

The Impacts of Foreign Language Anxiety on Speaking Confidence: A Correlational Study in Students of the English Department of the University of Mataram

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Abstract

The interplay of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and speaking confidence are important in the trajectory learning of the English language, and anxiety can lead to diminished students' communication ability and willingness to communicate. The current study explored the relation of FLA, with emphasis on anxiety in relation to speaking confidence, for the students of the English Department of the University of Mataram. The method used was a quantitative correlational design in which two sets of questionnaires on the concept were used to explore the variables. Descriptive statistics were used to derive the mean levels of FLA and speaking confidence, and Spearman's rank correlation was implemented to establish the strength and direction of the relationship. The analysis established three types of impacts of FLA which is cognitive, academic, and social. Overall, the correlation test found evidence of a negative relation between FLA and speaking confidence, implying that increased anxiety decreased the students' confidence to speaking English. The data highlight the need to address FLA around students learning English in the language classroom, in terms of developing students' speaking confidence and communicative competence.

Keywords

foreign language anxiety, speaking confidence, impact, correlation, FLCAS

INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language can be difficult when facing an experience known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which can include feelings of apprehension, nervousness and discomfort at various points throughout the language learning process. For instance, Al-Khasawneh (2016) describes in his research on factors that create negative emotions when learning a second language or a foreign language. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) also note that FLA is a specific psychological anxiety that prevents language learning from taking place, notably through anxieties and tensions that impede cognitive processing and performance.

At the University of Mataram, some students encounter difficult problems related to their speaking confidence particularly in oral presentations or speaking in class. The difficulties are often related to a number of issues that manifest in speaking anxiety manifested through nerves, worry over making a mistake, or embarrassment speaking in class in front of their peers. All of this can lead to lack of confidence in their speaking and at times, stop them from speaking English opportunities.

Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that this kind of feeling is a lack of self-confidence developed as a result of a fear of mistakes, being embarrassed when speaking, or feeling nervous about speaking. Understanding the effect of this type of anxiety on learner confidence and performance, is valuable for improving the overall quality of language learning. Cultural factors also have a great impact on anxiety and language learning (Horwitz, 1986). Many Indonesian students are reluctant to speak publicly, as they fear making pronunciation or grammar mistakes, as this mistake may lead to embarrassment or what they might think could cause social judgment. As a result, the students will be afraid using English in public or formal situations, limiting their options to practice and develop confidence in speaking.

While speaking skills are important in language learning, many students experience threats to their confidence and participation in speaking as a result of FLA. This study investigates how this FLA can impact students' performance during the learning process. To avoid this situation in speaking class, a teacher, as a facilitator in the teaching and learning process, should find an interesting way to engage students in English speaking class. In addition, Amrullah et al. (2020) stated that English teachers should create a classroom environment in which students can communicate in real life through authentic activities and meaningful tasks that can increase the use of oral language.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the impacts of foreign language anxiety on speaking confidence and examine the correlation between foreign language anxiety and speaking confidence among English students at the University of Mataram considering its potential to hinder the learning process, especially in speaking class. The researcher expects to find that foreign language anxiety negatively affects students' speaking confidence. Furthermore, the researcher wants to find out the impacts of FLA on speaking confidence due to speaking is an important skill for communication, but it often causes the most anxiety for students. This lack of confidence in their speaking abilities makes them feel hesitant to participate. The students are still afraid to start a conversation because they are afraid to make mistakes. They felt shy to speak English in front of their friends, they felt embarrassed about their speaking ability. This supported by Rizanti et al. (2024) who stated that shyness is another psychological problem faced by students.

FLA is specific in learning and using a foreign language, often tied to fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, or test anxiety related to the language (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Communication apprehension is defined as the anxiety to communicate with

people, including both the production apprehension (talking in front of others or groups), and the reception apprehension (receiving and responding to spoken messages). Even though communication apprehension leads to fear of speaking, it also causes the fear of being unable to understand others' speech.

