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Psychological and pedagogical support for overcoming speech anxiety in students in the process of learning a foreign language

***Abstract.** The article examines speech anxiety in foreign language learning and substantiates psychological and pedagogical support as a holistic, multi-level system of assistance. The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that elevated anxiety during oral performance reduces learning activity, impairs communication quality, intensifies avoidance of speaking, and reinforces negative expectations about one's own performance. The purpose of the article is to generalize current theoretical approaches to speech anxiety, identify the factors of its formation in the student environment, and justify a conceptual model of psychological and pedagogical support for its reduction. The methodological basis is a theoretical-conceptual analysis, comparison, synthesis, and systematization of contemporary research on foreign language anxiety and supportive educational environments. The novelty of the study lies not in addressing speech anxiety as such, but in proposing an integrative model that combines psychological and pedagogical mechanisms within a single support framework and in explicating the criteria by which its components were*

selected: empirical recurrence in the literature, modifiability in educational practice, and correspondence to the logic of multi-level support. The article outlines the key support mechanisms: diagnostics and monitoring of anxiety level, psychoeducation regarding the nature of errors and evaluation, development of self-regulation skills, gradual increase in the complexity of oral speech (gradual exposure), organization of safe group interaction, and the use of formative feedback without stigmatization. The expected result of implementing such support is a reduction in speaking avoidance, greater participation in communicative tasks, increased confidence, and stabilization of learning motivation. It is concluded that effective reduction of speech anxiety requires coordinated action by the teacher and the psychological service, together with orientation toward psychological safety, graduality, and a supportive culture of assessment.

Keywords: *speech anxiety; foreign language classroom anxiety; students; foreign language learning; psychological and pedagogical support; psychological safety; formative feedback*

Introduction. Modern foreign language education in higher education institutions is increasingly focused not only on the acquisition of lexical and grammatical knowledge, but also on the student's ability to use a foreign language as a tool for real interaction. However, oral speech often turns out to be the most emotionally stressful form of educational activity for students. The need to speak spontaneously, demonstrate one's own knowledge in front of a group, quickly respond to the interlocutor's remarks, be evaluated by the teacher and compared with others creates conditions under which the educational situation can be experienced as psychologically threatening. In the scientific literature, this phenomenon is described through the concept of foreign language anxiety or foreign language classroom anxiety - situationally specific anxiety associated with the study and use of a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2010).

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses show that speech anxiety is not a random emotional background to learning, but is among the factors consistently associated with lower academic performance, poorer self-perceptions of speaking competence, less willingness to engage in communicative tasks, and a tendency to avoid speaking (Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019). At the same time, modern research increasingly emphasizes that the problem is not limited to the individual vulnerability of the student. Its intensity is mediated by the type of feedback, the atmosphere in the academic group, the structure of tasks, the level of support, and the logic of assessment (Alrabai, 2015; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021; Xiong et al., 2024).

For young students, this problem is of particular importance, as it is combined with age-related tasks of self-presentation, the need for social approval, sensitivity to error and high dependence on the evaluative context. As a result, even a sufficient language resource is not always implemented in real communicative behavior: the student knows more than he can demonstrate in a situation of public foreign language speaking. In this context, it is advisable to

consider reducing anxiety not as a private task of an individual student, but as a task of designing a supportive educational environment (Bardus et al., 2021; Kharchenko et al., 2024). Despite a significant amount of research on foreign language anxiety, modern literature is dominated by either works focused on individual factors of anxiety, or research on the effectiveness of individual interventions. However, a holistic approach remains less developed, within which psychological and pedagogical support is understood as a multi-level system that combines psychological and pedagogical mechanisms of student support. This is the research gap that this article is aimed at overcoming.

The purpose of the article is to summarize modern theoretical approaches to understanding speech anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language, to identify the factors of its formation in the student environment and to substantiate the conceptual model of psychological and pedagogical support for its reduction. To achieve the goal, the following tasks were defined: 1) to analyze the theoretical foundations of the study of speech anxiety; 2) to outline the individual-psychological, socio-communicative and organizational-pedagogical factors of its formation; 3) to propose a model of psychological and pedagogical support for reducing students' speech anxiety; 4) to determine the organizational and methodological conditions for its implementation in a higher education institution. The article is of a theoretical and conceptual nature; its methodological basis is the analysis, comparison, synthesis, systematization and conceptual modeling of modern scientific sources.

