

The Level of Student Anxiety in Arabic Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

Mastering speaking skills is crucial for students learning a foreign language. However, many students still struggle with and feel anxious about speaking Arabic, even after years of exposure during school. This study aims to determine the levels of anxiety in learning Arabic, the levels of anxiety of speaking Arabic, and the fear of negative evaluation when speaking Arabic among professional communication Arabic language students at MARA University of Technology (UiTM), Shah Alam. This quantitative research uses a questionnaire as its instrument. The survey was adapted using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaires were distributed to 58 students from the professional communication Arabic language course at UiTM, Shah Alam. The findings showed that the anxiety level in learning Arabic is moderate. The anxiety level in Arabic speaking skills is high, and the fear of negative evaluation when speaking Arabic also has a high mean. Therefore, students need to overcome their speaking anxiety through guidance and motivation from lecturers and their environment.

Keywords: Anxiety, FLCAS, Speaking Skills, Arabic

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential communication tool that plays a significant role in human life today. It acts as a medium for expressing thoughts and feelings between individuals. Through communication, we can share information and foster relationships. There are four key skills in language learning: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Bailey (2005) and Samah et al. (2013), speaking is more difficult to master compared to other skills because speakers often find it challenging to communicate in real-time. They also struggle with the ability to spontaneously repeat and correct their speech without making mistakes. Speaking skills require the correct pronunciation of Arabic words regarding sound and structure, which involves recognizing consonants, words, sentences, and phrases, as well as managing intonation, stress, and other speech elements. Features like stress also significantly impact speech.

Students in the Professional Communication Arabic program at UiTM, Shah Alam have learned effective listening and speaking skills during their first semester through the Listening and Speaking Skills (BAP409) course. A variety of learning materials and activities have been provided, including books, articles, and lectures, to assist students in this area. The course aims to enhance students' spontaneous listening and speaking abilities in Arabic. They are given sentences to work with and participate in several presentation and public speaking activities in Arabic. This combination is designed to demonstrate their skills in both areas to improve their Arabic speaking proficiency.

Despite the numerous activities aimed at improving speaking skills, students' speaking abilities still remain at a low level. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the levels of anxiety or concerns impacting the speaking skills of semester six students pursuing a Bachelor of Applied Arts (Honours) in Professional Communication Arabic at UiTM, Shah Alam. The findings may help students address their anxiety and enhance their ability to speak and communicate in Arabic. Mastery of the Arabic language cannot be achieved if students focus solely on listening, reading, and writing skills without practicing speaking alongside these other skills.

Objectives

This study aims to identify the level of anxiety related to speaking skills in Arabic among students enrolled in the Arabic and Professional Communication course at UiTM Shah Alam. Therefore, there are three objectives to be achieved:

1. To determine the level of anxiety in learning Arabic classes.
2. To assess the level of anxiety in speaking skills among students in the Arabic program.
3. To identify the level of fear among students regarding negative evaluation when speaking in Arabic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language anxiety, often called language learner apprehension or second language nervousness, has been thoroughly researched in academia due to the distinct challenges it creates for language learners (Chen, 2023). Foreign language anxiety fundamentally involves a range of emotional responses and cognitive processes that learners experience while learning a new language. This complex phenomenon often acts as a barrier, limiting learners' ability to engage actively, communicate effectively, and display their linguistic competence. As a complex construct with numerous interconnected facets, foreign language anxiety has been extensively researched to understand the various factors contributing to this intricate psychological process (MacIntyre, Noels & Clement, 1997; Jackson, 2002).

A theory known as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), developed by Horwitz & Cope (1986), was established to study the levels of foreign language anxiety, particularly among students. The FLCA theory includes three domains: test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. Numerous studies have adapted the FLCA to determine the levels of foreign language anxiety in languages such as Arabic, Japanese, English, and more. According to Dellah et al. (2020), students experience communication anxiety due to a lack of vocabulary and discomfort speaking a foreign language in front of others. In terms of fear of negative evaluation, students often try to maintain their image to avoid being ridiculed for language mistakes when speaking. Anxiety during language classes is another aspect, where students do not see language skills as a platform to improve their abilities, particularly in speaking.

