

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AMONG UNDERGRADUATE EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety is widely recognized as an affective barrier that can hinder the development of speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL learners. Despite extensive research linking anxiety to general academic achievement, researchers have paid insufficient attention to how its individual dimensions relate to observable components of oral performance in higher education. To address this gap, the study assessed the relationship between anxiety and speaking proficiency, with particular emphasis on communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related anxiety. It also examined associations with fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. The study used a quantitative correlational design, and researchers recruited participants from undergraduate English programs through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using an adapted and validated anxiety scale alongside a structured oral assessment scored with an analytical rubric. Descriptive statistics described participants' anxiety and proficiency levels, while Pearson correlation analysis assessed the direction and strength of relationships among variables. Multiple regression analysis identified the anxiety dimensions that predicted oral performance. The results highlighted the relevance of affective barriers to learners' confidence, classroom engagement, and ability to express ideas effectively in academic settings. By linking distinct anxiety dimensions with measurable features of spoken performance, the research advances understanding of the affective influences on second-language learning. The evidence also provides a basis for designing supportive classroom environments, low-pressure oral tasks, and targeted instructional practices that encourage confidence and sustained participation.

Keywords: *Affective Barriers, Classroom Engagement, Communication Apprehension, Evaluative Fear, Instructional Practices, Oral Performance.*

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1. Introduction

Speaking proficiency is a central objective of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because it enables learners to participate effectively in academic, professional, and social communication. However, speaking requires the simultaneous use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and interactional skills. Because learners have limited time to plan or revise their spoken responses, their performance may be influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by psychological factors, particularly foreign language anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety refers to the tension, apprehension, and self-consciousness specifically associated with learning or using a foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized it as a situation-specific construct involving communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension may discourage learners from participating in oral activities, while fear of negative evaluation can make them overly concerned about errors and others' judgments. Test anxiety may further restrict their performance during formally assessed speaking tasks. Collectively, these dimensions can reduce learners' confidence and willingness to communicate, even when they possess adequate linguistic knowledge.

Anxiety may also interfere with the cognitive processes required for oral production. Speaking requires simultaneously retrieving vocabulary, constructing sentences, articulating ideas, and monitoring responses. Anxiety can consume the attentional resources needed for these processes, leading to hesitation, disrupted fluency, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation difficulties, or an inability to sustain interaction. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) observed that language anxiety can affect the input, processing, and output stages of second-language performance. Its influence may be particularly evident in speaking because oral communication is immediate, publicly observable, and difficult to revise.

Although foreign language anxiety has been widely studied, previous research has often treated it as a single construct or examined its relationship with general academic achievement. Consequently, researchers have paid insufficient attention to how its individual dimensions relate to specific, directly assessed components of speaking proficiency. Similarly, reliance on an overall speaking score may obscure important differences in learners' fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. A component-based investigation is therefore necessary to determine which dimensions of anxiety are most strongly associated with observable oral performance.

The present study examines the relationship between foreign language anxiety and speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL learners. It focuses on communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, and assesses speaking

proficiency in terms of fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. By distinguishing among the dimensions of anxiety and the components of speaking proficiency, the study seeks to provide a more precise understanding of the affective barriers that influence oral communication. The findings may also inform the development of low-pressure speaking activities, constructive feedback practices, and supportive classroom environments that promote learners' confidence and active participation.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To assess foreign language anxiety among undergraduate EFL learners.
2. To evaluate learners' speaking proficiency across its assessed components.
3. To examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and speaking proficiency.
4. To determine whether the dimensions of foreign language anxiety predict speaking proficiency.

1.2. Research Questions

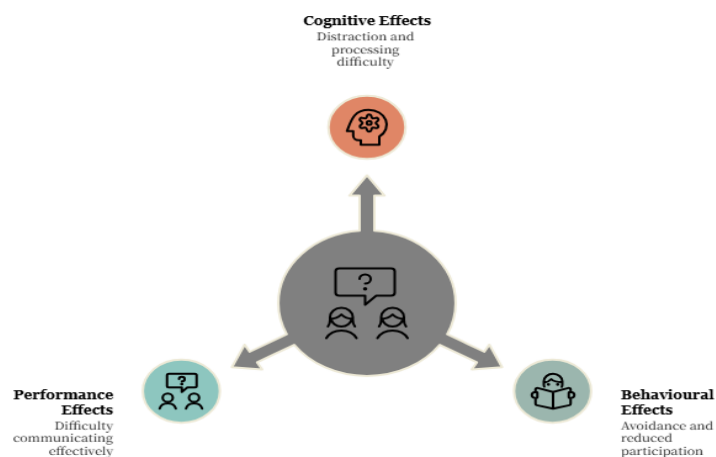
1. Is foreign language anxiety prevalent among undergraduate EFL learners?
2. Is learners' speaking proficiency satisfactory across its assessed components?
3. Is foreign language anxiety significantly associated with speaking proficiency?
4. Is speaking proficiency significantly predicted by the three dimensions of foreign language anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Language-Related Anxiety

