



The Influence of Anxiety on EFL Learners Speaking Performance: A Library Research

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Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian untuk mengkaji pengaruh psikologis kecemasan terhadap kemampuan berbicara peserta didik. Kemampuan berbicara sering dipengaruhi oleh faktor psikologis, khususnya kecemasan. Penelitian ini mensintesis temuan dari penelitian sebelumnya untuk menelaah bagaimana kecemasan memengaruhi kemampuan berbicara peserta didik, baik itu dalam mode daring maupun tatap muka. Metode studi pustaka dengan menggunakan model PRISMA digunakan pada penelitian ini. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan secara signifikan menghambat kemampuan berbicara peserta didik dengan mengurangi kemauan mereka untuk berkomunikasi, meningkatkan keragu-raguan, dan menyebabkan kesulitan dalam mengatur ide selama berbicara. Selain itu, faktor-faktor seperti takut akan penilaian negatif, kurangnya kepercayaan diri, dan kondisi lingkungan kelas berkontribusi pada kenaikan tingkat kecemasan. Implikasi pedagogis menunjukkan bahwa guru harus menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung dan menurunkan kecemasan peserta didik, menerapkan strategi pengajaran komunikatif, dan mendorong umpan balik positif untuk membantu mengurangi kecemasan siswa. Oleh karena itu, memahami dan mengelola kecemasan peserta didik sangat penting untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Berbahasa Asing, Kemampuan Berbicara, Psikologi Pembelajaran Bahasa

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the psychological impact of anxiety on students' speaking ability. Speaking ability is often influenced by psychological factors, particularly anxiety. This study synthesizes findings from previous studies to examine how anxiety affects students' speaking ability, both online and face-to-face. A literature review method using the PRISMA model was used in this study. The findings indicate that anxiety significantly hinders students' speaking ability by reducing their willingness to communicate, increasing hesitation, and causing difficulty in organizing ideas during speaking. In addition, factors such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of self-confidence, and classroom environmental conditions contribute to increased anxiety levels. Pedagogical implications suggest that teachers should create a supportive learning environment that reduces students' anxiety, implement communicative teaching strategies, and encourage positive feedback to help reduce students' anxiety. Therefore, understanding and managing students' anxiety is crucial for improving speaking skills.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, speaking performance, language learning psychology

Introduction

In the context of globalization, the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language has become an important skill, particularly in academic settings. Among the four core language skills, speaking is often regarded as the most challenging for foreign language learners (Lestari & Nugraha, 2023). This is because speaking requires real-time processing, including the ability to organize ideas, apply grammatical knowledge, and produce accurate pronunciation simultaneously. As a result, according to Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2020), many learners experience psychological barriers that hinder their speaking performance, with anxiety being one of the most significant factors.

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is widely recognized as a specific form of anxiety that occurs in language learning contexts (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). It encompasses feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with language use, especially in speaking situations (Alazeer & Ahmed, 2023). Learners often feel afraid of making mistakes, being negatively evaluated by peers or teachers, or failing to express their ideas clearly. These emotional responses can lead to avoidance behavior, reduced participation, and ultimately lower speaking proficiency.

Numerous studies in applied linguistics and psycholinguistics have highlighted the negative relationship between anxiety and speaking performance. According to Putri et al. (2020) and Suparia et al. (2022), high levels of anxiety are associated with decreased fluency, limited vocabulary use, frequent pauses, and lower confidence in communication. In contrast, learners with lower anxiety levels tend to perform better, demonstrating greater fluency, coherence, and willingness to communicate (Normawati, Nugrahaeni, Kusuma, & Susanto, 2023). This suggests that anxiety not only affects learners' emotional states

but also has a direct impact on their cognitive processing during language production.

Furthermore, the emergence of digital learning environments and technology-enhanced language learning has introduced new dimensions to foreign language anxiety (Pahargyan, 2021). While tools such as online platforms and AI-based applications may help reduce anxiety by providing a less threatening environment (Fahmadi, Gharbi, & Mahmoud (2025). They may also create new forms of pressure, such as performance anxiety in recorded speaking tasks or fear of public exposure in virtual classrooms. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of anxiety in both traditional and digital contexts is also increasingly important.

