

Examining the Complexities of Foreign Language Anxiety: Gendered Perspectives and Pedagogical Interventions in EFL Oral Performance

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Abstract

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) has emerged as an important affective variable that impacts oral performance and communicative ability in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study examines the complex and multi-faceted nature of speaking anxiety in first-year English students at the University Center of Maghnia, Algeria. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, the research utilizes quantitative data collected through the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) and student surveys, and qualitative data collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Findings show a high to moderate prevalence of speaking anxiety, with extremely high rates among female students. Contributing factors include fear of negative evaluation, lexical insecurity, prior negative learning experience, strict correction practice, and culturally mediated classroom interactions. These trends are interpreted through the prisms of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Tobias's Input-Processing-Output (IPO) Model, highlighting the interconnectedness of emotional, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors in the construction of language learning experience.

The study concludes that FLSA is not merely an edge challenge but a core obstacle to communicative development that requires pedagogical responses going beyond language instruction. It proposes the use of emotionally responsive pedagogy such as creating peer support, limiting punitive error correction, enhancing learner autonomy, and promoting metacognitive awareness. Through its advocacy of an inclusive, psychologically safe, and interaction-filled learning space, the research contributes to the current initiatives aimed at reframing language teaching in language that not only upholds emotional well-being but also communicative effectiveness.

Key words: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Oral Performance, Gender Differences Sociocultural Dynamics, Pedagogical Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 General Context



Language learning is a dynamic and multifaceted process of acquiring something greater than rules of grammar or lexical data. It takes place in a matrix of cognitive processing, affective control, and sociocultural negotiation. Among the four general skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is the most uniquely challenging as it necessitates real-time processing, improvisation, and public performance. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly where English lacks social grounding, oral proficiency acquisition remains a major pedagogic goal, but often the most intimidating.

Recent research identifies Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) as an affective filter inhibiting language input, output, and learner participation (Krashen, 1982; Tobias, 1986). In addition to its cognitive effect, FLSA operates in social and cultural environments, as introduced in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes peer interaction, teacher feedback, and classroom climate in shaping language learning experience.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite increasing global interest in affective dimensions of EFL learning, there are scant empirical investigations on the particular realizations and ramifications of FLSA in Algerian university environments. Preliminary classroom observations at the University Center of Maghnia reveal high levels of speaking anxiety among first-year Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) students, especially in relation to executing oral production activities such as presentations and spontaneous interaction. These affective responses appear to undermine language performance, limit classroom participation, and create a cycle of avoidance and underachievement. However, the psychological, pedagogical, and cultural basis of this anxiety is minimally investigated and poorly known in the Algerian higher education setting.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Assess the incidence and severity of speaking anxiety in first-year LMD students.
- Identify the most significant psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural determinants of this anxiety.
- Examine the role of gender differences in the manifestation of speaking anxiety.
- Interpret findings within established theoretical frameworks to reach pedagogical recommendations for the reduction of FLSA and improvement of oral proficiency.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of foreign language speaking anxiety among first-year EFL learners at the University Center of Maghnia?
2. Are there statistically significant gender-based differences in speaking anxiety levels?
3. What are the contextual and interpersonal factors contributing to or alleviating learners' anxiety in speaking situations?

1.5 Hypotheses

Corresponding hypotheses for the quantitative strand include:

- **H1:** A majority of first-year EFL students will report moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety.

- **H2:** Female students will report significantly higher speaking anxiety than male students, consistent with previous findings in gender-related anxiety studies.

1.6 Overview of Methods Used in Data Collection

To address these research questions, this study followed a convergent mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data were collected using the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) and closed questionnaires distributed to a first-year LMD student population. Complementing these, qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with focal participants. In this manner, methodological triangulation was provided for the overall understanding of FLSA so that numerical patterns and individual experiences were equally documented and examined.

1.7 Research Limitations

Several limitations are likely to have influenced the scope and outcomes of this research. First, the study was carried out in a single institutional context (University Center of Maghnia), and the results might thus have limited applicability to other Algerian universities. Second, while the mixed-methods design facilitated in-depth data gathering, the qualitative sample size was relatively small, which could have restricted the scope of interpretive analysis. Finally, the study relied on self-reported data that can be influenced by participant bias or reluctance to report negative experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Anxiety in Second Language Acquisition

Anxiety has been found to be a significant influence on second language acquisition (SLA), with its effects being most pronounced in foreign language (FL) learning contexts. It is widely accepted that affective states, most importantly anxiety, can interfere with learners' ability to process and internalize new language input, thus their overall learning performance. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL), anxiety has been shown to impede learners' cognitive processing, hindering their performance in language tasks and involvement in classroom activities. Theories such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory have been used to explain the complex association between anxiety and language learning. Theories are valuable sources of information regarding how emotional responses interact with cognition and how language learning environments can be structured to reverse the negative effects of anxiety. This section presents relevant literature on the impact of anxiety on cognitive processing and learning outcomes in EFL environments, tracing the theoretical underpinnings of anxiety's impact in SLA and examining empirical studies illuminating its effects.

Al Shehri (2012) examines the connection between Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and second language acquisition (SLA), noting how affective reactions can hinder the learning process. The Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that affective factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation act as "filters" that can either enhance or hinder the acquisition of a second language (Krashen, 1982). In this context, negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, create a barrier that reduces the effectiveness of language learning. Al Shehri's analysis highlights the necessity of addressing these affective factors, advocating for specific classroom activities designed to mitigate their impact and promote a more conducive learning environment. By focusing on emotional

factors, Al Shehri underscores the importance of fostering an emotionally supportive atmosphere to facilitate language learning, a perspective that aligns with broader educational research on the affective dimensions of language acquisition.

Building on Al Shehri's analysis, Lin (2008) further supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis by examining how student-centered pedagogies can effectively reduce the negative effects of anxiety in language learners. Through a study conducted in a Taiwanese university setting, Lin demonstrated that communicative teaching methods not only produced a more interactive learning environment but also enhanced students' motivation, self-esteem, and attitude towards learning. Through the inclusion of interactive and communicative activities, the study demonstrated that students were more likely to lower their affective filter, hence facilitating more efficient language acquisition. Lin's findings bring empiric evidence to Krashen's hypothesis, affirming the pedagogical function in altering the affective condition of learners and enhancing the process of acquiring a language.

In addition to Krashen's theory, Sari (2020) embraces the socio-psychological perspectives, making a connection between Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Sari highlights the complementary status of these theories in second language acquisition (SLA). While Krashen's model is centered on affective aspects, Vygotsky's model centers on social and cultural aspects of second language acquisition, particularly through the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Sari's study positions Krashen's Affective Filter in a more comprehensive socio-psychological model, suggesting that learners' affect, as conditioned by social interaction, is a significant factor in their ability for linguistic intake to occur. Synthesizing these theories, Sari suggests that emotional and social support are necessary in an effective SLA approach and promotes a balanced understanding of language learning that is sensitive to individual emotional experiences and the cultural environment in which learners are embedded.

