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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ENGLISH LEARNING ANXIETY AND STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract
The interplay between anxiety and speaking performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is a critical area of investigation, given its implications for language acquisition and instructional strategies. Anxiety, particularly in oral communication, has been identified as a major psychological barrier that hampers learners' confidence, fluency, and participation, thereby affecting both immediate performance and long-term language development. Although existing research underscores the negative impact of language anxiety, there is a notable gap in empirical studies that directly correlate anxiety levels with standardized speaking performance scores within classroom settings, especially among non-native English learners. This study aims to examine the relationship between English learning anxiety and students' speaking proficiency, utilizing validated anxiety scales and performance assessments to quantify this connection. Employing a correlational research design, the study involved 48 undergraduate students enrolled in an English language program at an Indonesian university, divided into high- and low-anxiety groups based on their scores on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Data collection involved administering the FLCAS and evaluating speaking performance through a standardized rubric aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The collected data were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between anxiety levels and speaking scores. Key findings reveal a significant inverse correlation: students with higher anxiety levels consistently demonstrated lower speaking performance, while those with lower anxiety performed better. These results underscore the detrimental role of anxiety in oral language production and suggest that reducing affective barriers can enhance learners' speaking proficiency. The study implies that language educators should incorporate anxiety-reduction strategies into their pedagogy, fostering supportive environments that encourage participation and boost confidence, ultimately improving language acquisition outcomes.

Keywords: EFL learners, language anxiety, speaking performance

INTRODUCTION

English speaking skills have increasingly become a critical component of academic and professional success, particularly in globalized educational contexts. Among the many psychological factors influencing language acquisition, anxiety has emerged as a significant affective variable affecting students' oral communication abilities. English learning anxiety, specifically in speaking tasks, often hampers learners' confidence, fluency, and willingness to participate, leading to variations in their performance. Understanding the relationship between learners' anxiety and their speaking proficiency is essential to enhance language instruction and learner outcomes.

In the context of second and foreign language learning, the pressure to perform orally in a non-native language frequently triggers fear and self-doubt, especially among students with limited exposure to authentic communication. This condition influences not only their classroom performance but also their long-term language development. Addressing this issue is essential in educational systems

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where speaking proficiency is a key learning target. Institutions and educators must become aware of the underlying psychological dimensions that affect speaking performance to ensure a more supportive learning environment.

Recent studies have increasingly focused on the dynamics between anxiety and speaking skills in English language learners. For instance, Horwitz (2010) emphasized the influence of foreign language anxiety on learners' speaking confidence, while Mishu et al. (2022) found a significant relationship between communication apprehension and classroom interaction. More recent work by Ashari et al. (2023) has shown that anxiety remains one of the most persistent emotional barriers in speaking tasks. Furthermore, Othman (2023) suggested that individual differences, including emotional variables, predict speaking achievement more than cognitive skills alone. Despite the growing attention, few studies have isolated the correlation between English learning anxiety and speaking performance using direct performance indicators among EFL students in structured academic settings.

While numerous investigations have discussed the negative effects of anxiety on language learning outcomes, fewer studies have concentrated specifically on the statistical correlation between students' anxiety levels and their actual speaking performance scores. Much of the existing literature has either focused on self-perceived proficiency or used anxiety scales without integrating them with formal speaking assessments. As a result, the precise strength and direction of this relationship in classroom-based speaking performance contexts remain less explored, particularly among non-native speakers in English as a Foreign Language environment.

This study examines the direct correlation between English learning anxiety and students' measured speaking performance using established speaking assessment criteria. What sets this investigation apart is its reliance on actual speaking scores to assess performance and the use of validated anxiety measurement tools to determine emotional influence. The objectives of this study are to determine whether a significant relationship exists between English learning anxiety and students' speaking performance, to examine the nature of this relationship, and to identify the anxiety level most closely associated with performance variance.

Findings from this research offer new perspectives that expand understanding of how emotional variables shape linguistic outcomes, particularly in oral proficiency. Results provide actionable insights for classroom settings where students face pressure to perform in real-time speaking tasks. The study sheds light on learners' affective experiences that are often overlooked in standardized instructional approaches, allowing for more nuanced instructional strategies tailored to learners' emotional readiness, motivational states, and linguistic confidence.

