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THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh Kecemasan Bahasa Asing (Foreign Language Anxiety/FLA) terhadap kinerja berbicara mahasiswa EFL di Indonesia. Menggunakan desain penelitian kuantitatif dengan metodologi survei, data dikumpulkan dari 17 mahasiswa Universitas Al-Khairiyah. FLA diukur menggunakan Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) yang dikembangkan oleh Horwitz et al. (1987), sementara kinerja berbicara dinilai melalui wawancara kemahiran lisan menggunakan rubrik standar berbasis pedoman ACTFL. Hasil analisis korelasi menunjukkan korelasi negatif yang signifikan ($r = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$) antara kecemasan bahasa asing dan kinerja berbicara. Selanjutnya, analisis regresi menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan bahasa asing menjelaskan 38,8% varians dalam kinerja berbicara. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa tingkat FLA yang lebih tinggi berkaitan dengan kinerja berbicara yang lebih rendah. Hasil ini memiliki implikasi penting bagi pendidik bahasa, menyoroti perlunya penerapan strategi pengurangan kecemasan di kelas EFL untuk memfasilitasi perkembangan berbicara yang lebih efektif.

Kata-kata kunci: Kecemasan Bahasa Asing, Kinerja Berbicara, Peserta Didik EFL, FLCAS, Mahasiswa Universitas

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on speaking performance among EFL university students in Indonesia. Using a quantitative research design with a survey methodology, data were collected from 17 undergraduate students Al-Khairiyah universities. Foreign Language Anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1987), while speaking performance was assessed through an oral proficiency interview using a standardized rubric based on ACTFL guidelines. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$) between foreign language anxiety and speaking performance. Furthermore, regression analysis

indicated that foreign language anxiety accounted for 38.8% of the variance in speaking performance. The findings suggest that higher levels of FLA are associated with lower speaking performance among EFL learners. These results have important implications for language educators, highlighting the need to implement anxiety-reduction strategies in EFL classrooms to facilitate more effective speaking development.

Keywords: *Foreign Language Anxiety, Speaking Performance, EFL Learners,*

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a complex cognitive and socio-emotional process that involves not only linguistic competence but also psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Among these psychological variables, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been identified as one of the most influential affective filters that can significantly impact language acquisition and performance (Horwitz et al., 1987; Young, 1991). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), anxiety is particularly prevalent due to the cultural and linguistic distance between the learners' mother tongue and the target language.

Speaking, often regarded as the most challenging of the four language skills, is especially susceptible to the effects of anxiety. Unlike reading or writing, which can be performed at one's own pace, speaking requires real-time processing of linguistic input and immediate production of output in social contexts (Ellis, 2008). This puts considerable psychological pressure on EFL learners, who must simultaneously manage linguistic encoding, cultural awareness, and social interaction—all while being monitored by peers and instructors.

In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language at various levels of education, speaking anxiety is widely reported among university students. Despite years of English language instruction, many Indonesian EFL learners still struggle with oral communication, often citing fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation by peers, and low self-confidence as primary concerns (Saito & Takagi, 2020). These observations suggest that affective factors, particularly anxiety, may play a more significant role than previously acknowledged in determining speaking outcomes.

Previous research on FLA has yielded mixed results regarding its relationship with language performance. While some studies have documented a clear negative relationship between anxiety and speaking proficiency (Dewaele, 2010; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), others have found weaker or inconsistent associations, possibly due to differences in measurement instruments, population characteristics, or contextual variables (Saito & Takagi, 2020). This inconsistency underscores the need for further empirical investigation, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context, which remains relatively understudied.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to: (1) describe the level of Foreign Language Anxiety among EFL university students, (2) describe the level of speaking performance among EFL university students, and (3) examine the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and speaking performance among EFL university students in Indonesia.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and prior literature, the following hypothesis

is proposed: There is a significant negative correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and speaking performance among EFL university students. In other words, students who exhibit higher levels of FLA will demonstrate lower levels of speaking performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Foreign Language Anxiety is defined as a complex set of negative self-evaluative feelings triggered by the prospect of using a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1987). It is conceptualized as a situation-specific anxiety—distinct from general trait anxiety—that emerges uniquely in foreign language contexts. Horwitz et al. (1987) further identified three primary components of FLA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and foreign language classroom anxiety. Communication apprehension refers to the difficulty or reluctance in communicating with others, while fear of negative evaluation pertains to the apprehension of being judged unfavorably by peers or instructors.