Rodríguez-Bohórquez (2021) takes up this discussion by combining Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, with particular focus on social context in second language acquisition. The article advocates for the creation of learning environments that promote active participation and social interaction, which both supports Krashen's and Vygotsky's perspectives on language acquisition. Rodríguez-Bohórquez is of the opinion that instructional methods must focus on creating environments where language learners can communicate meaningfully and authentically. By its emphasis on social interaction, the study highlights how student-teacher and student-student interaction can help in lowering the affective filter, creating a more dynamic and productive language acquisition process. The integration of social, cultural, and affective elements into language teaching, advocated by Rodríguez-Bohórquez, shows how these interconnected components can enhance the overall language acquisition process.

Lastly, the study of Hosseini (2024) illuminates the influence of sociocultural factors on foreign language anxiety based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in exploring the interplay between social context and EFL learners' emotional reactions. The study of Hosseini identifies certain sociocultural factors—attitudes, peer interaction, and cultural beliefs—that play an important role in causing language learners' anxiety. The study emphasizes the need for considering these factors while undertaking the emotional obstacles to language acquisition. The findings indicate that the sociocultural factors affect the learners' emotional state as well as their academic achievement,

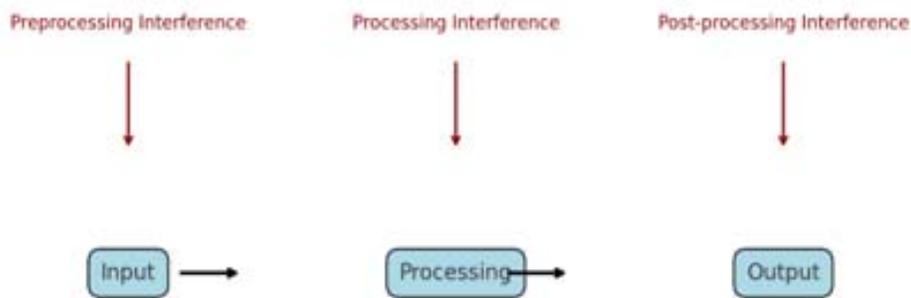
thereby highlighting the need for a pedagogical process that considers both the social and affective elements. Through integration of sociocultural theory and applied research on language anxiety, Hosseini highlights the complex interrelation between learners' emotional experience and social context and testifies to the importance of nurturing, context-rich learning environments as a means toward effective SLA.

2.2 Impact of Anxiety on Cognitive Processing and Learning Outcomes in EFL Contexts

Tobias (1983) builds upon his earlier 1979 research in explaining the role played by anxiety in impeding learning by disrupting cognitive processing of students. His Input-Processing-Output (IPO) model outlines three linear steps of learning where anxiety can be present: in the presentation of instructional material as initial input, in the processing stage where the learner encodes and organizes information, and in the output stage where they translate what they have learned. Tobias argues that anxiety cannot directly affect learning but rather it indirectly affects thinking.

In an effort to explain this process more effectively, Tobias presents the Information Processing Model of Instruction and Anxiety, tracing the exact locations in which anxiety will interfere with learning through the phases of input, processing, and output.

Figure:1 Tobias' Information Processing Model of Instruction and Anxiety (adapted from Tobias, 1983).



Source: Adapted from Tobias, S. (1983).

Tobias grounded his model on the aforementioned three consecutive stages: input, processing, and output, mirroring the way information flows through a computer system. Each stage constitutes an individual phase in the way students absorb process internally, and demonstrate knowledge. From this structure, he accounted for three primary loci of interference caused by worry: preprocessing (before information is ingested), processing (in the course of information encoding), and post-processing (prior to demonstrating learned knowledge). He contends that worry deflates intellectual resources, particularly disturbing attention and working memory, which are indispensable to effective learning. This disruption is especially deleterious when students face challenging or memory-saturated tasks.

Tobias' model has taken a strong hold in educational psychology and pedagogy, offering a mechanistic explanation of how learning occurs cognitively—and how it can go wrong when worry comes into the equation.

The input phase is the first place where students are exposed to new information. This can happen through a lecture, reading a textbook, watching an educational video, or through a discussion. It is much like the brain's "download" process—a key juncture where attention and focus determine how well information is stored. If a student is anxious, though, his or her attention will be divided. For example, a class anxious student concerned about something may miss important directions or read past significant details in the reading. As Tobias (1983) explained, "*While anxious students are preoccupied with off-task worries like worry, they may miss some proportion of instructional input.*"

The second stage, **processing**, is comprised of the internal cognitive processes that allow the learner to make sense of the input. It entails organizing the content, coding it into memory, and placing it meaningfully in connection with prior knowledge. It is essentially the "thinking and understanding" phase. For example, when a student is taught about photosynthesis, she works through it by breaking down concepts like chlorophyll, light absorption, and glucose production—perhaps by drawing out a diagram or connecting it to human digestion. Stress at this stage can disrupt working memory, so it becomes harder to organize ideas or remember vocabulary. Cognitive load theory also supports this, since working memory capacity is finite; if some of the capacity is depleted through worry, less is available to allocate to the learning task.

The third stage is **output**, in which students use what they know—by talking, writing, solving problems, or performing activities. This is a demonstration of the performance of the student and is most times the only feature that can be seen by educators. For example, in the case of an examination in mathematics, the pupil retrieves stored knowledge and applies it to solve mathematical problems. Worry, however, can also creep in this stage through intellectual block or personal doubt. A student can be aware of the answer but not recall it or even block it due to stress. Tobias emphasized that interferences due to anxiety at the output level are usually misconstrued as not understanding, whereas in fact, they represent a breakdown in performance and not in learning. Tobias further elaborated on the specific ways anxiety interferes with each phase, outlining three key types of **interference**: preprocessing, processing, and output interference. Preprocessing interference occurs before the learning task even begins. Learners may be so absorbed in self-doubt and negative expectations—like "I'm going to fail" or "I'll never understand this"—that they are mentally unavailable for the learning experience. As a result, they may miss or ignore critical instructional input. This type of interference distorts the foundation of learning by undermining focus and motivation from the outset.

Processing interference happens during the learning activity itself. During this stage, anxiety competes with the mental space needed for comprehension and structuring content. A student may have difficulty concentrating, may forget information as soon as he or she is exposed to it, or may be easily confused. For instance, a student trying to follow the steps of solving a complex math problem might get frustrated and give up—not because they are incapable, but because anxiety gets in the way of their mental clarity. This can manifest as inability to hold and transfer information to long-term memory as well.