The model components were selected on the basis of three explicit criteria: first, repeated confirmation of their relevance in contemporary empirical or review literature; second, their practical modifiability within higher education teaching; and third, their coherence with a multi-level understanding of support that links the student, the group, and the pedagogical environment. Such specification clarifies the conceptual grounding of the model and differentiates the present study from descriptive overviews of isolated anxiety factors or single interventions.

Theoretical foundations of the study of speech anxiety in the process of mastering a foreign language. Classical works on the problem of anxiety in foreign language learning emphasize that it is not a general personality trait, but a situationally specific affective state that arises specifically in the context of learning and using a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Horwitz, 2001). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language classroom anxiety as a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behavioral reactions related to the specifics of language learning. Such conceptualization made it possible to consider language anxiety as an independent research construct, and not a derivative of general anxiety.

Within the framework of this article, the basic concept is students' speech anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language. It is interpreted as a practical manifestation of the broader phenomenon of foreign language anxiety, which is especially acutely actualized in oral speech situations. Accordingly,

speaking anxiety and pronunciation anxiety are considered as more specific forms of this phenomenon, which are exacerbated in cases of public speaking, spontaneous response and pronunciation assessment (Kralova et al., 2017; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025).

Structurally, speech anxiety encompasses at least three interrelated components: communicative alertness, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In an oral speech situation, these components are combined especially tightly. The student simultaneously doubts the correctness of the statement, feels tension due to the limited time for speech reaction and fears that errors will be noticed by the teacher or classmates. That is why speaking often becomes the epicenter of language anxiety even when reading or writing exercises do not cause such pronounced tension.

Further studies have shown that anxiety negatively affects various stages of cognitive processing of foreign language information. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), increased anxiety impairs the perception, processing and reproduction of language material, reduces the amount of operational attention and complicates access to already mastered language units. This means that a student in a state of high tension may demonstrate a lower level of performance not because he does not know the material, but because anxiety blocks its actualization.

Modern generalizations confirm a stable negative relationship between speech anxiety and learning performance. Meta-analyses by Teimouri et al. (2019) and Botes et al. (2020) show that foreign language anxiety is associated with both lower academic achievement and poorer subjective assessment of one's own speaking ability. At the same time, it is important that this relationship is not fatal: it is mediated by pedagogical conditions, motivation, type of interaction in the classroom and the student's ability to self-regulate.

A significant addition to the classical understanding of the problem was the positive psychological perspective, within which anxiety is analyzed not in isolation, but in connection with positive emotions of learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) showed that anxiety and enjoyment are not simple opposites: a student can simultaneously experience tension, interest, involvement and satisfaction from the learning process. Dong et al. (2022) also demonstrated that foreign language classroom anxiety, enjoyment, and motivational measures are interrelated and jointly influence self-rated foreign language achievement. This suggests an important practical implication: the teacher's task is not only to reduce stress, but also to create conditions in which speaking is associated with support, success, and the experience of gradual progress.

Factors of speech anxiety formation in the student environment. Students' speech anxiety is multifactorial and arises under the influence of individual-psychological, socio-communicative and organizational-pedagogical factors. This approach makes it possible to avoid a simplified explanation, as if the problem is reduced only to insufficient language training. Even with a relatively sufficient level of language proficiency, anxiety may persist if the

educational situation itself is experienced as risky for self-esteem and self-presentation.

Individual-psychological factors include, first of all, low confidence in one's own speech competence, increased sensitivity to error, fear of judgment, a tendency to negative self-commentary and perfectionistic attitudes. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) showed that anxious students evaluate their own oral speech much more harshly, focus on shortcomings and gravitate towards inflated standards that are practically impossible to implement in spontaneous communication. As a result, even a minor error is experienced not as a natural stage of learning, but as evidence of incompetence.

