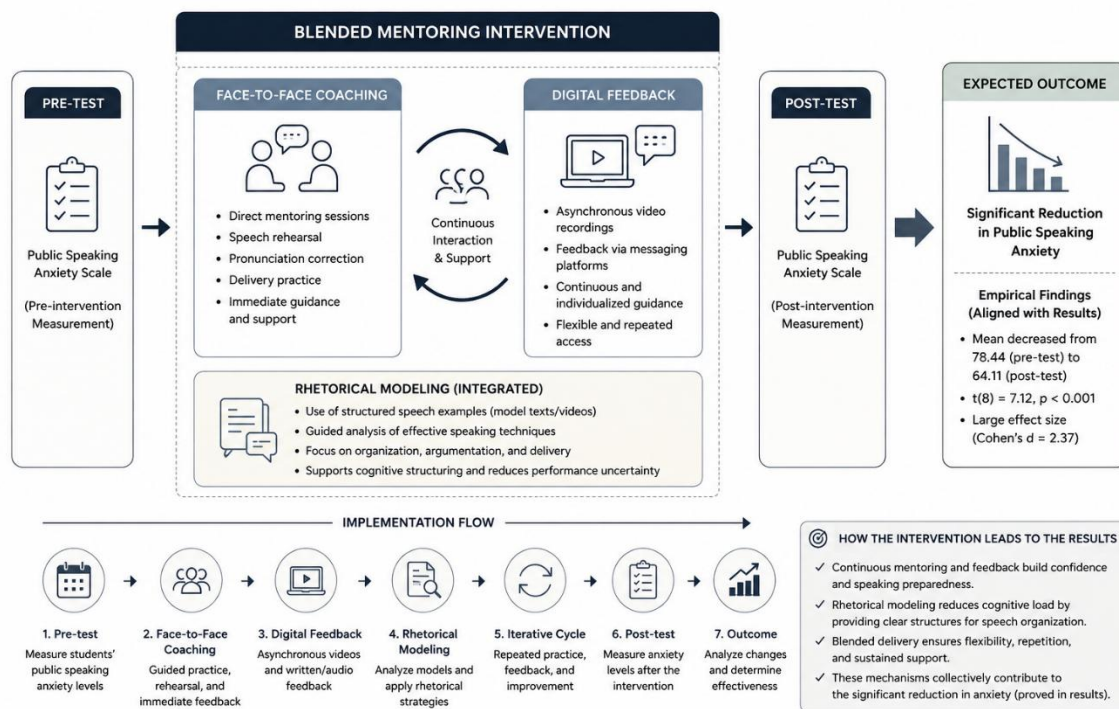


Figure 2. Blended Mentoring Intervention Model for Reducing Public Speaking Anxiety in EFL Contexts

This figure illustrates the structured flow of the blended mentoring intervention implemented in this study, consisting of three main stages: pre-intervention, intervention process, and post-intervention. The pre-intervention stage involves the measurement of students' public speaking anxiety using a standardized scale. The intervention phase integrates two complementary components, namely face-to-face coaching (including speech rehearsal, pronunciation correction, and delivery practice) and digital feedback (through asynchronous video recordings and messaging-based feedback), which operate in a continuous and iterative cycle. Rhetorical modeling is embedded throughout the process to support students' cognitive structuring of speech, focusing on organization, argumentation, and delivery. The post-intervention stage captures the changes in anxiety levels, reflecting a significant reduction as indicated by the decrease in mean scores and large effect size. Overall, figure 2 illustrates the sequence of the blended mentoring intervention

implemented in this study and summarizes the instructional components applied throughout the intervention period.

Discussion

Mechanism of Anxiety Reduction

Rather than merely confirming that supportive learning environments can reduce speaking anxiety, the present findings provide a more explicit explanation of the pedagogical mechanism through which anxiety reduction may occur in EFL public speaking. The statistically significant decline in participants' public speaking anxiety following the blended mentoring intervention suggests that anxiety reduction is not simply the consequence of increased speaking opportunities or teacher encouragement. Instead, the findings indicate that the intervention functioned by simultaneously strengthening learners' cognitive preparedness and affective readiness, enabling them to approach speaking tasks with greater confidence and perceived control. This interpretation extends previous research by shifting the discussion from whether supportive instruction reduces anxiety to how different instructional components interact to facilitate that reduction.

