

## THE DIFFERENCES OF SPEAKING ANXIETY ACROSS ACADEMIC LEVELS AND GENDER

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**Abstract:** Speaking anxiety poses a crucial challenge for university-level students during their speaking classes. This study aims to investigate the differences in English anxiety levels according to year level and gender at the University of Islam Malang and explore potential causes that contribute to anxiety levels. This study used a quantitative approach and employed a causal-comparative and descriptive quantitative design. Data were collected by using a 31-item FLSAS questionnaire. The subjects were freshmen and sophomores in which freshmen took an intensive course and sophomores took the public speaking course. One hundred fifteen students completed the questionnaire online. The data were analyzed by using an independent t-test and descriptive analysis. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference was found in anxiety levels between the freshmen and sophomores. Both groups exhibited moderate anxiety levels, which were approaching a high level. Besides, in terms of gender, this study did not find significant results among female and male freshmen students, but this study found there are significant results among female and male sophomore students. This study also investigated factors affecting speaking anxiety, including competitiveness, perfectionism, lack of confidence, physical and mental avoidance, fear of failure, and lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes. All these identified factors exerted moderate influence, except for competitiveness, which demonstrated a high level of impact.

**Keywords:** *anxiety, freshmen, gender, sophomore, speaking anxiety.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a necessary ability that students need to ace to improve their English proficiency. Tridinanti (2018) emphasized that speaking skill is substantial in communicating effectively through spoken language students. Also, speaking is a skill whose development is highly dependent on practice and usage and is an

essential component in this era of a communication-based world (Khreisat, 2022). The inability of students to speak English can be an obstacle to informing information or expressing their ideas. According to Burns (2001), language learning refers to utilizing dialect in both spoken and written communication and can express sentiments, considerations, and encounters in different settings.

Similar to speaking, writing as a productive skill involves producing sentences and organizing ideas to communicate with others. However, the difference lies in the fact that mistakes are often considered normal in speaking as long as the message conveyed is still understandable to the interlocutor (Kurniasih, 2018). Even though it is like that, it is essential to recognize that students experience speaking difficulties because of linguistic matters, lack of motivation, learning environment, and lack of practice. Ali et al. (2019) found that a lack of motivation and environment influence students' talking aptitudes. Besides, Pishghadam and Akhondpoor (2011) found that perfectionist learners who are driven by high standards and fear of mistakes may prefer to remain silent in speaking classes to avoid errors. This lack of participation affects their speaking practice and how the teacher evaluates them. Consequently, the elevated anxiety levels in perfectionist learners significantly impact their speaking performance, leading to decreased proficiency.

Furthermore, Huwari (2019) highlights that a lack of practice is the most significant matter influencing students speaking in English inside the classroom. Because of those reasons, students feel anxious to speak. Therefore, it is essential to remember that teachers have an important role in boosting students' confidence by creating a non-threatening classroom atmosphere (Kurniasih et al., 2022). Besides, a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom will help smoothen the learning process and slowly increase student motivation.

Anxiety, as described by Huberty (2013), is a condition that arises in specific situations and is often triggered by identifiable factors. Angellia and Listyani (2019) emphasize that anxiety is not merely an illness but a range of behavioural responses to anticipate unpredictable circumstances. Additionally, Sari (2017) highlights that anxiety is a common and inherent occurrence that can be experienced by individuals universally.

Speaking anxiety, as defined by Balemir (2009), refers to the hesitation to use language orally. The anxiety of using spoken language can be experienced by a person when communicating with many people. Sari (2017) argued that when they are demanded to speak English in front of the classmates, they sense threatened, unsafe, and uncomfortable can be felt by students. Also, Zulfikar (2022) stated that foreign language anxiety might be reasoned by classroom-related exercises that request learners to deliver the language verbally or in fore of their fellows. The results were comparable to those who explained that the most frequently reported obstacle experienced by both beginner and advanced EFL learners is experiencing anxiety from having to deliver language verbally in fore of fellows (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Anxiety makes the students feel uncomfortable in every situation of learning English and does not have many opportunities to show their performance because they have anxiety. There are three main anxiety factors in speaking English, as stated by Horwitz (2010). The first aspect is Communication Apprehension. Horwitz (2010) stated that communication apprehension is an embarrassment represented by fear, anxiety about communicating with others, trouble speaking in groups, and

verbal communication in public. The second is test-Anxiety. It refers to exhibition anxiety from fear of failure. Students who experience test anxiety set unrealistic expectations for themselves and perceive that anything deficient than an impeccable test performance is a non-success. The next concern is the fear of negative evaluation. It regards evaluation by others. It may also involve avoiding evaluative conditions and expecting others to evaluate them negatively.