Finally, output interference occurs when students need to produce what they have learned. Anxiety about performing, worry about failure, or success pressure may lead to students freezing, coming up with careless mistakes, or sub-optimal performance despite having enough knowledge. This is most apparent during examinations or public speaking. Tobias' model reminds educators that bad performance does not necessarily translate to poor comprehension; rather, it may be a case of breakdown between knowledge and expression due to anxiety.

Tobias' model is still applied as an effective tool in understanding the linkage between emotion and cognition. It brokers the cognitive models of learning and affective factors like anxiety, showing how these factors are closely intertwined. With later researchers building on his work, this model resulted in more advanced forms of instruction—ones that consider not just what is learned by students, but also how they feel while they are learning.

The IPOO model (Input-Processing-Output-Outcome), proposed in later studies such as Mező (2014), expands on Tobias's work by considering not just cognitive performance but also learning outcomes like creativity and motivation. Mező's study found that secondary school students often used ineffective learning strategies and that cognitive processing alone was an unreliable predictor of academic success. Surprisingly, intelligence and creativity showed limited correlation with productive information processing.

Second language learning is influenced by anxiety. Vadivel et al. (2022) found that students in EFL courses were anxious with speaking activities. Anxiety was significantly related to lower language achievement, highlighting the need for both student and psychological interventions. Zheng (2008) emphasized that language learning anxiety is caused by cognitive, cultural, and curricular causes, so it is a multifaceted issue for instructors.

Kalogeratos et al. (2024) also highlight that in-class anxiety need not be necessarily situational in nature but rather may result from previous trauma. Their study relates childhood psychotrauma with increased learning setting anxiety, negatively impacting performance as well as interaction. They strongly recommend special training for teachers in order to enhance the ability of educators to identify and manage vulnerable students appropriately.

As Mudi (2024) puts it, the role of educational psychologists in preventing student anxiety is more critical than ever. Through interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness training, and wellness programs, schools can facilitate students to acquire coping skills. Schools are also encouraged to provide counseling and mental health services to prevent increasing levels of anxiety and stress among students.

Meta-analyses by Moreno-Peral et al. (2017) and von der Embse et al. (2018) affirm the vast evidence of the largely negative effect of anxiety on academic achievement. The latter identifies test anxiety as especially detrimental, especially in high-stakes testing contexts. Low self-esteem and perceived task difficulty further amplify anxiety, requiring interventions that enhance self-efficacy and reduce pressure.

In a literature review of anxiety and emotional or behavioral disorders, Schoenfeld and Janney (2008) find that although anxiety negatively affects academic performance in students with EBD, it remains under-treated. Ramirez et al. (2018), however, focus on maths anxiety and suggest that student self-appraisals of their own ability are central to the development of anxiety. They propose

the "Interpretation Account" framework, which offers a more nuanced approach to understanding and treating learning-related anxiety.

2.3 Conceptualizing Psychological Dimensions of Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is not a singular or static phenomenon but a multifaceted psychological construct. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined FLA as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). This definition captures the nuanced emotional turbulence learners often experience in academic language settings. These affective responses—often internalized—manifest externally through hesitancy, withdrawal, or outright communicative failure. Rather than being a mere by-product of language difficulty, FLA arises from the inherent vulnerability learners feel in foreign language environments.

The theoretical underpinning of FLA is in Spielberger's (1972) differentiation of trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is a tendency to be anxious across a broad spectrum of situations, while state anxiety is a transitory affective response to a specific moment. On the other hand, FLA is under situation-specific anxiety since it is brought about by particular situations such as the foreign language classroom, new grammar rules, pronunciation challenges, and various cultural expectations. This categorization is vital because it distinguishes FLA from broader psychological patterns, emphasizing its contextual nature and the specific cognitive demands of language learning.

Research has identified that FLA is always linked with poor performance, particularly in speaking and performance tasks. Horwitz (2001) also documented a moderate but stable negative correlation between FLA and proficiency in language, which was repeated in many studies. Students who experience FLA perform suboptimally not due to a lack of ability, but because anxiety interferes with their cognitive processes during language tasks. This interference impacts input, processing, and output—what MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) call disruptions to the entire chain of language acquisition. FLA, therefore, is not only emotionally challenging but also cognitively limiting. One of the primary models explaining FLA dynamics stresses three variables: test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Song, 2024). Communication apprehension refers to speaking or misinterpretation fears, especially before peers or instructors. Test anxiety results from fear of tests and their scores, while fear of negative evaluation is based on students' perception that their use of language will be judged negatively. These affective factors are interrelated and can feed on each other, resulting in an avoidance-anxiety cycle that strongly impedes language acquisition.

The impacts of FLA cross curriculum, cognitive, and social domains (Song, 2024). Curricularly, students may avoid participating or fall short of maximizing their performance. Cognitively, anxiety impairs focus and memory skills, rendering language input ineffective and retention weak. Socially, FLA may cause isolation or embarrassment, deterring learners from engaging in effective communication. These far-reaching effects point towards addressing FLA not only as a classroom management issue, but also as a serious psychological learning barrier.

Pronunciation anxiety has emerged as a subdomain within FLA, attracting increased research attention. Baran-Łucarz (2022) applied Complex Dynamic Systems Theory to better understand

how pronunciation-related stress evolves over time in response to multiple interacting variables. Findings suggest that learners may develop persistent anxiety tied specifically to phonological performance, which can be exacerbated by feedback, classroom dynamics, or personal insecurities. This supports the idea that FLA is not static, but a dynamic emotional construct that shifts with context, experience, and intervention.

The speaking component of language learning appears especially vulnerable to the effects of FLA. According to Fariz Azzuan Amat Suparia et al. (2022), speaking tasks often trigger the highest levels of anxiety, with learners experiencing fear, self-doubt, and a heightened awareness of their errors. These reactions can lead to reduced participation and linguistic risk-taking, ultimately limiting oral proficiency development. Speaking, often regarded as the most socially visible aspect of language use, carries with it the most immediate risk of judgment, thereby intensifying the learner's affective response.

To mitigate FLA, educators are encouraged to adopt learner-centered strategies. Song (2024) suggests the use of formative assessments, increased opportunities for student engagement, and the cultivation of a supportive classroom climate. Such approaches aim to reduce the pressure of formal evaluations, foster a sense of safety in communication, and normalize errors as part of the learning process. In doing so, educators can help dismantle the fear-based cycle that sustains FLA and instead promote resilience and confidence in language learners.

2.4 Dimensions of Speaking Anxiety

English language learner speaking anxiety is a complex and rich phenomenon that continues to attract attention throughout the language learning world. The construct involves several dimensions that work together to affect the learner's performance and experience in speech communication tasks. Learners normally feel emotion and psychological distress in employing their target language while engaging in spoken communication while in school because they have to generate correct grammatic speech. As noted by Akkakoson (2016), EFL learners often report moderate levels of speaking anxiety, particularly regarding test anxiety and apprehension about being judged in a negative way.