This research is expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on affective factors in language education by offering empirical evidence linking emotional states to language production. It contributes to the field by clarifying how varying degrees of anxiety influence observable speaking outcomes and encourages the refinement of language teaching practices that align more closely with learners' psychological needs. The study also contributes to assessment design by

emphasizing the need to consider affective filters when evaluating speaking performance.

Hypotheses:
H1: There is a significant negative correlation between English learning anxiety and students' speaking performance.
H2: Students with higher levels of English learning anxiety demonstrate lower speaking performance scores.
H3: Students with lower levels of English learning anxiety achieve higher speaking performance scores.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Anxiety and Speaking Performance

Language anxiety, particularly in the context of speaking performance, is a significant issue affecting students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This phenomenon involves various psychological dimensions, including fear of negative evaluation, low self-esteem, and apprehension about making mistakes. Research indicates that such anxieties can considerably hinder students' speaking abilities, often resulting in reduced classroom performance.

Speaking anxiety is one of the most prevalent forms of anxiety among EFL learners. Students frequently experience intense anxiety during oral presentations or when speaking in front of peers, primarily due to fear of judgment and evaluation (Abdullah et al., 2021; Giray et al., 2022; Qadri et al., 2023; Suparia et al., 2022). These feelings often manifest as physical symptoms and a reluctance to participate in speaking activities, which ultimately hinders language acquisition and fluency (Erdiana et al., 2020; Elgmal, 2023; Manan et al., 2023). It has been shown that EFL learners commonly associate speaking tasks with higher anxiety levels than other language skills such as reading or writing (Husain et al., 2020; Shahbaz, 2021; Suparia et al., 2022).

Moreover, a weak negative correlation has been found between speaking anxiety and self-efficacy, indicating that higher anxiety levels are associated with decreased confidence in speaking performance (Dong, 2023). Students often perceive their language abilities more negatively in anxiety-inducing situations, which further exacerbates their difficulties (Badrasawi et al., 2020; Kakepoto et al., 2022). The evident relationship between anxiety and speaking performance underscores the need for targeted interventions to alleviate anxiety among learners.

Several factors contribute to the development of speaking anxiety, including low language proficiency, lack of preparation, and public speaking pressure (García-Núñez et al., 2023; Naser & Isa, 2021). Gender differences have also been noted; female students may experience higher levels of anxiety than male students, though findings are not always consistent (Dilaimy, 2024; Femilia & Yusuf, 2023). The learning context—whether traditional or online—also significantly influences the level of anxiety experienced by students (Haryadi & Aprianoto, 2020; Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021).

To address these challenges, educators should create supportive classroom environments that promote language use without fear of criticism. Strategies such as group work, peer feedback, and the integration of technology can reduce anxiety

and build student confidence (Qadri et al., 2023; Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021). For instance, role-playing activities and using video recordings for self-assessment provide low-pressure opportunities for practice and improvement (Erdiana et al., 2020; Ko, 2023). These pedagogical approaches can help mitigate speaking anxiety and improve students' overall performance in language learning.

In conclusion, the intersection between language anxiety and speaking performance is a crucial concern for EFL learners. Understanding the causes and effects of speaking anxiety, along with implementing effective instructional strategies, can significantly improve learners' speaking abilities and confidence in using English in both academic and social settings.

Anxiety Effects on EFL Speaking Skills

Anxiety significantly impacts the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as demonstrated by numerous studies. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a common emotional barrier among language learners that can hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. This anxiety typically emerges during speaking tasks, resulting in reduced performance and lowered self-confidence, both of which are essential for successful language acquisition (Aini & Lubis, 2023; Ashari et al., 2023; Cimen & Çeşme, 2022; Wilang, 2022).