Furthermore, the speaking anxiety tendency is not merely coated by students when they speak in English. However, it is also widely experienced by language learners who study an L2 or foreign language (Basith, 2021; Sung & Li, 2019). Therefore, it is unfortunate if many experience anxiety when speaking because speech anxiety is a severe issue for students that can affect their attainment in speaking (Al-Khotaba et al., 2019; Tridinanti, 2018).

Many effects arise if students experience speaking anxiety problems. Most students have trouble expressing their ideas when speaking in English. In addition, the negative perception that they lack adequate proficiency in the English language affects their confidence to express their perspectives in English easily (Habiburrahim et al., 2020).

Several studies relevant to this study have investigated speaking anxiety with different results. The first study was carried out by Yassin and Razak (2017), who focused on foreign language anxiety and gender among Yemeni University EFL Students, especially in the four skills and the year of study. The sample for this study consisted of 155 students selected through stratified random sampling from the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University in Yemen. Their findings indicated no significant difference in anxiety levels between the foreign language and the study year. In addition, the implication was also discussed that two other factors that affected this relationship were the intervention of the native language and the novelty effect.

The second study was conducted by Pratiwi (2020), who analyzed students' speaking anxiety. With a descriptive quantitative design, 21 students were chosen using purposive sampling. Utilized a questionnaire with 30 statements, the six factors that caused speaking anxiety was found. The factors include sensitivity to anxiety, overprediction of fear, oversensitivity to threats, irrational beliefs, slow self-efficacy, and a wrong ascription of body signals. Moreover, over-sensitivity toward the threat was the prominent matter that made the students feel anxious about speaking.

The third study by Khreisat (2022) who focused on Saudi tertiary, investigated the anxiety levels EFL students face when speaking a foreign language at year level and gender differences. As quantitative research, this study used questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection. With 158 subjects of Saudi EFL university students, this study showed that anxiety derivations were not in the same sequence when analyzing the deviations according to gender. The fear of tests, communication fear, and fear of evaluation are the main factors of speaking anxiety of EFL Saudi university students. Moreover, according to the differences in speaking anxiety among year-level results, there was showed no statistically significant.

Another previous related study on speaking anxiety was carried out by Sadiq (2017), who focused on speaking anxiety in English language learning. The study involved samples of 100 randomly selected from Princess Nora University students in Saudi Arabia. To collect research data, the study employed the FLCAS developed by Horwitz. The study found a significant difference in language anxiety levels based

on age. Recommendations include faculty awareness of language anxiety among EFL learners, encouraging English-language practice inside and outside the classroom, and facilitating informal interaction with native speakers via social networking platforms.

Furthermore, a previous related study was also carried out by Pabro-Maquidato (2021), who focused on exploring anxiety during English speaking and the various strategies employed to cope with it. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 subjects from a state university in the Philippines. From this group, the researcher specifically selected the five students who exhibited the highest anxiety levels for data collection. The findings revealed that learners face emotional, physiological, and cognitive challenges when speaking English. Anxiety was attributed to the fear of negative feedback. The students adopted various strategies to manage their anxiety, such as reading English books and using dictionaries. These strategies helped them express their thoughts in writing, overcome shyness, and become more receptive to teacher corrections and feedback.

Although the speaking anxiety problem has been examined in several studies, it is still an exciting issue in language learning. The results will also be different in location and the number of study participants. In addition, from studies that researchers have reviewed, no studies have been reviewed comparing the speaking anxiety level in freshmen and sophomore students and the possible causes of speaking anxiety of them. The findings from previous studies and their shortcomings will strengthen this research. So, to find out more about speaking anxiety, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences in the level of English-speaking anxiety among students at Universitas Islam Malang based on their year level?
2. Are there any significant differences in the types of anxiety across gender among students at Universitas Islam Malang?
3. What are the possible causes of speaking anxiety among students at Universitas Islam Malang?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Subjects**

The subjects of this study were chosen from freshmen and sophomores who took speaking classes, precisely in the intensive course subject in freshmen and public speaking course subject for sophomores at the English department of the Universitas Islam Malang. This study employed convenient sampling as a sampling technique. Sugiyono (2015) stated that convenience sampling is a way of selecting samples freely at the researcher's discretion. In convenience sampling, the researcher selects participants based on their readiness and availability to participate in the study (Creswell, 2012). Convenience sampling was deemed appropriate as the subjects were students enrolled in speaking classes. A total of 115 students completed a 31-item questionnaire via Google Forms. Of these participants, 51 were freshmen (22 males and 29 females) while 64 were sophomores (22 males and 42 females).

