

# Investigating the Levels and Factors Contributing to English Language Speaking Anxiety among English Major Undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam

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## ABSTRACT

Although it is widely believed that English major undergraduates experience minimal anxiety when conversing in English, a significant number of them continue to encounter substantial difficulties with English-speaking anxiety. This study aimed to investigate the level of English Language Speaking Anxiety among English major undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam and to analyse gender-based differences in the level of anxiety. Grounded in the theoretical framework of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014), the study employed a 16-item Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) questionnaire adapted from Toubot et al. (2018) which highlighted three factors: Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Low Self-confidence (LSC). The questionnaire gathered responses from 140 respondents. The findings revealed that students predominantly had moderate to high levels of anxiety with the highest mean in CA (3.35), followed by FNE (3.26) and lastly LSC (3.23). The independent samples T-Tests revealed no significant difference in anxiety levels based on gender. Overall, English major undergraduates at UiTM Shah Alam generally experience a moderate to high level of English-speaking anxiety. The study highlights the need for supportive and communicative learning environments that can foster students' confidence and reduce anxiety in speaking contexts.

**Keywords:** English Language Speaking Anxiety, English Major Undergraduates, FLSAS, Gender

## INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is highly valued by most people, as it serves as a means of effective communication across cultures and facilitates academic and professional success. The importance of mastering the English language has been acknowledged by people as language plays a crucial role in one's learning and acquiring language for effective communication (Miskam and Saidalvi, 2018). Language students, especially those acquiring English, encounter diverse challenges influenced by various factors affecting their performance. This is because language acquisition extends beyond rule memorisation, presenting numerous obstacles for second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) students. Bai (2023) highlights the complexities students face with anxiety emerging as an extensively studied negative emotion in FL/SL learning. This anxiety impedes the development of speaking skills, impacting confidence, fluency, and overall language proficiency.

Lin, Yih, and Long (2019) stated that English is taught and learnt as a second language in the Malaysian education system and the fear of communicating in English is still prevalent among Malaysian students

whereby, they continue to face challenges in achieving fluency and communication effectiveness. Speaking skill, acknowledged as the challenging aspects of learning English, continues to present difficulties, intensified by the presence of anxiety. Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) noted that Malaysian students often find speaking in English intimidating, attributing to English-speaking anxiety that inhibits their willingness to speak. Moreover, this anxiety is pervasive among second-language students, who perceive mastering English-speaking skills as a daunting challenge (Yacob and Mohamad, 2022). Furthermore, Kashinathan and Aziz (2021) also mentioned that most of the students have anxiety due to physiological causes such as classroom fear and shyness when using English in front of peers. Therefore, it is evident that English-speaking anxiety is a significant challenge that students face.

Anxiety remains as one of the affecting factors to student's performance in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning, not only affecting the less proficient students but the competent ones too. According to Kashinathan and Aziz (2021), while weak ESL users experience lack of soft skills necessary to communicate effectively, competent ESL users who have achieved a high level of proficiency in the English language may still encounter some challenges, particularly in the context of speaking because it requires a great amount of effort to maintain it. Research also has shown that there are significant differences in language anxiety levels between low and high-performing ESL students. Bai (2023) investigated the differences among Chinese English-major students of various competencies and found out that from 123 participants, half of them had a moderate level of anxiety. In addition, Naudhani et al. (2018) found that English majors experienced a moderate level of foreign language speaking and classroom anxiety, while non-English majors encountered a high level of foreign language speaking and classroom anxiety.

Furthermore, despite the challenges faced by weak ESL students, there is also a misconception about more competent ESL users where they are believed to be naturally confident and fluent speakers, leading to the presumption that they do not experience anxiety when communicating in English. Bai (2023) reasoned that English major students would still have anxiety when they used English language since they were enrolled in English-centred programmes and needed higher oral English ability. Therefore, English-speaking anxiety is a significant challenge faced by language students, especially English major students. Hence, there is a need to investigate this issue specifically among English major undergraduates at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam based on these three research objectives:

1. To investigate the levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety based on factors of Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Low Self-confidence (LSC).
2. To analyse gender-based differences in the levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety across the three anxiety factors.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Language Anxiety

Language anxiety is a well-documented affective factor that significantly influences second or foreign language learning. It is commonly defined as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Among the various forms of language anxiety, speaking anxiety which is the fear or apprehension experienced when required to communicate orally in a second or foreign language is considered one of the most debilitating and commonly experienced forms (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

## FLSAS (Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale)

This study is grounded in the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety framework, which was introduced by

Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014). This framework divides speaking anxiety into three primary components which are Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), and Low Self-confidence (LSC) as described below:

- Communication Apprehension: a type of anxiety linked to the process of interacting with others, especially in a second language.
- Fear of Negative Evaluation: a result of learners' apprehension regarding the possibility of being negatively evaluated by peers, instructors, or listeners.
- Low Self-confidence: a learner's belief that they lack the capability to communicate effectively or fluently in the target language.

