**Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)**
**2022, Volume 7, Issue 10, e001863**
**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i10.1863

# An Overview on Speaking Anxiety in Foreign Language Classroom: Level of Speaking Anxiety, Gender, and Factors

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**KEYWORDS:**
Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety
Speaking Skills
Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety
Speaking Anxiety

**CITATION:**
Fariz Azzuan Amat Suparia et al. (2022). xxxxxxxxxxxxx. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 7*(10), e001863. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i10.1863

## ABSTRACT

Language anxiety has become a prevalent problem for students of foreign languages as a second language, and extensive study is being conducted to investigate the association between language anxiety and speaking skills. Students in foreign language classes experienced fear and anxiety as a result of tasks involving speaking abilities. Numerous research investigations have been conducted in order to establish a link between language anxiety and speaking skills and to gain broad conceptions regarding foreign language speaking anxiety. The purpose of this study is to conceptualise speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom. This study also looked at the prevalence of speaking anxiety among students, its relationship with gender, and the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety. It is found that foreign language anxiety is highly related to speaking skills, as foreign language students are apprehensive and fearful of communicating with others in foreign language sessions. This study also presents suggestions and recommendations for further research.

**Contribution/Originality:** This paper explores the topic of foreign language speaking anxiety. Furthermore, this study adds to the current literature on issues associated to speaking anxiety, providing scholars, academics, and teachers with more insight, knowledge, and explanation.

## 1. Introduction

Generally, language has four primary skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and foreign language students must acquire all the skills to master this language well. All

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skills play an essential role in developing students' language competence, and speaking skill is one of the most critical language skills in learning a foreign language, as students need to utilize it in academic activities and assignments such as class presentations, discussions, and interaction with teachers and friends (Khalil As'ad Mansi, 2016).

However, some students encounter problems related to foreign language classes, one of which is foreign language anxiety. Students develop language anxiety in a foreign language class, especially when they are in situations that require them to speak in the target language. Hence, symptoms of language anxiety appear in students that hinder them from practising speaking skills and make it difficult for them to develop their language performance effectively (Salih, 2016).

In this sense, the researchers aim to conceptualize speaking anxiety in foreign language classrooms as many studies and research have not discussed speaking anxiety in depth and to provide an overview of speaking anxiety. The researchers relies on previous thesis, articles, and journals related to the present research to obtain related information, materials, and findings.

This research is divided into three sections, and the researchers begin by roughly explaining the definition of foreign language classroom anxiety in general and speaking skills. In the last section, the researchers clarify the concept of speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom in detail, including students' level of speaking anxiety, its relationship with gender, and factors that influence speaking anxiety among students.

## 2. Foreign language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)

The emergence of an awareness of language anxiety among researchers and teachers started then, and they used the term "language shock" to refer to the feeling of anxiety among students in foreign language classes. In the mid-sixties, many researchers studied. The relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning and the term "language anxiety" is used to express this issue (Stephenson Wilson, 2016).

In general, according to the psychology dictionary, anxiety is "a general feeling of dread and fear of an upcoming disaster that is about to occur, and anxiety, in general, is a response to an unspecified threat, often emanating from unconscious conflicts, feelings of insecurity, and forbidden instinctive conflicts emanating from within the soul, and in both cases, the body mobilizes its capabilities (Al-Jashami & Al-Jashami, 2012).

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a complex of perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours associated with language learning in foreign language classrooms. MacIntyre et al. (1998) specified foreign language anxiety with fear or apprehension that the students have of what happens when learning a foreign language.

In another reference, Young (1990) defined language anxiety as a type of anxiety associated primarily with contexts of learning a language other than the mother tongue. Language anxiety is also defined as the unease, tension, nervousness, and dread experienced by non-native speakers or those who use a second or foreign language.

