

An Analysis of Language Anxiety on Students' Academic Speaking Performance

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ABSTRACT

Language anxiety remains one of the most critical affective factors influencing students' success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in speaking performance. This study investigates the types of language anxiety and their impacts on students' academic speaking performance at Universitas Balikpapan. The research aims to (1) identify the dominant types of language anxiety experienced by students and (2) examine how anxiety affects fluency, accuracy, and complexity in academic speaking. A descriptive qualitative method was employed with data gathered from twenty second-semester students of the English Literature program. Instruments included the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), observation checklists, and recorded oral performances. Results revealed that trait anxiety was the most prevalent, experienced by 45% of participants, followed by situation-specific anxiety (30%) and state anxiety (25%). Regarding impact, language anxiety significantly reduced students' fluency, with most classified as disfluent or very disfluent speakers. However, accuracy and complexity were less affected; most students achieved good or excellent ratings. These findings suggest that while anxiety predominantly impairs the spontaneity of speech, it does not heavily disrupt students' ability to produce correct or comprehensible language. This study highlights the need for targeted classroom interventions to address anxiety-related fluency issues while reinforcing existing strengths in accuracy and complexity.

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1. Introduction

English speaking proficiency is essential in academic contexts, especially for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Among the various challenges students face, language anxiety has emerged as a major affective factor negatively impacting speaking performance. Language anxiety, particularly in oral communication, can hinder fluency, reduce confidence, and affect academic success. Students are often expected to perform well in oral academic tasks at institutions like Universitas Balikpapan because English is a core curriculum component. However, observations and experiences show that despite many students having adequate knowledge and preparation, they experience intense nervousness, mental blocks, and physiological symptoms like sweating and trembling when speaking in front of others. These reactions are commonly rooted in language anxiety, particularly related to speaking (Amalia et al., 2022; Aswad et al., 2019; Sachiya et al., 2025). This study focuses on understanding the nature of language anxiety in academic speaking and its effects on students' performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which has become a foundational tool in this field. Their work identified communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as key dimensions of language anxiety. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1993) emphasized the detrimental effects of anxiety on cognitive processing during language tasks. These studies have significantly advanced the understanding of how anxiety influences general language learning (Ko et al., 2025; Kyeongjae et al., 2025; Yaumi et al., 2023).

However, the existing research tends to treat language anxiety as a broad construct, often overlooking the specific types of anxiety experienced in particular contexts, such as academic speaking. Liu and Jackson (2008) found that high levels of anxiety negatively correlated with students' willingness to communicate and oral proficiency. Similarly, Woodrow (2006) highlighted that anxiety could lead to avoidance behavior and reduced participation in speaking activities. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often focus on general language anxiety without dissecting its specific types and their distinct impacts on speaking performance. Moreover, while the negative correlation between anxiety and

language performance is widely acknowledged, few studies have explored in detail how anxiety specifically impairs students' academic speaking performance in classroom settings. This gap highlights the need for more context-sensitive and performance-focused investigations. To address these limitations, the present study explores two central research questions: What types of language anxiety do students experience in academic speaking contexts? and how does language anxiety impact students' academic speaking performance?

This study seeks to provide a more detailed understanding of language anxiety from a task-specific perspective by answering these questions. It aims to offer insights that inform educators and curriculum designers on supporting students in overcoming anxiety-related barriers in academic speaking. The novelty of this research lies in its focused examination of anxiety in academic speaking situations, a subfield that remains underexplored despite its practical relevance in EFL education.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to explore students' anxiety in academic speaking performance. A qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in capturing detailed and nuanced insights into human behavior in natural settings. This design ensures that the data reflect the real conditions of classroom interaction and emotional response, thus supporting the reliability and validity of the results (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The participants were 20 second-semester students from the English Literature Program, Faculty of Cultural Science, Balikpapan University. The selected class was identified using purposive sampling based on the students' observed difficulties and anxiety when performing spoken tasks in English.

Data were collected using two instruments: a questionnaire and an observation checklist to address the two research questions. Data were collected in two main stages. First, the questionnaire was administered to assess the types and levels of speaking anxiety. Students completed the instrument individually in a classroom setting to ensure consistent conditions. Second, classroom observations were conducted during speaking performances. The researcher recorded behaviors using the observation checklist, providing a real-time account of anxiety indicators.

The questionnaire was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). It contained 30 statements (15 positive and 15 negative) rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). These items were designed to measure three specific categories of anxiety:

State anxiety (Items 1–10)

Trait anxiety (Items 11–20)

Situation-specific anxiety (Items 21–30)

Table 1. Likert Scale Scoring System

Statement Type	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (NA)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Positive	5	4	3	2	1
Negative	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Sugiyono, 2002

Each student's total score was used to classify their level of anxiety using criteria from Sugiyono (2002), ranging from Highly Anxious to Never Anxious.