The foundation of this study's framework is derived from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986). Based on this, the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) offers a more targeted approach by focusing specifically on speaking-related anxiety. It captures how emotional and cognitive factors interplay to hinder oral communication. According to Gao (2022), FLSAS tends to yield higher anxiety levels than FLCAS, supporting the idea that speaking is often perceived as the most stress-inducing aspect of language learning. As such, FLSAS is widely accepted as a suitable tool for measuring anxiety specifically related to English language speaking (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018).

This study adopted a 16-item FLSAS questionnaire from Toubot et al. (2018), who had based their instrument on the framework developed by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014). Since the original framework did not assign items into specific categories, Toubot et al. (2018) performed an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the dimensions of speaking anxiety among English undergraduates. As a result, two items were removed from the initial 18-item scale, producing a more reliable structure centred on three key dimensions: Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), and Low Self-confidence (LSC). By adopting this refined framework, the present study sought to measure speaking anxiety levels among English major undergraduates and explore the potential influence of gender on these experiences

### *Speaking Skills and Speaking Anxiety among English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners*

Speaking is an important linguistic skill that enables individuals to participate in oral communication for the exchange and dissemination of information, particularly in English, which is in high demand among learners across all levels of proficiency. Kashinathan and Aziz (2021) mentioned that developing speaking skills is always regarded as a challenge as it requires a great amount of effort to maintain by ESL learners.

English language speaking anxiety is a specific type of language anxiety that individuals encounter when they are learning, using, or speaking English as a second or foreign language. Halder (2018) mentioned that learners usually encounter challenges in the English language which leads to English language speaking anxiety. Moreover, it is described as a specific type of communication apprehension that individuals experience when it comes to speaking in English, particularly in public or formal settings. Bai (2023) justified that when it is compared to other language skills, speaking was the one that caused the most concern among language learners. Therefore, English language anxiety especially in terms of speaking skills is a critical problem and it needs to be overcome by the language learners, especially among English major undergraduates.

## Previous Studies on Speaking Anxiety among English Major Undergraduates

English-speaking anxiety remains a common yet persisting issue in English language proficiency. Various contributing factors have been identified in numerous studies that have examined this phenomenon across different proficiency levels. Toubot et al. (2018) reported that based on their investigation of English language speaking anxiety among undergraduates from the department of English language in three Libyan universities, a moderate to high level of EFL speaking anxiety was observed in the students. The study also demonstrated that the Low Self-confidence factor (LSC) had the highest average, followed by the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Communication Apprehension (CA) factors. This demonstrates that the factor of reduced self-confidence was the most prevalent source of anxiety among the university students majoring in English, resulting in the highest average score.

Next, Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) in their study of "Investigating English Language Speaking Anxiety among Malaysian Undergraduate Learners" revealed that Communication Apprehension (CA) was the most prevailing factor among students with high and moderate level of speaking anxiety. It is intriguing that in the context of ESL, test anxiety was the predominant factor contributing to English language speaking anxiety in individuals with modest levels of anxiety. Finally, Bai (2023) in his study of "Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among Chinese English Majors: Causes, Effects and Strategies" further confirmed that English major undergraduates were anxious when facing oral test and expressed that speaking anxiety greatly affected their oral performance. He further revealed this can be caused by a variety of factors, including a language environment, students' personalities, a fear of negative evaluations, a limited vocabulary, a lack of practice, and poor English skills. Overall, these studies emphasise the significance of addressing the persistent challenge of facing speaking anxiety among English major undergraduates and the multifaceted character of English-speaking anxiety.

## Gender in Language Speaking Anxiety

Studies have explored the connection between gender and anxiety related to speaking a foreign language, yet the results remain inconclusive. Some studies indicate that female learners often report higher levels of speaking anxiety, which may stem from heightened concern about peer judgment and a stronger fear of being negatively evaluated (Dewaele, 2017; Park & French, 2013). For instance, Park and French (2013) observed that female students exhibited greater communication apprehension and anxiety about making mistakes when compared to their male peers. These trends are frequently attributed to sociocultural expectations, where female students may experience increased pressure to perform well in academic and social settings involving language use. On the other hand, several studies have found no statistically significant differences between male and female students in relation to language anxiety, suggesting that such anxiety is likely influenced more by personal factors such as personality, confidence, or learning history than by gender alone (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Tóth, 2010). Dewaele and Al-Saraj (2015) also point out that inconsistencies across studies may arise from differing research contexts and methodologies, including variations in language proficiency levels, task types, and the overall classroom environment. Therefore, based on these arguments, there is a need to explore gender within the setting of present study to identify the connection between gender and anxiety in speaking skill.