A notable finding emerging from this study is the role of rhetorical modeling as a form of cognitive scaffolding rather than merely a technique for improving speech organization. Previous studies have frequently associated rhetorical modeling with discourse development, genre awareness, and communicative effectiveness, particularly within genre-based pedagogy (Hyland, 2019). However, the present findings suggest that its contribution extends beyond improving the quality of spoken discourse. By providing learners with explicit models of how to introduce ideas, develop arguments, and conclude presentations, rhetorical modeling appears to reduce uncertainty during speech preparation. Instead of generating content and organizing ideas simultaneously while speaking, learners are able to rely on internalized rhetorical structures, thereby reducing the mental effort required during performance.

This interpretation can be understood through the perspective of Cognitive Load Theory proposed by Sweller (1988). According to it, learning becomes more effective when instructional designs minimize unnecessary cognitive demands, allowing learners to allocate greater working-memory resources to task execution (Sweller, 1988; Sweller et al., 2019). Within the present intervention, rhetorical modeling appears to function as an instructional scaffold that simplifies the cognitive demands of public speaking. Rather than struggling to determine both what to say and how to organize ideas in real time, learners entered speaking situations with a clearer rhetorical schema. As a result, cognitive resources could be redirected toward pronunciation, audience engagement, and delivery, reducing the uncertainty that often triggers public speaking anxiety. The findings therefore suggest that anxiety reduction may occur because learners perceive speaking tasks as cognitively more manageable.

The findings also highlight that cognitive preparedness alone is unlikely to fully explain the observed reduction in anxiety. While rhetorical modeling provided learners with structured cognitive guidance (Stevani & Saragi, 2025), the mentoring process created repeated opportunities to transform that knowledge into communicative practice. Unlike instructional approaches that rely on isolated classroom activities, the blended mentoring

model implemented in this study encouraged iterative rehearsal, individualized feedback, and gradual refinement across multiple learning cycles. This sustained process allowed learners to revisit mentor feedback, reflect on previous performances, and continuously improve subsequent presentations. Consequently, anxiety reduction appeared to emerge gradually throughout the intervention rather than immediately after a single instructional session.

From an affective perspective, the findings are consistent with the view that learners' emotional responses to speaking tasks are strongly influenced by perceived preparedness and supportive instructional interactions (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). However, the present study provides a more integrated interpretation by suggesting that emotional reassurance becomes substantially more effective when learners simultaneously experience increased cognitive preparedness. In other words, mentoring does not appear to reduce anxiety solely because learners receive encouragement from the mentor. Instead, encouragement becomes meaningful because it is accompanied by concrete improvements in learners' ability to organize, rehearse, and deliver their speeches. This interaction between cognitive preparation and affective reassurance appears to strengthen learners' sense of control over public speaking tasks, thereby lowering anxiety levels.

Findings suggest that public speaking anxiety should be viewed not merely as an emotional response requiring affective support, but as the outcome of an interaction between cognitive and affective processes occurring throughout instructional practice. The present study therefore proposes that blended mentoring functions by simultaneously reducing learners' cognitive uncertainty through rhetorical modeling and strengthening their affective readiness through sustained mentoring. This interpretation provides a more comprehensive explanation of anxiety reduction than approaches that focus exclusively on emotional support or speaking practice alone and establishes the conceptual foundation for the dual-layer support framework proposed in the following section.

