



## EXPLORING THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH AND SPEAKING ANXIETY OF THE EFL LEARNERS



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### ABSTRACT

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EFL learners.

This study sought to explore the attitude towards English and the level of the English language speaking anxiety of the EFL learners. The students were classified according to their age, sex, program, and employment status. Stratified random sampling was utilized in order to ensure that every member of all groups gets equal opportunity to be selected. The adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was used in determining the English language anxiety of the students while the Students' Attitudes towards English questionnaire identified the perceptions of students in learning the English language. A focus group discussion was also done with selected students to corroborate the quantitative data gathered. Results revealed that females had higher level of anxiety than males. Working students were found to be more confident than non-working students. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the levels of English language anxiety according to sex and status. A significant relationship was noted between English language anxiety and attitude towards English. Hence, it is recommended that humanistic approaches must be utilized for teachers to build positive relationships with students, thereby accepting their individual differences, dealing with them more patiently, and creating a supportive and conducive classroom for learning. EFL teachers may make use of collaborative student-centered activities through paired or group work to eradicate competition among the students, to lessen tension, and eventually, lower the anxiety levels. Lastly, the study recommends the university administration to support activities, especially those which would provide avenues for students to improve their self-esteem.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature on anxiety and attitudes towards English language speaking of the EFL students, taking into consideration some learner and situational variables. The study is significant because the relationship of between speaking anxiety and students' attitudes towards the English language has not been comprehensively explored so far.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In most cases, anxiety impedes students' capabilities to execute successfully in a language classroom. It has been a known fact that foreign language or second language learners of a certain language would find learning stressful despite the teachers' efforts to create a classroom conducive to learning.

A number of researchers have defined language anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) defined language anxiety as the panic or hesitation taking place when a student is likely to use a foreign or second language.

Language anxiety is the unconstructive feeling or reaction during learning a second or foreign language. [Ferdous \(2012\)](#) asserted that majority of the language students undergo an upsetting level of anxiety. Language anxiety is truly a personal feeling which is experienced by both second and foreign language learners since this establishes latent problems. Along this line, language anxiety comprises diverse discernments, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings pertinent to learning the language in the classroom. This is surfacing from individuality of the process in learning the language. Moreover, [Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope \(1986\)](#) underscored that the correlates of foreign or second language anxiety include communication trepidation or the uneasiness of interacting with other people; exam uneasiness or the fear of tests, and other assessments utilized to estimate the performance of students; and apprehension of harmful evaluation or being worried on how other people would react when they speak. To point out such fretful students in higher education institutions and assess the levels of their anxiety, [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Speaking anxiety, in particular, is something that has a great impact on one's self-confidence since it often makes one experience failure when not being able to speak out and show what one knows. Irregular heartbeat, perspiration, stumbling and the inability to act are a few symptoms that block one's capacity to act and speak. This issue often turns into a vicious circle because one bad experience from speaking often becomes a reminder when the next opportunity arises. If a student with speaking anxiety experiences failure he or she will rather remain quiet than take the risk of failing again. This situation drags them into a silence that becomes more and more difficult to break since it contributes to a role as "the quiet one" in class. Speaking anxiety creates a low self-confidence which makes students remain quiet in all situations, even if they have the capacity to express themselves and knowledge that is worth hearing ([Lanerfeldt, 1992](#)). Persons with speaking anxiety often avoid anxiety-producing social or performance situations, but when unavoidable, these situations are endured with feeling of intense anxiety and distress. Anticipatory anxiety also frequently occurs when an individual imagines the actual experience of speaking anxiety in advance ([Dela Cruz, 2019](#)). [Atma \(2018\)](#) found out that speaking anxiety potentially stems from students themselves who regard that lack of vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, others' negative judgment, and low-perceived ability are triggers. According to [Said and Weda \(2018\)](#) speaking anxiety affects language achievements in a variety of skills. It needs to be positioned as one of crucial attributes in language learning. It can be deduced that anxiety in the foreign or second language has been regarded as a psychological correlate in the process of learning.