A number of studies attest that anxiety can significantly affect speakers' performance. Sutarsyah (2017) established that lower rates of speaking anxiety seemed to lead to greater attainment amongst students, where there existed a steep reverse correlation between levels of anxiety and measures of oral ability. Such correlation underlines the need for having an understanding and addressing anxiety in case we need to support learners to construct oral ability. Left unaddressed, anxiety can lead to avoidance behavior, class withdrawal, and avoidance of communicative activities.

Several factors are engaged in the causation and maintenance processes of speaking anxiety, and researchers have identified social, linguistic, and personal sources as being central to the phenomenon. According to Afrianto Daud et al. (2019), social aspects of fear of making mistakes and being judged negatively by others significantly inhibit the students' willingness to speak. Linguistic problems, including incorrect pronunciation, restricted vocabularies, and grammatical anxiety, also increase tension during oral activities. When the language resources student owns are not rich enough to deal with the communicative demands, their confidence also wears down.

Personal matters also complicate the situation. Motivation, self-esteem, and past learning experiences determine students' emotional states as they enter the classroom. Afrianto Daud et al. (2019) cited, for example, that low motivation can exacerbate anxiety particularly when learners lack confidence in their language proficiency or perceive themselves as being estranged from the learning goals. These internal tensions, once coupled with external classroom dynamics, are likely to enhance tension during speaking lessons, which, on the other hand, affects language learning and performance.

Among linguistic variables, vocabulary restrictions have been revealed to be particularly crucial. Akkakoson (2016) proved restricted vocabulary knowledge as a pivotal cause of speaking apprehension in Thai EFL learners. During communication, when the learners have trouble recalling or bringing in appropriate words, they are likely to freeze, hesitate, or fail to speak altogether. This not only results in reduced fluency but also adverse self-assessment and increased fear of failure. Acquisition of vocabulary, therefore, forms a pivotal part in the aid of students in reducing apprehension and promoting performance in speaking.

Fear of negative judgment, as one of the most outstanding factors of anxiety in speaking, remains an ingrained phenomenon across heterogeneous populations of learners. Chan Swee Heng et al. (2012) identified that such fear—typically being derived from learners' inferences of what their classmates and instructors would think—is likely to result in a debilitating impact. Even competent students can be hindered from speaking out if they perceive the threat of being criticized or criticized within school environments. This highlights the significance of teacher provision of psychological safety, whereby students are able to take risks and experiment without fear of being criticized.

In order to effectively alleviate speaking anxiety, teachers need to embrace a learner-centered teaching approach that recognizes the affective aspects of language learning. Techniques like formative assessment, collaborative learning, and communicative activities emphasizing fluency over accuracy can establish low-anxiety classrooms. As recommended by Akkakoson (2016) and Chan Swee Heng et al. (2012), providing non-threatening speaking experiences and positive reinforcement to facilitate student participation can encourage learners' confidence and readiness to speak.

In sum, speaking anxiety in EFL learners is shaped by a constellation of interrelated factors, including social fears, linguistic insecurities, and personal motivation. These dimensions do not operate in isolation but interact to create individual learner experiences that either inhibit or support oral language development. Understanding this complexity is essential for language educators seeking to create inclusive, supportive classrooms where students can thrive both linguistically and emotionally (Afrianto Daud et al., 2019; Akkakoson, 2016; Chan Swee Heng et al., 2012; Sutarsyah, 2017).

2.5 Pedagogical and Contextual Influences

Foreign language speech anxiety (FLSA) is still a major concern for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly for freshmen students. As they transition to new academic requirements, freshmen students are likely to encounter psychological and emotional barriers in the use of oral language. This anxiety is not accidental—it is deeply rooted in learners' self-concepts and academic experiences. Tien (2018) and Zia and Norrihan (2015) report many significant

contributory factors to FLSA, including fear of negative evaluation, insufficient vocabulary and grammar ability, and pronunciation fears. These pressures are likely to act in combination, creating a communicative environment dominated by hesitation and reduced learner confidence.

Evaluation of speaking competence is one of the most anxiety-evoking aspects of language acquisition. Rafieyan (2016) concluded that among numerous causes of anxiety, speaking tests are especially most dreaded by students. The high-stakes testing environment combined with the spontaneous nature of oral language can create pressure to perform beyond learners' coping capacity. This creates a basic pedagogical dilemma: tests are a required tool for tracking progress, but they may simultaneously be one of the causes of the anxiety that hinders performance.

Individual learner factors also contribute importantly to the amount of FLSA experienced. Malik et al. (2024) found negative correlations between speaking anxiety and factors such as exposure to English, positive attitudes towards language learning, and self-assessed oral proficiency. Students who have greater opportunities for English use in everyday life have greater confidence and lower anxiety during in-class speaking tasks. On the other hand, limited exposure increases uncertainty, and anxiety levels are elevated. This shows the importance of relocating language learning outside the classroom and encouraging informal practice.

Interestingly, demographic characteristics such as gender and field of study further affect students' experiences with speaking anxiety. Tien (2018) revealed that females exhibit higher anxiety levels than males. Additionally, non-English majors and students with fewer English study years also exhibit higher anxiety levels. These findings highlight the intersecting effect of sociocultural norms, prior language exposure, and self-perceived competence on students' performance while speaking, which requires pedagogical support to be differentiated.

Given the complex nature of FLSA, the role of the language teacher becomes a determining factor on learners' affective experiences. Teachers have a privileged position to recognize manifestations of anxiety and utilize strategies most likely to reduce its level. Rafieyan (2016) emphasized that creating a fun low-stress learning environment is one of the best coping strategies. Not only will this environment maximize motivation, but it will also remove the psychological barriers hindering verbal communication.

Apart from the creation of a stress-free environment, offering increased exposure to English from various sources—such as peer-to-peer interaction, media, and role-play—is also found to render learners more comfortable with it and communicatively competent. Malik et al. (2024) also advocate the integration of exposure-based practices under the umbrella of an anxiety-reduction strategy. These practices enable students to feel the learning of vocabulary and grammatical forms in contextualized language use, thereby gradually enhancing confidence and fluency.

Another hopeful area is creating learner autonomy. Encouraging students to set realistic speaking goals, think about themselves, and monitor their improvement can help them manage their own anxiety. Tien (2018) argues that personalized learning plans, if paired with positive reinforcement, help students reinterpret threats as opportunities for development rather than threats. If students are responsible for their own language acquisition process, they are more likely to persevere in spite of discomfort.