Table 2. Scoring classification

Score Range	Classification
20–35	Highly Anxious (HA)
36–51	Anxious (A)
52–67	Mildly Anxious (MA)

Score Range	Classification
68–83	Lowly Anxious (LA)
84–100	Never Anxious (NA)

Source: Research Data, 2025

Questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively using Likert-scale scoring. Positive and negative items were scored inversely to ensure accurate interpretation of anxiety levels. The final scores were classified into five categories: Highly Anxious, Anxious, Mildly Anxious, Lowly Anxious, and Never Anxious. Simultaneously, observation data were analyzed descriptively to identify recurring patterns in anxiety-related behavior, supporting the findings from the questionnaire.

A combination of an observation checklist and recorded speaking tasks was utilized to answer the second research question on the impacts of anxiety. The checklist included ten indicators related to physical and verbal signs of anxiety (e.g., avoiding eye contact, shaky voice, limited vocabulary, etc.). It was used to observe students during their speaking performances. In addition, recordings were analyzed to assess three core aspects of speaking: fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Table 3. Fluency Scoring Classification

Total Words Produced	Classification
150 – 330	Very Disfluent (VD)
331 – 510	Disfluent (D)
511 – 690	Middle Fluent (MF)
691 – 870	Fluent (F)
871 – 1050	Very Fluent (VF)

Source: Nation & Newton, 2009

Table 4. Accuracy and Complexity Scoring

Wrong Words (in 10 mins)	Classification
5 – 13	Very Good (VG)
14 – 22	Good (G)
23 – 31	Bad (B)
32 – 40	Very Bad (VB)

Source: Research Data, 2025

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, data triangulation was employed by comparing questionnaire responses with observational evidence. This approach ensured that both internal (psychological) and external (behavioral) dimensions of anxiety were addressed. Academic peers also reviewed the instruments to confirm content validity.

3. Result and Discussion

This study investigated the types of language anxiety experienced by students and its impact on their academic speaking performance. The findings are presented in response to the two research questions.

3.1 Types of language anxiety in students' academic speaking performance

Data collected through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and classroom observations identified three primary types of language anxiety: trait anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and state anxiety. The distribution among the 20 student participants is detailed in Table 2.

Table 5. Distribution of language anxiety types

Anxiety Type	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Trait Anxiety	9	45%
Situation-Specific Anxiety	6	30%
State Anxiety	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Source: Research Data, 2025

Trait anxiety was the most prevalent, affecting 45% of the students. This suggests that many students perceive speaking tasks as inherently threatening due to stable personality traits such as low self-confidence or perfectionism. Observational data corroborated these findings, with many students displaying behaviors like avoiding eye contact, remaining silent, and exhibiting physical discomfort during presentations.

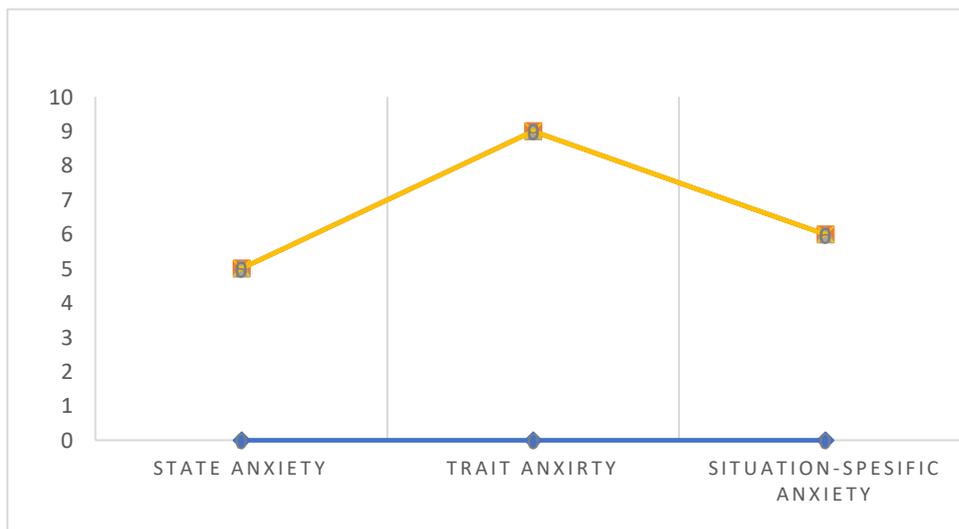


Figure 1. Frequency of the Language Anxiety Based on Questionnaires

The total score from the questionnaire was 1.847, with a total sampling of 20 students. It shows that the students' types of language anxiety in English academic speaking performance are five students who are classified as state anxiety, nine students who are classified as trait anxiety, and six students who are classified as situational specific anxiety. It means that almost half of the students were classified as trait anxiety.