Anxiety in Different Language Contexts

Muhamad Sepian & Surat (2023) studied second language anxiety, specifically in English speaking skills among students. The study showed that students' second language anxiety was at a moderate level, with a correlation between anxiety and speaking skills. Despite being at a moderate level, the researcher emphasized the need to control it to prevent it from escalating.

Another research was conducted by Badrasawi et al. (2020) to investigate the level of speaking anxiety in a second language among Malaysian postgraduate students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. The result show that the respondents do not have high levels of speaking anxiety. However, many of them feel uncomfortable using English in the classroom because they fear negative evaluation and worry about making mistakes while speaking in a foreign language.

In the context of the Arabic language, Ahmad Radzi et al. (2021) conducted a study on the anxiety levels in learning Arabic at University College of Islam Melaka. The researcher used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale adapted from Horwitz (1986), which consists of 33 items. The findings showed that students learning Arabic had high levels of anxiety in speaking, feeling nervous, panicked, and anxious when communicating in Arabic.

The study conducted by Zawawi et al. (2023) examining relationship between oral language anxiety and students' Arabic language learning outcomes in Malaysia secondary schools. The result revealed the significance of speaking skills and anxiety ($r=-.154$, $p<.05$). This study also states that the students feel anxious when an oral test is about to be conducted. They feel nervous when facing unknown questions during the oral exam. The students do not feel confident speaking spontaneously and organizing their ideas well.

Tulgar's (2018) study on Turkish foreign language students found that they faced several challenges, such as fear of making mistakes, negative evaluations, and comparing themselves to others. Students also feared speaking with native speakers due to their fluency and the speed at which they speak.

American students learning Japanese experience high levels of anxiety related to pronunciation and kanji characters, as reported by Saito and Samimy (2008). The complexity of the language and fear of negative evaluation are similar to the challenges faced by Arabic learners, as described by Ahmad Radzi et al. (2021). Diner's (2023) study on speaking anxiety in Japanese within the Japanese Language Education Department at Unnes also revealed that 60% of Level 2 students feel anxious about speaking in Japanese due to a lack of vocabulary.

A study on Korean as a foreign language by Jee (2019) found that students have a moderate level of anxiety, particularly in speaking and listening skills. Despite this, the students still feel anxious due to their lack of knowledge about the Korean language.

Regarding studies above, it can conclude that the second language anxiety is a prevalent issue that affects students' speaking abilities and overall language learning experiences. Addressing the sources of anxiety and implementing effective strategies to reduce it are essential for improving language learning outcomes and fostering a more supportive learning environment.

Factors Contributing to Foreign Language Anxiety

Mohamed Mokhtar's (2020) study examined factors contributing to speaking anxiety during the 4th Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), focusing on learning Arabic. Using recent sources such as books, magazines, seminars, conferences, online sources, articles, and journals, the discussion highlighted numerous factors contributing to student anxiety. The study suggested that educators should find initiatives to address the anxiety issues faced by students during IR 4.0 when teaching Arabic.

According to Jamil (2017), one factor contributing to speaking anxiety is the students' personality, which can be either extroverted or introverted. The study found that extroverted students are more confident in communication, whereas introverted students, who are generally more passive and quiet, experience higher language anxiety.

Other studies by Tulgar (2018) and Pratiwi (2014) identified shyness, lack of courage, fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, and disinterest as factors contributing to speaking anxiety. Many students remain silent in class due to these factors, even if they understand the teacher's instructions.

Additionally, Dellah et al. (2020) noted that limited vocabulary, fear of grammatical errors, pronunciation mistakes, and fear of correction by others contribute to students' lack of confidence in speaking. Bailey (1983) also highlighted that the competitive nature of students, who compare themselves to more fluent peers, can lead to anxiety. As a result, students fail to master speaking skills until they gain confidence and motivation to speak the foreign language they are learning.