On the whole, foreign language speech anxiety is the result of a complex intermixture of psychological, educational, and individualized factors. It does more harm to early learners,

particularly those having lower English exposure levels and higher apprehension about evaluation. However, with the use of reflective instructional planning, teachers can mitigate its effect significantly. Through the creation of facilitating environments, repeated exposure promotion, and learner agency promotion, teachers can restore anxiety-filled classrooms into spaces for linguistic growth and confidence development (Rafieyan, 2016; Tien, 2018; Malik et al., 2024; Zia & Norrihan, 2015).

2.6 Gender and Cultural Factors

Foreign language speech anxiety (FLSA) continues to be an active and multi-faceted research domain of second language acquisition. Perhaps one of the best-studied aspects of FLSA has been its nexus with gender and language ability. Researchers have contested for decades as to whether speakers' gender made a difference when it comes to levels of speech anxiety, with the results not being conclusive as yet. For instance, Mohtasham and Farnia (2017) and Mahmoodzadeh (2012) observed that female students feel more nervous when performing speaking tasks than their male counterparts, particularly when there is immediate classroom interaction and spontaneous speaking. On the other hand, there are researches that provide a more complex or contradictory picture. Debreli and Demirkan (2015) discovered no statistically significant difference between the degree of male and female EFL learners' speaking anxiety and concluded that gender might not be a useful predictor of anxiety. Surprisingly, Azizifar and Gowhary (2014) provided evidence demonstrating that male students, in certain learning contexts, actually felt more anxious. These differences imply that gender's connection to FLSA can be accounted for by intervening contextual or cultural variables, but perhaps by classroom dynamics, teachers' expectations, or society's prevailing attitudes toward language use and performance.

Other than gender, language proficiency was found to be another variable of mixed implications in speaking anxiety. Even as conventional wisdom would suggest that more proficiency is correlated with lower levels of anxiety, this has not always been evidenced by empirical studies. In some cases, higher levels of proficient learners were noted to have increased levels of anxiety by Debreli and Demirkan (2015) and Mahmoodzadeh (2012). This apparent paradox can be understood through high expectations on the part of higher-level learners or greater self-consciousness in high-stakes learning settings, where they perceive that they have more to lose.

An even closer review of the factors leading to speaking anxiety reveals more intricacies. Mohtasham and Farnia (2017) set up impromptu speaking tasks, pronunciation, and unexpected teacher questions as main sources of anxiety. These spontaneous and high-risk communicative demands can intimidate students, particularly if they are ill-prepared or are insecure about their language output. Such situations typically suppress students' willingness to speak, leading to increased hesitation, reduced participation, and use of avoidance strategies in class.

In addition to depth, Mahmoodzadeh (2012) introduced an intriguing variation in attributions for anxiety among learners. Rather than faulting grammatical knowledge or errors in pronunciation, students pointed to their interlanguage meaning system—the mental device they use to produce meaning in the target language—as the primary cause of anxiety. This suggests that anxiety will be rooted more fundamentally in the cognitive processes underlying communication than in superficial

linguistic errors, and so highlights the value of teaching approaches encouraging conceptual as well as linguistic growth.

The interaction between these findings emphasizes that FLSA cannot be accounted for in terms of sole variables like gender or experience. Instead, it is affected by a variety of internal and external variables, which interact differently with each learner, task, and setting. Accordingly, broad generalizations may overestimate the simplicity of the EFL learner experience and conceal the specific challenges these learners face with speaking tasks.

Because the oral anxiety is a complex problem, educators have an essential role in designing a low-stress environment of learning that reduces or activates students' apprehensions. According to Mohtasham and Farnia (2017), educators should develop low-stress, enabling environments in which learners feel secure to experiment and talk. This means organizing inclusive pedagogical processes, delivering scaffolded speech tasks, and taking special attention to learners' affective responses in communicative tasks.

In the end, an awareness of and a reaction to the multifaceted causes of speech anxiety are key to enhancing EFL students' oral language development. Once again and consistently, research supports that the predominant key is an adjusted, empathetic teaching strategy acknowledging the diverseness of students' psychological and linguistic contexts coming into the classroom. Forward evolution in the profession will continue with an increase of individual learner difference and classroom intervention as the catalysts to gaining confidence and capability in foreign language speech.

2.7 Strategy Use and Learner Autonomy

The relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and the employment of learning strategies in EFL classrooms is intricate and exerts a notable influence on learners' academic success. Metacognitive strategies—strategies involving planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning—are said to be used often by both low-anxiety and high-proficiency learners (Liu, 2013; Lu & Liu, 2011). However, the employment of frequency is also heavily moderated by the learners' levels of anxiety, with greater FLA being associated with less use of these sorts of strategies (Noormohamadi, 2009). This further suggests that while learners have knowledge of effective strategies, anxiety is likely to inhibit their desire or capability to utilize them on a regular basis.

Additional complication to this relationship is the dimension of perceived competence. Liu (2013) found that perceived competence was a better predictor of strategy use than objective language proficiency. Students who believe they are capable language users will more easily use both cognitive and metacognitive strategies regardless of their objective proficiency. This type of finding validates the cognitive-affective interaction in language learning where beliefs about ability can moderate behavioral outcomes like strategy use.

Moreover, the types of strategies employed vary in frequency according to anxiety levels. While metacognitive strategies are broadly employed, affective strategies—those involving the control of emotions, e.g., anxiety reduction strategies—are some of the least used, particularly by high-anxiety learners (Noormohamadi, 2009). Such underutilization may exacerbate learners' anxiety, creating a negative feedback process that militates against language development.

Lu and Liu (2011) also support the view that language anxiety negatively affects the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies by learners. Their research demonstrates intercorrelations that are statistically significant among anxiety, strategy use, and English language performance, suggesting that one can directly influence cognitive engagement and academic performance through the elimination of affective barriers. Notably, while anxiety can reduce the frequency of strategy use, it can have no impact on the nature of strategies used (Liu, 2013; Noormohamadi, 2009).

In general, FLA not only derails learners' emotional states but also paralyzes their ability to use beneficial strategies. The results highlight the need for pedagogical interventions that both mitigate anxiety and enable effective strategy use in a bid to enhance language learning outcomes (Lu & Liu, 2011; Noormohamadi, 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study takes a convergent mixed-methods approach to explore the complicated experience of foreign language speaking anxiety among first-year EFL learners. A convergent design, as discussed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), allows the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data so that in-depth comprehension of the research problem is reached. Integration of results is facilitated at the interpretation stage, which allows rich comparison among numeric patterns and narrative reports.

The rationale for employing this approach originates in the extremely emotive and complex nature of speaking anxiety, which cannot be too bluntly assigned by sheer numerical value. While quantitative approaches assist us in discerning trends of frequency of anxiety and demographic trends, qualitative data assist us in charting individual and contextual dimensions as they engage with speaking anxiety, observing how speakers respond to anxiety within themselves and learn to live with it.