Language anxiety has three main components identified by Horwitz et al. (1986), and Occhipinti (2009): communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

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i. Communication apprehension is the state in which a person falls into a fear of communicating with others, defined as a state of distancing from social interaction. This situation may appear when a person speaks in a group, in front of an audience, or accepts verbal messages from another person. That person tends to face difficulties in speaking in foreign language classes. In some cases, the talkative person in his mother tongue feels shy and afraid to speak a foreign language. Foreign language learners think they do not master that language well, especially grammar and vocabulary (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018). Then, they tend to sit at the back of the classroom to avoid participating in verbal activities.
ii. Fear of negative evaluation is when the person feels fear of evaluation by others, fear of negative evaluation, distancing from evaluation situations, and expectations of negative evaluation (Watson et al., 1969). The fear of negative evaluation is broader than exam anxiety because it relates to social interaction and the evaluative context, such as a job interview and public speaking. In addition, students shy away from initiating the dialogue and do not contribute much to it. In a foreign language learning classroom, students participate in educational activities in the classroom to a lesser extent because they do not want to expose themselves to negative evaluation, such as volunteering to answer questions in class or speaking an opinion.
iii. Test anxiety is a type of anxiety that stems from a feeling of fear of failure, and the person feels fear as a result of poor performance in the evaluation situation; because of this feeling, students set unrealistic expectations for their performance, and they are not satisfied with any score less than a full score, and this situation leads to continuous pressure and severe anxiety in themselves. For foreign language learners, exam anxiety affects the performance of their tasks because they focus the feeling of fear on their performance a lot instead of making an effort to complete their tasks (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018).

## 3. Speaking skills

The definition of speaking is the speech by which the speaker expresses what is in himself, his obsession, his thoughts, his mind, his opinion and his thought (Sufya et al., 2019). In addition, speech productivity requires the learner to produce sounds accurately and master grammatical rules and word order in terms of helping students express themselves in speaking situations (Masruroh, 2020).

Speaking is one of the four primary language skills, and it is the art of transmitting ideas, opinions, information, knowledge, feelings, and experiences from the sender to another party who is the listener, receiver, or addressee in achieving acceptance, understanding, interaction and response (Masruroh, 2020).

One of the importance of speaking skills, as explained by Elyan (2010), is that speaking is a human activity carried out by the individual to provide him with more opportunities to deal with life and express his necessary needs. It is a means of persuasion and understanding between the speaker and the receiver in discussing the presented issues and the personal and public problems in conflict situations. In addition, speaking is a

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prominent approach in teaching and learning at different stages, and the teacher cannot dispense with it in any of the materials for explanation and clarification.

## 4. Foreign language speaking anxiety

### 4.1. Concept of foreign language speaking anxiety

In this research, the researchers did not find the concept of language anxiety in the skill of speaking as a fixed concept, but it is related to one of the components of language anxiety, which is communication anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined communication anxiety as a kind of shyness with a feeling of anxiety and fear of communicating with others. The student's anxiety level is related to the process of communication that he makes, whether it is accurate or expected with one or more individuals, because there is a relationship between language anxiety and speaking skills with complex psychological structures such as communication anxiety, self-confidence, and social anxiety. Then language anxiety affects the performance of speaking skills among foreign language students (Young, 1990).

Moreover, many researchers confirmed that speaking skill is more intriguing in anxiety than other language skills such as listening, reading, and writing, thus they focus on deducing the relationship between anxiety and the performance of the speaking skill (Akkakoson & Mongkut, 2016).

Loyarte (2015), in his research on the impact of language anxiety on the performance of the speaking skill, and the results indicated that language anxiety affects the performance of the speaking skill significantly negatively. MacIntyre et al. (1998) added that verbal activities require students to expose their language incompetence in front of their classmates. Nowadays, lesson syllabuses are prepared with many verbal activities in foreign language classes, making students feel anxious performing activities. Many instructors and teachers agree that language anxiety appears in students' speaking skills in the context of foreign language learning. Akkakoson and Mongkut (2016) explained that students experience language anxiety when they are asked to speak without preparing in advance in academic discussions, discourses, role-playing, and giving meaning to specific words and vocabulary.