On the other hand, research results also suggest that students' attitude towards English may or may not have an influence on their language speaking anxiety. One of the studies reflected significant differences on the foreign language anxiety and attitude towards foreign language learning between males and females. There was significant negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and students' attitude towards foreign language learning. Females exhibited lesser anxiety in a language class and had more positive attitude towards the language ([Muhammad, 2011](#)). It is also seen that correlates such as attitudes, orientations, motivation, and anxiety that affect language learning are truly significant ([Hassan & Somayeh, 2013](#)).

Hence, this study delved on foreign language, specifically the English language speaking anxiety of the students, their attitude towards English, and their various coping mechanisms.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Fretfulness restrains the students' ability to work out incoming language and hampers the course of acquisition. Moreover, language anxiety as an emotional obstruction is prevalent when students are exposed and engaged to language inputs made available to them ([Krashen, 1985](#)). Conversely, if learners are motivated and unperturbed, emotional barrier will be lessened and the surrounding language input will more likely be acquired. Moreover, severe language anxiety leads to problems of weaker risk-taking ability, while self-regard, and confidence would eventually decelerate foreign language learning ([Crookall & Oxford, 1991](#)).

These negative effects of language anxiety had been proven true by relevant research results. Language anxiety is primarily related to speaking situations. This projects the fact that students are usually nervous when they are immersed into speaking activities in a classroom (Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003). Many students had the fright of being evaluated negatively or being worried on the perceptions of others to them. Moreover, students also experienced anxiousness when they converse with their classmates in the EFL classroom (Ferdous, 2012).

Language anxiety affects students' performance in assessments which involves reading and writing and has established a considerable correlation of second or foreign language anxiety for both writing and reading skills (Trang, 2012). In addition, it was observed that secondary school students with the lowest degrees of Foreign Language (FL) (Spanish, French or German) anxiety on the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale showed highest grades (Sparks & Ganschow, 2007). Research has analyzed several variables associated with language learning the anxiety. The said variables can be grouped into two core groups: learner variables and situational variables. Course level is an example of a situational variable while aptitude, sex, and age are learner variables. The above-mentioned independent variables may interrelate in multiple ways to create situations induced by anxiety (Willimas & Andrade, 2008). Donovan and Macintyre (2005) found higher language anxiety marks in French language among the Anglo-Canadian college learners compared to high school students. Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (2000) study with tertiary education students registered in French, German, and Spanish courses reveal that older learners had higher degrees of anxiety, than younger learners did. According to Dewaele (2007) younger learners had lower anxiety conditions when using the foreign or second language. On the contrary, it was found that older adult multilinguals suffer less from foreign language anxiety than younger learners in their respective languages (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008). The study of Arnaiz and Guillén (2012) revealed that students had average anxiety level and that females had greater anxiety than males. Students in lower levels exhibited higher anxiety levels and age had been found to have a notable negative correlation with anxiety. The results in Machida (2001) study however point in the opposite direction. Machida examined FL class which was the Japanese language. The basis of anxiety was sex and other variables and deduced that females were more fretful than males. Liu (2006) discovered in his study with Chinese students learning English that the higher their language level, the less anxious the students were in spoken English. However, the lack of control over a certain situation may incite anxiety when students begin to learn a foreign language. Extensive research therefore signifies that language anxiety is not simply conceptual as advanced by theorists but a reality for many learners (Liu, 2006) All these findings consistently confirmed the negative effects of language anxiety on language learners (e.g., (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991a)). On the contrary, a number of theorists also asserted that language anxiety has nothing to do with students' difficulties in learning a foreign or second language. Sparks and Ganschow (2007) doubted the relationship of anxiety in learning a language. They argued with the assertions of Horwitz et al. (1986) regarding the significance of anxiety; they claimed that nervousness first existed in learning the first language and this then led to difficulties in grasping the language. As such, anxiety should not be attributed only in the course of second or foreign language learning since it had been already the cause of poor achievement even in learning the first language. Trang (2012) expressed his views regarding language anxiety. He contended that if learners who possess a significant level of anxiety obtained significantly low performance in their language skills, the predicament is not anxiety but the students' deficiency of aptitude in the language caused by their various origins. Language anxiety does not bring about failure in learning a language, may it be the second or foreign language, but an outcome. In spite of these divergent opinions, it has been evident that a number of researches on the influence of language anxiety has given a well-built confirmation on the harmful effects of anxiety on language learning.

