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RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Fear to Fluency: Exploring English Speaking Anxiety and Communication Willingness in UKM Undergraduates

Amirul Aiman Mohd Yusuf Bahadur[1], Fuzirah Hashim[2*]

[1]Pusat Penyiaran Asia Astro, Taman Teknologi Malaysia, 57000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Email: theamirulaiman@gmail.com
[2]Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.
Email: fuzy@ukm.edu.my

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (*):
Fuzirah Hashim
(fuzy@ukm.edu.my)

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ABSTRACT

This research study explores Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) levels among undergraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Employing a quantitative methodology, the study aims to comprehensively understand these phenomena. The research sample comprises 102 participants from various academic disciplines at UKM. The primary objectives include evaluating SLSA and WTC levels and investigating their interconnections. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) measures SLSA, while the WTC Scale assesses participants' WTC in English. Results indicate a high level of SLSA and a moderate level of WTC in English among students, with a strong negative correlation between the two constructs. These findings significantly contribute to the existing knowledge in second language acquisition. Future research should consider larger sample sizes for enhanced reliability and generalizability. Additionally, longitudinal studies can capture temporal patterns and trajectories of SLSA and WTC over time.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to positive social change by offering students a renewed perspective on factors influencing their readiness for English oral communication, promoting organizational improvements within universities, and fostering the development of proficient, motivated English learners to enhance societal human capital.

1. Introduction

The significance of English as a global language cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of international interactions where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds converge. Therefore, effective communication in English is essential for facilitating intercultural exchanges and promoting mutual understanding among individuals from different countries. Effective communication relies on clear and precise language to convey messages accurately and foster understanding between individuals. Clear and

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precise language involves using words and phrases that are specific and unambiguous, eliminating any possibility of misunderstanding or ambiguity. The acquisition of language skills is a crucial aspect of the learning process for individuals and in order to achieve proficiency, learners must possess a comprehensive understanding of all language modalities, including oral and written communication.

Numerous investigations in the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) or Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) have underscored that many language learners face intrapersonal obstacles. The present discourse concerns the topic of anxiety, which has been identified as a significant psychological phenomenon. The detrimental impact of anxiety on the academic performance of students learning a Foreign Language (FL) or Second Language (L2) has been extensively documented in various studies (Horwitz et al. 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1994). Thus, it is the interest of this study to investigate the impact of Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA) on an individual's Willingness to Communicate (WTC) as well as the impact of the increasing prevalence of SLSA within the academic community on the linguistic proficiency of non-native language learners. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature, this research has aimed to shed light on students' communicative competencies in the context of SLSA and provide insights into this approach's potential benefits and drawbacks. The study's results have the potential to significantly impact language instructors and learners, who are both tasked with navigating the complex terrain of acquiring language in social contexts.

Communicating effectively orally is crucial in diverse settings, as evidenced by scholarly work such as Al-Alawneh et al. (2019). The ability to communicate effectively through oral means is a crucial aspect of fostering literacy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning skills, as demonstrated by the research conducted by Hindeme and Iwikotan (2022). This is supported by Crosling and Ward (2000) who mentioned that the importance of effective oral communication skills for undergraduate students to achieve success in their academic pursuits and future professional endeavours has been discussed in educational curricula and policy. The capacity of undergraduates to excel in their academic pursuits is also contingent upon their aptitude to verbally articulate their thoughts and ideas, as posited by Crosling and Ward (2000). However, developing proficient oral communication skills is a complex and challenging task for those aiming to improve their speaking abilities, as highlighted by Aziz and Kashinathan (2021). In addition, previous literature has established that apprehension plays a crucial role in shaping one's oral communication abilities (Amiri & Puteh, 2018).

In Malaysia, even though the students have undergone eleven years of formal education in English language acquisition, a significant language barrier persists, impeding their ability to engage in fluent English conversation. The lack of enthusiasm among students could be attributed to their inadequate level of proficiency, as suggested by Dörnyei (2020). The latest TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) policies in Malaysia highlight ongoing concerns about English proficiency among graduates, noting that a lack of language skills is a significant barrier to employability. Many Malaysian employers find that graduates in general struggle with effective communication in English, which limits their competitiveness in the job market. This proficiency gap has made graduates less appealing to employers, who increasingly prioritize candidates with strong language skills, particularly for roles requiring interaction with foreign clients and partners (Business Today, 2024).