Trait anxiety refers to a stable personality disposition where individuals are more likely to perceive situations, such as public speaking, as threatening, regardless of actual danger (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The observational checklist further confirmed the presence of anxiety symptoms during academic speaking tasks. Students displayed shyness and silence, avoided eye contact, had limited vocabulary, used inaccurate grammar, had poor pronunciation, and had reduced fluency. Physiological signs like sweating and trembling were also observed, alongside emotional reactions such as reduced self-confidence and feelings of inferiority. These indicators reflect the characteristics of language anxiety as described by Horwitz, et al., (1986), who emphasized that anxious students tend to avoid speaking, give brief responses, or experience visible discomfort when required to speak in public.

3.2 Impacts of language anxiety on academic speaking performance

The impacts of language anxiety were evaluated through students' speaking performance, measured in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The data was collected via recorded presentations and supported by an observational checklist.

a. Fluency

Fluency was assessed by counting the total words produced during a seven-minute speaking task. The findings reveal that only a small proportion of students demonstrated fluent speech, while most students showed signs of decreased fluency associated with anxiety.

Table 6. Impact of language anxiety on speaking performance

Fluency Level	Number of Students	Description (Words Spoken)
Very Fluent (VF)	1	871 – 1050 words
Fluent (F)	1	691 – 870 words
Middle Fluent (MF)	3	511 – 690 words
Diffluent (D)	10	331 – 510 words
Very Diffluent (VD)	5	150 – 330 words

Source: Research Data, 2025

Fluency was the most affected component. Students who experienced high anxiety demonstrated lower fluency levels, with speech that was often interrupted by fillers such as "uh," "um," and long pauses. Fluency involves the continuous and smooth delivery of speech. Most students were categorized as fluent or very fluent, which reflects a diminished ability to articulate ideas smoothly.

b. Accuracy

The number of incorrect words used determined accuracy. The results indicate that while most students maintained good to perfect accuracy, a minority experienced significant difficulties, which likely reflect the negative influence of anxiety.

Table 7. Accuracy Classification of Students' Speaking Performance

Accuracy Level	Number of Students	Wrong Words Range
Very Good (VG)	8	5 – 13
Good (G)	8	14 – 22
Bad (B)	2	23 – 31
Very Bad (VB)	2	32 – 40

Source: Research Data, 2025

The impact of anxiety on accuracy was less severe than on fluency. While some students made pronunciation or grammatical errors, these did not occur at a level that severely impaired understanding. Anxiety may affect pronunciation, especially when students are self-conscious or fearful of making mistakes. However, the findings suggest that many students could still produce accurate speech, especially when using familiar vocabulary and sentence structures. Moreover, the fewer errors may be due to the shorter length of students' utterances. Anxious students tend to say less, thereby reducing the likelihood of errors, but also limiting the range of language use.

c. Complexity

Complexity, reflecting speech comprehensibility, mirrored the accuracy results, with most students performing at good or excellent levels. However, a few students' speeches were challenging to understand due to pronunciation and structural errors.

Table 8. Complexity Classification of Students' Speaking Performance

Complexity Level	Number of Students	Wrong Words Range
Very Good (VG)	8	5 – 13
Good (G)	8	14 – 22
Bad (B)	2	23 – 31
Very Bad (VB)	2	32 – 40

Source: Research Data, 2025

Complexity, defined as speech's comprehensibility and linguistic richness, was also somewhat impacted by anxiety, though not as substantially as fluency. Pronunciation plays a key role in delivering meaning. The results showed that mispronunciations occurred but did not significantly hinder comprehension. This suggests that while anxiety may reduce students' confidence and expressiveness, it does not entirely prevent them from conveying their intended message. The findings indicate that the complexity of students' speech remains generally understandable, even if limited in vocabulary or structure. This outcome reflects that while anxiety may inhibit spontaneous language production, it does not necessarily distort meaning to an unrecognizable degree.

The findings indicate that language anxiety significantly affects fluency, with 75% of students classified as disfluent or very disfluent. It suggests that anxiety disrupts the natural flow and spontaneity of speech. In contrast, accuracy and complexity were less affected, with 80% of students performing at good or very good levels. It implies that while anxiety hampers fluency, students' ability to use correct language structures and convey complex ideas remains relatively intact.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion of the study, the researcher concludes: a. The types of language anxiety on students' speaking performance of second semester of English literature students at Universitas Balikpapan are trait anxiety with the dominant percentage, followed by state anxiety and situational specific anxiety of language anxiety on students' academic speaking performance. b. The impacts of language anxiety on students' academic speaking performance showed that most of the students classified as fluent in the second semester of English literature at Universitas Balikpapan, the accuracy and complexity showed the students categorized as very good, because most students could be fluent in speaking performance. It means the fewer words produced while speaking, the fewer words are mispronounced. If fewer words are wrongly pronounced, it means that we are easier to understand the meaning of the content when speaking.

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