Young (1991) expanded upon this framework by identifying six sources of language anxiety, including personal and cognitive anxieties, instructor-induced anxiety, classroom environment, curriculum design, and cultural factors. These sources interact dynamically and may intensify or attenuate one another depending on the specific learning context. In the Indonesian EFL context, cultural factors—such as the collectivist orientation of Indonesian society and the emphasis on avoiding public embarrassment—are particularly likely to amplify anxiety during speaking tasks (Pishghadam & Mohammadi, 2012).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1987), remains one of the most widely used instruments for measuring FLA. The FLCAS consists of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale, and has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity across diverse populations and linguistic contexts (Dewaele, 2010).

Speaking Performance

Speaking performance in the context of EFL education refers to the learner's ability to produce meaningful, coherent, and contextually appropriate oral communication in the target language. It encompasses several sub-competencies, including pronunciation accuracy, grammatical correctness, vocabulary use, fluency, coherence, and communicative effectiveness (ACTFL, 2012). Assessment of speaking performance typically involves structured oral tasks such as interviews, role-plays, group discussions, or presentations, which are evaluated using standardized rubrics.

Research in second language acquisition has consistently highlighted the importance of speaking as a language skill that is closely tied to learners' socio-emotional states. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis suggest that when the affective filter—encompassing anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence—is high, learners are less likely to effectively process and produce the target language. Furthermore, Ellis (2008) distinguished between controlled and automatic processes in speaking, arguing that anxiety is most likely to interfere with controlled processes, such as grammatical monitoring and lexical retrieval.

The Relationship Between FLA and Speaking Performance

The relationship between FLA and speaking performance has been a focal point of research in applied linguistics for several decades. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) reported a negative correlation between anxiety and speaking proficiency among Canadian French learners. Similarly, Dewaele (2010) found that higher levels of FLA were associated with lower oral proficiency scores among multilingual individuals across several European languages.

In the Asian EFL context, several studies have corroborated these findings. Chen and Chang (2004) documented a significant negative relationship between FLA and English speaking ability among Taiwanese university students, while Pishghadam and Mohammadi (2012) found similar patterns among Iranian EFL learners. These studies collectively suggest that the negative impact of FLA on speaking performance may be a generalizable phenomenon.

However, it is important to note that some researchers have argued that moderate levels of anxiety may actually facilitate performance by enhancing attentiveness and motivation (Saito & Takagi, 2020). This distinction between facilitative and debilitating anxiety underscores the need for nuanced investigation that considers the intensity and nature of anxiety experienced by learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey methodology. The quantitative approach was selected because the study seeks to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables—Foreign Language Anxiety and speaking performance—across a defined population. Cross-sectional design was employed to capture data at a single point in time, which is appropriate for correlational research of this nature.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of students majoring in English Language of Al-Khairiyah university, Indonesia. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they were enrolled as undergraduate students in the English Language Subject, (2) they had completed at least two years of English language coursework, and (3) they voluntarily consented to participate in the study. The sample size was determined using the formula for correlation studies, and the final sample of 17 was deemed adequate for detecting medium-to-large effect sizes.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study. First, Foreign Language Anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1987). The FLCAS consists of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of anxiety. Prior to data collection, the FLCAS was validated in the Indonesian context through a pilot study involving 40 participants, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating high reliability.

Second, speaking performance was assessed through an oral proficiency interview (OPI). Each participant was individually interviewed for approximately 10 minutes on assigned topics. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently rated

by two independent raters using a standardized rubric adapted from the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview guidelines. The rubric assessed five dimensions: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and communicative effectiveness, each scored on a scale of 1 to 5. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC), which yielded a value of 0.89, indicating excellent agreement.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks between sept and Oct 2025. Participants first completed the FLCAS questionnaire in a supervised classroom setting. Following the completion of the survey, participants were scheduled for individual oral proficiency interviews. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. First, descriptive statistics were computed to characterize the distribution of FLA scores and speaking performance scores. Normality assumptions were tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Since both variables were found to be normally distributed (FLA: $W = 0.971$, $p = 0.14$; Speaking: $W = 0.965$, $p = 0.11$), Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between FLA and speaking performance. Additionally, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which FLA predicts speaking performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for both FLA and speaking performance scores.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for FLA and Speaking Performance