Toward a Dual-Layer Support Framework

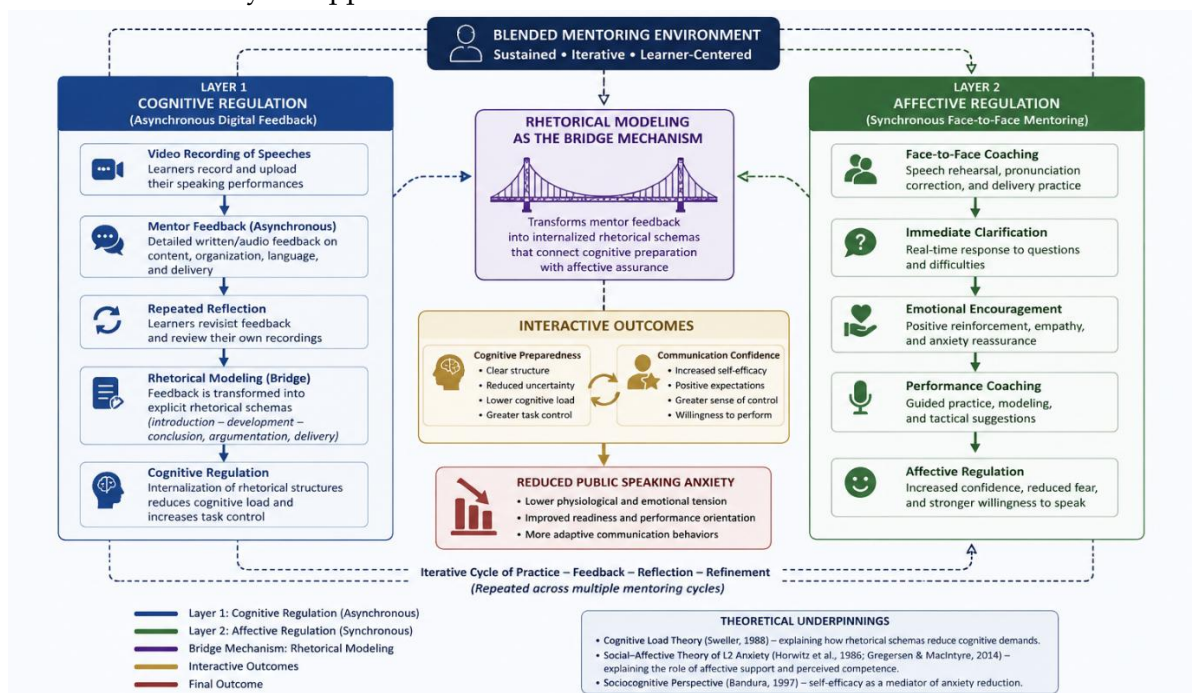


Figure 3. Proposed Dual-Layer Support Framework Emerging from the Present Study

Beyond explaining the statistical reduction in public speaking anxiety, the present findings allow the development of a preliminary conceptual framework describing how blended mentoring may facilitate anxiety reduction in EFL speaking. Rather than viewing asynchronous digital feedback and face-to-face mentoring as two complementary instructional modes, the findings suggest that each component performs a distinct pedagogical function while operating within an interconnected learning process. This interpretation moves the discussion beyond instructional delivery by emphasizing the underlying mechanisms through which learners gradually develop confidence and reduce anxiety.

Within this framework, the asynchronous digital component primarily functions as a mechanism of cognitive regulation. By allowing learners to repeatedly review their recorded performances, revisit mentor feedback, and refine rhetorical organization at their own pace, digital mentoring creates opportunities for continuous reflection and self-monitoring. These repeated cycles appear to facilitate the gradual internalization of rhetorical structures rather than encouraging immediate performance improvement. Consequently, learners become increasingly familiar with how ideas should be introduced, developed, and concluded before entering subsequent speaking tasks. Consistent with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), this process reduces unnecessary cognitive demands during speech production because learners no longer need to simultaneously generate content and organize discourse under performance pressure.

In contrast, face-to-face mentoring primarily serves as a mechanism of affective regulation. Immediate clarification, personalized encouragement, and direct interaction with the mentor appear to reduce learners' uncertainty while strengthening their confidence to perform publicly. Previous studies have emphasized that supportive teacher-student interactions promote emotional security and reduce communication apprehension (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). The present findings extend this perspective by suggesting that affective regulation becomes progressively stronger when learners perceive themselves as cognitively prepared before performance. Thus, emotional reassurance does not operate independently but is continuously reinforced by learners' growing sense of preparedness throughout the mentoring process.

An important conceptual contribution emerging from this study is the positioning of rhetorical modeling as the pedagogical bridge connecting these two regulatory processes. Rather than functioning solely as a strategy for improving discourse organization, rhetorical modeling transforms mentor feedback into explicit cognitive schemas that learners repeatedly apply across successive rehearsal cycles (Hyland, 2019; Zimmerman, 2013). Through this process, feedback becomes progressively internalized, reducing cognitive uncertainty while simultaneously increasing learners' confidence in their ability to perform. Accordingly, rhetorical modeling should be understood not merely as an instructional technique but as the mechanism through which cognitive regulation and affective regulation become mutually reinforcing.

Public speaking anxiety is reduced not because learners receive digital feedback or face-to-face mentoring independently, but because both components operate

simultaneously within an iterative mentoring cycle. Cognitive regulation prepares learners for the speaking task, whereas affective regulation sustains learners throughout the performance process. Their interaction gradually develops cognitive preparedness and communication confidence, which together appear to explain the observed reduction in public speaking anxiety. Figure 2 summarizes this preliminary Dual-Layer Support Framework, which may serve as a conceptual basis for future studies investigating blended mentoring in EFL speaking contexts.