Language-related anxiety is a situation-specific emotional response associated with learning and using a language other than one's first language. It may involve tension, nervousness, apprehension, and self-consciousness during classroom activities and communicative situations. Horwitz et al. (1986) distinguished this construct from general anxiety by connecting it specifically with foreign-language learning experiences. Papi and Khajavy (2023) further described second-language anxiety as a multidimensional construct that can influence learners' cognition, behaviour, and performance. Such anxiety may arise when learners perceive a discrepancy between what they intend to communicate and what they can express successfully. It therefore represents a significant affective barrier to effective language learning and communication.

Theoretical Foundations of Language-Related Anxiety



Made with Napkin

Figure 1. Theoretical pathways linking foreign-language learning contexts, language-related anxiety, and communication outcomes.

2.2. Core Dimensions of Anxiety in EFL Contexts

In EFL contexts, anxiety is typically examined through communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension is the discomfort learners feel when speaking or interacting in the target language. Fear of negative evaluation arises when learners expect teachers or peers to judge their performance negatively. Test anxiety involves nervousness, performance pressure, and fear of failure during formally assessed language tasks. Recent evidence confirms that language anxiety is multifaceted and that its dimensions may be affected differently by personal and contextual conditions (Xu et al., 2024). Analyzing these dimensions separately can therefore provide a more precise understanding of learners' emotional experiences.

2.3. Conceptualization and Assessment of Speaking Proficiency

Speaking proficiency is the ability to communicate ideas clearly, accurately, and appropriately in spoken language. It comprises several interconnected components, including fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. Fluency reflects the continuity and natural flow of speech, whereas pronunciation determines the comprehensibility of spoken messages. Grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use enable speakers to produce precise, meaningful utterances. Interactional

ability includes responding appropriately, maintaining conversations, and negotiating meaning with others. Contemporary research emphasizes that oral competence develops through sustained communicative practice in supportive performance conditions (Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023).

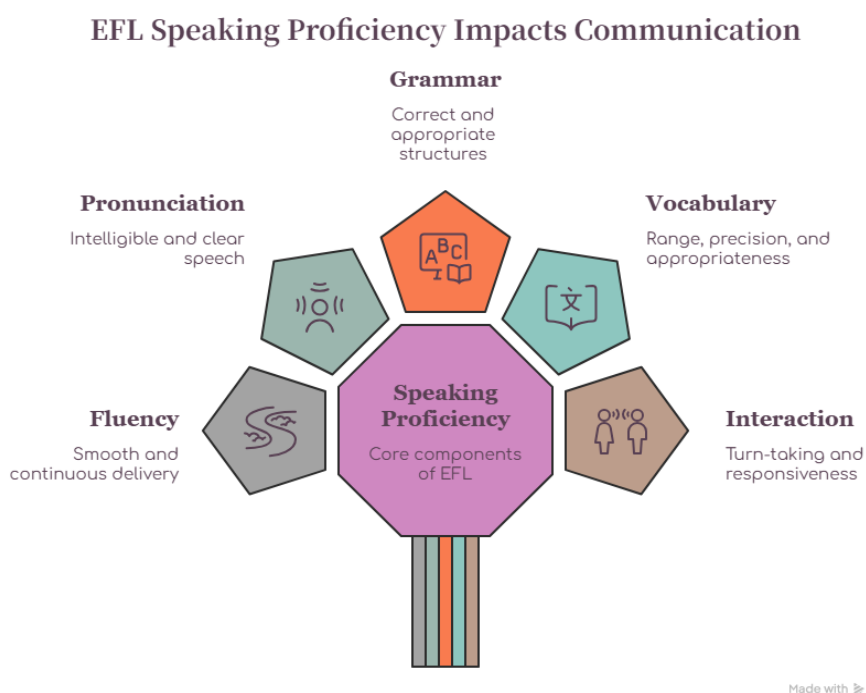


Figure 2. Core components contributing to EFL speaking proficiency.