Despite the growing body of research on foreign language anxiety, there remains a need to synthesize existing findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety affects speaking performance, either online or face-to-face setting. A literature review is essential to identify patterns, gaps, and inconsistencies in previous studies, as well as to highlight effective strategies for reducing anxiety and improving speaking outcomes. By examining various theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of anxiety in foreign language learning.

Anxiety plays a crucial role in shaping learners' speaking performance in a foreign language. Addressing this issue is essential for improving language teaching practices and creating supportive learning environments. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and analyze existing literature on the effects of anxiety on foreign language speaking performance, with the goal of providing insights for educators, researchers, and learners alike.

Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review method using the PRISMA

approach to investigate the influence of anxiety on foreign language speaking performance.

In this study, the relevant literature was collected from several reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar and Scopus. The publication years were limited between 2015 and 2025 to make sure that the relevance and recency of the data.

In the screening stage, all retrieved articles were carefully reviewed to remove duplicates and irrelevant studies. Titles and abstracts were examined to determine their relevance to the research focus. Studies that did not directly address language anxiety or speaking performance were excluded.

Next, the inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) empirical or review studies focusing on foreign language anxiety, (2) research involving speaking performance as a primary variable, (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, and (4) publications written in English. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included: (1) studies unrelated to speaking skills, (2) non-academic publications such as blogs or opinion articles, and (3) incomplete or inaccessible full-text documents.

In the final stage, namely inclusion, selected articles were systematically analyzed and synthesized. Data extraction was conducted by identifying key information such as authors, year of publication, research design, participants, instruments, and main findings. The data were then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across studies. This process enabled the researcher to draw comprehensive conclusions about how anxiety affects foreign language speaking performance.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study followed the PRISMA flow diagram procedure and maintained transparency in the selection process. The systematic approach enhances the credibility of the review and minimizes potential bias in interpreting the data.

Results and Discussion

Results

The results of a literature review indicate that anxiety is an affective factor that significantly influences foreign language speaking performance. Anxiety is generally categorized as foreign language anxiety (FLA), which encompasses three main dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These three aspects are interconnected and collectively influence learners' performance, especially in speaking.

Several studies have shown that students with high levels of anxiety tend to have difficulty expressing ideas verbally. They exhibit symptoms such as hesitation, frequent repetition, unclear pronunciation, and the use of simpler language structures to avoid errors. This directly impacts the quality of speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Furthermore, studies indicate that anxiety can lead to cognitive overload, a condition in which a learner's cognitive capacity is burdened by fear and nervousness, thus hindering optimal language processing. In this context, learners face not only linguistic challenges but also psychological pressure that impairs their performance.

However, some literature also finds that, to a certain extent, anxiety can be facilitative, motivating learners to better prepare. However, the predominant form of anxiety found in the context of foreign language learning is debilitating anxiety.

In general, most of the research analyzed in this study revealed a negative relationship between anxiety levels and speaking ability. The higher the level of anxiety experienced by learners, the lower their speaking performance. This is reflected in several indicators, such as fluency, pronunciation errors, limited vocabulary, and the inability to construct sentences effectively. Learners experiencing high levels of anxiety tend to frequently pause, repeat words, and avoid actively participating in speaking activities.

Furthermore, research results also show that anxiety affects learners' cognitive aspects, particularly in information processing and spontaneous linguistic decision-making. Anxiety can impair working memory capacity, making it difficult for learners to access previously learned vocabulary and language structures. Consequently, language production is suboptimal and often hampered by doubt and self-doubt.

Furthermore, learning environment factors have also been shown to contribute to anxiety. An unsupportive classroom environment, teaching methods that focus too much on errors, and evaluative attitudes from teachers and peers can exacerbate learners' anxiety levels. Conversely, an inclusive learning environment, the use of a communicative approach, and emotional support from teachers can help reduce anxiety levels and increase students' confidence in speaking.