Previous experience of foreign language communication plays a significant role. If a student has repeatedly encountered ridicule, harsh criticism, public correction of errors or interruption of the answer, this forms an expectation of threat in similar situations in the future. Repeating such experience consolidates the avoidance of speaking as a protective behavior. Temporarily, avoidance reduces tension, but in the long term it maintains anxiety itself, since the student does not gain experience of safe successful speaking.

Socio-communicative factors are associated with the specifics of group interaction. For many students, speaking a foreign language becomes a form of public self-presentation, within which any language error can be perceived as a loss of status in the eyes of the group. A particularly high risk of anxiety occurs when competition, comparison or ironic commenting are widespread in the academic group. Özdemir and Seçkin (2025) showed that among the most common factors for increasing speaking anxiety in higher education, students mention fear of pronunciation errors, public speaking, lack of vocabulary and insufficient experience in real-life speech use.

Organizational and pedagogical factors relate to the teaching format itself. High levels of anxiety are supported by situations in which control dominates over support, assessment is perceived as punishment, and oral response is organized according to the principle of “speak right away”. A study by Alrabai (2015) showed that the targeted use of anxiety-reducing strategies by teachers can significantly reduce foreign language anxiety. A review by Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) and a meta-analysis by Xiong et al. (2024) further confirm that interventions based on supportive interaction, self-management, gradual involvement, and positive feedback have a statistically significant anti-anxiety effect.

The connection between anxiety and the motivational sphere requires special attention. A high level of tension reduces not only the actual participation in speaking, but also the student's willingness to engage in communicative tasks in the future. A kind of vicious circle is formed: the more often a student avoids oral speech, the less opportunities he has to experience success; the less experience of success, the more persistent doubts about his own abilities become. That is why overcoming speech anxiety should be considered not only

as an emotionally supportive task, but also as a condition for stabilizing motivation, increasing participation, and readiness for foreign language communication.

Conceptual model of psychological and pedagogical support for reducing speech anxiety. Psychological and pedagogical support should be understood as a holistic multi-level support system that combines diagnostic, preventive, developmental and correctional-supportive components. Its goal is not to completely eliminate anxiety as such, but to reduce destructive anxiety to a level that does not block the student's participation in foreign language interaction. Accordingly, support should be aimed simultaneously at the student's internal mechanisms of self-regulation and at the external conditions of the educational environment. The proposed model was constructed through an integrative synthesis of the literature reviewed above. Its components were included not arbitrarily, but because they repeatedly appear in empirical studies and systematic reviews as factors or interventions associated with lower anxiety, because they can be implemented within university teaching practice, and because together they cover the three analytically distinguished levels of support: individual, interactional, and organizational-pedagogical. In this sense, the model is conceptually grounded in the logic of literature-based selection rather than in a merely illustrative enumeration of possible measures.

In the proposed model, speech anxiety is considered as the result of the interaction of three planes: 1) the student's individual vulnerability; 2) the experience of group communication; 3) the pedagogical design of foreign language learning. This means that no single technique can be sufficient in itself. Only that support that combines psychological normalization of emotional experience, formation of self-regulation skills and change of structure of educational interaction is effective. Accordingly, the diagnostic and monitoring component primarily addresses the individual level; psychoeducation and self-regulation link the individual and instructional levels; gradual speech involvement operationalizes the transition from protected participation to public speaking; psychologically safe group interaction addresses the socio-communicative level; and formative feedback reorganizes the assessment dimension of the pedagogical environment. This mapping of components to levels constitutes the article's specific conceptual contribution, because it explains not only what support measures should be used, but also why they belong to a coherent system.

The first component of support is diagnostics and monitoring. The teacher and psychological service should identify signs of speech anxiety not only with the help of standardized questionnaires, but also through observation of behavioral indicators: evasion of answer, refusal to participate in discussion, sharp drop in quality of speech in public situation, excessive self-correction, noticeable physiological manifestations of tension. Regular monitoring allows to distinguish situational anxiety from persistent problem and to offer targeted support in a timely manner.

The second component is psychoeducation. It is important to explain to students the nature of anxiety as a normal reaction to uncertainty, publicity and evaluation. Awareness that an error is a natural part of language acquisition reduces catastrophizing of one's own inaccuracies and weakens the fear of condemnation. In this sense, psychoeducation performs a dual function: it normalizes emotional experience and changes the interpretation of the error - from a threat to self-esteem to a learning resource.