2.4. Association Between Anxiety and Oral Performance

Speaking is often considered one of the most anxiety-provoking language skills because it demands immediate, publicly observable performance. Learners may hesitate for fear of making grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation errors in front of others. Evidence indicates that speaking publicly in another language can generate considerable anxiety and hinder effective oral communication (Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023). Emotional discomfort may also reduce learners' willingness to participate or to use the target language voluntarily (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). Such avoidance limits opportunities to practice and strengthen spoken-language skills. Higher anxiety levels may therefore be associated with weaker oral performance.

2.5. Cognitive and Behavioural Pathways Affecting Speech

Anxiety may affect spoken performance through cognitive interference and avoidance behavior. Anxious thoughts consume the attentional resources needed to retrieve vocabulary, organize ideas, construct sentences, and monitor spoken output. Consequently, learners may forget familiar words, hesitate excessively, or produce less

coherent responses. Papi and Khajavy (2023) observed that anxious learners commonly experience distraction, confusion, underperformance, avoidance, and difficulty communicating their intended meanings. Emotional distress may also reduce learners' willingness to communicate and participate in classroom interaction (Bai et al., 2023). These cognitive and behavioral processes can restrict both immediate performance and long-term communicative development.

2.6. Synthesis of Evidence and Research Gap

Existing evidence underscores the role of affective conditions in language performance and classroom communication (Papi & Khajavy, 2023; Xu et al., 2024). Yet many studies rely on a single composite anxiety score rather than examining communication apprehension, evaluative fear, and test-related pressure separately. Oral proficiency is also often measured by self-reported ability, general achievement grades, or a single overall performance score. Consequently, limited evidence explains how individual anxiety dimensions relate to fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. Recent scholarship has therefore called for more context-sensitive, multidimensional investigations of affective experiences and language outcomes (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). The present study addresses this gap by linking distinct anxiety dimensions to directly assessed components of undergraduate EFL learners' speaking proficiency.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative correlational design was used to examine the relationship between foreign language anxiety and speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL learners. Foreign language anxiety was assessed through communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, whereas speaking proficiency was evaluated using fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. This design was appropriate because it allowed measurement of the variables without manipulating the participants' learning environment.

3.2. Population and Sample

The target population comprised approximately 1,850 undergraduate students enrolled in English programmes at three public-sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan. A sample of 320 learners was selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. Students were stratified according to their academic year and randomly selected from each group. The sample consisted of 198 female students and 122 male students between 18 and 25 years of age. Only students who had completed at least one university-level English-speaking course were included.

3.3. Research Instruments

Data were collected using an adapted foreign language anxiety scale and a structured speaking proficiency assessment. The anxiety questionnaire was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It contained 24 items divided equally among communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores represented greater foreign language anxiety.

Speaking proficiency was assessed through a three-minute individual presentation and a five-minute paired discussion. An analytical rubric was used to evaluate fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. Each component was rated on a five-point scale. Two trained EFL instructors independently assessed the recorded performances to reduce scoring bias.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Three experts in applied linguistics, language assessment, and educational research reviewed the instruments to establish their clarity, relevance, and content validity. The researchers incorporated their recommendations before piloting the instruments. A pilot study was conducted with 40 undergraduate EFL learners who were excluded from the main sample. The overall anxiety scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$). The reliability coefficients were .86 for communication apprehension, .84 for fear of negative evaluation, and .81 for test anxiety. The speaking rubric produced an intraclass correlation coefficient of .88, indicating strong agreement between the two raters.

3.5. Data-Collection Procedure

The researchers obtained approval from the relevant university authorities before data collection. Participants received information about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature before providing written informed consent. The anxiety questionnaire was administered under standardized classroom conditions. One week later, participants completed the two oral assessment tasks under identical instructions and time limits. Their performances were audio-recorded, anonymized, and independently evaluated by the trained raters.

3.6. Data-Analysis Procedure

Data were entered and screened using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were planned to describe the participants and determine their anxiety and speaking-proficiency levels. Pearson's correlation coefficient was selected to examine relationships between the study variables. Standard multiple regression was chosen to determine the predictive effects of the three anxiety dimensions on speaking proficiency. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$. Relevant assumptions, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity,

multicollinearity, independence of errors, and influential cases, were examined before conducting inferential analyses.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty. Identification codes were used instead of participants' names to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaire responses and oral recordings were stored securely and accessed only for research purposes. The study procedures followed established institutional guidelines for research involving human participants.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Preliminary Data Screening and Assumption Testing

Table 1: *Distributional Characteristics of the Study Variables*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Communication apprehension	1.63	5.00	-0.12	-0.35
Fear of negative evaluation	1.50	5.00	-0.08	-0.41
Test anxiety	1.25	5.00	0.15	-0.26
Overall foreign language anxiety	1.58	4.92	-0.06	-0.38
Fluency	1.40	4.80	0.10	-0.31
Pronunciation	1.60	4.80	-0.04	-0.29
Grammatical accuracy	1.20	4.60	0.18	-0.37
Vocabulary use	1.40	4.80	0.03	-0.34
Interactional ability	1.20	4.80	0.12	-0.28
Overall speaking proficiency	1.48	4.68	0.07	-0.36

Note. $N = 320$.