The comparison reveals that foreign language anxiety is a universal phenomenon affecting learners across various languages and educational contexts. Common factors such as fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and personality traits consistently contribute to anxiety. However, the specific linguistic and cultural challenges of each language can influence the intensity and nature of this anxiety. Addressing these factors through supportive teaching practices and leveraging technology thoughtfully can help mitigate anxiety and improve language learning outcomes across different contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative research that conducts a survey to identify the factors contributing to anxiety in Arabic speaking skills among final-year students in the Professional Communication Arabic program at UiTM Shah Alam. The research analyzes data descriptively by gathering information on each construct being studied.

The sample consists of 58 students pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Arabic at UiTM Shah Alam. This study employs purposive sampling, where the researcher specifies certain characteristics for the study (Munawar, 2015). Among these characteristics, the sample includes final-year students who use Arabic as their primary language in class and have experience learning Arabic since secondary school. The instrument used in this research is a questionnaire, which was developed by adapting the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) created by Horwitz et al. (1986) to assess students' anxiety levels when communicating in Arabic. However, in the FLCAS instrument by Horwitz et al. (1986), the researcher exclusively adapts and utilizes items from the communication anxiety subconstruct, as these are directly related to speaking skills. Three constructs in the questionnaire adapted from the FLCAS are showed in Table 1:

Table I: Questionnaire Construct

Bil	FLCAS	Item
1	Test Anxiety in Learning Arabic Classes	7
2	Test Anxiety in Arabic Speaking Skills	7
3	Test Anxiety the Fear of Negative Evaluation When Speaking Arabic	5

The FLCAS is a five-point Likert-type scale comprising 19-items with the responses ranging from a scale of 1-5 (i.e., 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree/nor disagree, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree). A pilot study was conducted to obtain the Cronbach's alpha value. The reliability index for the questionnaire related to FLCAS was 0.87 (19 items). In the descriptive analysis, the data were analyzed using basic statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and score distribution (Chua, 2012). The results of this study were analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Science version 26 (SPSS v.26). To assess the level of this study, the researcher used the mean score interpretation by Alias Baba (1999) as follows:

Table 2: Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.41 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A set of questionnaires with three constructs regarding the level of anxiety in Arabic speaking skills was developed and distributed to 58 students enrolled in the Bachelor of Professional Communication in Arabic program at UiTM Shah Alam. Table 3 below presents the questionnaire for the first construct, which assesses the level of anxiety among Arabic language students at UiTM Shah Alam in learning Arabic classes.

A. Level Of Anxiety Among Arabic Language Students at UiTM Shah Alam in Learning Arabic Classes

Table 3: Level Of Anxiety Among Arabic Language Students at UiTM Shah Alam in Learning Arabic Classes

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I was worried about the consequences of failing in Arabic classes.	3.90	.968	High

2.	In Arabic class, I would get nervous until I forgot what I already knew.	3.72	.988	High
3.	Even though I had made good preparations for the Arabic class, I still felt worried.	3.67	.886	High
4.	I felt more stressed and nervous in my Arabic class compared to my other classes.	3.22	1.155	Moderate
5.	I felt like I was stressed by the variety of words I had to learn to speak Arabic.	2.86	1.099	Moderate
6.	I felt like I was stressed by the variety of sentences I had to learn to speak Arabic.	2.97	1.075	Moderate
7.	I always felt like I didn't want to go to Arabic classes.	2.17	1.187	Low
	Overall Mean	3.2167	.75935	Moderate

Based on Table 3 above, the descriptive analysis of students' anxiety levels in learning Arabic, the mean score was found to be moderate at 3.21, with a standard deviation of 0.759. The results indicated that the items within this construct varied across high, moderate, and low mean scores. While students experience anxiety about learning Arabic, it remains at a manageable level due to the moderate mean score. This finding is consistent with Yusoff's et al. (2020) study on Arabic anxiety among religious school students and Dellah's et al. (2020) research on English language anxiety among university students from four different faculties at UiTM Melaka.

The item with the highest mean score, item 1, shows that students are concerned about failing in Arabic class. Item 2 indicates that students feel nervous during class, often forgetting what they know, while item 3 reveals that anxiety persists even after preparation. This anxiety and nervousness are linked to internal factors, such as a lack of self-confidence. This aligns with Noorafini & Muhammad Suhaimi's (2017) study, which found that students who feel anxious often experience this due to internal issues, leading to fear and embarrassment when making mistakes while learning Arabic.