As noted by Hui and Melur Md Yunus (2021), there is a growing apprehension among ESL

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instructors regarding the effectiveness of their students' English communication skills. This study seeks to explore this issue in greater detail and provide insights into the challenges ESL students face in communicating effectively in English. The present observation suggests that students' lack of English-speaking proficiency may be attributed to the common practice of conversing in one's native language during classroom interactions. The study by Hui and Melur Md Yunus (2021), in line with the findings of Abdullah, et al. (2021) highlights the challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in achieving fluency and accuracy in their English-language communication skills. Moreover, a study conducted by Lin et al. (2019) revealed that the speaking skills of university students in Malaysia are not up to the mark. Given that the present investigation is centred on undergraduates at UKM, the outcomes of their research hold significance for the current study.

1.1. Research Objectives

Given the above, the present study aims to investigate the concerns raised by English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors regarding the communication proficiency of their students in English. Specifically, the objectives are to investigate English-speaking anxiety (FLSA) and willingness to communicate (WTC) among UKM undergraduates. Additionally, it seeks to examine the correlation between students' speaking anxiety and their WTC in English.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Concept of Speaking

This section will provide a comprehensive overview of the fundamental aspects of verbal communication, including its definition, constituent elements, and distinguishing features. It shall delve into the crucial constituents that enhance the efficacy of oral communication. Throughout the history of linguistic theory, scholars have put forth a multitude of interpretations regarding the meaning of the verb 'speaking'. These various definitions have been shaped by a range of factors, including the cultural and historical contexts in which they were developed, as well as the theoretical frameworks and linguistic paradigms that informed them.

Despite the diversity of these perspectives, they all share a common goal; to reveal human communication's complex and multifaceted nature through the lens of the verb 'speaking'. The attainment of fluency in speaking is a complex process encompassing not only the mastery of linguistic components but also the ability to engage in spontaneous information and language processing. As Harmer (2001) suggests, the latter aspect is crucial in achieving fluency in speaking. The attainment of fluency is a crucial factor in the successful execution of interpersonal communication. It is believed that the acquisition of speaking skills appears to be the most arduous task among all language abilities. Unlike reading or writing, speaking unfolds in real time, and the interlocutor is often eager to receive an immediate response.

However, the attainment of success as a public speaker is not solely predicated upon the ability to communicate efficiently. This is deduced from the seminal work of McDonough and Mackey (2000) who argue that speaking is a complex and multifaceted skill that extends beyond the mere verbalization of written language. Instead, it involves a diverse set of sub-competencies that must be developed in learners to facilitate fluent speech

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production. The orator must comprehensively comprehend the various traits and components that constitute speech. This significance of language qualities in effective communication has been highlighted by Hermer et al. (2001) who emphasised the importance of certain language qualities that are essential for a good communicator, such as; having connected speech, using expressive devices, proficient in language structure and word usage, and ability to negotiate language.

2.2. The Importance of English-Speaking Competence

The acquisition and development of English language speaking proficiency is a crucial responsibility that lies primarily with the students themselves. This is due to the fact that a considerable number of students acknowledge the significance of English language speaking proficiency for their career prospects. As a result, they are motivated to acquire and enhance their English language skills (Rochecouste et al., 2010). The rationale behind this assertion is grounded in the observation that numerous major corporations mandate the possession of exceptional verbal communication abilities among their employees. The notion that developing one's English-speaking abilities holds more significance than acquiring a university degree is a belief held by a subset of students. This belief is grounded in the idea that such progress directly contributes to one's overall value, as argued by Marginson (2011). This is further supported by Andrade (2006) who believes that the development of students' ability to communicate effectively in spoken English is an essential component of students' overall competency, as well as a precondition for achieving success in both their academic and social life (Andrade, 2006; Marginson, 2011). Many EFL and ESL programs place less emphasis on developing strong oral communication skills, a tendency that Klimoviene et al. (2016) attribute to language modules and syllabi that inadequately encourage fluency or motivate students to improve their speaking abilities in the target language.