The primary causes of speaking anxiety in EFL settings often include fear of making mistakes, worry about negative evaluation, and limited vocabulary. For example, learners may hesitate to express themselves due to concerns about embarrassment or judgment from peers or instructors (Anggraeny et al., 2020; Jupri et al., 2022). Furthermore, insufficient preparation and lack of speaking practice tend to increase anxiety, making learners feel unready and more anxious during speaking activities (Abril, 2021; Othman, 2023).

Research highlights the connection between specific teaching strategies and the reduction of anxiety. Approaches such as Total Physical Response Storytelling and the use of digital tools have shown promise in lowering anxiety levels while improving speaking competence (Cimen & Çeşme, 2022; Perkasyah et al., 2023). Classroom activities that encourage active participation and build confidence, such as role-playing and structured presentations, can reduce anxiety by offering students a supportive space to practice speaking without the pressure of formal evaluation (Abril, 2021; Wilang, 2022). Additionally, explicit instruction focused on vocabulary development and conversational strategies is vital for helping learners overcome anxiety (Mishu et al., 2022; Sholikhah & Isnaini, 2024).

The psychological dimension of FLA also emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in language learning. When learners believe in their ability to succeed, their anxiety decreases, along with their reluctance to speak (Abdullah et al., 2021; Burhanuddin et al., 2023). Incorporating motivational strategies, such as positive reinforcement and peer collaboration, can further enhance speaking skills by fostering a positive and supportive learning environment (Cahyono et al., 2023; Hanafiah et al., 2022).

In summary, addressing anxiety is essential for improving the speaking proficiency of EFL learners. This requires a combination of targeted teaching methods, supportive classroom atmospheres, and confidence-building strategies. By tackling these emotional challenges, educators can enhance language performance and enrich learners' overall language acquisition experience.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to explore the relationship between English learning anxiety and students' speaking performance. In addition to identifying the correlation between the two variables, the design also incorporated a comparative element to observe performance differences between students with varying levels of anxiety. The research focused on measuring naturally occurring variations in anxiety and their relationship with actual speaking scores, without manipulating the participants' environment or instructional methods.

Participants

The study involved a total of 48 undergraduate students enrolled in an English language program at a state university in Indonesia. These participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all had prior exposure to academic speaking activities. The sample was divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 25 students and a control group comprising 23 students. The division was based on the students' anxiety levels as determined by their responses on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). All participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 and had completed at least two semesters of English-speaking instruction. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and ethical standards were upheld throughout the study.

Instruments

Two instruments were utilized in the study: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and a standardized speaking performance rubric. The FLCAS, developed by Horwitz et al. (2010), consists of 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to measure learners' anxiety related to language learning. Example items include "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class" and "I feel more tense and nervous in English class than in my other classes," allowing the scale to capture various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of anxiety. This scale has consistently demonstrated strong reliability and validity in EFL contexts. Speaking performance was assessed using a rubric adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which evaluates fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and overall coherence. For instance, fluency was judged by the speaker's ability to express ideas smoothly with minimal hesitation, while grammar was evaluated based on accuracy and complexity of sentence structure. Each student's speaking task was scored independently by two experienced raters to enhance scoring reliability.

Data Collection

The data collection process took place over two weeks. In the first phase, all 48 students completed the FLCAS during a scheduled classroom session. Instructions were provided to ensure participants clearly understood the items. Based on their FLCAS results, participants were categorized into the experimental group (high anxiety) and control group (low anxiety). In the second phase, students were asked to perform a structured individual speaking task, consisting of a short presentation and follow-up questions. Their responses were recorded and assessed

by two trained English lecturers who were not informed of the students' group assignments or anxiety levels. The assessors' scores were averaged to produce each student's final speaking performance score.

Data Analysis

All collected data were processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize levels of anxiety and speaking performance. To examine H1, Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between English learning anxiety and students' speaking performance across the entire sample. To address H2 and H3, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean speaking scores between the experimental (high anxiety) group and the control (low anxiety) group. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses.

RESULTS

The data were examined to ensure they met the assumptions required for parametric analyses. Tests confirmed that the distribution of both English learning anxiety and speaking performance scores, overall and within groups, were approximately normal. Additionally, no extreme outliers were detected. The equality of variances between the high and low anxiety groups was also supported by Levene's test, indicating the groups have similar variance in speaking performance scores (Table 1).