From this previous information, it is noteworthy mentioning that foreign language anxiety effect students' speaking skills as various research indicated that they feel afraid of communicating with others, especially participating in verbal activities, and they tend to show some symptoms related to speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

### 4.2. Level of speaking anxiety in foreign language

Many studies tried to find out students' level of foreign language classroom anxiety. Zulfikar (2022) researched investigating High-school EFL learners' foreign language anxiety involving 34 students from 12th grade. Foreign language speaking anxiety scales were used to determine the level of speaking anxiety, and the result showed a moderate level of speaking anxiety. The majority of students experience an average level of anxiety, where 10 of them feel anxious, and 20 other students have mild anxiety in the foreign language classroom. The students opinionated that the most anxiety-inciting situation is when they are asked to speak in front of the class using a foreign language. It is even

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worse when they are unprepared with their presentation and starts to fear being evaluated negatively.

Badrasawi et al. (2020) also conducted research aimed to examine the level of speaking anxiety in a second language in schoolteachers that enrolled in master's degrees at International Islamic University Malaysia. The findings indicate that the respondents have no speaking anxiety at high levels. However, most of them are uncomfortable using English to express themselves in the classroom caused of scared of being evaluated negatively and worried about making mistakes while speaking in a foreign language.

The study conducted by Toubot and Seng (2018) examining levels and factors of speaking anxiety among EFL Libyan English undergraduate students found that their level of speaking anxiety is moderate to high. It also found that they experience high speaking anxiety when they need to involve in speaking activities without proper preparation as they are afraid of making mistakes in a foreign language.

The study done by Djafri and Wimbarti (2018) examines foreign language anxiety in different languages among Indonesian undergraduate students, including English, French, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic. The results revealed that Japanese learners have the highest score in level anxiety, followed by Arabic, French and Korean. Meanwhile, English learners were found to be the least who experience foreign language anxiety. It can be explained by the level of difficulty in the Japanese language that learners must go through, starting from beginner, intermediate, and advanced. In the beginner levels, students are required to learn three different Japanese characters, and the feeling of pressure and anxiety among learners is intriguing. On the contrary, English has a lower score in language anxiety because learners have experience in learning English from school and are familiar with the language. The study also divided these languages into Latin language groups and non-Latin language groups. It is found that there is a significant difference between Latin and non-Latin language groups in terms of foreign language anxiety, in which non-Latin learners have higher anxiety levels than Latin learners.

In the context of the Arabic language, Salih and Hussain (2017) researched the level of language anxiety among students in Arabic as a foreign language. The number of participants in this research was 120 male and female students. A foreign language classroom anxiety questionnaire was distributed to the students, and then the analysis was carried out using the SPSS program. The results showed that the level of language anxiety among students, in general, was moderate. This result is in line with the research done by Masruroh (2020**)** and Sufya Masrurah et al. (2019), where the level of anxiety in Arabic classes among students is moderate.

Jee (2019) investigated the level of foreign language anxiety among students of Korean as a foreign language, and the findings showed that students have moderate language anxiety. Among four primary language skills, students experience higher speaking anxiety levels in the classroom. It is also found that students tend to feel more anxious and stressed in productive skills activities rather than in receptive skills. Another research by Jee (2012) focused on the effects of language anxiety on three levels of Korean classes as a foreign language. It is found that students in the First-year Korean I class have lower anxiety levels compared to the second-year Korean II and the accelerated First-year Korean class. It is likely because activities and assignments

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performed in this class were easy since it is only for the beginner, and the students might not feel any difficulties completing the tasks in class.

Regarding the studies above, it can conclude that the level of foreign language classroom anxiety and speaking anxiety among students are relatively moderate even though it is presented in different languages. Therefore, it shows that anxiety is not an unusual phenomenon that occurs in a foreign language and is inevitable in the context of a foreign language classroom.

### 4.3. Gender in speaking anxiety

Many studies tried to differentiate the level of anxiety between gender and to determine which gender have high and low anxiety, male or female. Tercan and Dikilitas (2015) researched EFL students' speaking anxiety, and one of the objectives was to determine the effect of speaking anxiety on gender. The foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) scale was used on 159 students. The results indicate those female students have higher anxiety levels than male students in terms of speaking skills. The study also explained that cultural, pedagogical, or social factors might influence the result. The teacher suggested encouraging female students to be more active and create less threatening situations in speaking activities.

