

The Silent Struggle: How Social Anxiety Impacts English Language Proficiency in University Students

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Article Info	Abstract (10pt, Bold)
Article History Received: June 3, 2025 Revised: August 15,, 2025 Published: September 26, 2025	<i>In the era of globalization and digital transformation, mastering foreign languages, especially English, has become an essential skill in various aspects of life. This ability not only plays a role in cross-cultural communication but also determines individual success in education, work, and global social interactions. English is now not just a subject, but a key tool in accessing information, building international relations, and participating in the global economy. However, behind the importance of mastering English, significant psychological challenges arise, namely, social anxiety. Social anxiety is defined as excessive fear or nervousness in social situations, especially when speaking in front of other people. In the context of foreign language learning, social anxiety can manifest in the form of fear of making mistakes, fear of being evaluated, and worry about negative judgments from others. Recent studies show that individuals who have high levels of social anxiety tend to experience difficulties in speaking skills, even when they have a good command of grammar or vocabulary. This study aims to explore the relationship between social anxiety and English language skills among college students, specifically focusing on the correlation between anxiety and self-confidence in speaking a foreign language. Utilizing a quantitative survey design with 6 respondents from Gorontalo State University, the research collected data via online questionnaires and analyzed it using descriptive and Pearson correlation analysis. The main findings indicate a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.56$) between anxiety and self-confidence, suggesting that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower self-confidence in speaking English. This highlights the importance of addressing psychological factors, such as social anxiety, in English language education at the university level to foster more effective and holistic language learning strategies.</i>
Keywords Speaking; Clarity; Students' Anxiety	

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INTRODUCTION (TIMES NEW ROMAN, FONT SIZE 12)

In the current era of globalization and digital transformation, proficiency in foreign languages, especially English, has become an indispensable skill across various aspects of life. This ability is crucial not only for cross-cultural communication, but also determines individual success in education, work, and global social interactions (Simanjuntak & Simanjuntak, 2025). English is now not just a subject, but a key tool in accessing information, building international relations, and participating in the global economy. Consequently, English language competency is widely recognized as an indicator of modern literacy and an individual readiness to face global challenges.

Despite the undeniable importance of English proficiency, a significant psychological challenge often arises: social anxiety. Social anxiety is characterized by excessive fear or nervousness in social settings, especially when speaking in front of other people (Paraguas, 2025). Within the context of foreign language learning, this anxiety can manifest in the form of fear of making mistakes, fear of being evaluated, and worry about negative judgments from others. Recent studies show that individuals who have high levels of social anxiety tend to experience difficulties in speaking skills, even when they have a good command of grammar or vocabulary (Vi, Dan & Han, 2025). This phenomenon is very common among students, especially those studying in multicultural or international academic environments. When required to convey ideas in a foreign language, many students feel inhibited from expressing themselves freely because of embarrassment, fear of being judged negatively, or concerns about their imperfect abilities (Marshalina, 2025). This feeling of discomfort can hinder the learning process and ultimately impact academic performance and learning motivation.

Previous research has proven that anxiety about speaking a foreign language is negatively correlated with speaking ability and class participation. While various approaches, such as the use of digital media (e.g., vlogging and podcasts) have been tried to reduce psychological stress in language learning, most studies still focus on teaching techniques, not on exploring the fundamental relationship between psychological aspects (especially social anxiety) and linguistic abilities as a whole.

Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between social anxiety and foreign language skills, especially English, in the context of higher education. This study focuses on college students because they are at a critical stage of academic and social development. By understanding the relationship between these two variables, educational institutions can design more effective and empathetic pedagogical approaches in supporting the development of students' language competence. Furthermore, it is hoped that this research can become the basis for developing psycho-pedagogical intervention programs to reduce psychological barriers in language learning. The main aim of this study was to explore the relationship between social anxiety and English language skills among college students. By conducting correlation analysis and identifying psychological patterns that influence oral communication skills, this research aims to contribute to the development of a more holistic language learning strategy one that does not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also pays attention to students' emotional and social aspects.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach with a survey design to examine the relationship between social anxiety and foreign language skills among university students. A quantitative approach was chosen due to its capacity for numerical measurement of variables and statistical analysis to determine relationships between the variables under investigation.

The study's population consisted of students from the English Education Studies program at Gorontalo State University. A random sampling method was used to select students who volunteered to participate in the research. Questionnaires were distributed to 6 students, and all respondents who completed the questionnaire were deemed eligible for analysis.

Data was collected using a questionnaire specifically designed to measure students' levels of social anxiety and foreign language skills. The questionnaire included questions based on a Likert scale of 1-5 (where 1 = Never and 5 = Always) to assess:

- Anxiety when speaking a foreign language
- Concern about the judgment of others
- Level of confidence in speaking a foreign language
- Frequency of avoiding social situations involving the use of a foreign language.