## METHODOLOGY

The participants for this study were 140 English major undergraduates enrolled in the Bachelor of Applied Language Studies (Hons.) English for Professional Communication (LG240) and Bachelor of Applied Language Studies (Hons.) English for Intercultural Communication (LG243) enrolled in English major programme at the English Language Department of the Academy of Language Studies UiTM Shah Alam. According to the sample size calculator with a 2000 population size, 95% confidence level, and 8% margin



of error, it was determined that the sample size for this study would be 140. It is commonly considered an “acceptable” margin of error for survey researchers to be between 5% and 8% at a 95% confidence level (Pollfish, n.d.). Moreover, the study employed random sampling for the sampling method. Based on simple random sampling, this method is widely recognised for producing unbiased, representative, and for providing each member of the population with an equal probability of selection (Noor, Tajik and Golzar, 2022). Hence, all LG240 and LG243 students in UiTM Shah Alam had an identical chance of being randomly selected and were able to represent the intended population.

The study utilised a 16-item online FLSAS questionnaire adapted from Toubot, et al. (2018). The online questionnaire elicited responses from the respondent based on the Speaking Anxiety Scale between 1 to 5 (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Additionally, the classification of factors leading to English-speaking anxiety was measured in three dimensions: Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), and Low Self-confidence (LSC). The responses gathered were analysed to determine the overall level of English Language Speaking Anxiety among English major undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam and to examine the differences based on gender.

Descriptive statistics were implemented in this investigation through the utilisation of SPSS. The means were tabulated and represented to illustrate the results of the research question on the levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety experienced by English major undergraduates at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam. The factors considered were the Communication Apprehension Factor (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation Factor (FNE), and Low Self-confidence Factor (LSC). Next, T-Test was implemented to evaluate gender-based disparities in the levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety across the three anxiety factors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Objective 1: The levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety experienced by English major undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam

Factor	Highest Mean Item	Mean Score	Lowest Mean Item	Mean Score	Level
CA	B11: “I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do”	3.54	B13: “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English classes”	3.16	CA emerged as the highest factor (overall mean 3.35), indicating that anxiety is primarily rooted in real-time communication and peer comparison.
FNE	C2: “I am afraid of making mistakes in English class”	3.50	C9: “I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make”	3.02	FNE ranked second (overall mean 3.26), showing that students are anxious about making mistakes and being judged by peers/teachers, especially in unprepared situations.
LSC	D4: “I start to panic when I have to speak without	3.46	D8: “I don’t feel confident when I speak English in	3.06	LSC recorded the lowest mean (overall mean 3.23), but still at a

	preparation in English classes"		classes"		moderate level, suggesting that lack of preparation and self-consciousness contribute to speaking anxiety.
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Table 1 The Levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety by English Major Undergraduates

Table 1 shows the findings for RO1. It is revealed that the English major undergraduates at UiTM Shah Alam encountered different levels of anxiety with regard to the three factors. **Communication Apprehension (CA)** had the overall mean score of (3.35). This suggests that students' anxiety associated with speaking is mainly triggered by real-time communication involving comparisons to peers or being called to speak spontaneously. **Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)** had the overall second higher mean (overall mean 3.26), showing that students are anxious about making mistakes, being unprepared, and are worried about being evaluated by peers or a teacher. **Low self-confidence (LSC)** was the lowest mean (overall mean 3.23), but it is still within the moderate range, demonstrating that a lack of preparation and higher self-consciousness also contribute to speaking anxiety. These findings indicate that it is evident that all three factors contribute toward anxiety levels with CA being the most prevalent factor contributing to anxiety followed by FNE and then LSC.

Research Objective 2: To analyse gender-based differences in the levels of English Language Speaking Anxiety across the three anxiety factors.

Table 2 Mean Score for Gender

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
CA	Female	78	3.2527	.93690	.10608
	Male	62	3.4724	.95274	.12100
FNE	Female	78	3.0308	1.04848	.11872
	Male	62	3.4774	1.03851	.13189
LSC	Female	78	3.1218	1.16269	.13165
	Male	62	3.4234	1.09075	.13853

Table 3 Independent Sample T-Test for Gender

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances						
		F	Sig.	t	df	p-value
CA	Equal variances assumed	0	0.996	-1.367	138	0.174
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.365	129.978	
FNE	Equal variances assumed	0.036	0.849	-2.514	138	0.013
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.517	131.502	
LSC	Equal variances assumed	0.34	0.561	-1.567	138	0.12
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.578	134.215	

The Independent Samples T-Test was employed to examine gender-based differences in English language speaking anxiety across the three factors: Communication Apprehension (CA), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), and Low Self-Confidence (LSC). The results indicated that male students reported slightly higher mean scores across all three dimensions (CA = 3.47; FNE = 3.48; LSC = 3.42) compared to female students (CA = 3.25; FNE = 3.03; LSC = 3.12). However, the differences were not statistically significant for CA ( $p = .174$ ) and LSC ( $p = .120$ ).