This present investigation also aims to examine whether there is a relationship between language speaking anxiety and students' attitude towards the said language. Studies show that there is negative association between foreign language anxiety and students' attitude towards English language learning. Students undergo anxiety in

the language class because most of the time, they deem that they would not be able to achieve better in the language test (Trang, 2012).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized mixed methods research design. “Mixed methods design involves the intentional collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and the combination of the strengths of each to answer research questions” (Pasick et al., 2009). For quantitative data, this study adapted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). Composed of 12 questions which were taken from the FLCAS, the questionnaire was modified to suit the needs of the investigation which focused on determining only students’ English language speaking anxiety. As such, only those statements relevant to the current investigation were utilized. On the other hand, a questionnaire on Students’ Attitudes towards English was used to determine the attitudes of students in learning English, which may either be positive or negative. For qualitative data, FGD sessions were conducted to selected students to identify some of their coping mechanisms when they are confronted with English language speaking anxiety. Stratified random sampling was utilized in order that ensure that every member of all groups get equal opportunity to be selected. The students were classified according to their age, sex, program, and employment status.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety of Students

Table-1. Level of English language speaking anxiety of students.

Category	N	Mean	SD	Description
A. Entire Group	110	3.05	1.13	Fairly Anxious
B. Age				
20 years old and below	36	3.04	1.23	Fairly Anxious
21-23 years old	47	3.06	1.18	Fairly Anxious
24 years old and above	27	3.03	1.16	Fairly Anxious
C. Program				
Business	72	3.00	1.23	Fairly Anxious
International Studies	8	2.98	1.12	Fairly Anxious
Computing	7	3.13	1.25	Fairly Anxious
Informatics Engineering	20	3.15	1.18	Fairly Anxious
Mechatronics Engineering	3	3.51	1.15	Fairly Anxious
D. Sex				
Male	81	2.58	1.21	Slightly Anxious
Female	29	3.10	1.10	Fairly Anxious
E. Employment Status				
Working	76	2.01	1.11	Slightly Anxious
Non-working	34	3.13	1.25	Fairly Anxious

Table 1 shows the level of speaking anxiety of EFL students as a whole and when grouped according to age, program, sex, and employment status. Based on the results, the students were categorized as “fairly anxious” as an entire group. When grouped according to age and program, the students were also categorized as “fairly anxious” towards English. On the other hand, when students were categorized on the basis of sex, it was observed that females had higher level of anxiety than males. Males were “slightly anxious” while females were “fairly anxious”.

The female’s level of anxiety had been corroborated by studies of Arnaiz and Guillén (2012) and Machida (2001) which revealed that females were more fretful than males.

Moreover, FGD responses of selected female students revealed the following:

*“I am afraid to speak in English because my male classmates might laugh at me.”*

*“I am not comfortable talking in front of the boys.”*

*“Speaking in front of men, would require a lot of confidence since this is not very common in our culture.”*

*“Our culture is more conservative than other cultures so I think it is normal if I won’t feel at ease talking especially if there are males around”.*

All these results were supported by Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) who asserted that language anxiety was primarily related to speaking situations. This means that students are usually nervous when there are immersed into speaking activities in the classroom. Ferdous (2012) also added that many students had the fright of being evaluated negatively or being worried on the perceptions of others to them. Moreover, students also experienced anxiousness when they conversed with their classmates in the EFL classroom. Moreover, when students were classified based on their status, results showed that working students were more confident than non-working ones. Those working were “slightly anxious” while the non-working were “fairly anxious”. This was substantiated by working students’ FGD responses such as:

*“I don’t usually care even if my English skills are not that good. What is more important is that I am able to deal properly with my clients at work. That’s all that matters.”*

*“My work made me more exposed to people. I guess it helped me a lot in gaining confidence especially in using the English language.”*

*“I am a call center employee so I am required to speak English properly.”*

*“Yes, I am not nervous when I speak in English because at work, I use English to communicate with my expatriate colleagues.”*

*“I was anxious to use English before, whether in speaking or writing. Now that I am working as a secretary, I have learned a lot and I became more confident.”*

#### 4.2. Attitudes towards English of Students

**Table-2.** Attitude towards English of students.

Category	N	Mean	SD	Description
A. Entire Group	110	3.96	1.30	Positive
B. Age				
20 years old and below	36	4.06	1.23	Positive
21-23 years old	47	3.88	1.18	Positive
24 years old and above	27	3.87	1.16	Positive
C. Program				
Business	72	3.94	1.30	Positive
International Studies	8	4.36	1.06	Highly Positive
Computing	7	3.75	1.57	Positive
Informatics Engineering	20	3.98	1.01	Positive
Mechatronics Engineering	3	2.83	2.30	Neutral
D. Sex				
Male	81	3.90	1.30	Positive
Female	29	4.03	1.28	Positive
E. Employment Status				
Working	76	3.93	1.20	Positive
Non-working	34	3.92	1.54	Positive

Table 2 shows the students’ attitude towards English taken entirely and categorized into various variables. As an entire group, the students exhibited a “positive” attitude towards English. When grouped on the basis of age, sex, and employment status, they also regarded English positively. However, when classified as to the program enrolled, BSIS students had “highly positive” attitude towards English while the Business, Computing, Informatics Engineering, and Mechatronics Engineering students had “positive” attitude.

FGD responses, which supported these results, are as follows:

“I graduated from a government school and English was not really given importance. However, when I enrolled at the university, I learned to love English.”

“I like English though I admit that I am still not that good in terms of speaking and writing.”

“I couldn’t speak or write correct English when I started studying in this university. I had three remedial classes in English and I guess those really helped me a lot in learning how to speak and write.”

“My English teachers taught me a lot and I really thank all of them. Before, I hated English but now, I am willing to learn everything about the language.”

“It was really my dream to enroll in this university because I know that I will have better English. English is used in all my classes so this motivated me to strive harder to be proficient in English.”

“My English teachers are very patient in dealing with students who have difficulties in learning the language. In fact, most of them would offer tutorial classes just to be of help to students.”

“I am not afraid to use the English language even if I know that I am not that good at it.”

“I have a positive attitude towards learning the English language. Aside from the English courses I had in the university, I also develop my English skills by watching English movies, reading books, and listening to music.”

#### 4.3. Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Sex

**Table-3.** Differences in the level of English language speaking anxiety according to sex.

Category	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sex						
Male	81	2.58	1.21	-2.435	108	0.019*
Female	29	3.10	1.10			

Note: \*p<.05

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of English language speaking anxiety according to sex. Females had higher level of anxiety than males. These results are consistent with those of Machida (2001) and Arnaiz and Guillén (2012).

#### 4.4. Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Employment Status

**Table-4.** Differences in the level of English language speaking anxiety According to employment status.

Category	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Employment Status						
Working	76	2.01	1.11	-2.080	107	0.040*
Non-working	34	3.13	1.25			

Note: \*p<.05

#### 4.5. Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Age

Table 4 shows a significant difference between the levels of English language anxiety speaking according to the students’ employment status. Working students have lower level of English language anxiety than students who are not working.

**Table-5.** Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Age.

Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
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Between Groups	4.648	3	2.324	1.777	0.174
Within Groups	139.907	107	1.308		
Total	144.555	110			

Table 5 reveals no significant difference on the levels of English language speaking anxiety when students were grouped based on age. Results do not coincide with those of Donovan and Macintyre (2005); Dewaele (2007) and Bailey et al. (2000) who had found out that older learners had higher degrees of anxiety, than younger learners; while Dewaele et al. (2008) advanced that older adult multi-linguals suffer less from foreign language anxiety than younger learners in their various languages.