The third component is the development of self-regulation skills. The study by Guo et al. (2018) showed that students with a lower level of foreign language anxiety more often use cognitive, metacognitive and social self-regulation strategies, while with high anxiety, avoidance increases. This gives grounds to include short breathing techniques, positive self-talk, cognitive rethinking ("my task is to be understandable, not error-free"), as well as short algorithms for preparing for an oral response. Such microstrategies do not eliminate all difficulties, but they return the student a sense of control over the situation.

The fourth component is gradual speech involvement (gradual exposure). Its essence lies in the gradual increase in the complexity of communicative tasks: from individual training and short remarks behind the support - to dialogue in pairs, discussion in a small group, mini-presentation and public discussion. Such logic corresponds to the principle of a safe approach to a situation that was previously experienced as threatening. Practice shows that it is precisely the sharp transition immediately to a speech in front of the whole group that often increases anxiety, while intermediate formats create conditions for building confidence. The fifth component is the organization of psychologically safe group interaction. Support from classmates and the teacher reduces the fear of negative evaluation and creates a sense of permissibility of an educational error. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) showed that it is the supportive behavior of the teacher and the group that is associated with a higher level of foreign language enjoyment, and a review by Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) showed that student-student interaction, student-teacher support and mood boosters are among the most promising areas of intervention. The sixth component is formative feedback. For an anxious student, the way the teacher reacts to speech errors is extremely important. If the correction is carried out sharply, publicly and evaluatively, it increases the fear of negative evaluation. In contrast, delayed, friendly and specific feedback supports learning activity, records progress and maintains speech initiative. Therefore, formative assessment should be considered not as an additional pedagogical option, but as a central element of the prevention of speech anxiety.

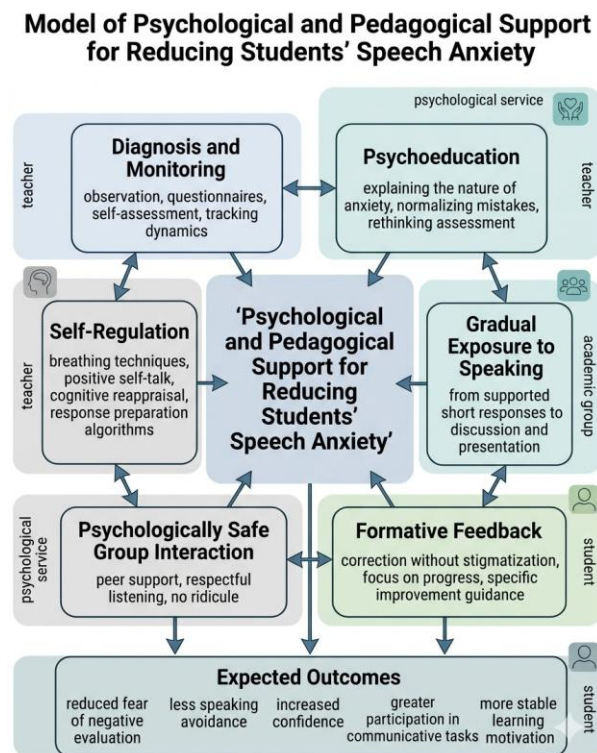


Figure 1. Conceptual model of psychological and pedagogical support for reducing students' speech anxiety in foreign language learning.

*Source: developed by the authors based on the literature synthesis presented in the article; visual design refined with AI-assisted layout support.

Thus, the proposed model (fig.1) is not fragmentary, but systemic in nature. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it combines preventive, developmental and support mechanisms, and also distributes responsibility between different subjects of the educational process. It is thanks to this that speech anxiety is considered not as a “personal weakness” of the student, but as a phenomenon that can be changed through the purposeful organization of the educational environment. Its originality lies in translating disparate findings on anxiety factors and anxiety-reducing interventions into a single literature-grounded architecture of support that is applicable to higher education practice.