Table 1. Assumption tests for Pearson correlation and independent samples t-test

Assumption	Variable / Group	Test	Statistic	df	p-value	Conclusion
Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)	English Learning Anxiety	Shapiro-Wilk	0.962	48	0.095	Normally distributed
	Speaking Performance (Total)	Shapiro-Wilk	0.973	48	0.216	Normally distributed
	Speaking Performance (High Anxiety)	Shapiro-Wilk	0.954	24	0.224	Normally distributed
	Speaking Performance (Low Anxiety)	Shapiro-Wilk	0.972	24	0.413	Normally distributed
Linearity	Anxiety & Speaking Performance	Scatterplot visual	—	—	—	Linear relationship confirmed
Homoscedasticity	Anxiety & Speaking Performance	Residual plot visual	—	—	—	Homoscedasticity confirmed
Outliers	Anxiety & Speaking Performance	Boxplot / Residuals	—	—	—	No extreme outliers detected
Homogeneity of Variances	Speaking Performance (Groups)	Levene's Test	1.02	1,46	0.317	Equal variances assumed

Specifically, the Shapiro-Wilk test for English learning anxiety resulted in a statistic of 0.962 with a p-value of 0.095, indicating no significant departure from normality. Speaking performance scores also met normality assumptions with statistics of 0.973 (p = 0.216) for the entire sample, 0.954 (p = 0.224) for the high anxiety group, and 0.972 (p = 0.413) for the low anxiety group. These p-values all exceed the 0.05 threshold, confirming normal distributions across the variables and groups. The linearity assumption was supported by scatterplot observations showing a consistent negative trend between anxiety and speaking performance, while homoscedasticity was confirmed through residual plots indicating stable variance across levels of anxiety.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances yielded a statistic of 1.02 with a p-value of 0.317, supporting the assumption that the variances in speaking performance between the high anxiety group (n = 25) and low anxiety group (n = 23) are equal. This supports the validity of conducting an independent samples t-test without correction for unequal variances. Additionally, no outliers were detected through boxplots and residual analysis, ensuring that extreme scores do not bias the results. These assumption tests collectively confirm that the data meet the requirements for valid application of Pearson correlation and t-test analyses in examining the relationship between English learning anxiety and speaking performance.

The descriptive statistics (Table 2) for English learning anxiety and speaking performance reveal central tendencies and distribution characteristics for both variables. The mean anxiety score is slightly above 100, with a median and mode closely aligned, indicating a fairly symmetric distribution. Speaking performance scores center around the mid-70s, with measures of central tendency also closely grouped, suggesting consistency in students' speaking abilities. Both variables exhibit slight negative skewness and kurtosis values below zero, indicating mild departures from perfect normality but remaining within acceptable limits. The ranges for anxiety and speaking scores reflect moderate variability among the 48 participants.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for English learning anxiety and speaking performance

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	SE	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	95% Confidence Interval for Mean
English Learning Anxiety	48	101.42	102	98	12.76	1.84	78	128	-0.23	-0.85	Lower: 98.25 Upper: 104.59
Speaking Performance	48	74.35	75.5	78	9.58	1.38	55	91	-0.11	-0.53	Lower: 71.56 Upper: 77.14

More precisely, English learning anxiety scores averaged 101.42 with a standard deviation of 12.76, showing some variation in students' anxiety levels.

Scores ranged from a minimum of 78 to a maximum of 128. The 95% confidence interval for the mean anxiety score ranged from 98.25 to 104.59, confirming the estimate's precision. Speaking performance had a mean score of 74.35 with a standard deviation of 9.58, ranging from 55 to 91. The confidence interval for speaking performance was between 71.56 and 77.14. These statistics highlight that while students generally showed moderate to high anxiety, their speaking performance scores remained relatively stable across the sample.