2.3. The Barriers to English-Speaking Competence

The phenomenon of SLSA in speaking performance has been the subject of numerous studies. A study conducted by Rumiyati and Septika (2018) demonstrated that EFL students exhibit a general tendency towards anxiety when it comes to speaking the language. A more recent study conducted by Jaya et al. (2022) found that anxiety is a prevalent issue among English students. Meanwhile, Fernandez-Garcia and Fonseca-Mora (2022) and Arfan et al. (2019) advocated the view that there is a significant correlation between WTC and students' speaking proficiency.

2.3.1. Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA)

The phenomenon of SLSA is a psychological state that arises in individuals who undertake the acquisition of a language that is not their native tongue. This condition is characterised by a range of physical and behavioural manifestations that accompany the learning process. The role of students' self-perceptions of their abilities, prior experiences (especially in other languages), and other factors in anxiety have been highlighted by Spolsky (1998). Richards and Schmidt (2002) further defined the concept of anxiety in language learning as a phenomenon that encompasses the experience of apprehension and worry among individuals as they engage in the process of language acquisition and use. This definition seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of anxiety in the context of language learning. The phenomenon of SLSA, akin to the anxiety experienced during public speaking, may be contingent upon the specific situation it encounters. The

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study of anxiety in language learning is a complex and multifaceted area of research, with one key issue being whether anxiety is a cause or a result of poor performance in language learning. Additionally, scholars have investigated anxiety in specific instructional situations, such as language testing or speaking in front of others as well as the relationship between general language anxiety and more specific types of anxiety related to speaking, reading, or taking tests.

The impact of anxiety on the acquisition and application of L2 by learners has been studied by Gardner (1985). The study's findings suggest that anxiety negatively affects the performance of learners in this context. Specifically, the study examines how students' attention is shifted away from the main topic and toward their own abilities or limitations in dealing with the given classroom situation. The investigation of anxiety in the context of language learning poses a significant challenge due to the fact that it may not necessarily impede the development of L2 proficiency. The study also highlighted that anxiety may have a negative effect on the quality of students' verbal output.

a. Sources of Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA)

Horwitz (1986), delineates the three distinct forms of anxiety that students commonly encounter while acquiring foreign language; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The study investigates the phenomenon of communication apprehension experienced by students in speaking classes. Specifically, the study focuses on the inability of students to engage in speaking activities such as discussions, questioning, and responding, which leads to communication apprehension. Earlier, Watson and Friend (1969), provided a definition of fear of negative evaluation as a state of being worried about how others perceive oneself, experiencing discomfort in response to negative evaluations, and anticipating that others will judge oneself unfavourably. Test anxiety refers to the apprehension or unease experienced by individuals regarding their performance on an examination. The study investigates the potential existence of fear of failure and memory deficits among undergraduate students. A more recent study conducted by Karunanayake (2022) has shed light on the sources of SLSA from the perspective of instructors. The aim of this study was to investigate the psychological factors that contribute to public speaking anxiety, as perceived by lecturers. The findings suggest that speaking fears may be linked to a range of factors, including low self-confidence, poor self-esteem, a fear of failure, a fear of negative evaluation, a desire for perfection and accuracy, and negative past experiences.

2.3.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The concept of WTC was introduced by McCroskey (1992) in 1992. It refers to an individual's decision to engage or avoid communication in specific situations, assuming that they have the freedom to choose whether or not to communicate (McCroskey, 1992). The significance of language learning is particularly noteworthy in this domain. Numerous scholars have put forth and verified the notion that language learners who possess a strong inclination toward communication will proactively pursue chances to participate in communicative activities, thereby enhancing their communicative proficiency and attaining superior learning results (Bećirović et al., 2021).