### **Design and Procedures**

This current study aimed to investigate whether there are significant differences in the level of English-speaking anxiety among Universitas Islam Malang students

based on their year level and gender and to identify the possible causes of speaking anxiety. The study employed a quantitative research method. Based on Creswell (2012), quantitative research serves as a mechanism to test objective theories by investigating the connections between variables. These variables, which can be assessed using instruments, enable the collection of numerical data that can be analysed using statistical techniques. Additionally, the study utilized a causal-comparative and descriptive quantitative research design. According to Fraenkel et al. (2011), comparative causal research or ex post facto is a study that focuses on groups of research subjects. Then it pays attention to the variables studied in the groups being compared. While descriptive quantitative is a method used to explain, analyse, and classify something.

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

In this research study, a quantitative approach was utilized. To examine the identified concerns, the researchers employed the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The FLSAS questionnaire was adopted from Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013). The FLSAS contains 31 items and is divided into several sections, including lack of confidence, fear of failure, physical and mental avoidance, lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes, competitiveness, and perfectionism. To score, a five-point Likert scale was employed. The Likert scoring scale was based on positive and negative statements by Horwitz et al. (1986). They were starting from numbers 1 to 5. For positive statements, the interpretation ranged from strongly agree to disagree strongly, while for negative statements, the interpretation ranged from strongly disagree to agree strongly.

The data analysis using IBM Statistic SPSS 24 utilized an independent t-test to answer the first and second research problem question to determine the differences in speaking anxiety levels and gender among freshmen and sophomores. The table range of scores starting from 31 up to 155 is shown below:

Table 1. FLSAS anxiety scale

FLSAS Score	Anxiety Level
104 – 155	High
52 – 103	Moderate
31 – 55	Low

In addition, the researchers employed descriptive statistics to address the third research problem. They determined the mean score for each item in the questionnaire, and to facilitate interpretation, they referred to Oxford's (1990) table, as presented below:

Table 2. Anxiety level by Oxford (1990)

Range	Level
3.45- 5.00	High
2.45- 3.44	Moderate
1.00- 2.44	Low

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Quantitative data gathered with the FLSAS were analysed to ascertain the levels of anxiety among freshmen and sophomores in speaking classes. The FLSAS anxiety scale (Table 2) was used to measure the anxiety levels of the participants, while the Oxford classification (1990) (Table 3) was used to identify the causes of anxiety experienced by freshmen and sophomores at the Universitas Islam Malang. According to the Oxford classification, the respondents' average scores were categorized as high, moderate, or low anxiety. This analysis was conducted to gain insights into the factors that contribute to anxiety in speaking classes.

### *Differences in the level of English-speaking anxiety across levels*

To answer the first question, the result of data analysis used an independent t-test using IBM SPSS Statistic 24 are shown in tables 4 and 5:

Table 3. Mean of level anxiety

Group Statistics						
		Semester	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking anxiety level	Freshmen		51	95.51	17.033	2.385
	Sophomore		64	96.70	15.661	1.958

The table presented above displays the average scores for speaking anxiety levels of freshman and sophomore students. The analysis revealed differences in speaking anxiety between the two-year levels. The freshmen students showed an average rating of 95.51, and sophomores showed an average rating of 96.70. Based on the FLSAS Anxiety Scale presented in Table 2, both groups fall within the moderate level of speaking anxiety.

Table 4. Significance difference in speaking anxiety

Independent Samples Test					
		t-test for Equality of Means			
			df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Speaking anxiety level	Equal variances assumed		113	.697	-1.193
	Equal variances not assumed		102.968	.700	-1.193

In both cases, the p-value is greater than .05 (the conventional threshold for statistical significance), with values of .697 assuming equal variances and .700 assuming unequal variances. This showed that there is no significant difference in the two groups' levels of speaking anxiety. In this case, the mean difference is -1.193, indicating that the mean speaking anxiety level for sophomores is slightly higher than that of freshmen.