Despite the high mean scores for worry and nervousness in learning Arabic, students remain eager to attend classes. Item 7, stating, "I often feel like I don't want to go to Arabic class," received a moderate mean score of 2.17 and a standard deviation of 1.187. This study showed that while anxiety is present, it does not negatively impact their motivation to learn Arabic.

Based on the findings, lecturers need to encourage more positive reinforcement by providing positive feedback and celebrating small successes to build students' self-confidence. Additionally, lecturers can do individualized feedback that is constructive and supportive. This can also be assisted by implementing techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and anxiety management workshops. Furthermore, creating student profiles helps to understand each student's anxiety triggers and personality traits (introverted vs. extroverted).

B. Levels of Anxiety in Arabic Speaking Skills

Table 4: Level Of Anxiety in Arabic Speaking Skills

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I always felt uncertain of speaking Arabic in Arabic classes.	3.28	.790	Moderate
2.	I would panic if I had to speak Arabic without any preparation.	3.64	1.135	High

3.	I feel ashamed of myself when I speak Arabic.	2.91	1.144	Moderate
4.	I feel nervous when I speak Arabic with Arabs.	3.62	1.105	High
5.	I feel nervous when I know I will be called by a lecturer in an Arabic class.	3.47	.995	High
6.	I feel nervous when I don't understand what the lecturer is saying in Arabic.	3.55	.958	High
7.	I become nervous when the teacher asks me questions in Arabic about things I am not prepared for.	3.59	.859	High
	Overall Mean	3.44	.735	High

The construct of student anxiety levels in Arabic speaking skills recorded a high overall mean value of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.735. While the first construct showed that student anxiety in learning Arabic classes was moderate, their anxiety in speaking skills was notably high among UiTM's Arabic language program students. This indicates that speaking is a significant source of anxiety and worry for students, as it involves their emotions during classes. This is supported by Al-Khotaba et al. (2019), who found that a 1% increase in anxiety could lead to an 88.8% decrease in speaking skills.

Among the items assessed, item 2 had the highest mean value of 3.64, indicating that students panic when asked to speak without preparation. Factors contributing to this anxiety include the students' own language proficiency and self-confidence (Kamaruddin, 2017 & Abdullah et al., 2017). Students prefer to prepare before speaking. According to Ajeng (2016) & Tulgar (2018), students with high speaking anxiety focus too much on grammar and pronunciation, which can make their speech unclear and hinder their ability to convey ideas effectively. To mitigate this, students should be allowed preparation time before speaking to lower their anxiety levels. This aligns with a study by Ali et al. (2021), which found a correlation between speaking anxiety and the classroom environment. A positive classroom environment can help reduce students' anxiety when speaking a foreign language.

Additionally, item 4, with a mean value of 3.62, revealed that students feel nervous when speaking with native Arabic speakers. Muhamad Nasir et al. (2023) found that students are more comfortable speaking English with their classmates than with native speakers. In this context, students feel anxious and worried when speaking with native Arabic speakers, who are fluent, speak quickly, and use more complex language compared to non-native speakers (Cagatay, 2015). This makes students more afraid of making mistakes and worried about not understanding the native speaker (Tulgar, 2018).

Furthermore, item 6 indicated that students feel nervous when they do not understand what their lecturer is saying in Arabic, and item 5 showed that students feel nervous when called upon in Arabic class, both with high mean values of 3.55 and 3.47, respectively. These findings are consistent with Radzi et al. (2022), who stated that students feel nervous when they do not understand their lecturer because they fear not being able to respond verbally when questioned directly.

Therefore, lecturers should diversify communication activities and provide more extrinsic motivation to help students feel more comfortable and confident in speaking Arabic directly.

Additionally, lecturers need to consider curriculum design and assessment methods. They should diversify assessment methods to allow students to demonstrate their competence more confidently. Furthermore, a communicative approach should be emphasized, prioritizing meaningful interaction over rote learning in language teaching. It can also be assisted by incorporating technology through virtual exchanges, which involve creating virtual exchanges with native speakers to provide real-world practice in a controlled setting.