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b. Second Language (L2) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The notion that L2 WTC is a simple reflection of L1 WTC has been challenged by MacIntyre et al. (1998). Their research suggests that the relationship between WTC in L1 and L2 is far from straightforward. The definition of L1 WTC at the trait level does not apply to L2 WTC. This is because the former is defined as the willingness to converse with a particular person or group using the first language, whereas the latter involves the use of a second language. Kang's (2005) research posits that L2 WTC is a complex phenomenon that involves an individual's active participation in communicative acts within specific settings. This participation is subject to variation based on factors such as the interlocutor(s), topic, conversational context, and other situational aspects. The potential reasons for the differences between L1 and L2 WTC can be attributed to the intricate interplay of multiple factors beyond L1 WTC. As such, it is imperative to consider a broader range of variables that may impact L2 WTC in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

c. Variables Influencing WTC

A recent study by Kahrimanović (2021) delves into the sociological and psychological factors that are believed to influence an individual's reluctance to engage in communication. These factors include communication apprehension and low self-esteem. By examining these variables, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the underlying causes of communication reluctance and provide insights into potential strategies for addressing this issue.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

2.4.1. Second/Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) established the concept of FLSA based on the outcomes of 225 foreign language students who had voluntarily joined various language support groups because of their problems studying an L2. The students expressed nervousness about connecting with others, taking tests, and being judged. Communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of a negative evaluation were the three main themes that emerged from this research. Communication apprehension is the feeling of fear that one has when interacting with others, whether it is actual or anticipated (McCroskey, 1982). Studies show that 15% and 20% of American college students are afflicted by communication apprehension, preventing them from fully participating in activities and completing their tasks (McCroskey, 1977). Test anxiety is the fear of failure that one feels in the lead-up to and during exams (Zeidner, 1998). People who are suffering from test anxiety, as described by Sarason and Sarason (1990), are more likely to view assignments as stressful and challenging, to believe that they are incapable of handling the work at hand, of dwelling on the negative consequences of their own perceived inadequacy, to engage in task- relevant cognitive activity and to anticipate and accept failure. Lastly, fear of negative evaluation is worry and anxiety about how others will perceive you based on their opinions and the belief that people will view you adversely if they do (Watson & Friend, 1969). Test anxiety is only one aspect of fear of negative evaluation. Instead, fear of negative evaluation covers circumstances such as interacting with classmates. When it comes to fear of negative external evaluation, they worry about what other people think of them, even though they know it does not matter and that others will notice their flaws and disapprove of them or create judgements about them (Leary, 1983). FLCAS, a survey

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developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), is frequently used to account for the levels of FLSA or SLSA in these areas. FLSA is measured using a 33- question, 5-point Likert scale self-assessment questionnaire that language learners complete.

2.4.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

McCroskey and Baer (1985) clarify that WTC is ready to use L2 to talk to a person or people at a given time. The concept of WTC, pertains to the psychological state of an individual's inclination to engage in communicative behaviour, regardless of whether or not the actual act of communication takes place. The subsequent parameters within the theory are considered to be representative of the possible reasons someone would be willing to communicate in a certain context. Their study explores the potential relationship between students' comprehension of a question in their L2 and their subsequent confidence in their linguistic ability to provide a correct response. Drawing on existing literature in the field (Ellis 2012), this investigation also considers the role of motivation and comfort in influencing a student's willingness to engage with the question and provide a response.

The notion of WTC (as argued by MacIntyre et al. 1998) suggests a behavioural intention or a person's desire to speak, if the opportunity arises. The study is grounded in the seminal work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), which posits that the intention to engage in communication must be conjoined with a concrete behavioural opportunity. The study also draws on Ajzen's (2005) theoretical framework to investigate the potential limitations of a person's behavioural intention to engage in a communicative act with another individual in the context of L2 exchanges. Specifically, the study explores the circumstances that may hinder the realisation of a person's intention to engage in a communicative exchange in an L2 setting. The assertion made by Gabrys-Barker and Bielska (2013) suggests that an individual's WTC in their L1 may not necessarily translate to their willingness to communicate in their L2. However, it is important to note that situational contexts can significantly impact an individual's communicative behaviour.