The questionnaires were distributed online via Google Forms to ensure accessibility for students. Respondents were given 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Upon completion of data collection, all participating respondents were provided with information about the research's purpose, and the confidentiality of their data was guaranteed.

The collected data were analyzed using Excel statistical software. Descriptive analysis was performed to calculate the mean, median, and mode for each variable. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to determine the relationship between social anxiety and students' self-confidence in speaking a foreign language. The results of the analysis are presented in tables and graphs to facilitate interpretation. This section comprises 10-15% of the manuscript.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Based on the data analysis from 6 respondents, the following are the key findings regarding levels of anxiety, worry, self-confidence, and the tendency to avoid situations.

Table 1. Psychological Variable Score Distribution

Variabel	Mean	Median	Modus	Range
Anxiety	3.83	4	4	3-5
Worry	4.33	5	5	3-5
Self-Confidence	3.17	3	3	2-4
Avoiding the Situation	3.67	4	4	2-5

Key findings from the descriptive statistics:

- Worrying recorded the highest score (mean = 4.33), with 83% of respondents (5 out of 6 people) giving a score of ≥ 4 .
- Confidence has the lowest mean (3.17), where 50% of respondents gave a score of < 3 .
- The modes for anxiety and situation avoidance were both 4, indicating a dominant response pattern

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between Anxiety and Self-Confidence ($r = -0.56$). Figure 1 illustrates a decreasing trend: respondents with an anxiety score of 4-5 tend to have a confidence score of 2-3.

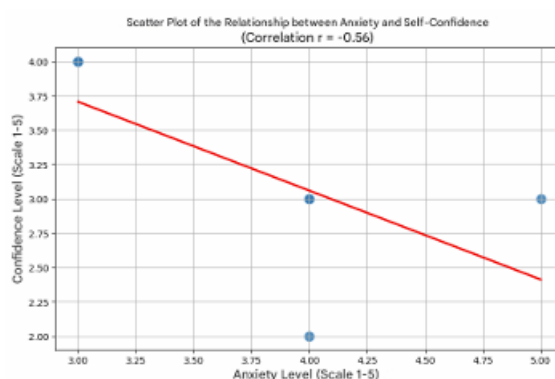


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Anxiety-Self-Confidence Relationship

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between social anxiety and English language skills among college students, with a specific focus on the correlation between anxiety and self-confidence in speaking a foreign language. The findings indicate a notable presence of social anxiety among the surveyed students, evidenced by relatively high levels of worry and anxiety, coupled with lower self-confidence in speaking English.

The descriptive statistics clearly reveal that "Worrying" had the highest mean score of 4.33, with a significant majority of respondents (83%) reporting scores of 4 or higher on the 1-5 Likert scale. Conversely, "Self-confidence" registered the lowest mean score of 3.17, with half of the respondents scoring below 3. These results are consistent with existing understanding that social anxiety can manifest as a fear of being judged negatively by others.

The Pearson correlation analysis further strengthens this relationship by uncovering a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.56$) between anxiety and self-confidence in speaking a foreign language. The scatter plot visually supports this finding, showing a downward trend where higher anxiety scores tend to correspond with lower self-confidence scores. This suggests that as students' anxiety levels regarding speaking a foreign language increase, their confidence in their abilities tends to decrease. This is consistent with previous research that highlights how anxiety can hinder speaking ability and class participation in foreign language learning contexts.

These findings underscore the critical importance of addressing psychological factors, such as social anxiety, within university-level English language education. Students who struggle with social anxiety may feel inhibited from actively participating and expressing themselves in English, which can potentially impact their learning progress and academic performance. Therefore, pedagogical approaches should not exclusively focus on cognitive aspects but must also integrate strategies to mitigate psychological barriers and cultivate a more supportive learning environment. The results highlight the necessity for educators to consider and address social anxiety to facilitate more effective and holistic language learning experiences for students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides evidence of a negative relationship between social anxiety and self-confidence in English language skills among the surveyed college students. The results clearly demonstrate that higher levels of anxiety and worry are associated with lower levels of self-confidence when speaking a foreign language. The significant negative correlation observed between anxiety and self-confidence highlights the detrimental impact that social anxiety can have on a student's perceived ability to use English effectively. This suggests a clear need for educational interventions that extend beyond traditional teaching methods to address the emotional and psychological challenges faced by students in language learning.

RECOMMENDATION

Future research should consider expanding the sample size to validate these findings with a larger and more diverse group of participants and to explore the relationship between social anxiety and other aspects of English language proficiency. Additionally, further studies could investigate specific psycho-pedagogical intervention programs aimed at reducing psychological barriers in language learning and their effectiveness in improving student confidence and speaking abilities. It is recommended that educational institutions design more effective and empathetic pedagogical approaches that support the development of students' language competence by acknowledging and addressing social anxiety.

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