Test anxiety arises out of the fear of failing to perform. Students reported intense nervousness before speaking tests or oral evaluations. Test anxiety, on the other hand, arises from fear of failure or poor performance in speaking tests or oral evaluations, often accompanied by physiological symptoms such as rapid heartbeat or forgetfulness (Indrianty, 2016). Fear of negative evaluation involves worry about being judged unfavorably by teachers or peers, which makes learners reluctant to participate in classroom discussions.

This is important research to consider since the outcome will help educators and students at the University of Mataram find solutions to the negative impacts of FLA on speaking confidence. The teachers can use this information to generate strategies that may help reduce anxiety and improve students' performance when speaking, while also improving the overall process of learning a language.

Moreover, this study could also help to be a resource for students to see how anxiety influences their confidence in speaking and find a reason to seek methods to overcome anxiety by trying to develop stronger speaking skills. Awareness of one's abilities using another language is an important factor to developing confidence which is an important element of learning additional languages. With the knowledge of how foreign language anxiety impacts confidence in speaking, teachers will likely understand even more supportive pedagogical methods, can develop the confidence building, and develop classroom activities which reduced anxiety. Additionally, this knowledge could suffice for recommended instructional methods that reinforce an students' emotional awareness in instructional practices and make speaking activities more comfortable to engage in the classroom.

Furthermore, this study contributes new knowledge in examining how foreign language anxiety affects the confidence of students to speak and thus affects their learning. Although the majority of studies have sought to concentrate on academic performance, we pointed attention towards personal- and long-term effects of language anxiety, especially as it pertained to students' learning processes.

RESEARCH METHOD

To examine the effects of FLA, this study considered and scrutinized items from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). Creswell (2012) supported the process by explaining that it should include a content analysis of the items to verify whether the item captures its intended construct or dimension. This analytical process is a type of content and theoretical validation that requires the items to be conceptually aligned with the foundation of the study. In that respect, to examine the relationship between FLA and speaking confidence, this study applied a correlational study as part of quantitative research. This approach allows researchers to determine whether a relationship exists between variables. The respondents were 10 students of one translation class from English department. The students responded to the questionnaire after the researcher distributed the Google form virtually as the instrument of this research. And then,

respondents were questioned with closed-ended items to discover the answers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Impacts of FLA

This section sets out to present the types of impacts that FLA has on students' speaking confidence, as reflected in the selected items of the FLCAS. The impacts can be identified within three categories, namely academic, cognitive, and social.

Academic Impacts

The academic impact of FLA becomes evident when the students feel anxious in the classroom situations requiring spontaneous verbal communication. Indeed, from the questionnaire, many subjects reported a panic experience whenever they were called to speak impromptu or when they were asked some unanticipated questions during lessons; the unexpected speaking tasks have often made them feel unprepared and led eventually to their refraining from participation, avoidance of speaking opportunities, and a tendency to remain silent during discussion, influencing their confidence during class interactions. Such behaviors may cause long-term effects on low performance in speaking, loss of practice opportunities, and eventual deterioration in academic success, particularly in the speaking tests or performance assessment tasks. This chronic avoidance to participate out of anxiety or apprehension will hinder their fluency development, lower their academic accomplishments, and weaken their ability to fulfill the speaking class expectations. Therefore, it can be concluded that chronic anxiety during classroom speaking contexts reduces learning opportunities and hurts the overall academic success of the students.

Cognitive Impacts

This term refers to the influence of FLA on learners' ability to think clearly while accomplishing selected speaking tasks. Learners who have FLA struggle to concentrate, retrieve grammar or vocabulary items, and process information. In fact, Macintyre argued (in Zheng & Cheng, 2018) that FLA interrupts key cognitive functions involved in language learning and acquisition. The questionnaire shows that many students are feeling the burden of the cognition that they need to engage in when learning the language, especially when they are trying to recall or remember the correct selection of vocabulary and processes that relate to grammatical structures. FLA can interrupt normal functioning of working memory processes and limiting their ability to construct new sentences and recall past words quickly. Since FLA stimulates a burden cognitively, anxious students may talk slower, make typical syntactical errors, and speak more disfluent. Not always due to a lack of knowledge. Over time, these challenges can hinder students' overall language development and diminish their ability to enhance both accuracy and fluency.