This finding was also found by Çağatay (2015) on 147 Turkish students after they responded to foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). Female students are highly anxious about speaking a foreign language than male students. It is believed that culture affects female students' level of speaking anxiety. Culturally, females are not encouraged to confidently express their opinion and view on specific issues in a social context. It is also found that male students possibly have a more facilitating situation in speaking anxiety. Generally, foreign language students are more anxious when communicating with a native speaker than their classmates.

Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) also agreed that culture plays a vital role in emerging speaking anxiety in foreign language students, and it is found that Taiwanese female students are more anxious than male students in speaking activities. It is derived from female students' fear of negative evaluation at a higher level, and it is knowingly to be the cultural characteristic of Taiwanese society.

Karatas et al. (2016) investigated university students' foreign language speaking anxiety and aimed to discover the significant difference between gender. It is concluded that speaking anxiety affects gender, and female university students were more anxious than male students. It can be explained that female students tend to be more competitive then feel pressure and stress at the thought of fulfilling their achievements.

Contradicted with previous studies, Abrar (2017) investigated Indonesian EFL university students' speaking anxiety to find out speaking anxiety in terms of gender. The data showed that female students have less anxiety experience than male students in speaking skills. In this context, female students to believe are more motivated than male students to learn a second language.

Another research by Mahmoodzadeh (2012) on investigating foreign language speaking anxiety within the EFL learners' interlanguage system. The results also found that male

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students tend to be more anxious in speaking anxiety concerning their interlanguage grammar.

There are also many studies focused on exploring gender differences in speaking anxiety, and one of them is research done by Fauziah et al. (2022) on 43 students of English as a foreign language. It is found that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of their level of speaking anxiety, even though female students feel more anxious in performing speaking activities in foreign language classrooms compared to male students. These results are also supported by research from Gaibani and Elmenfi (2014), which found no significant impact on public speaking anxiety between male and female students. It is explained in the research that this result might be associated with the abnormal distribution of the number presented by male and female students in the study.

Meanwhile, Hwa and Jaya (2014) found the opposite in her study about the impact of gender on speaking anxiety among Malaysian tertiary ESL learners. The result indicates a significant difference between male and female students in the context of speaking anxiety, even though both genders have a moderate level of speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom. These results are in line with a study done by Mohtasham and Farnia (2017), where it is found that there are statistically significant differences between male and female students' anxiety in speaking skills. Female students are reported to be more anxious in speaking courses compared to males.

### 4.4. Factors of speaking anxiety

It is proven that many foreign language students have speaking anxiety, and multiple studies have discussed factors of speaking anxiety towards students. One is from Damayanti et al. (2020) on an analysis of students' speaking anxiety in academic speaking class. This research aimed to determine the factors contributing to the emergence of speaking anxiety in English language education program students in Indonesia. The results conclude that there are three main factors of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. It is noticeable that these three main factors originated from the components of foreign language classroom anxiety in the general context. For communication apprehension, students tend to feel that they do not have the ability and have less confidence in speaking of foreign language. They also agreed that speaking in a foreign language class makes them more nervous compared to other academic classes.

In terms of test anxiety, students will panic to speak a foreign language without proper preparation to the extent that they will be blank and cannot think clearly. They also think teachers are always ready to correct their language during speaking activities. Another factor discussed in this research is fear of negative evaluation. Students always think that their friends will mock and laugh at them when they make mistakes in speaking a foreign language. They also underestimate their ability and look at themselves as lower than their classmate in foreign language classrooms.

Mulyono et al. (2019) investigated the factors contributing to EFL students' speaking anxiety and divided it into three main factors: language barriers, negative attitudes, and intercultural communication. For language barriers, it is identified that poor grammar, lack of vocabulary and pronunciation and interlocutors' language deficiency are the reason for emerging speaking anxiety in students in the foreign language classroom. In

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addition, there is infrequent contact among English speakers among students, and they tend to avoid using English. Hence, they cannot practice and communicate in English with their friends. It is revealed that negative attitudes contribute to the emergence of speaking anxiety where students are afraid of making mistakes, shy, interlocutors' judgmental views and unwelcome attitudes. The results also showed that intercultural communication apprehension is one of the factors in speaking anxiety. Asian students tend to feel anxious when they speak English with native speakers, such as American and British, while they feel less anxious when conversing in English with other Asian such as Korean and Japanese, as they are not native speakers and English is their foreign language.