The study also highlights that anxiety does not always have an absolutely negative impact. In some cases, moderate levels of anxiety can actually serve as a motivator, encouraging learners to better prepare and improve their performance. However, excessive anxiety remains a major obstacle to developing speaking skills.

Discussion

The results of this study shows that affective factors play a crucial role in successful language learning. Anxiety, as an emotional variable, has been shown to influence not only psychological aspects but also directly impact learners' linguistic performance.

From the perspective of the theory proposed by Stephen Krashen, anxiety functions as a "filter" that can inhibit the entry of language input into the language acquisition system. The higher a person's anxiety level, the stronger their affective filter, resulting in a suboptimal language internalization process. This explains why

learners with adequate linguistic abilities still demonstrate low speaking performance when placed in stressful situations.

Furthermore, anxiety in speaking a foreign language is often triggered by social and environmental factors, such as pressure from lecturers or teachers, an unsupportive classroom atmosphere, and peer evaluation. These conditions exacerbate the fear of negative evaluation, ultimately discouraging learners from actively participating in speaking activities.

Cognitively, anxiety is also closely related to limited working memory capacity. When individuals feel anxious, a significant portion of their cognitive resources are diverted to managing these emotions, reducing their ability to process language simultaneously. As a result, learners experience difficulty constructing sentences, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and maintaining fluency.

Another interesting finding is the relationship between anxiety levels and the communication strategies used by learners. Individuals with high anxiety tend to use avoidance strategies, such as avoiding speaking, using their native language, or providing very brief answers. Conversely, learners with low anxiety are more willing to take linguistic risks, which are crucial for developing speaking skills.

The implications of these findings suggest that language instructors need to create a conducive, low-anxiety classroom environment. Strategies such as the use of group work, constructive feedback, and a communicative approach can help reduce learners' anxiety levels. Furthermore, integrating technology, such as using AI-based applications or conversation simulations, can also provide alternative ways to practice speaking skills without high social pressure.

Therefore, it can be concluded that anxiety has a complex influence on foreign language speaking performance. While it can

be motivating in some circumstances, anxiety generally has a more negative impact, hindering the development of learners' speaking skills. Therefore, managing affective factors, particularly anxiety, is a crucial aspect in efforts to improve the quality of foreign language learning.

Overall, this study confirms that anxiety is a significant variable influencing foreign language speaking performance, both linguistically and psychologically. Therefore, managing anxiety through appropriate pedagogical strategies is key to creating an effective language learning process oriented toward improving oral communication skills.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion indicates that anxiety has a significant and often negative impact on foreign language speaking performance. The various studies analyzed consistently indicate that high levels of anxiety can hinder fluency, reduce self-confidence, and affect the accuracy and complexity of language used by learners. Anxiety in this context often manifests as a fear of making mistakes, worry about negative judgment from others, and pressure when having to communicate spontaneously in public or in formal situations.

Furthermore, this study revealed that anxiety impacts not only the performative aspect but also the learner's cognitive processes. Individuals experiencing anxiety tend to experience impairments in language processing, such as difficulty accessing vocabulary, formulating sentence structures, and maintaining speech coherence. This suggests that anxiety acts as a barrier to the internal mechanisms of language learning, rather than being solely an emotional factor.

However, the literature also shows that, to a certain extent, anxiety can be facilitative

when managed effectively. Mild anxiety can motivate learners to better prepare themselves and increase their communication awareness. Therefore, it is important for educators to create a supportive learning environment, reduce psychological stress, and implement teaching strategies that can boost student confidence, such as using a communicative approach, providing constructive feedback, and utilizing user-friendly technology.

Overall, this research confirms that anxiety is a crucial factor that needs to be considered in foreign language learning, particularly in speaking skills. Efforts to understand and manage anxiety effectively can significantly contribute to improving students' communication performance, thus optimally achieving language learning goals.

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