For FNE, the analysis indicated a p-value of .013, which falls below the conventional significance threshold of .05. This result suggests that there may be a meaningful difference in students' fear of negative evaluation between genders, with male students scoring higher. Nevertheless, given the marginal nature of this finding and the relatively small sample size, the difference should be interpreted with caution. Overall, the findings suggest that gender does not substantially influence English-speaking anxiety, although minor differences may exist in how students perceive negative evaluation.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the levels and factors that contribute to English language speaking anxiety among undergraduates who major in English at UiTM Shah Alam. Based on the findings, students were reported to demonstrate a moderate to high level of English-speaking anxiety. Communication Apprehension (CA) was recorded as the most contributing factor to speaking anxiety, followed by Low Self-Confidence (LSC) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). These results are in accordance with the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSAS) model of Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014), which highlights CA as a significant factor in speaking-related anxiety in foreign language contexts. Similarly, Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) discovered that Communication Apprehension was the most prevalent factor among Malaysian undergraduates, particularly in situations that necessitated spontaneous or public speaking. Their participants reported increased anxiety when requested to speak without preparation or when comparing their fluency to others, which is confirmed by the present study.

Interestingly, the respondents in the present study ranked LSC second, despite the fact that Toubot et al. (2018) identified Low Self-Confidence as the most prominent factor among Libyan EFL students. This variation may be attributed to different sociocultural contexts or academic expectations. Nevertheless, both studies highlight self-perception and personal belief as critical contributors to language anxiety. Similarly, Bai (2023) acknowledged that students' limited vocabulary, poor English proficiency, and lack of practice significantly increase anxiety, especially in academic environments where high oral proficiency is expected. In terms of Fear of Negative Evaluation, the findings affirm earlier research by Halder (2018) and Kashinathan and Aziz (2021), who reported that fear of being judged by peers or instructors remains a core anxiety trigger. In this study, students were notably anxious about making mistakes or being laughed at, which reflects a social and evaluative dimension to their speaking anxiety.

Regarding gender, the Independent Samples T-Test showed no significant differences in speaking anxiety across male and female students. The findings contradict Halder (2018) who found out that the female students experienced higher level of English language anxiety than male students. This shows that gender does influence English language anxiety indicating that female students have higher English language anxiety than male students. While some literature reasoned that females are more prone to anxiety due to greater sensitivity to judgment (Park & French, 2013; Dewaele, 2017), this study aligns with the findings of Tóth (2010) and Yan and Horwitz (2008), who argued that individual differences such as personality, confidence, and past language experiences play a more substantial role than gender. Overall, the study affirms that even English majors often presumed to be more proficient and confident are not immune to English-speaking anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the levels and factors of English language speaking anxiety among English major students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam. The investigation revealed that students predominantly had moderate to high levels of anxiety, with Communication Apprehension (CA) identified as the primary factor, followed by Low Self-Confidence (LSC) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). Contrary to the prevalent belief that English majors are inherently confident speakers, the findings revealed that these individuals still encounter significant anxiety, especially in spontaneous speaking or performance-based contexts. Furthermore, no notable differences were observed between male and female students regarding their anxiety levels, indicating that gender does not significantly influence students' perceptions or experiences of English-speaking anxiety. The findings underscore the persistent necessity for supportive learning environments that prioritise students' emotional well-being while promoting engagement in English speaking activities. Educators and institutions should prioritise practical measures to facilitate students' confident verbal expression, including low-stakes discussions and positive reinforcement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To further add depth into the area of English language speaking anxiety as well as to address the gap identified in this study, future research could explore a mixed-method approach combining surveys with interviews or observations that would enhance richness in the findings. Additionally, while the study reports mean scores for CA, FNE, and LSC, it does not explore the interrelationships among these factors or their influence on overall oral performance. Therefore, future research may investigate this to establish the interrelatedness of the factors. Next, since gender differences were statistically insignificant, researchers might consider investigating other potential mediators, such as personality traits, cultural background, or prior learning experiences. Lastly, tracking students' speaking anxiety over time through longitudinal studies could reveal whether interventions have lasting effects on their confidence and fluency as they progress through their academic journey.

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