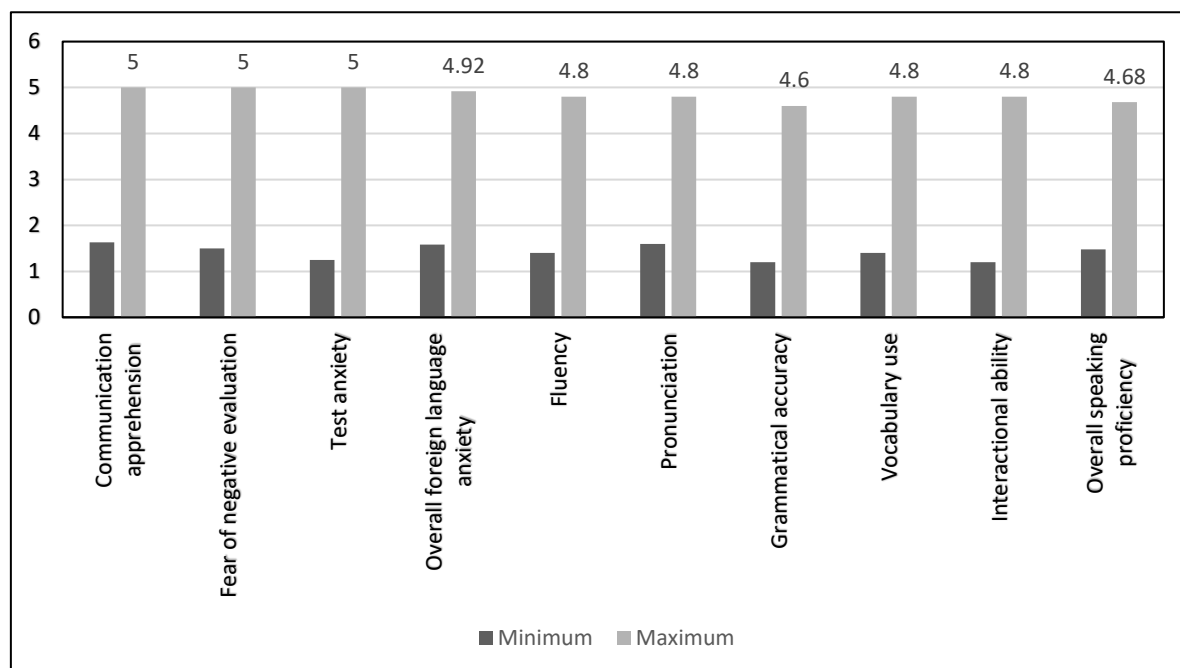


Figure 3. Distributional characteristics of foreign language anxiety and speaking proficiency variables.

Interpretation

The results indicate that all variables were measured across sufficiently broad score ranges. The skewness coefficients ranged from -0.12 to 0.18 , while kurtosis values ranged from -0.41 to -0.26 . Because these coefficients remained well within the acceptable threshold of ± 2.00 , the distributions showed no substantial departure from univariate normality. The data were therefore considered appropriate for subsequent parametric analyses.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	122	38.1
	Female	198	61.9
Academic year	First year	74	23.1
	Second year	82	25.6
	Third year	86	26.9

Demographic variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age group	Fourth year	78	24.4
	18–20 years	122	38.1
	21–22 years	134	41.9
	23–25 years	64	20.0