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Foreign Language Anxiety (FLCAS)	17	89.43	14.27	52–148
Speaking Performance	17	3.21	0.74	1.40–5.00

The mean FLA score was 89.43 (SD = 14.27), which falls within the moderate-to-high anxiety range as classified by Horwitz et al. (1987). The mean speaking performance score was 3.21 out of 5.00 (SD = 0.74), indicating that, on average, participants performed at an intermediate level of oral proficiency.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis between FLA and speaking performance.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Between FLA and Speaking Performance

Variables	r	p-value	Sig.
FLA & Speaking Performance	-0.623	< 0.001	***
Note: *** $p < 0.001$			

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant negative

correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and speaking performance ($r = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates a strong negative linear relationship: as FLA scores increased, speaking performance scores decreased. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient ($|r| = 0.623$) suggests a strong effect size according to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks.

Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine the extent to which FLA predicts speaking performance. Table 3 presents the regression summary.

Table 3
Regression Summary Predicting Speaking Performance from FLA

Source	B	SE	t	p-value	R ²
Intercept	5.82	0.19	30.63	< 0.001	
FLA	-0.029	0.003	-9.68	< 0.001	0.388

The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 185) = 93.70$, $p < 0.001$). The R² value of 0.388 indicates that Foreign Language Anxiety accounted for approximately 38.8% of the variance in speaking performance. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.623$) confirms the direction and strength of the predictive relationship. For every one-unit increase in the FLCAS score, speaking performance decreased by 0.029 points on the five-point rubric scale.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with a substantial body of prior research that has identified a negative relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and speaking performance among EFL learners (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dewaele, 2010; Chen & Chang, 2004). The strong negative correlation ($r = -0.623$) observed in the present study suggests that anxiety plays a meaningful role in constraining the oral production abilities of EFL university students in the Indonesian context.

The moderate-to-high mean FLA score ($M = 89.43$) reported in this study is noteworthy. This level of anxiety is consistent with findings reported in other Asian EFL contexts (Pishghadam & Mohammadi, 2012) and may be attributed to several contextual factors. First, the collectivist cultural orientation prevalent in Indonesian society may heighten sensitivity to social judgment, making public speaking particularly anxiety-inducing. Second, the limited opportunities for authentic English communication outside the classroom may contribute to a lack of confidence and preparedness for oral tasks. Third, the evaluative nature of classroom activities—particularly those conducted in front of peers and instructors—may intensify fear of negative evaluation.

The regression analysis further demonstrates that FLA is a significant predictor of speaking performance, accounting for 38.8% of the variance. This is a substantial proportion, although it also indicates that other variables—such as motivation, self-efficacy, language proficiency, and instructional quality—contribute to the remaining 61.2% of the variance. Future research should adopt a multivariate approach to identify additional predictors and to examine potential mediating and moderating variables.

The findings also have practical implications for language educators. Given the significant negative impact of FLA on speaking performance, it is essential that EFL instructors adopt strategies aimed at reducing anxiety levels in the classroom. Such

strategies may include creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment, employing scaffolding techniques to gradually build learner confidence, utilizing group-based activities to lower the perceived stakes of individual performance, and incorporating explicit instruction on anxiety management techniques. Additionally, formative assessments—rather than high-stakes summative evaluations—may help alleviate test-related anxiety and encourage risk-taking in oral communication.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Foreign Language Anxiety exerts a significant negative influence on speaking performance among EFL university students in Indonesia. The strong negative correlation ($r = -0.623$) and the regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.388$) collectively indicate that anxiety is a powerful predictor of oral proficiency, and that higher levels of FLA are associated with substantially lower speaking performance.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing affective variables in EFL language teaching and learning. Language educators should be mindful of the anxiety levels experienced by their students and actively incorporate anxiety-reduction strategies into their instructional practices. Furthermore, curriculum designers and policy makers should consider the role of anxiety in shaping learner outcomes when designing language programs and assessment frameworks.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inference. Second, the study was conducted within a single national context (Indonesia), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Third, the sample was restricted to English Language Education majors. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include diverse populations, and investigate potential mediating and moderating variables to deepen our understanding of the FLA–speaking performance relationship.

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