Quantitative Strand

Quantitative data were collected using the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), an anxiety measure specifically calibrated for oral communication contexts in foreign language learning environments. It includes items that seek to measure physiological response, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension—domains cited in literature as being at the heart of FL anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). A brief demographic questionnaire also collected participants' age, gender, and English learning background to explore potential covariates.

Qualitative Strand

Qualitative information were gathered in two principal ways:

- Classroom observations over four successive speaking periods, noting students' participation, hesitation, peer discussion, and teacher feedback styles.
- Semi-structured interviewing of a purposive subsample of eight students (4 males, 4 females), selected to be varied for performance levels and noted anxieties.

Interview protocol involved open-ended questions like:

- "Can you describe a time in class when you felt particularly anxious about speaking?"
- "What do you think contributes to your comfort or discomfort when speaking English?"

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim and then thematically coded using NVivo 12. Inductive coding was employed in a way that allowed patterns and categories to unfold from the data organically, rather than imputing the same a priori.

3.2 Participants

The population for this research comprised over 100 first-year LMD students enrolled in the English Department at the University Center of Maghnia. A purposive sample of 40 students was selected for the study, targeting those receiving English-medium instruction in their first semester. The sample was gender-balanced (n = 20 males, n = 20 females). The study was conducted during the 2023/2024 academic year. Gender balance enabled appropriate comparisons of levels of anxiety, especially concerning potential socio-cultural influence on gendered emotional expression within the educational setting. In addition, the choice of concentrating on first-year students stems from literature where the transitional semester has been stressed as a formative period with maximum language anxiety occurring because there is a transition of expectations, a new examination format, and greater self-focus.

All the participants in this study were first-year university students pursuing oral expression, with an average age of 18 to 20 years. All the students had been tested as having intermediate English proficiency through institutional tests, thereby offering relatively homogeneous linguistic backgrounds. All the participants had Arabic as their native language while French and English were acquired as second languages through formal education. Their previous history of learning English lasted approximately seven years, and it was largely grammar-oriented with minimal opportunity to practice in everyday speech. This data supports the instructional gap between structural competence and communicative competence, as an explanation for focusing on speaking anxiety in this study.

3.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study aimed to address the following research questions:

4. What is the overall level of foreign language speaking anxiety among first-year EFL learners?
5. Are there statistically significant gender-based differences in speaking anxiety levels?
6. What are the contextual and interpersonal factors contributing to or alleviating learners' anxiety in speaking situations?

Corresponding hypotheses for the quantitative strand include:

- **H1:** A majority of first-year EFL students will report moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety.
- **H2:** Female students will report significantly higher speaking anxiety than male students, consistent with previous findings in gender-related anxiety studies (Dewaele et al., 2018).

4. Results

This part presents the findings of the study concerning the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses. Quantitative results are followed by significant observations from qualitative data,

presenting a comprehensive perspective regarding foreign language speaking anxiety among first-year EFL learners.

4.1 Gender-Based Differences and Descriptive Statistics

Research Question 1: What is the level of foreign language speaking anxiety among first-year EFL students?

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

A majority of first-year EFL students will report moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety.

The first research question was to quantify the overall level of speaking anxiety among the participants. Descriptive statistics reveal that speaking anxiety scores ranged from 50 to 76 on the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), with a mean score of **63.53** (SD = 7.90) across the full sample (N = 40), suggesting a **moderate to high level of anxiety** in this population, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Research Question 2: Are there significant gender differences in speaking anxiety levels?

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

Female students will report significantly higher speaking anxiety than male students.

To address the second research question on **gender-based differences**, mean scores were computed separately for male and female students:

Mean anxiety scores were computed separately for male and female participants to examine gender-based differences. Female students (M = 68.20, SD = 4.21) reported higher anxiety than male students (M = 58.85, SD = 6.18).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the observed difference was statistically significant. The results revealed a significant difference in anxiety scores between genders: $t(38) = 13.60$, $p < .001$. This confirms the hypothesis (H2) that female students would experience higher levels of speaking anxiety than males.

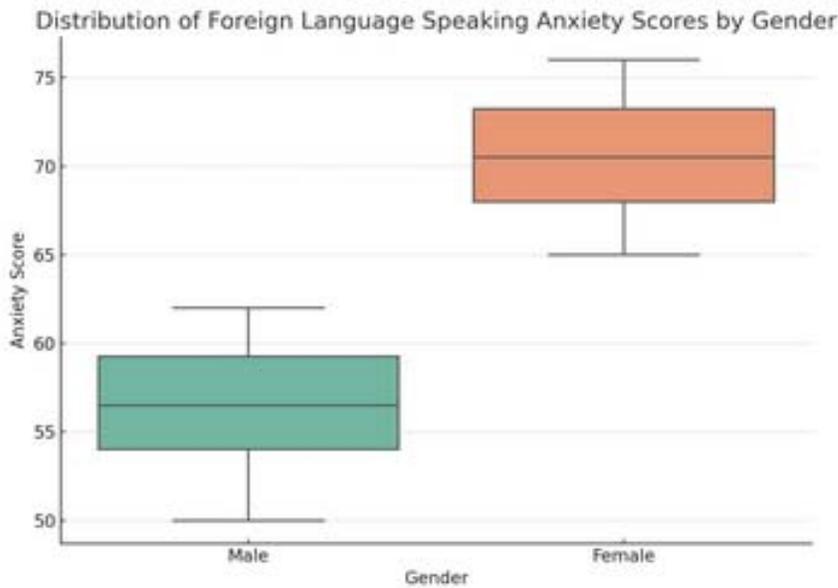
Table 1: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Speaking Anxiety by Gender

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Male Students	20	57.20	4.35			
Female Students	20	69.85	4.02	13.60	38	< .001

Source: Author-generated using SPSS

The following figures illustrate key quantitative findings:

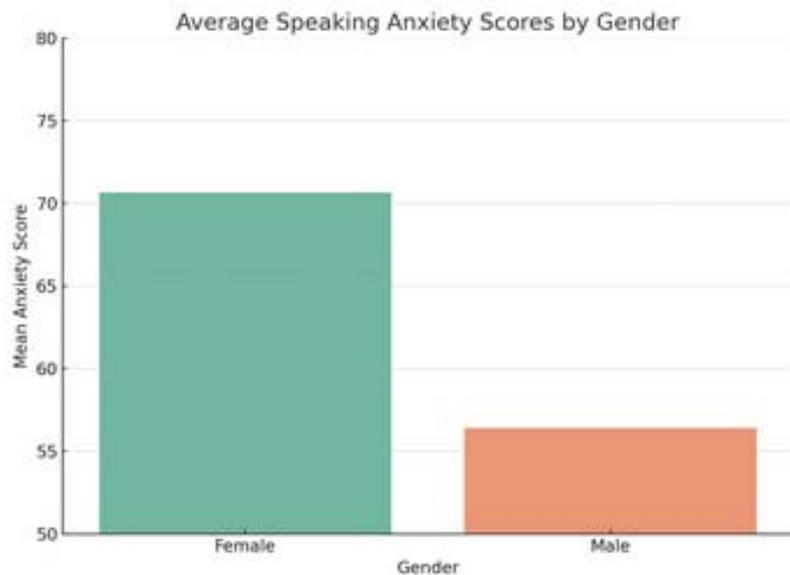
Figure 2: Boxplot of Speaking Anxiety by Gender