***Differences in the level of anxiety across gender***

To accomplish the second question, we collected data on the speaking anxiety level of male and female for freshmen and sophomore students at the Universitas Islam Malang. The data was analysed using an independent samples t-test to compare the mean speaking anxiety level of male and female students. The results of the freshmen data are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Mean of level anxiety across gender in freshmen

Group Statistics						
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking anxiety level		Female	29	97.76	15.410	2.862
		Male	22	92.55	18.920	4.034

Table 5 presents the average level of speaking anxiety for male and female freshman students. The data revealed that, on average, female students had higher speaking anxiety levels (97.76) compared to male students (92.55). Based on the FLSAS Anxiety Scale that researchers have presented in Table 2, both females and males fall into the moderate level of speaking anxiety.

Table 6. Significant difference in speaking anxiety across gender in freshmen

Independent Samples Test						
		t-test for Equality of Means				
			Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	
Speaking Anxiety Level	Equal variances assumed		.283	5.213	4.807	
	Equal variances not assumed		.298	5.213	4.946	

The table above shows the results of the independent sample t-test. It has tested whether there is a significant difference between the level of speaking anxiety between female and male students. The findings show that there is no highly statistically significant difference. As detailed, the p values (0.283 and 0.298) were greater than the alpha level of 0.05.

To take it further, the researchers have conducted a comparison of speaking anxiety levels between female and male sophomore students. Here are the results of the data processing to gain further insight.

Table 7. Mean of level anxiety across gender in freshmen

Group Statistics						
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking anxiety level		Sophomores Female	42	99.95	17.132	2.644
		Male	22	90.50	10.065	2.146

Table 7 shows the mean level of speaking anxiety for male and female sophomore students. The data suggest that, on average, female students had higher speaking anxiety levels (99.95) compared to male students (90.50). Both groups fall within the moderate level of speaking anxiety.

Table 8. Significant difference in speaking anxiety across gender in sophomore

		Independent Samples Test			
		t-test for Equality of Means			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference	Error
Speaking Anxiety Level	Equal variances assumed	.021	9.452	3.978	
	Equal variances not assumed	.007	9.452	3.405	

Table 8 displays the results of an independent samples t-test that aimed to test whether there is a significant difference in speaking anxiety between male and female sophomore students. The results show that there is a significant difference in speaking anxiety levels between male and female students, as indicated by the p-values (0.021 and 0.007) being less than the standard alpha level of 0.05.

### *The possible causes of speaking anxiety*

To address the third research question, 115 students from the Universitas Islam Malang, including both freshmen and sophomore students, completed a questionnaire. The tables below provide a detailed explanation of the causes that potentially affect students' speaking anxiety. Moreover, the researcher has analysed and categorized based on the level of anxiety using Oxford's categorization (1990). Quantitative descriptive statistical tools were used to analyse the data, and the results obtained using IBM SPSS 24 are presented in the tables below.

Table 9. The number of freshmen and sophomore students in each level of anxiety

Anxiety Level	Range	
	Freshmen	Sophomores
Low	5	6
Moderate	39	43
High	7	15
N	51	64

The table above has shown the number of students in each level, namely freshmen and sophomores who have been categorized in each anxiety level (low, medium, high). The researchers have also included a table that provides a more detailed breakdown of the number of students in each anxiety factor within each anxiety level that the researchers have found. This is of course to prove and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the number and level of student anxiety in each factor.



Table 10. The number of freshmen and sophomores in each anxiety factor and in each anxiety level

Anxiety Factor	Level	Range	
		Freshmen	Sophomore
Competitiveness	Low	3	3
	Moderate	12	12
	High	36	49
Perfectionism	Low	5	4
	Moderate	24	30
	High	22	30
Lack of Confidence	Low	7	8
	Moderate	32	39
	High	12	17
Physical and mental avoidance	Low	7	13
	Moderate	35	32
	High	9	19
Fear of Failure	Low	10	10
	Moderate	29	40
	High	12	14
Lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes	Low	16	15
	Moderate	33	43
	High	2	6

### Lack of Confidence

The table below has shown a detailed analysis of the factor of lack of confidence among freshmen and sophomore students. With eight items, the overall average score is 3.10 with an average range from 2.92 to 3.37.