3. Research Methods

The study uses a quantitative and descriptive approach to investigate English-speaking anxiety (FLSA) and willingness to communicate (WTC) among UKM undergraduates. Data was collected via Google Form questionnaires, including two established scales: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and the WTC Scale developed by McCroskey (1992). FLCAS assesses anxiety levels related to negative expectations, social evaluations, and physical/psychological symptoms, while the WTC Scale measures the propensity to initiate communication. The study employed convenience sampling to select participants, as the researcher was concurrently a student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. A cohort of 102 students was involved in the study. The research aims to explore the utilisation of convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling technique. According to Fowler (2018), convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily accessible to the researcher. This method is widely used in research due to its simplicity and cost-effectiveness. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 27, where levels of anxiety and WTC were measured, and Pearson's correlation was applied to explore the relationship between these variables. Key steps in data collection included giving instructions to students, collecting and anonymizing responses, and following structured analysis protocols to ensure accuracy. The research highlights the reliability and validity of the instruments used. During the research process, ethical

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considerations may arise. To obtain clearance to collect data from participants affiliated with UKM, the researcher needed to submit a proposal to the Vice Chancellor, the primary gatekeeper. The researcher believed that UKM would have a significant interest in the study's outcome.

4. Results

4.1. Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA) Level

The first research question pertains to the speaking anxiety level of undergraduate students of UKM. This study has sought to examine the levels of anxiety experienced by participants through the administration of the FLCAS. The measurement instrument employed in this study utilises a Likert-type scale, encompassing a range of responses from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The study involved the analysis of data through the process of summing the total scores of the respondents and subsequently calculating the mean score. Its findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Second Language Speaking Anxiety

Valid N	**102**
Missing N	0
Mean	81.019
Minimum	44.00
Maximum	111.00

Table 1 refers to the level of second language speaking anxiety among participants of the study. The study has utilised a sample size of 102, denoted as the valid N, signifying that the data under investigation has been meticulously gathered from 102 distinct individuals. The absence of missing values within the dataset indicates that the data lacks any incomplete or absent information, thereby rendering it suitable for comprehensive analysis and subsequent interpretation.

The empirical findings of this study indicate that the average level of speaking anxiety among participants is 81.019, a value that can be considered relatively high within the context of anxiety scores. The observation posits that the participants within the selected sample exhibit a discernible degree of anxiety, ranging from moderate to high while engaging in L2 communication. The observed minimum score of 44.00 within the sample population indicates an evident presence of individuals who exhibit a comparatively reduced degree of anxiety while engaging in L2 speech. In contrast, it is noteworthy that the uppermost attainable score within the given context amounts to 111.00. This numerical value indicates that certain participants within the sample exhibit an exceedingly high degree of anxiety when engaging in oral communication in their L2. Above all, the empirical evidence indicates a considerable degree of apprehension when it comes to verbal communication in L2 among the participants included in the study.

4.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English

The second research question deals with the WTC of UKM undergraduate students. To facilitate the examination of their WTC in English, the study participants were requested to complete the WTC scale. The measurement instrument employed in this study utilises a Likert-type scale, consisting of a range from 0 (never) to 100 (always). Furthermore, this study also assesses the levels of WTC, contextual preferences, and receiver

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preferences among the participants. It has employed a quantitative research design to investigate the construct of WTC among participants. The mean score of WTC was measured and subsequently interpreted in light of the established WTC normal scores.

The provided statistical data encapsulates the manifestation of WTC in English as it pertains to various categories of communication. Table 2 exhibits the average scores of context-type sub-scores of WTC in English across four distinct categories: group discussion, meeting, interpersonal conversation, and public speaking. The findings reveal that the mean score attained in the group discussion category stands at an impressive 70.57, thereby establishing its supremacy over all other evaluated categories. This suggests that the individuals involved in the study exhibit a moderate inclination towards engaging in communication using their L2 within group discussions. The variable of interest, namely the mean score for interpersonal conversation, exhibits a noteworthy position in the hierarchy of scores. Specifically, it occupies the second-highest rank, with a numerical value of 64.53. This indicates that the individuals involved exhibit a moderate inclination towards engaging in L2 communication during interpersonal dialogues. As for the meeting category, the mean score is 51.69, indicating that it is the lowest among all the categories under consideration. The assertion suggests that the individuals involved exhibit a moderate WTC using their L2 during meetings. Next, the average score for public speaking, as measured by the sample mean, is 60.07. This value falls within the range of moderate scores, suggesting that the participants' performance in public speaking can be characterised as neither exceptionally high nor exceptionally low. The individuals involved in the research exhibit a moderate level of inclination to communicate using their L2 within the context of public speaking occasions.