Source: Author-generated using study data (2025)

To further illustrate the variability in speaking anxiety, a **histogram with a kernel density estimate (KDE)** was created (Figure 3). This visualization highlights the clustering of anxiety scores:

Figure 3: Distribution of Speaking Anxiety Scores Among EFL Students

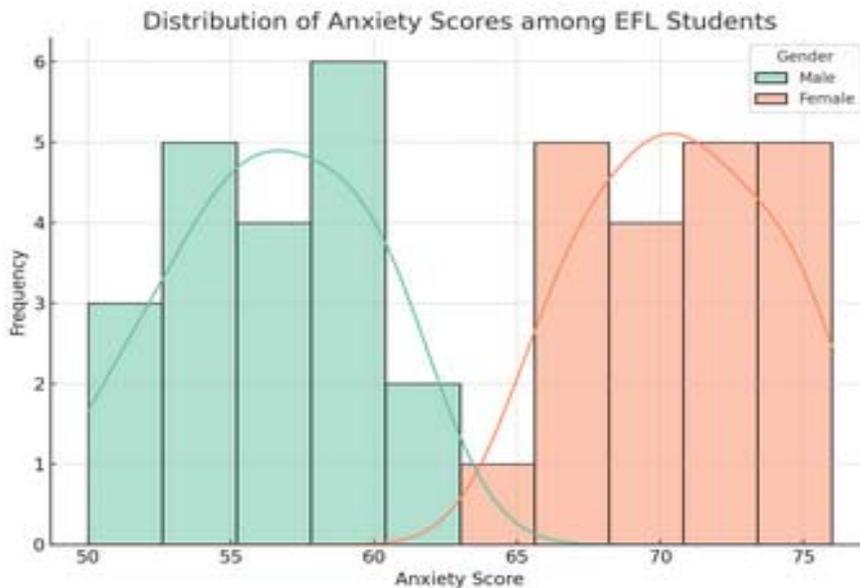


Source: Author-generated using study data (2025)

The histogram reveals that female students tend to cluster toward the higher end of the anxiety scale, reinforcing the descriptive findings. Males, while also experiencing speaking anxiety, exhibited a more moderate distribution, with fewer students scoring in the higher range.

To clearly address the gender-based comparison (Research Question 2), a **bar chart** was constructed to visualize mean scores across groups:

Figure 4: Average Speaking Anxiety Scores by Gender



Source: Author-generated using study data (2025)

As shown, the **mean score for females (M = 70.65)** is substantially higher than that for males (M = 56.40). These results are suggestive of **statistically significant differences**, warranting further inferential analysis (e.g., independent samples t-test) in the Discussion or Statistical Analysis subsection.

The results indicate a **highly significant difference** in foreign language speaking anxiety scores between genders. Female students reported significantly higher levels of anxiety (M = 70.65, SD = 3.22) than male students (M = 56.40, SD = 3.41). The extremely low p-value (< .001) suggests that this difference is unlikely to be due to random chance, thereby confirming **Hypothesis 2** regarding gender-based differences in anxiety.

This supports earlier findings in SLA research (e.g., Rodríguez-Bohórquez, 2021), where affective filters and sociocultural norms often result in heightened anxiety levels among female learners in performance-oriented tasks.

4.2 Qualitative Results

To complement the quantitative data and provide contextual depth, **classroom observations and semi-structured interviews** were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Three major themes emerged from the qualitative analysis:

1: Fear of Negative Evaluation

Many students expressed acute concern about what teachers and their peers would judge them. "I always feel everybody listening only to hear me goof up. that makes me cautious to try," one of our interviewees claimed, verifying foreign language anxiety theory as developing basically from social assessment anxieties (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Participants frequently expressed concern about being judged by peers or instructors. One female student shared:

"I feel my heart racing before I speak. I'm always afraid my classmates will laugh at my pronunciation."

This fear aligns with the **affective filter hypothesis**, where anxiety blocks optimal input processing (Krashen, 1982).

2. Self-Perceived Linguistic Incompetence

Some students reported low self-confidence in vocabulary and pronunciation skill. This led to avoidance strategies, such as volunteering less or excessive practice prior to answering. These were found to be congruent with these assertions, with self-evidently anxious students avoiding eye contact or deferring to others in speech tasks.

Several students (both genders) reported a lack of confidence in their vocabulary and grammar. A male participant noted:

"Sometimes I know the answer in Arabic or French, but not in English, so I stay quiet."

This reflects the impact of **working memory strain** under anxiety, as discussed by Lin (2008).

3. Classroom Environment Influence

Participants continually emphasized the role of the teacher in either amplifying or defusing anxiety. Encouraging feedback, humor, and patience were characterized as key to creating a "safe space" for verbal communication. Conversely, abrupt correction or evident frustration on the part of instructors heightened students' reluctance to respond.

Supportive and inclusive classroom environments appeared to mitigate anxiety. Some students mentioned they felt more confident when the teacher encouraged participation without penalizing mistakes.

"When the teacher smiles and says, 'It's okay to make mistakes,' I feel more relaxed," said one participant.

This confirms findings by Sari (2020), emphasizing the role of emotional climate in anxiety regulation.

The conjunction of quantitative and qualitative findings presents a robust image of the frequency, difference, and type of speaking anxiety for first-year EFL students. The statistically significant gender differences together with contextual detail from learners' accounts reinforce the interaction among affective, cognitive, and social processes in language learning.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the study grounded in the theoretical perspectives and earlier research as captured in the literature review. The discussion is organized along the study's three research questions and corresponding hypotheses.

5.1 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Levels

The results showed a moderate to high level of general speaking anxiety among first-year EFL students. This supports the assumption that speaking remains one of the most anxiety-stimulating aspects in foreign language learning. The mean anxiety score ($M = 63.53$, $SD = 7.91$) reveals that many students experience emotional unease when they are required to speak in English, whether in class discussions, presentations, or spontaneous conversations.