Table 11. Lack of confidence section results of freshmen and sophomore

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 1	115	3.31	1.012	Moderate
Item 12	115	2.99	1.104	Moderate
Item 15	115	3.37	1.063	Moderate
Item 17	115	2.99	.893	Moderate
Item 22	115	3.10	1.063	Moderate
Item 29	115	2.97	1.108	Moderate
Item 13	115	3.11	1.074	Moderate
Item 24	115	2.92	.992	Moderate
Total Mean		3.10		Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	115			

### Fear of Failure

Item 9 in this factor, with the highest mean of 3.67 indicates fear of the consequences of failure in the English language classroom. The next interesting item is that students are afraid if they do not understand what the teacher is correcting, with a mean of 3.27. The overall mean score was 3.04, identified as a moderate level of fear of speaking.

Table 12. The section “Fear of Failure” results of freshmen and sophomores

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 2	115	3.05	1.283	Moderate
Item 4	115	3.04	1.063	Moderate
Item 9	115	3.67	1.175	High
Item 14	115	3.27	1.046	Moderate
Item 18	115	2.64	1.069	Moderate
Item 23	115	3.14	1.034	Moderate
Item 28	115	2.84	.923	Moderate
Item 30	115	2.63	.832	Moderate
Total Mean		3.04		Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	115			

### Physical and Mental Avoidance

The physical and mental avoidance section includes items that reflect students' tendency to avoid or experience physical and mental symptoms when speaking in class. The total mean score of this section is 3.09, indicating a moderate level of anxiety. Item 11 stands out with the highest mean score of 3.49, indicating a high anxiety level, and students report forgetting things they know when they get too nervous. Other items in this section have moderate mean scores, with item 26 being the lowest at 2.70, suggesting that students do not feel very relaxed when on their way to speaking class.

Table 13. The section “Physical and Mental Avoidance” results of freshmen and sophomores

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 3	115	3.24	1.129	Moderate
Item 11	115	3.49	.968	High
Item 19	115	2.90	.827	Moderate
Item 25	115	3.12	.839	Moderate
Item 26	115	2.70	.991	Moderate
Total Mean		3.09		Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	115			

### Lack of Eagerness to Participate in Speaking Classes

This section revealed that students have a moderate level of speaking anxiety related to a lack of eagerness to participate in speaking class, with a total mean score of 2.65. While two items (items 5 and 16) had low mean scores, indicating a low

level of anxiety, two other items (items 6 and 10) showed a moderate level of anxiety. Additionally, the mean score of 3.03 suggests that many students think about unrelated things during speaking class.

Table 14. The section “Lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes” results of freshmen and sophomores

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 5	115	2.44	.966	Low
Item 6	115	3.03	.991	Moderate
Item 10	115	2.94	1.003	Moderate
Item 16	115	2.19	1.091	Low
Total Mean		2.65		Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	115			

### Competitiveness

The results of this factor indicate that the total average score for this factor is 3.89, which is in the high category. Specifically, the mean score for item 7 is 4.01, indicating that most students think that their classmates are better at the language than they are. The mean score for item 21 is 3.77, indicating that students always assume that their classmates speak the foreign language more competently than they do.

Table 15. The section of “Competitiveness” results of freshmen and sophomores

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 7	115	4.01	1.120	High
Item 21	115	3.77	.983	High
Total mean		3.89		High
Valid N (listwise)	115			

### Perfectionism

In the section of “Perfectionism”, we can observe that items 8 and 31 show a high level of perfectionism. Students appear to panic when they are required to speak without any preparation in their speaking class (item 8) and become apprehensive when the speaking teacher asks questions that they have not prepared ahead of time (item 31). The total mean of this section is 3.25, which indicates a moderate level of perfectionism. Item 20 demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of students do not feel pressured to prepare properly for speaking class, with a mean score of 2.51, which falls under the moderate category. Item 27 shows that they become anxious when they cannot grasp what the speaking teacher says, with a mean score of 3.16, which also falls under the moderate category.

Table 16. The section of “Perfectionism” results of freshmen and sophomores

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 8	115	3.78	1.090	High
Item 20	115	2.51	.931	Moderate

Number of Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Item 27	115	3.16	1.005	Moderate
Item 31	115	3.53	.892	High
Total Mean		3.25		Moderate
Valid N (listwise)	115			

Table 17 shows the order of possible causes of speaking anxiety based on the FLSAS factors, along with their mean scores and level of severity. The highest mean score is for competitiveness, which is rated as high, followed by perfectionism, lack of confidence, physical and mental avoidance, fear of failure, and lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes, all of which are rated as moderate. These results suggest that competitiveness is the most significant factor contributing to speaking anxiety among the surveyed students, followed by other factors related to self-doubt and avoidance.