Table 2: Context type sub-scores of WTC

Category	Group Discussion	Meeting	Interpersonal Conversation	Public Speaking
Mean Scores	70.57	51.69	64.53	60.07
Level	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

The statistical data presented in Table 3 pertains to the phenomenon of WTC in English, specifically focusing on various categories of recipients. The presented tabular data in Table 3 provides an overview of the average scores obtained in the context of the WTC construct across three distinct receiver categories: strangers, acquaintances, and friends.

Table 3: Receiver type sub-scores of WTC

Category	Stranger	Acquaintance	Friend
Mean Scores	43.49	61.40	76.91
Level	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

The statistical analysis reveals that the average score for WTC when interacting with unfamiliar individuals stands at 43.49, signifying its position as the lowest score compared to the other two categories. This observation suggests that the individuals who partook in the research exhibited a decreased inclination to engage in English interactions when confronted with unfamiliar individuals. The findings reveal a moderate WTC, indicating that participants did not exhibit a complete aversion to engaging with strangers, albeit their comfort levels were not exceptionally high. Next, the average score obtained when interacting with acquaintances, stands at a noteworthy 61.40. This score, compared to the score achieved when engaging with strangers, is higher. The observation

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posits that the individuals involved in the study exhibited a greater inclination to engage in linguistic exchanges utilising their L2 when interacting with individuals they were familiar with, as opposed to individuals they were not acquainted with. This implies that the participants exhibited a certain degree of comfort when communicating in their L2 with acquaintances. When engaged in communication with friends, the mean score for the WTC construct stands at an impressive 76.91. This score surpasses the mean scores observed in the other two categories under investigation. The observation suggests that the participants were more inclined to engage in L2 communication with individuals within their social circle, specifically their friends. The findings indicate that the participants' WTC is characterised as moderate, suggesting that they possess a reasonable degree of comfort when communicating in L2 with their friends.

The third research question has aimed to examine the correlation between students' speaking anxiety and their WTC in English. The Pearson's correlation test measured the correlation between the two variables.

The statistical data presented in Table 4 pertains to the correlation between SLSA and WTC in the L2 domain. The data is presented in a tabular format known as a correlation matrix. This matrix displays the correlation coefficient, significance level, and sample size for each pair of variables under consideration. The initial column of the matrix exhibits the degree of speaking anxiety, encompassing a spectrum spanning from 1 to 102. The subsequent column exhibits the WTC score, which spans a continuum from 1 to 102. The Pearson Correlation coefficient is employed to quantify the magnitude and orientation of the association between a pair of variables.

Table 4: Correlation between SLSA Level and WTC Score in English

		SLSA Level	**WTC Score**
SLSA Level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.823**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
WTC Score	Pearson Correlation	-.823**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The obtained correlation coefficient of -.823 between the levels of SLSA and the scores on the WTC test suggests a strong negative correlation between these two variables. The presence of a negative sign in the equation denotes an inverse relationship between the variables under consideration. This inverse relationship implies that the two variables tend to move in opposite directions. The obtained p-value for the correlation coefficient is 0.000, indicating statistical significance at a level of significance of less than 0.01. The results indicate that the observed correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as determined by a two-tailed test. In other words, there is less than a 1% chance that the observed correlation occurred by chance. This suggests that the correlation between the SLSA level and the WTC score likely represents a genuine association, rather than a random coincidence.

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5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA) Level

The study reveals that participants experienced a high level of Second Language Speaking Anxiety (SLSA), consistent with previous research. This anxiety negatively affects students' academic performance, making it important for language instructors to be aware of its impact. Instructors should create supportive environments, provide resources, and help students manage their anxiety through targeted strategies to improve oral communication skills. For learners, it is crucial to recognize that SLSA is common and manageable with consistent practice and exposure to the target language. Learners are encouraged to seek support from instructors to mitigate the negative effects of anxiety and enhance their language learning. Overall, addressing SLSA in language education is key to improving students' academic success, and creating a nurturing environment with adequate support can help reduce anxiety and promote language acquisition.