Organizational and methodological conditions for implementing the model in a higher education institution. The effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical support is determined primarily by its systematicity. One-time support actions can give a short-term effect, but do not change the student's stable expectations regarding the threat of speech situations. That is why support should be integrated into daily educational practice - from the formulation of classroom interaction rules to assessment methods, task structure and reflection mechanisms.

The first condition is the formation of a culture of psychological safety. To do this, it is advisable to establish in the group the rules of invaluable listening, a ban on ridiculing mistakes, recognition of the right to pause, the right to refine the answer and the principle of benevolent correction. Psychological

safety does not mean lowering the requirements; it means that academic exactingness is not combined with humiliation or stigmatization. In such an environment, a student can take risks in speech, without worrying that a mistake will become a social failure. The second condition is pedagogical gradualness. Communicative tasks should be built on the principle of accessible complexity. It is advisable to start with well-structured formats, where the student has speech supports: keywords, speech clichés, a short time for preparation, and the possibility of a trial statement in a pair. For example, at the initial stage, students may be offered a short paired statement based on speech supports; at the next stage, a discussion in a small group; then a mini-presentation with preliminary preparation; only after that - participation in an open discussion with the entire academic group. It is this gradualness that implements the principle of gradual exposure and reduces the likelihood of a sharp increase in anxiety.

The third condition is the combination of language training with psychological micropractices. Short rituals of entering an oral task are useful: respiratory stabilization, 15-20 seconds of internal planning of the answer, self-support phrases, reflective question “what can I say on this topic?”. Jin et al. (2021) showed that even a short intervention associated with the actualization of one’s own language achievements helps reduce anxiety. This confirms that work with attention to success and progress has real regulatory potential.

The fourth condition is interdisciplinary interaction between the teacher and the psychological service. If anxiety becomes persistent, support cannot be limited to changing teaching methods. Consultations, individual recommendations, and in some cases, short training programs for the development of self-regulation, self-acceptance and safe self-presentation skills are needed. Kralova et al. (2017) demonstrated that psychosocial training in combination with language training can reduce pronunciation anxiety and improve the quality of pronunciation; the psychological and pedagogical approach has an empirical basis.

The fifth condition is a change in the assessment culture. The student should receive feedback that separates the personality from the speech act, records progress, specifies the development zone and reduces the destructive effect of comparison with others. The formula “first the content and communicative success, then point language improvement” is especially productive at those stages when it is necessary to increase readiness for speaking. This assessment format supports participation and does not reduce foreign language communication to a demonstration of infallibility.

The sixth condition is the teacher's readiness to work with the emotional dimension of foreign language learning. Effective reduction of speech anxiety requires from him not only subject competence, but also the ability to recognize behavioral indicators of excessive tension, dose the complexity of tasks, correctly give feedback and create an atmosphere of supportive demandingness in the classroom. Therefore, the issue of speech anxiety should be included in

the broader issues of psychological and pedagogical competence of a higher school teacher.

Limitations of theoretical analysis and prospects for further research.

The presented article has a theoretical and conceptual nature, which determines its possibilities and limitations. On the one hand, this format made it possible to integrate the results of classical and modern research and on this basis to build a holistic model of psychological and pedagogical support. On the other hand, the proposed provisions require further empirical verification in the specific conditions of higher education institutions.

First of all, it is promising to compare the effectiveness of different support formats – individual, group and mixed. An important direction for further studies is also the study of the relationship between speech anxiety, psychological safety and readiness for foreign language communication in conditions of blended and digital learning (Bardus et al., 2021; Kharchenko et al., 2024). Special attention needs to be paid to studying which combinations of pedagogical and psychological interventions are the most effective for different categories of students.

Conclusions. Students' speech anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language is not a random accompanying experience, but a stable factor that affects learning activity, the quality of oral speech, self-esteem and motivation. Its specificity lies in the fact that it arises at the intersection of cognitive difficulties, emotional tension, fear of negative evaluation and the peculiarities of the organization of the educational environment. The analysis carried out in the article confirms that speech anxiety should be interpreted as a multi-level educational phenomenon rather than exclusively as an individual deficit.