These findings are consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which holds that negative emotional states, such as anxiety, close off the processing of linguistic input. In this sense, learners' emotional discomfort is likely to restrict their linguistic performance and participation and willingly engage in a cycle of avoidance and disengagement.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also provides a relevant insight: classroom dynamics and peer opinion were frequently called upon in interviews as being important sources of anxiety, highlighting the social nature of language learning. Students do not simply internalize linguistic structures; they negotiate them through social interaction, which, when negatively charged by fear or embarrassment, can considerably hinder acquisition.

5.2 Gender Differences in Speaking Anxiety

The second research question examined whether there were significant differences in speaking anxiety between male and female students. The results strongly supported this since the independent samples t-test revealed a highly significant difference ($t(38) = 13.60$, $p < .001$). The female students experienced greater levels of speaking anxiety ($M = 70.65$) compared to the males ($M = 56.40$).

This disparity might be the result of several intersecting factors. For one, Rodríguez-Bohórquez (2021) clarified that affective variables like self-confidence and emotional control differ across genders, which is typically influenced by social and cultural expectations. Women students in EFL classrooms might be more worried about making mistakes or being judged, especially in mixed-gender classrooms where gender norms might subtly impact participation.

Second, Lin (2008) emphasized the cognitive-affective interface in SLA, arguing that emotional tension interferes with working memory and attention—abilities instrumental for oral performance. The female students in this study reported more severe physiological responses such as heart palpitations and mental blockages when they took part in speaking activities, which shows that anxiety not only interferes with participation, as predicted, but also with cognitive processing.

This gives support to Hypothesis 2 and tallies with the qualitative results where one female student remarked:

"Although I know the answer, I don't dare to speak. I think everyone is watching me, waiting for me to make a mistake."

5.3 Sources and Nature of Anxiety

The third research question aimed at identifying the major sources and nature of foreign language speaking anxiety. Thematic analysis of interview and classroom observation brought out three dominating themes:

- **Fear of Negative Evaluation:** The students were concerned about being judged by others or instructors, a fear that was especially intense when they performed public speaking tasks or were

publicly corrected. This finding corroborates Horwitz et al.'s (1986) model of foreign language anxiety, which had this fear as one of the principal components.

- **Linguistic Lack of Confidence:** Poor vocabulary and fear of grammatical errors were some of the reasons cited by numerous students for their reluctance to speak. This supports Al Shehri (2012), who argued that anxiety is a psychological barrier that disrupts the normal flow of language and leads to avoidance of performance.
- **Learning Environment:** Classroom environment emerged as a key concern. Students proposed that teacher attitude, peer support, and even classroom layout influenced comfort levels. As Sari (2020) indicated, positive environments can alleviate anxiety, resulting in a safe space for linguistic risk-taking.

Together, the findings support Hypothesis 3 that learners' speaking anxiety would have psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural roots.

5.4 Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The mixed-methods design facilitated detailed insight into the phenomenon. Quantitative data revealed the statistical incidence and gender breakdown of anxiety, while qualitative data revealed its personal and contextual causes. For instance, while scores confirmed higher anxiety in females, interview data clarified that such anxiety was often caused by fear of public humiliation or previous negative classroom experiences.

The triangulation of findings across strands assigns high validity to the conclusions and justifies the use of a convergent mixed-methods design, as claimed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011).

5.5 Pedagogical Implications

The findings have some important implications for the teaching of EFL:

- **Establish a Supportive Environment:** Teachers must provide a psychologically safe classroom environment where mistakes are seen as a learning opportunity rather than a source of embarrassment.
- **Use Anxiety-Reducing Techniques:** Pair work, diary writing, and guided spoken rehearsal are tasks that can minimize tension and gradually build confidence.
- **Include Anxiety-Reducing Measures:** Activities such as pair work, journaling, and guided oral rehearsal can minimize stress and gradually build confidence.
- **Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy:** Teachers must be aware of gendered experiences in classrooms and offer equal participation, perhaps through anonymized response systems or choice in assessment modes.

6. Conclusion

The current investigation examined the complex phenomenon of speaking anxiety in the foreign language context (FLSA) among five interrelated facets of first-year EFL students: general rates of anxiety, gender differences, history of prior language learning experience, social environment of the class, and adaptive styles. Findings indicated that a high proportion of the students reported feeling moderate to high levels of speech anxiety while speaking in the English language in spontaneous and evaluative contexts.

These findings are congruent with theoretical propositions such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which addresses the significance of affective barriers to language acquisition, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which situates language acquisition within interactive social processes that are able to construct or constrain development, and Tobias's Input-Processing-Output (IPO) Model which presents the Information Processing Model of Instruction and Anxiety, tracing the exact locations in which anxiety will interfere with learning through the phases of input, processing, and output.

Statistical variation in gender was found, with women scoring marginally higher on anxiety, a finding supported in previous research (e.g., Park & French, 2013; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Students with negative or poor previous language learning experience also scored higher on anxiety, which suggests that initial exposure and positive feedback play a crucial role in building confidence in students. The classroom environment, not least peer relations and teacher behavior, was both a source of stress and a potential site of its reduction.

In particular, the study also highlighted an array of student coping mechanisms, ranging from cognitive reappraisal through peer support to increased preparation. These offer promising intervention avenues.

7. Recommendations

Based on the study, the following are suggested to language program administrators, curriculum planners, and teachers:

1. **Create Low-Anxiety Learning Environments:** Teachers can create a supportive and non-threatening classroom by encouraging risk-taking, offering constructive feedback, and minimizing public error correction. Pair and group work can relieve pressure and promote communicative confidence through interaction with others.
2. **Incorporate Affective Strategy Training:** Language classes can teach students explicitly how to manage anxiety, like relaxation, positive self-talk, and visualization. Strategy instruction can be incorporated in the curriculum that can enable students to control their emotional responses.
3. **Facilitate Positive Early Experiences:** With the power of earlier learning experience, there should be an early introduction of communicative English in a warm and interactive environment. Oral fluency and building confidence should have higher priority over the teaching of grammar in courses meant for young learners.
4. **Meet Gender-Specific Needs:** Considering the slightly higher anxiety level among female students, instructors can be attuned to this aspect and look at strategies that facilitate equal participation and ease, such as optional statuses for public tasks or multiple-choice formats in testing.
5. **Use Reflective and Peer-Based Strategies:** These exercises can help students become more aware of their anxiety triggers and monitor their progress over time. Peer mentoring can also provide emotional and academic guidance.
6. **Train Teachers in Affective Pedagogy:** Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs need to include modules that address affective dimensions of language learning, equipping teachers with the competencies to recognize, comprehend, and respond to student anxiety effectively.

By acknowledging and moving towards the affective dimension of language learning, particularly speech, educators can bring about more inclusive and effective classrooms in which students feel safe, motivated, and open to participating. Reducing anxiety is not merely about promoting greater comfort—it's about unlocking communicative potential and revealing doors to genuine language use.

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