Table 17. The order of possible causes of speaking anxiety

FLSAS Factors	Mean	Level
Competitiveness	3.89	High
Perfectionism	3.25	Moderate
Lack of Confidence	3.10	Moderate
Physical and mental avoidance	3.09	Moderate
Fear of Failure	3.04	Moderate
Lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes	2.65	Moderate

## Discussion

As presented in the previous section, this study analyses differences in levels of speaking anxiety and identifies possible causes of speaking anxiety between freshmen and sophomores. Based on the data from the questionnaires, it was found that the mean score of the freshmen students was (95.51) and sophomore students (96.70). Both groups fall within the moderate level of speaking anxiety. Nonetheless, the difference was not significant between freshmen and sophomores.

In line with previous research that compared differences in speaking anxiety between year levels was not statistically significant (Khreisat, 2022; Sadiq, 2017; Yassin & Razak, 2017). It can be caused by differences in the material studied at each student level. As said by Yassin and Razak (2017) that the lessons in each semester are different so it becomes a challenge for students. Besides, the results can be influenced by the way teachers teach in class, for example in teaching English they still use their mother tongue. Yassin and Razak (2017) said that when English teachers teach English to new students, they still use a mixture of Arabic to make it easy for students to comprehend the information.

Additionally, the teaching methods used by lecturers in speaking classes can affect students' anxiety levels. In EFL classrooms, learners mostly communicate with their teachers. If the teaching methods are more focused on providing positive feedback and building confidence, then students can feel more confident when speaking in public, regardless of class level. According to Hanifa (2018), FLA in learning to speak English as a foreign language is also affected by how learners feel about the people they are speaking to.

This current study also provides insight into the speaking anxiety levels of male and female students in freshmen students, with the data suggesting that females, on average, had higher anxiety levels (97.76) compared to males (92.55). The results of our data processing show no significant difference in the level of speaking anxiety between female and male students. It is similar to the results obtained in a study conducted by Tien (2018). She found that female students had higher levels of anxiety than male students when they engaged in speaking performance.

In comparison, the results of data processing that we get in this study in comparing anxiety levels between genders in sophomore students have obtained significant differences. Judging from the average obtained, male students get an average (90.50) lower than the anxiety level obtained by female students (99.95). Very comparable to the research that has been done by Mohtasham and Farnia (2017). They found in their research that there is a considerable difference between the anxiety levels of female and male students. Of course, in his research, female students have higher anxiety levels. Several factors have been found in her research, such as differences in personality traits, culture, and public speaking experience. In addition, the study also showed that male students always practiced before performing, and they had a positive reaction when discussing exciting topics.

Moreover, researchers have found the factors that cause speaking anxiety which we have ranked from highest to lowest in the current study. At the highest level, it has been found that competitiveness is the main factor causing speaking anxiety an average of (3.89), followed by perfectionism (3.25), lack of confidence an average of (3.10), physical and mental avoidance with an average of (3.09), followed by fear of failure at (3.04), and ending with the lowest factor of lack of enthusiasm to participate in speaking classes with an average of (2.65).

In the findings of this study, saying competitiveness has been identified as the most dominant anxiety factor. Students often perceive it as high stakes or pressure for students to perform better than their peers. When students perceive speaking as competitive in the classroom, they experience anxiety due to fear of mistakes or not meeting the standards to be achieved. This competitiveness factor can trigger fear due to uncertainty about students' ability to meet high standards and expectations. A study conducted by Damayanti and Listyani (2020) and Sari (2017) stated that students are often concerned that their English is not as strong as that of their classmates, thus they are hesitant to speak in front of their peers.

In contrast, the lack of eagerness to participate in speaking classes factor is the least dominant anxiety factor. It means that while some language learners may experience anxiety in speaking, they still have a willingness to participate in speaking classes. It is also possible that learners may not perceive speaking classes as a significant source of anxiety or that they have developed coping strategies to manage their anxiety during class participation.