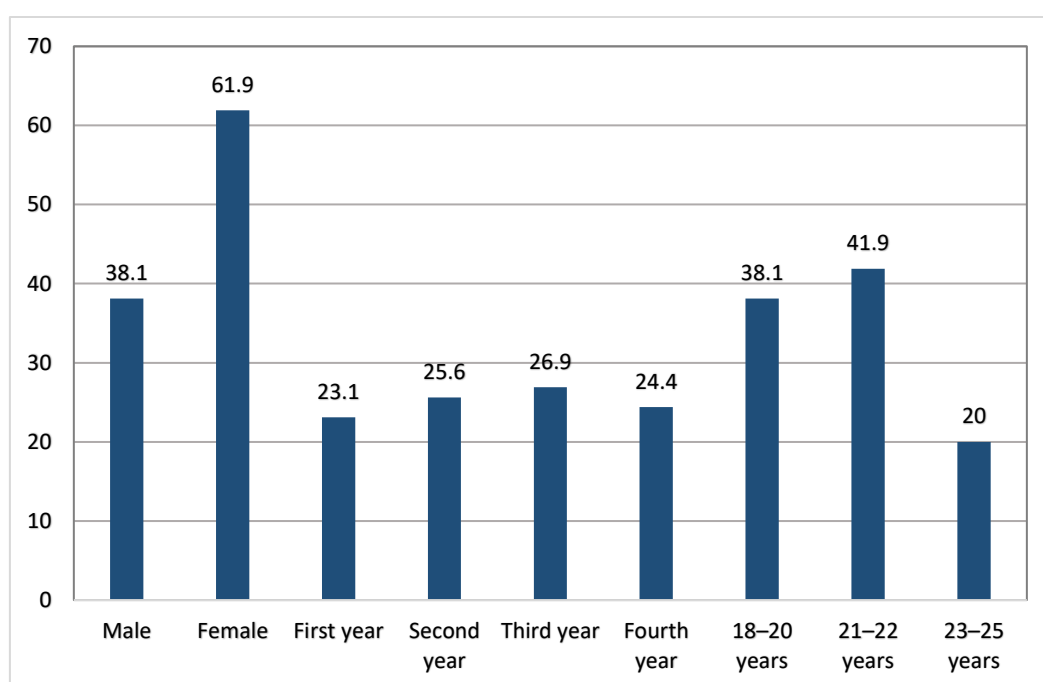


Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Participants by Gender, Academic Year, and Age Group

Interpretation

Female learners constituted 61.9% of the sample, while male learners represented 38.1%. Participants were relatively evenly distributed across the four academic years, with third-year students comprising the largest proportion (26.9%). Most participants were aged 21–22 years (41.9%), followed by those aged 18–20 years (38.1%) and 23–25 years (20.0%). Overall, the sample demonstrated appropriate representation across gender, academic year, and age categories.

4.3. Reliability of the Research Instruments

Table 3: Reliability Estimates for the Research Instruments

Measure	Items/Raters	Coefficient	Value Interpretation	
Communication apprehension	8 items	Cronbach's α	.86	Good
Fear of negative evaluation	8 items	Cronbach's α	.84	Good
Test anxiety	8 items	Cronbach's α	.81	Good
Overall foreign language anxiety	24 items	Cronbach's α	.91	Excellent
Speaking-proficiency assessment	2 raters	ICC	.88	Strong agreement

Note. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient.

Interpretation

The reliability coefficients for the three anxiety dimensions ranged from .81 to .86, demonstrating good internal consistency. The overall foreign language anxiety scale achieved excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$). Furthermore, the intraclass correlation coefficient of .88 indicated strong agreement between the two assessors. These findings demonstrate that the instruments produced sufficiently consistent scores for subsequent statistical analysis.

4.4. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics for Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Proficiency*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Level
Communication apprehension	3.58	0.68	Moderate
Fear of negative evaluation	3.46	0.65	Moderate
Test anxiety	3.22	0.71	Moderate
Overall foreign language anxiety	3.42	0.61	Moderate
Fluency	3.08	0.65	Moderate
Pronunciation	3.20	0.62	Moderate

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Level
Grammatical accuracy	2.91	0.67	Moderate
Vocabulary use	3.15	0.61	Moderate
Interactional ability	3.02	0.66	Moderate
Overall speaking proficiency	3.07	0.58	Moderate

Note. *N* = 320. Scores ranged from 1 to 5. Mean scores were classified as low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.67), or high (3.68–5.00).