Theoretical Contribution, Educational Implications, and Limitations

The present study contributes to the growing body of research on EFL speaking pedagogy by offering a preliminary conceptual explanation of how blended mentoring may reduce public speaking anxiety beyond the provision of supportive learning environments alone. While previous studies have generally examined digital feedback, mentoring, rhetorical instruction, or speaking anxiety as separate pedagogical constructs, the present findings suggest that these elements may operate as interconnected processes within a unified instructional framework (Cahya & Churnia, 2026; Hyland, 2019; Zhang, 2021). Rather than conceptualizing blended mentoring simply as the integration of online and face-to-face learning, this study proposes that its pedagogical value lies in the interaction between cognitive regulation and affective regulation, mediated through rhetorical modeling. This perspective extends existing discussions on language anxiety by emphasizing that learners' emotional readiness is strengthened not only through encouragement and supportive teacher-student relationships but also through explicit cognitive preparation that enables learners to organize and deliver their ideas more confidently. Although the proposed Dual-Layer Support Framework should be regarded as preliminary due to the exploratory nature of the present study, it offers a theoretically grounded explanation that may guide future investigations examining the instructional mechanisms underlying anxiety reduction in EFL speaking contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings also provide practical implications for English language teachers, mentors, and curriculum designers. Speaking instruction is frequently dominated by opportunities for practice and performance assessment, whereas comparatively less attention is devoted to the processes that help learners prepare cognitively and emotionally before speaking (Goh, 2017; Ma, 2022; Zheng et al., 2023). The present findings suggest that combining asynchronous digital feedback with face-to-face mentoring may create a more balanced learning environment in which learners are encouraged to rehearse, reflect, revise, and receive individualized guidance throughout the learning process. Within this environment, rhetorical modeling serves not merely as an example of effective speech organization but as an instructional scaffold that enables learners to internalize communicative structures before public performance. Consequently, speaking instruction may benefit from shifting its emphasis from evaluating final speaking products toward facilitating continuous developmental processes that progressively strengthen learners' preparedness and confidence.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design without a comparison group, limiting the extent to which causal

relationships between the intervention and anxiety reduction can be established. Accordingly, the observed improvements should be interpreted as evidence of promising associations rather than definitive causal effects. Second, the relatively small number of participants reflects the exploratory nature of the study and limits the transferability of the findings to broader EFL populations. Consequently, the proposed Dual-Layer Support Framework should be considered a preliminary conceptual model requiring further empirical validation across different educational contexts, learner characteristics, and proficiency levels. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ randomized or quasi-experimental designs involving larger and more diverse samples while incorporating longitudinal observations to examine whether the interaction between cognitive regulation and affective regulation remains stable over extended instructional periods. Such investigations would not only strengthen the empirical evidence for blended mentoring but also contribute to the continued refinement of the conceptual framework proposed in the present study.

Conclusion

This study confirms that blended mentoring is an effective intervention for reducing public speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The significant decrease in anxiety scores, supported by a large effect size, indicates that the integration of face-to-face coaching and asynchronous digital feedback provides both statistically and practically meaningful outcomes. These findings suggest that anxiety reduction in speaking is not solely dependent on increased practice, but on the availability of continuous, structured, and supportive guidance. A key contribution of this study lies in the incorporation of rhetorical modeling within the mentoring process. By providing learners with clear frameworks for organizing and delivering speech, rhetorical modeling reduces cognitive load during performance and enhances learners' sense of preparedness. This indicates that addressing the cognitive dimension of speaking particularly discourse organization—plays a critical role in mitigating anxiety, alongside affective support.

The results also highlight that the effectiveness of blended approaches in language learning is strongly influenced by the quality of interaction rather than the modality itself. In this case, the mentoring-oriented design—characterized by iterative feedback, guided rehearsal, and personalized support—appears to be a decisive factor in improving learners' speaking readiness. However, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of a small sample size and a pre-experimental design. Further research using controlled experimental methods and larger participant groups is necessary to validate and extend these results. Future studies may also investigate how different components of blended mentoring contribute individually to anxiety reduction and speaking performance.

In sum, this study provides empirical evidence that a pedagogical integration of mentoring, rhetorical structuring, and digital feedback offers a viable and effective approach to addressing public speaking anxiety in EFL contexts.

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