5.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English

The study examines UKM undergraduates' willingness to communicate (WTC) in their second language (L2). It reveals that students are more inclined to participate in group discussions, followed by one-on-one interpersonal conversations. However, they show lower willingness in formal settings like meetings and public speaking. These results align with prior research highlighting the importance of social support and the role of anxiety in influencing WTC. The findings suggest that educators should consider incorporating more group discussions and interpersonal activities in language instruction to enhance students' communication willingness. Overall, UKM students demonstrate moderate WTC, with a preference for less formal interaction, and the insights can help shape effective language learning programs that build communicative confidence.

5.3. Correlation between SLSA Level and WTC Score

The results of this study indicated that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between learners' SLSA and their WTC. Based on the findings of the study, one can conclude that people who have high levels of speaking anxiety have a lower propensity to participate in communicative activities in their L2 language. On the other hand, a lower level of anxiety is linked to a greater willingness to engage in activities that require communication. The present findings are similar to previous studies (Horwitz et al. 1986; Manipuspika, 2018) that have demonstrated a link between anxiety in language classrooms and a reluctance to speak in L2 among students of that language. According to the findings of a study carried out by Manipuspika (2018), there was a positive association between students' SLSA and their unwillingness to engage in communication. In addition, these previous researchers noticed a noteworthy link between the participants' unwillingness to communicate and their self-perceived level of SLSA, both of which demonstrated a statistically significant correlation with the participants' English language proficiency level. The findings of this study have also been supported by a study carried out by Alqarni (2021), which has established a connection between speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate.

This study which aimed to investigate the levels of SLSA and WTC in English among undergraduate students at UKM has provided a comprehensive analysis of these phenomena and explored the complex interrelationships among the participants

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involved. The SLSA levels exhibited by 102 participants of various disciplines were through the utilisation of FLCAS, a well-established and widely recognised measurement instrument in the field, designed to measure the levels of anxiety experienced by individuals in the foreign language classroom. In addition to assessing the levels of SLSA among participants, their WTC in the English Language was also delved into. WTC scale, a well-established measurement tool, was employed to evaluate the participants' levels of WTC, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their propensity to engage in effective communication. The study has yielded significant insights into the psychological state of the participants, shedding light on their levels of SLSA and WTC in the English language. The participants displayed significant apprehension in verbal communication and a moderate level of willingness to communicate in English. The analysis of the data collected from FLCAS revealed that the mean scores obtained by the participants indicated a moderate level of speaking anxiety. This observation posits that individuals may experience a certain degree of anxiety when engaging in English language communication; however, it does not escalate to significant distress.

The study also examined the construct of WTC within the context of English language proficiency. Findings indicated that participants demonstrated a moderate willingness to communicate in English, as measured by the WTC scale. This research further explored WTC across various communication settings and with different types of recipients. Results showed that participants were most willing to communicate in group discussions, while their WTC was lowest during formal meetings. Additionally, participants displayed the highest WTC when interacting with familiar individuals, such as friends, and the lowest WTC when engaging with unfamiliar individuals, particularly strangers. The study further aimed to investigate the complex relationship between SLSA and WTC in English among the diverse participants. It analyzed how speaking anxiety levels relate to WTC in English, revealing a strong negative correlation between these two variables. This finding suggests an inverse relationship, as speaking anxiety increases, the willingness to communicate in English decreases. The results highlight the importance of addressing speaking anxiety to promote effective English communication.

This study contributes to the existing literature on SLSA and WTC, expanding current findings and enriching the understanding of the complex relationship between the two. Specifically, these findings highlight the importance of addressing speaking anxiety to enhance students' willingness to engage in verbal communication in English. By emphasizing the importance of addressing this aspect, the study highlights the potential to create a more supportive environment for effective English language acquisition and proficiency. To conclude, the study's findings possess the potential to provide valuable insights to educators and policymakers, thereby facilitating the development of strategies and interventions aimed at assisting students in surmounting their speaking anxiety and fostering the acquisition of proficient communication skills in the English language. Further investigations into the realm of SLSA and WTC in English among undergraduate students hold great potential for advancement. This can be achieved through the expansion of the sample size, the implementation of longitudinal and qualitative methodologies, the exploration of cross-cultural variations, and the adoption of a mixed methods approach. By pursuing these directions, future research can enrich the existing body of knowledge and offer practical insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers working with language learners.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (RECUKM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

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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