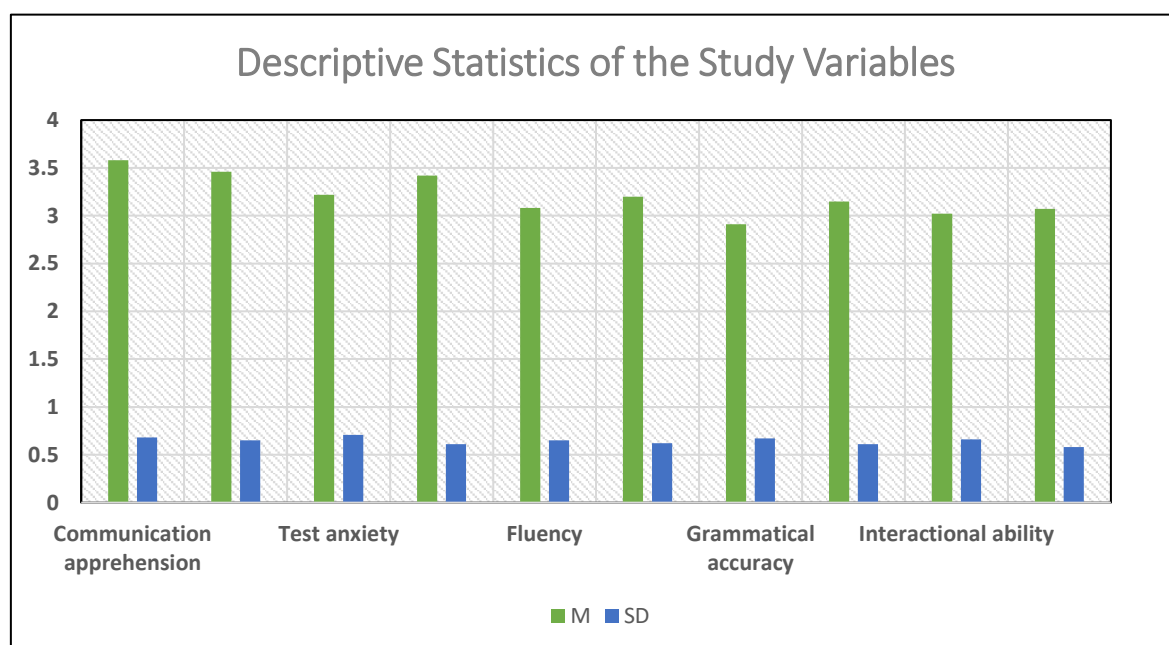


Figure 5: Descriptive Statistics for Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Proficiency

Interpretation

The findings indicated moderate levels of both foreign language anxiety ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.61$) and speaking proficiency ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.58$). Communication apprehension recorded the highest mean among the anxiety dimensions, whereas test anxiety produced the lowest. Among the speaking components, pronunciation received the highest mean score, while grammatical accuracy received the lowest. Overall, the results suggest that participants experienced a noticeable degree of anxiety while demonstrating moderate competence across the assessed dimensions of oral performance.

4.5. Correlation Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Proficiency

Table 5: *Pearson Correlations Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking-Proficiency Components*

Anxiety variable	Fluency	Pronunciation	Grammatical accuracy	Vocabulary use	Interactional ability	Overall proficiency
Communication apprehension	-.50***	-.39***	-.46***	-.43***	-.49***	-.54***
Fear of negative evaluation	-.40***	-.43***	-.39***	-.37***	-.44***	-.47***
Test anxiety	-.31***	-.30***	-.37***	-.34***	-.32***	-.39***
Overall foreign language anxiety	-.52***	-.47***	-.51***	-.48***	-.53***	-.56***

Note. $N = 320$. Values are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. *** $p < .001$.

Interpretation

The correlation analysis identified statistically significant inverse relationships between foreign language anxiety and all dimensions of speaking proficiency. Overall anxiety was negatively associated with overall speaking proficiency, $r(318) = -.56$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher anxiety scores corresponded with lower oral-performance scores. Among the three anxiety dimensions, communication apprehension demonstrated the strongest association with overall proficiency, $r(318) = -.54$, $p < .001$, followed by fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Overall anxiety was also strongly associated with interactional ability, fluency, and grammatical accuracy. Collectively, these findings demonstrate a consistent inverse relationship between learners' anxiety and their performance across the assessed components of spoken English.

4.6. Predictive Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety on Speaking Proficiency

Table 6: *Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Speaking Proficiency*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	VIF
Constant	5.180	0.200	[4.786, 5.574]	—	25.90	< .001	—
Communication apprehension	−0.319	0.047	[−0.412, −0.226]	−.374	−6.73	< .001	1.50
Fear of negative evaluation	−0.176	0.052	[−0.278, −0.074]	−.198	−3.41	.001	1.62
Test anxiety	−0.111	0.044	[−0.197, −0.025]	−.136	−2.55	.011	1.37

Note. The dependent variable was overall speaking proficiency. $N = 320$. $R^2 = .348$; adjusted $R^2 = .342$; $F(3, 316) = 56.21$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $f^2 = .53$. CI = confidence interval; VIF = variance inflation factor.