Factors of speaking anxiety in a foreign language classroom can be divided into five main factors: learner-self, teachers' attitude, Peer and classmate, classroom environment, and culture, according to research done by Han et al. (2016), Miskam and Saidalvi (2019), Sjaifullah (2019), Handayani et al. (2020), Mokhtar and Haron (2020), Yildiz (2021), Suparlan (2021) as follows:

i. Learner-self
Lack of foreign language proficiency, failing to recall correct lexical items and limited vocabulary, feeling uncertain in pronunciation and accent of foreign language, lack of interest in the lesson and they think that foreign language class is unnecessary, low self-esteem, learners' belief about language learning where they put high expectation in a foreign language such as speak like a native without accent, and learners do not have proper preparation for speaking presentation and activities.

ii. Teachers
A teacher is one of the factors of language anxiety, as his actions and behaviour contribute to language anxiety among students. For example, students feel fear when the teacher focuses too much on grammar and the language system and when the teacher expects their performance in language skills to be higher than their actual performance. Teacher's nationality also contributes to speaking anxiety, in which students feel more anxious knowing that the teacher is a native speaker of a foreign language. In addition, teacher's punishment makes students avoid speaking a foreign language in the classroom.

iii. Peer and classmate
Students feel anxious when they need to speak in front of their classmates and worry that they will make mistakes in a foreign language. Furthermore, students feel negative about their friends' opinions and views of their speaking ability.

iv. Classroom environment
The educational environment causes students to feel language anxiety in the teaching and learning process, and it is because students feel insecurity and inconvenience in the foreign language classroom. Besides that, a competitive environment in class between students and their classmates also contributes to speaking anxiety among students.

v. Culture
Due to different cultures, students sometimes have a problem understanding the gesture and body language used in foreign languages, thus making them hard to interact and communicate with their teacher in the classroom. It is also

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noted that unfamiliar culture makes students feel anxious in the foreign language classroom.

## 5. Conclusion

From these previous studies, it can be concluded that there is no solid definition of foreign language speaking anxiety that explains the concept of it in depth and detail. However, there is a strong relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) in general with speaking skills as one of the main components of FLCA named communication apprehension fits the criteria and understanding of speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

It is found that most foreign language students encounter foreign language classroom anxiety, mainly speaking anxiety. The level of speaking anxiety among students was moderate even though it is conducted in various languages such as English, Arabic, French, German, Japanese, and Korean.

This present study discussed the relationship between speaking anxiety and gender. The results indicated that female students are more likely to have high-level anxiety than male students. Many research investigates whether there are significant differences between male and female students in speaking anxiety, it is found that some studies found a significant difference between these gender in speaking while other research found the opposite. It can be explained by many reasons, such as the distribution of tests conducted for male and female students.

Factors of speaking anxiety have been discussed, and some research explained the factors regarding the components of FLCA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Furthermore, to get more insight into this point, the researchers divided it into five main factors, learner-self, teacher's factors, Peer and classmates, class environment, and culture.

Throughout this research, it is found that foreign language speaking anxiety is much related to culture. in terms of gender, female students tend to be more anxious than their opposite gender in the foreign language classroom can be associated with the norm of their culture that women are not encouraged to express their opinion and thoughts publicly. Therefore, it influences the behaviour of female students in the foreign language classroom, and they are not interested in involving themselves in conversation and oral activities.

Interestingly, the classroom environment plays a vital role in determining speaking anxiety among students. Many students feel insecure and inconvenienced being in a foreign language classroom, which is related to the classroom condition and diversity of students. It is suggested that teachers should create a welcoming and convenient environment in a foreign language class and allow students to be more expressive and build good relationships with them without putting any judgement and giving punishments.

In future research, a discussion on the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety, particularly speaking anxiety, and culture should be conducted. It is crucial to get more insight into this relationship because it can help teachers and students from

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various cultures find a solution and overcome language anxiety in foreign language classrooms.

**Acknowledgement**

We would like to show our appreciation to everyone directly or indirectly involved in this research.

**Funding**

This study received no funding.

**Conflict of Interests**

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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