#### 4.6. Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Program

Table-6. Differences in the Level of English Language Speaking Anxiety According to Program.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between Groups	6.762	5	2.324	0.912	0.460
Within Groups	194.729	105	1.308		
Total	201.491	110			

Table 6 presents that no significant difference in the level of English language speaking anxiety when students were classified based on the programs enrolled.

#### 4.7. Differences in the Attitude towards English According to Sex

Table-7. Differences in the attitude towards English according to sex.

Category	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sex						
Male	81	3.90	1.30	-1.734	108	0.086
Female	29	4.03	1.28			

Table 7 reveals that there is no significant difference in students' attitude towards English when grouped based on sex.

#### 4.8. Differences in the Attitude towards English According to Employment Status

Table-8. Differences in the attitude towards English according to employment status.

Category	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Employment Status						
Working	76	3.92	1.20	0.600	107	0.550
Non-working	34	3.93	1.54			

Table 8 reveals that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards English whether the students are working or not working.

#### 4.9. Differences in the Attitudes towards English According to Age

Table 9 shows that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards English when students are categorized based on age. This means that regardless of age, students have positive attitude towards English.

Table-9. Differences in the attitude towards English according to age.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between Groups	4.282	3	2.141	1.262	0.287
Within Groups	181.573	107	1.697		
Total	185.855	110			

#### 4.10. Differences in the Attitudes towards English According to Program

Table-10. Differences in the attitude towards English according to program.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between Groups	11.631	5	2.908	1.752	0.144
Within Groups	174.224	105	1.659		
Total	185.855	110			

Table 10 reveals that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards English when students are grouped based on their corresponding programs enrolled.

#### 4.11. Relationship between English Language Speaking Anxiety and Attitude towards English

Table-11. Relationship between English language speaking anxiety and attitude towards English.

		English language anxiety
Attitude towards	Pearson r	-0.203*
English	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034
	N	110

Note: \*p<.05

Table 11 exemplifies that there is a significant correlation between English language speaking anxiety and attitude towards English. These findings are confirmed by MacIntyre (1999); MacIntyre and Gardner (1989); MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a). On the other hand, results of the present investigation did not back up contentions of Trang (2012) and Sparks and Ganschow (2007) who asserted that language anxiety has nothing to do with students' attitudes and difficulties in learning a foreign or second language.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. As an entire group, the students' English-speaking anxiety was fairly anxious. When grouped according to age and program, the students were also fairly anxious.
2. Females have higher level of anxiety than males.
3. Working students were found to be more confident than non-working.



4. As an entire group and when classified based on age, sex, employment status, and program enrolled the students exhibited a positive attitude towards English.
5. There is a significant difference between the levels of English language anxiety according to sex.
6. There is a significant difference between the levels of English language speaking anxiety according to status.
7. There is no significant difference on the level of English language speaking anxiety when students were grouped as to age and program enrolled.
8. There are no significant differences in the attitude towards English when students are grouped as to age, program enrolled, sex, and employment status.
9. There is a significant relationship between English language speaking anxiety and attitude towards English.

The following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers, primarily English teachers, have the crucial role in eradicating or at least, reducing English language speaking anxiety in an EFL classroom. Teachers have to be cognizant about how they treat the learners which may be harmful such as correcting the students' errors, comparing them to each other, forcing them to talk, and humiliating them in front of others. Instead, more humanistic approaches have to be utilized in order for teachers to build positive relationships with students, thereby accepting their individual differences, dealing with them more patiently, and creating a supportive and conducive classroom for learning.
2. EFL teachers may make use of collaborative student-centered activities through paired or group work in order to eradicate competition among the students, lessen tension, and eventually, lower anxiety levels.
3. The university administration ought to support activities, especially those which would provide avenues for students to improve their self-esteem. These activities include variety shows, literary contests, leadership trainings, etc.
4. Similar studies may be conducted to further explain the results of the present investigation.

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