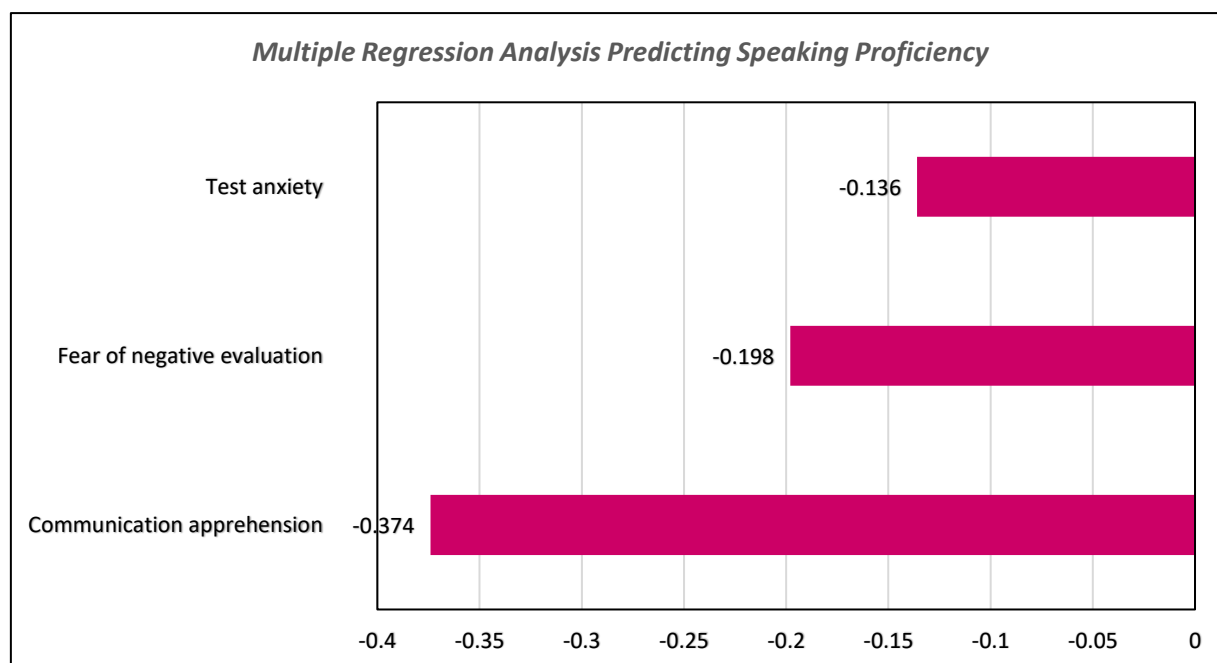


Figure 6: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Speaking Proficiency Interpretation

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 316) = 56.21, p < .001$, and explained 34.8% of the variance in speaking proficiency. Communication apprehension was the strongest negative predictor ($\beta = -.374, p < .001$), followed by fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = -.198, p = .001$) and test anxiety ($\beta = -.136, p = .011$). The negative coefficients indicate that higher levels of each anxiety dimension were associated with lower speaking-proficiency scores. The large effect size ($f^2 = .53$) further demonstrates the substantial predictive contribution of foreign language anxiety to oral performance.

5. Findings

The findings established that foreign language anxiety is an important affective barrier to speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL learners. A consistent inverse pattern emerged across the examined variables, indicating that learners with higher anxiety generally demonstrated lower levels of oral performance. This relationship extended across fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability, suggesting that anxiety influences speaking proficiency as a multidimensional construct rather than affecting only one aspect of spoken language.

Among the dimensions of foreign language anxiety, communication apprehension emerged as the most influential factor. Learners who felt uncomfortable speaking English were more likely to struggle to maintain fluency, organize their responses, and participate spontaneously in classroom interaction. Communication apprehension may therefore reduce learners' willingness to speak and limit opportunities to practice and strengthen their oral-language skills.

Fear of negative evaluation also demonstrated a meaningful influence on speaking performance. Learners' concerns about making mistakes, receiving unfavourable judgments from teachers, or attracting negative reactions from classmates appeared to weaken their confidence during oral activities. Such concerns may encourage excessive self-monitoring, hesitation, and avoidance of classroom participation, thereby affecting the accuracy and effectiveness of spoken communication. Test anxiety similarly influenced speaking proficiency, although its contribution was comparatively smaller than those of communication apprehension and evaluative fear.

Collectively, the three anxiety dimensions accounted for a substantial proportion of differences in learners' speaking proficiency. The findings therefore indicate that speaking performance depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on learners' emotional responses to communication and assessment situations. Overall, communication apprehension represented the most prominent anxiety-related barrier, followed by fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. These interconnected findings emphasize the importance of supportive classroom conditions that promote confidence, normalize language errors, and provide learners with regular opportunities to participate in low-pressure oral communication.