Social Impacts

It refers to how FLA impacts students' abilities and willingness to use the target language within a social context. Anxiety related to social contexts will result in a student's avoidance of language-related interactions. This avoidance decreases their participation in group learning opportunities and impairs the development of interpersonal language

abilities. This anxiety can put students in a position of extreme self-awareness that is damaging to their confidence when speaking. According to the questionnaire, in terms of social impacts, students strongly feel anxious in peer-related speaking situations. Social comparison significantly stimulates anxiety in learners, which eventually hampers their confidence in participating in social interactions. Therefore, students may be afraid to join any group discussion or remain silent during the collaboration activities and may even be reluctant to start a conversation in English. Thus, this avoidance behavior deprives students of critical opportunities for peer learning which is necessary for enhancing speaking fluency through practice and feedback. Meirizka A H (2017) argued that when the lecturer motivated most of the students by providing positive feedback during the learning process, they were encouraged to speak. During the class, the language used was simple, and they are more eager to participate when the lecturer showed humility. Thus, it means that social impacts may cause students to lose the opportunity to get positive feedback from lecturers and reduce enthusiasm during the learning process. Furthermore, the absence of participation in social uses of language can lead to feelings of isolation, causing students to lose out on opportunities to build academic and personal connections in the classroom environment.

The Correlation Analysis

This involved the use of Spearman’s rank correlation test since the data was based on ordinal Likert scales, with a relatively small sample size. According to Sugiyono (2016), when the sample size is small or the data are not normally distributed, Spearman’s rank correlation is more suitable because it does not require normal distribution and works well with ordinal data like Likert scales. Spearman’s rank correlation is employed to determine the relationship or influence between two ordinal variables, specifically the independent variable (FLA) and the dependent variable (speaking confidence). The correlation measurement in this research was carried out using Microsoft Excel on Windows.

A positive correlation coefficient means that there is a direct linear relationship between variables X and Y, whereas a negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship, meaning that a decrease in X is generally followed by an increase in Y, and vice versa (Azwar, 2018).

The correlation outcomes were compared with the critical value at a 5% significance level. If the absolute value of the correlation coefficient is greater than the critical value, it can be inferred that a significant relationship exists between the variables. The formula of Spearman’s rank correlation is presented below.

$$P = 1 - \frac{6 \sum b_i^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

p = Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient

bi = difference in ranking between the variable (x) and variable (y)

n = number of data points

The results of the Spearman’s rank correlation test are presented below.

Table 1. Correlation result

Responden	X	Y	Rank X	Rank Y	Bi	Bi ²
A	107	31	7	6,5	0,5	0,25
B	115	28	4	9	-5	25
C	108	32	6	2,5	3,5	12,25
D	119	34	3	4,5	-1,5	2,25
E	94	34	8	4,5	3,5	12,25
F	120	31	2	6,5	-4,5	20,25
G	109	30	5	8	-3	9
H	92	35	9	2,5	6,5	42,25
I	83	42	10	1	9	81
J	128	20	1	10	-9	81
10						285,50

The correlation coefficient (rs)= -0.7303 and Critical value at 5%= 0.648

The table shows the results of the Spearman’s rank correlation test between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Speaking Confidence (SC). The correlation coefficient (rs) obtained is -0.7303, and based on the critical value for 10 respondents at the 5% significance level (0.648), the absolute value of the correlation coefficient (0.7303) is greater than the critical value. It means H₀ is rejected and H₁ is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a negative relationship between variable X and variable Y. The negative sign of the coefficient confirms that the relationship is inversely proportional: higher anxiety is associated with lower confidence in speaking, or as the level of FLA increases, the speaking confidence of students tends to decrease.