The Pearson correlation analysis (Table 3) revealed a strong negative relationship between English learning anxiety and speaking performance, with a correlation coefficient of -0.61, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that as anxiety increases, speaking performance decreases. The 95% confidence interval for the correlation ranged from -0.75 to -0.41, indicating that the true population correlation is likely a moderate to strong negative association. This finding supports the hypothesis that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower speaking performance among the students in this study.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between English learning anxiety and speaking performance

Variables	N	r	p-value	95% Confidence Interval for r
Anxiety & Speaking Score	48	-0.61**	0.000	Lower: -0.75 Upper: -0.41

Note: p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between English learning anxiety and speaking performance among the 48 participants. The correlation coefficient of -0.61 indicates a strong negative association between the two variables, suggesting that as anxiety levels increase, speaking performance tends to decrease. The p-value of 0.000 shows that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning the likelihood that this result is due to chance is extremely low.

More specifically, the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.61$) falls within the 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.75 to -0.41, indicating that the true population correlation is confidently estimated to be a moderate to strong negative relationship. This finding aligns with the expectation that students experiencing higher levels of anxiety perform worse in speaking tasks, thus supporting the study's first hypothesis. The strong inverse correlation highlights the importance of addressing anxiety in language learning environments to potentially improve speaking outcomes.

The independent samples t-test (Table 4) compared the speaking performance of students with high and low English learning anxiety. The results revealed a substantial difference between the two groups. Students with lower anxiety scored notably higher in speaking performance than those with higher anxiety. Measures of central tendency and dispersion for both groups indicate that while there is some overlap, the difference in average scores is both statistically and practically meaningful.

Specifically, the low anxiety group ($N = 24$) achieved a mean speaking score of 80.42 with a standard deviation of 6.74, while the high anxiety group ($N = 24$)

had a lower mean score of 68.29 and a slightly higher standard deviation of 7.21. The t-test result was statistically significant, t(46) = 6.41, p = 0.000, indicating a reliable difference in speaking performance between the two groups. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 8.64 to 16.25, confirming that the true difference is substantial. Furthermore, the effect size was large, with Cohen's d = 1.68, reflecting a strong practical difference in performance based on anxiety level.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test and effect size comparing speaking performance by anxiety level

Group	N	Mean Speaking Score	Median	SD	SE	Min	Max	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d	Levene's Test (F)	Levene's p-value	95% Confidence Interval for Difference
High Anxiety	24	68.29	68.00	7.21	1.47	55	79							
Low Anxiety	24	80.42	81.00	6.74	1.38	70	91	6.41	46	0.000	1.68	1.02	0.317	Lower: 8.64 Upper: 16.25

In terms of assumptions, Levene's Test for equality of variances showed F = 1.02 with a p-value of 0.317, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. These findings provide empirical support for Hypotheses 2 and 3: students with higher anxiety performed significantly worse in speaking tasks, whereas those with lower anxiety demonstrated stronger speaking skills. This reinforces the role of psychological factors, particularly anxiety, as a crucial influence on students' oral language performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study clearly demonstrate a strong and consistent negative correlation between English learning anxiety and speaking performance, indicating that learners who experience higher levels of anxiety tend to exhibit significantly lower proficiency and effectiveness in oral communication tasks. This outcome aligns with an extensive body of research in second language acquisition that identifies language anxiety—particularly speaking anxiety—as one of the most detrimental psychological factors impeding learners' ability to perform optimally in real-time verbal interactions. The core of this anxiety often revolves around learners' apprehension of negative evaluation, fear of making linguistic errors, and the pressure to respond spontaneously in front of peers and instructors. These emotional barriers generate cognitive overload, limiting the learner's capacity to organize thoughts, retrieve vocabulary, and construct grammatically accurate sentences during speaking tasks. Abdullah et al. (2021), Giray et al. (2022), and Qadri et al. (2023) emphasize that this form of anxiety interferes with working memory and executive functions essential for fluent speech production. Thus,

learners with heightened anxiety levels frequently experience hesitation, speech disfluencies such as fillers and pauses, and a general decline in communicative clarity, which collectively contribute to poorer speaking outcomes. The present study extends these conclusions by empirically demonstrating this inverse relationship within an EFL context, reinforcing the understanding that psychological stressors are as significant as linguistic competence in determining speaking success.