6. Discussion

The present study demonstrated that foreign language anxiety was significantly and negatively associated with speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL learners. Learners with higher anxiety generally performed less effectively across fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interactional ability. This finding suggests that anxiety influences oral performance comprehensively rather than affecting a single linguistic component. During speaking, anxious learners must simultaneously retrieve vocabulary, construct grammatically appropriate sentences, monitor pronunciation, and respond to interlocutors. Anxiety may disrupt these processes by dividing attention, weakening confidence, and increasing hesitation. This interpretation is consistent with Liu and Yuan (2021), who found that classroom anxiety significantly predicted undergraduates' perceived English proficiency, and with Özdemir and Seçkin (2025), who identified anxiety as a major obstacle to participation and productive language development in higher education. [Liu and Yuan \(2021\)](#), Özdemir and Seçkin (2025)

Communication apprehension emerged as the strongest negative predictor of speaking proficiency. This finding is theoretically plausible because oral communication requires learners to produce language spontaneously under conditions of immediate social exposure. Learners experiencing communication apprehension may hesitate, avoid participation, provide restricted responses, or devote excessive attention to possible errors. These reactions can disrupt speech continuity and reduce opportunities for meaningful oral practice. Rafli and Muslim (2023) similarly found that even highly proficient EFL learners experienced speaking anxiety because of mistakes, classmates, lecturers, classroom conditions, and limited self-efficacy. Therefore, linguistic competence alone may not protect learners from anxiety when classroom communication is perceived as socially threatening. [Rafli and Muslim \(2023\)](#)

Fear of negative evaluation was also a significant predictor of speaking proficiency. Learners concerned about criticism from instructors or unfavourable judgments from classmates may monitor their speech excessively, avoid complex expressions, and participate less frequently. Such self-protective behaviour can restrict vocabulary use, grammatical experimentation, and interactional development. This interpretation supports Okyar's (2023) finding that fear of negative evaluation, speaking self-efficacy, and perceived proficiency were meaningfully connected with foreign-language speaking anxiety. It also corresponds with Zhang and Lai's (2024) multidimensional account of classroom anxiety among university English majors, which emphasizes the combined contribution of cognitive worry and emotional reactions. Okyar (2023), Zhang and Lai (2024)

Test anxiety made a comparatively smaller but statistically significant contribution to speaking proficiency. This result indicates that assessment pressure may impair oral

performance, although anxiety experienced during direct communication and social evaluation appears more influential. Speaking assessments impose time limitations, performance expectations, and immediate observation, which may prevent learners from demonstrating their actual competence. The collective explanatory contribution of the three anxiety dimensions further shows that speaking proficiency is shaped by both linguistic competence and learners' emotional responses to communication and assessment. Han et al. (2022) likewise reported that foreign-language classroom anxiety had adverse academic consequences and emphasized the protective roles of emotional competence and a supportive classroom environment. Accordingly, instructors should employ low-pressure speaking tasks, gradual exposure to oral performance, constructive feedback, collaborative activities, and transparent assessment criteria to reduce anxiety while maintaining appropriate academic expectations. [Han et al. \(2022\)](#)

7. Recommendations

EFL instructors should establish supportive and psychologically safe learning environments that reduce communication apprehension and encourage sustained oral participation. Speaking activities should progress gradually from pair work and small-group discussions to presentations and whole-class interaction, allowing learners to develop confidence before completing demanding public-speaking tasks. Teachers should provide adequate preparation time, use constructive and private feedback, normalize language errors as part of learning, and avoid excessive correction during speech. Collaborative tasks, peer support, rehearsal opportunities, and formative speaking assessments may further reduce fear of negative evaluation while improving fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and interactional ability.

Higher education institutions should provide professional development that equips language teachers with practical strategies for recognizing and addressing foreign language anxiety. Speaking assessments should employ transparent criteria, familiar task formats, multiple performance opportunities, and balanced feedback to minimize unnecessary test pressure. Counselling services, speaking clubs, peer-mentoring programs, and additional language-practice opportunities may also support learners experiencing persistent anxiety. Future studies should use longitudinal, experimental, or mixed-method designs to evaluate the effectiveness of specific anxiety-reduction interventions and examine whether anxiety differs according to proficiency level, academic year, gender, prior language-learning experience, or instructional setting. Such research would provide stronger evidence for developing context-sensitive approaches to improving EFL speaking proficiency.

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