The highest mean score of item 6 is 3.03 which suggests that many students think about unrelated things during speaking class. They were not focused and were not really engaged in the speaking class. It is convinced by the research by Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu (2013) stated that 64.1% of students also think about unrelated things to the speaking class. There could be several reasons why students think about unrelated things during speaking class. One possibility is that the topics being discussed in class are not engaging or relevant to the students, making it difficult for them to maintain their attention. According to Hanifa (2018), it is crucial for English

as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to be knowledgeable about the topic they are going to discuss when communicating with others. If EFL students are asked to talk about topics they are not familiar with, they are likely to experience difficulties in generating ideas.

Furthermore, the second highest factor is perfectionism (3.25). Perfectionist students often establish a high standard in learning and want to speak without mistakes in pronunciation and grammatical. They may feel anxious if they make mistakes or if they perceive their performance to be less than perfect. This can lead to self-doubt, self-criticism, and apprehension of being evaluated by others. In line with the findings of Pishghadam and Akhondpoor (2011), it has been observed that perfectionist tendencies are associated with language anxiety.

The lack of confidence (3.10) is in the third sequence of causes in speaking anxiety. The items in the Lack of Confidence factor suggest that students feel unsure, embarrassed, anxious, and self-conscious when speaking in front of their peers. They also fear being judged or laughed at by their peers (Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). So, lack of self-confidence is an influential factor that results in low-performance levels. In concert with this statement, Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) also revealed that some students felt insecure when speaking. These negative feelings and thoughts can significantly affect their confidence and make them more anxious when speaking in English.

Besides, there is an item with the highest mean in the physical and mental avoidance factor. The item states that when the students feel anxious, they will forget the things they know. This may happen because anxiety can affect cognitive processes such as attention, working memory, and executive functions. In another research, Rosyidah et al. (2020) found that kinaesthetic students seemed uncomfortable, nervous, frustrated powerless, and ashamed when speaking in public. When a person is experiencing anxiety, their attention is often directed towards the source of the anxiety rather than the task at hand, which can make it difficult to remember things.

Moreover, in fear of failure factor, the interesting point is that students become annoyed when they do not grasp what the teacher is attempting to fix. The hat has been proven by students who are afraid of the adverse reaction or judgment from their teachers, which makes them feel more like failures in speaking (Messadh, 2017). Students will feel more disturbed when they do not understand what their teacher has corrected. In fact, students may take it as a sign of failure or incompetence. This of course, triggers a threat to their self-esteem leading to anxiety and frustration.

In addition, if the teacher corrects in a way that is not supportive and constructive, then this will further reinforce their fear and hinder their participation during speaking class. As stated by Kurniasih et al. (2018), it must be remembered that students are not programmable tools like machines. They will achieve better results when working on tasks if treated as individuals with their own needs and comforts.

Overall, it was found in this study that there was no highly significant difference in anxiety levels between first- and second-year students. However, it has been found that female students from both first- and second-year students have higher anxiety levels than males. The contributing factors of speaking anxiety have been found in this study. These factors include competitiveness, perfectionism, lack of confidence, physical and mental avoidance, fear of failure, and lack of desire to participate in

speaking classes. Although the current study provides information about EFL students' speaking anxiety at different levels and genders, it is essential to note that other differences and factors can influence anxiety beyond the current study. Therefore, further research is needed to better understand this area among EFL students.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The current study entitled "The Differences of Speaking Anxiety Across Academic Levels" has investigated the differences in anxiety levels based on the gender and year level of first and second-year students at the Universitas Islam Malang. However, this current study's outcomes showed no significant difference between freshmen and sophomores. Also, showed that female students have higher speaking anxiety levels. In addition, this study investigated six possible causes that could increase anxiety levels, and it was found that competitiveness was a contributing factor to high speaking anxiety among freshmen and sophomores. Giving students opportunities to speak and practice their English can be beneficial, especially for those who need more confidence, low achievers, and have low motivation to take speaking classes. It will allow them to boost their confidence as well.

Students' biggest problem when learning English is anxiety, especially in speaking class. So, future research might observe what model practices trigger anxiety in teachers towards students, whether students have experienced anxiety or the teacher's teaching system makes students feel anxious when attending classes. In addition, future research may utilize other methods to examine the possible causes of speaking anxiety. In the current study, the researchers utilized an instrument in the form of a questionnaire. To enhance the depth of the research findings, further exploration can be conducted using a mixed-method approach to obtain richer data. Additionally, expanding the sample by including respondents from diverse universities in Indonesia would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

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