The outcome of this research therefore provides an enlightening overview of how FLA influences the confidence of students in speaking within the setting of English language learning. Identifying three strands of impact, which are social, academic, and cognitive impacts, implies that FLA is not a temporary emotional response but a complex, multi-dimensional factor that could seriously impede the development of speaking skills. These findings, therefore, have several implications which dictate that any language class should give due attention to the psychological conditions of students. For instance, not wanting to participate in group discussions is a social issue, remaining mute during collaborative activities. It implies that in addition to linguistic proficiency, a certain amount of social and psychological safety is necessary for successful language learning. In favor, Sukroini et al. (2021) also confirm that some psychological variables account for students’ difficulties in speaking, such as lack of motivation and self-confidence, shyness, and fear of making mistakes. Nonetheless, the academic implications indicate that FLA may lower students’ academic performance and slow their fluency development, which means it must be considered carefully. In the same way the cognitive effects show that psychological stress can disrupt their thought processes, FLA can disrupt working memory capacity, making it difficult for students to remember new vocabulary, produce sentences in the correct forms, and process information in real-time

Another important implication is that FLA acts as a major obstacle to building the speaking confidence of students. Persistent anxiety would hamper the process of internalization of language and create a psychological barrier that is tough to overcome, if not properly handled. This goes to support the view of treating affective aspects, such as anxiety and

confidence, as integral to the process of language learning. The present finding consolidates several previous theories and studies that have identified anxiety as one of the primary inhibitors to speaking ability. Horwitz and Cope (in Brown, 2001) explicated that communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—major components of FLA—are directly linked to students' sense of comfort and readiness regarding speaking. For instance, those with communication apprehension will feel anxious when they are required to express themselves in the language under study since they feel incapable of comprehending or delivering the message correctly, which directly causes the loss of self-confidence.

This finding is also in line with the study conducted by Djahimo et al. (2018) entitled “Student Anxiety and Their Speaking Performance: Teaching EFL to Indonesian Students”. In this study, it was stated that FLA has impact on speaking performance, such as low or uneven participation. These results can also be related to the theory of sources of anxiety suggested by Young (2010), in which several factors, including classroom procedures such as being called suddenly to speak, teacher-student interactions, and students' beliefs about language learning, contribute to anxiety levels. All these factors indicate that FLA is a kind of psychological stress that is not only emotional but also imposes an impact on students' cognitive and social aspects, which in turn weakens their confidence in speaking.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) exerts a significant negative influence on the speaking confidence of English department students at the University of Mataram. The findings reveal a strong inverse correlation ($r_s = -0.7303$, $p < 0.05$) between FLA and speaking confidence, confirming that as anxiety levels increase, students' willingness and ability to engage in oral communication decrease. The impacts of FLA manifest across three interrelated dimensions: academic, cognitive, and social. Academically, students avoid participation and speaking opportunities, which limits practice and undermines performance. Cognitively, anxiety disrupts working memory and lexical retrieval, hindering fluency and accuracy even when linguistic knowledge is present. Socially, fear of peer judgment and negative evaluation leads to withdrawal from collaborative and communicative activities, depriving learners of essential interaction-based learning experiences.

These results align with established theoretical frameworks—particularly Horwitz et al.'s (1986) tripartite model of FLA—while also highlighting the contextual role of Indonesian classroom culture, where concerns about making errors and losing face in front of peers intensify anxiety. The study thus affirms that FLA is not merely an emotional reaction but a multidimensional barrier that permeates multiple facets of language learning. Consequently, language pedagogy must incorporate affective-supportive strategies—such as creating psychologically safe environments, using low-stakes speaking tasks, providing constructive feedback, and fostering collaborative rather than competitive classroom dynamics—to mitigate anxiety and nurture speaking confidence.

Future research should expand on these findings by employing larger, more diverse samples across different universities and educational levels in Indonesia to enhance

generalizability. Additionally, mixed-methods longitudinal studies could explore how FLA and speaking confidence evolve over time and in response to specific anxiety-reducing interventions—such as mindfulness training, drama-based language activities, or technology-mediated speaking practice (e.g., using AI chatbots or recorded self-presentations). Further investigation into the role of cultural and religious identity—particularly in Islamic higher education contexts like UIN or Madrasah-based institutions—may also yield valuable insights into localized sources of language anxiety and culturally responsive pedagogical solutions.

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