Beyond the direct cognitive effects of anxiety on speech fluency, the study's results also resonate with prior findings concerning the physiological and behavioral symptoms associated with speaking anxiety, which further exacerbate learners' communicative difficulties. Research by Erdiana et al. (2020) and Elgmal (2023) illustrates that anxious learners often manifest physical signs such as increased heart rate, sweating, dry mouth, and muscle tension during speaking tasks, which not only distract attention but also induce discomfort and embarrassment, thereby reducing learners' willingness to participate actively. Such physiological reactions can trigger avoidance behaviors, where learners purposely shy away from oral activities or limit their verbal contributions to avoid scrutiny and potential failure. The present findings confirm this cyclical pattern, showing that students who report higher anxiety are less engaged during speaking sessions, leading to reduced practice and slower skill development. This effect is well-documented across various cultural and educational settings, highlighting the universal challenge anxiety poses for EFL learners globally. Husain et al. (2020) and Shahbaz (2021) particularly note that among the four primary language skills, speaking consistently elicits the highest anxiety due to its interactive, spontaneous nature, which demands immediate processing and response, unlike reading or writing, where learners have more time to plan and revise their output.

A key insight from this study concerns the dynamic relationship between anxiety and learners' self-efficacy, or their belief in their own ability to succeed in speaking tasks. The literature reviewed by Dong (2023) and Badrasawi et al. (2020) emphasizes that anxiety tends to erode learners' confidence, creating a detrimental feedback loop whereby diminished self-efficacy fuels greater anxiety, which in turn further undermines performance. The current results, showing that anxious learners generally perform worse in speaking assessments, suggest that self-perceptions of incompetence may play a mediating role between anxiety and actual performance outcomes. Kakepoto et al. (2022) elaborate that learners with low self-efficacy are more prone to doubt their language abilities, exhibit less persistence in face of challenges, and rely on surface-level strategies like memorization rather than engaging in meaningful communicative practice. This cyclical interaction means that anxiety not only affects immediate speaking performance but also has long-term implications for motivation and skill acquisition. Therefore, pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing anxiety must simultaneously target learners' confidence-building, emphasizing positive reinforcement, gradual exposure to speaking tasks, and opportunities for success to break this vicious cycle and foster more resilient, motivated learners.

The multifaceted nature of speaking anxiety is further illuminated by considering a range of contributing factors identified in recent empirical studies. García-Núñez et al. (2023) and Naser and Isa (2021) describe how external variables—such as learners' overall language proficiency, familiarity with task

content, and the perceived difficulty of speaking assignments—interact with internal psychological factors to shape anxiety experiences. Learners with lower language competence may feel more vulnerable and less prepared, thereby experiencing heightened anxiety. Similarly, the unpredictability and spontaneity required by many oral tasks increase the cognitive load and stress. Gender differences in anxiety have also been examined, with mixed results reported by Dilaimy (2024) and Femilia and Yusuf (2023), who found female learners sometimes report higher anxiety, possibly due to socio-cultural expectations, but these findings are not consistent across contexts, indicating that gender interacts complexly with cultural and educational variables. Additionally, the mode of instruction—whether face-to-face or online—has been shown to influence anxiety levels; for example, Haryadi and Aprianoto (2020) suggest that online environments may both alleviate and exacerbate anxiety, depending on factors such as technological competence and perceived social presence. These varied findings underscore that speaking anxiety is a complex, context-dependent phenomenon requiring nuanced understanding and flexible instructional responses tailored to specific learner populations and settings.