C. Level of Fear of Negative Evaluation When Speaking Arabic

Table 5: Level Of Fear of Negative Evaluation When Speaking Arabic

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I often feel that other students have a better command of Arabic than I do.	4.21	.874	Very High
2.	I was afraid that other students would laugh at me when I spoke Arabic.	3.24	1.113	Moderate
3.	I was terrified when the lecturer always wanted to correct my misuse of Arabic.	2.88	1.171	Moderate
4.	I always assumed that other students were more fluent in Arabic than I was.	4.03	.936	High
5.	I always feel nervous when I take the Arabic exam.	3.00	.991	Moderate
Overall Mean		3.4724	.74429	High

The third construct, the level of fear of negative evaluation when speaking Arabic, recorded a high overall mean value of 3.47 with a standard deviation of 0.744. This fear of communication is closely tied to the apprehension of negative evaluation during speaking activities. When students feel uncertain and lack confidence in speaking Arabic, they are afraid of being judged negatively by those around them (Ahmad Radzi et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with Yusoff et al. (2020), who noted that this construct had the highest mean value compared to other constructs. This suggests that students' fear and worry about being judged negatively and laughed at when they make mistakes while speaking significantly affect their anxiety levels.

The highest mean value of 4.21 was found in item 1, where students felt that their peers had better Arabic proficiency. Item 4 also had a high mean value of 4.03, indicating that students believed others were more fluent in Arabic than themselves. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), language anxiety increases when students perceive that their peers have better language proficiency. This perception exacerbates their fear of speaking, as they feel inferior and worry about making mistakes in front of their peers.

Furthermore, students experience heightened anxiety and worry when they believe that their peers are evaluating them while they speak Arabic (Radzi et al., 2022). This fear of being judged negatively can stem from various factors:

- Comparison with Peers:** Students often compare their language skills with those of their peers, leading to feelings of inadequacy and increased anxiety. When they perceive their peers as more proficient, their own confidence diminishes, making them more susceptible to anxiety.
- Fear of Making Mistakes:** The fear of making mistakes and being laughed at or criticized by others can significantly hinder a student's willingness to speak. This fear is particularly pronounced in language learning, where students may feel that any error could lead to ridicule.
- Social Anxiety:** Social anxiety can amplify the fear of negative evaluation. Students who are generally anxious in social situations are likely to experience greater fear when required to speak in a foreign language, as they worry about being judged by both their peers and teachers.

Based on the findings of the level of fear of negative evaluation while speaking, it can be concluded that students feel significant anxiety when their peers are better at Arabic than they are. Lecturers need to create a classroom environment that fosters peer support by encouraging collaborative activities that promote peer support rather than competition. Additionally, they should establish a classroom culture where making mistakes is normalized and viewed as a learning opportunity.

CONCLUSION

The synthesis of these three constructs reveals that students' anxiety in learning Arabic is multifaceted, encompassing concerns about general apprehension about the learning process, speaking skills, and fear of negative evaluation.

1. **General Learning Anxiety:** While students experience a moderate level of anxiety about learning Arabic, it does not severely impact their motivation to attend classes. However, it is essential to address this anxiety through confidence-building activities and support strategies to enhance students' overall learning experience.
2. **Speaking Skills:** Students' anxiety about speaking Arabic is driven by fears related to preparation, interaction with native speakers, and self-perceived proficiency. Addressing these concerns through supportive classroom environments and targeted practice opportunities can help alleviate some of this anxiety.
3. **Fear of Negative Evaluation:** The fear of being judged negatively is a significant contributor to students' anxiety. Creating a positive and supportive atmosphere in the classroom, where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process, can help mitigate this fear. Encouraging peer support and providing constructive feedback can also reduce the anxiety associated with negative evaluations.

In conclusion, understanding these constructs allows educators to tailor interventions to address the specific sources of anxiety students face. By creating a supportive learning environment, providing ample preparation opportunities, and addressing fears of negative evaluation, educators can help students manage their anxiety and improve their proficiency and confidence in speaking Arabic.

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