A generalization of modern scientific sources gives grounds to assert that speech anxiety is formed under the influence of a set of interrelated factors: low confidence in one's own speech competence, perfectionistic attitudes, previous negative experience, social pressure of the group, as well as pedagogical practices in which control prevails over support. That is why effective reduction of language anxiety is impossible without a systemic approach that takes into account both the psychological characteristics of the student and the pedagogical logic of organizing foreign language learning. In this respect, the article specifies the research gap by demonstrating that the decisive issue is not the identification of yet another isolated factor, but the integration of modifiable factors and interventions into a coherent support design.

The theoretical significance of the article lies in the integration of psychological and pedagogical approaches to overcoming speech anxiety and in the conceptualization of psychological and pedagogical support as a multi-level model that combines diagnostics, psychoeducation, self-regulation, phased speech engagement, psychologically safe interaction and formative assessment. The practical significance of the work lies in the possibility of using this model to design a supportive foreign language environment in higher education institutions. The original contribution of the study is the justification of the selection logic of these six components and their correlation with three levels of

support individual, socio-communicative, and organizational-pedagogical which makes the model analytically transparent and applicable for instructional design.

Thus, effective reduction of students' speech anxiety is ensured not by separate fragmentary methods, but by a systematic combination of academic rigor, psychological safety, gradual speech engagement and supportive assessment culture. A promising direction for further research is the empirical verification of the proposed model in various educational contexts, in particular in the conditions of blended learning, digital communication and interdisciplinary interaction of the teacher and the psychological service. Future studies may also test the relative contribution of each model component, compare different implementation formats, and examine how the model functions across disciplines and delivery modes.

AI use statement. Artificial intelligence tools were used only as supportive instruments for language refinement, readability improvement, and visualization of the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. No AI tools were used to generate empirical data, fabricate sources, or make independent analytical conclusions. The conceptualization of the study, selection and interpretation of literature, argumentation, and final editing of the manuscript were carried out by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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Психолого-педагогічний супровід подолання мовленнєвої тривожності студентів у процесі вивчення іноземної мови

***Анотація.** У статті розглядається мовленнєва тривожність у вивченні іноземної мови та обґрунтовується психолого-педагогічна підтримка як цілісна багаторівнева система допомоги. Актуальність теми визначається тим, що підвищена тривожність під час усного виступу знижує навчальну активність, погіршує якість комунікації, посилює уникнення говоріння та підкріплює негативні очікування щодо власної успішності. Метою статті є узагальнення сучасних теоретичних підходів до мовленнєвої тривожності, визначення факторів її формування в студентському середовищі та обґрунтування концептуальної моделі психолого-педагогічної підтримки для її зниження. Методологічною основою є теоретико-концептуальний аналіз, порівняння, синтез та систематизація сучасних досліджень щодо тривожності перед вивченням іноземної мови та підтримуючого освітнього середовища. Новизна дослідження полягає не в розгляді мовленнєвої тривожності як такої, а в пропозиції інтегративної моделі, яка поєднує психолого-педагогічні механізми в рамках єдиної системи підтримки та в поясненні критеріїв, за якими відбиралися її компоненти: емпірична повторюваність у літературі, модифікованість в освітній практиці та відповідність логіці багаторівневої підтримки. У статті окреслено ключові механізми підтримки: діагностика та моніторинг рівня тривожності, психоосвіта щодо характеру помилок та їх оцінювання, розвиток навичок саморегуляції, поступове збільшення складності усного мовлення (поступове ознайомлення), організація безпечної групової*

взаємодії та використання формувального зворотного зв'язку без стигматизації. Очікуваним результатом впровадження такої підтримки є зменшення уникнення мовлення, більша участь у комунікативних завданнях, підвищення впевненості та мотивація навчання. Зроблено висновок, що ефективно зниження мовленнєвої тривожності вимагає скоординованих дій вчителя та психологічної служби, а також орієнтації на психологічну безпеку, поступовість та підтримуючу культуру оцінювання.

Ключові слова: *мовленнєва тривожність; тривожність перед уроком іноземної мови; студенти; вивчення іноземної мови; психолого-педагогічна підтримка; психологічна безпека; формувальний зворотний зв'язок.*

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