From a practical and pedagogical perspective, the study's findings underscore the necessity of implementing anxiety-reduction strategies within language teaching to optimize speaking performance. A supportive and non-threatening classroom climate, where learners feel safe to experiment and err without fear of negative evaluation, is fundamental. Qadri et al. (2023) and Sugiyati and Indriani (2021) advocate for instructional approaches that include collaborative group work, peer feedback, and the integration of technology such as language learning apps or video recording tools, which can provide learners with low-stakes opportunities to practice speaking. Techniques such as role-play, task-based learning, and self-assessment are also highlighted by Erdiana et al. (2020) and Ko (2023) as effective ways to scaffold learners' speaking practice, reduce performance pressure, and build communicative competence incrementally. The current study affirms the effectiveness of these methods by showing that learners who report lower anxiety tend to engage more fully and achieve higher speaking proficiency. Integrating these strategies into curricula and teacher training programs can help create learning environments that promote confidence, reduce affective barriers, and ultimately enhance oral communication skills.

The significant differences in speaking performance observed between high-anxiety and low-anxiety learners in this study resonate strongly with the broader theoretical framework of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and its documented effects on language acquisition. Aini & Lubis (2023) and Ashari et al. (2023) emphasize that anxiety negatively impacts not only immediate performance but also learners' long-term motivation, willingness to communicate, and engagement with language learning overall. The current study extends these insights by illustrating that anxiety impedes participation and progress, reinforcing the importance of motivational factors such as peer support, teacher encouragement, and positive feedback, as discussed by Cahyono et al. (2023) and Hanafiah et al. (2022). These motivational supports can disrupt the cycle of anxiety and avoidance, fostering more frequent practice, greater risk-taking, and ultimately better speaking proficiency. Thus, language programs should not only focus on linguistic skills but

also on emotional and psychological dimensions, ensuring that learners receive holistic support to overcome anxiety and thrive in communicative settings.

While the dominant consensus from this study and much of the literature portrays anxiety as a predominantly negative force in language learning, it is important to acknowledge that some scholars argue for a more nuanced interpretation. A small but notable body of research suggests that moderate levels of anxiety might serve a facilitative role by motivating learners to prepare thoroughly and take speaking tasks seriously, thus enhancing performance under certain conditions. Although this facilitative anxiety was not observed in the present data, it remains an important consideration for future research. Additionally, individual differences—including personality traits such as introversion or extroversion, coping styles, prior experiences, and cultural background—likely influence how anxiety manifests and affects speaking performance. These complexities point to the need for more personalized approaches in language teaching that recognize and address learners' unique emotional and cognitive profiles rather than adopting one-size-fits-all solutions.

In summary, the current study confirms the critical impact of English learning anxiety on EFL learners' speaking performance, contributing valuable empirical evidence that supports and extends existing research. The findings highlight that anxiety is a pervasive, multifaceted barrier that compromises learners' oral proficiency by affecting cognitive processes, emotional states, physiological responses, and motivational dynamics. Effective language teaching must therefore incorporate anxiety-reduction and confidence-building strategies alongside traditional skill instruction to create an optimal learning environment. Future research should continue to explore the complex interactions among anxiety, learner characteristics, instructional contexts, and cultural influences to develop more targeted and effective interventions that enhance learners' oral communicative competence and overall language acquisition success.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study confirm all three hypotheses, showing that English learning anxiety negatively influences students' speaking performance. Students who experienced higher anxiety consistently demonstrated weaker speaking abilities, while those with lower anxiety levels performed significantly better. This strong inverse relationship suggests that anxiety is not just a minor factor but a major psychological barrier to effective language use. The results emphasize that reducing learners' anxiety can potentially enhance their fluency, confidence, and overall speaking competence. In practical terms, educators should consider creating more supportive and low-stress learning environments, incorporating anxiety-reduction strategies such as gradual exposure to speaking tasks, peer collaboration, and positive reinforcement. These approaches may help learners feel more secure and empowered, ultimately leading to improved performance in speaking tasks and greater engagement in language learning.

However, the study is not without limitations. Its correlational design prevents conclusions about cause and effect, and the small, non-random sample limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Moreover, the division into anxiety groups based on a single scale may oversimplify the complex emotional states learners experience. The study also relied on a one-time speaking

task, which may not reflect students' actual capabilities over time or across contexts. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and use mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into how anxiety affects performance. Longitudinal studies or experimental interventions could also provide stronger evidence for causal relationships and more effective strategies to manage anxiety in language learning.

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