

A Mixed-Methods Study of Speech Anxiety among Malaysian Primary ESL Pupils

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Abstract

Speech anxiety, or communication apprehension, is a widespread phenomenon among pre-students with debilitating effects on classroom participation, self-concept, and achievement. The current study focused on the incidence and predictors of speech anxiety in Malaysian primary school students within a public-school context. Informed by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and grounded in socio-cultural theories of learning, this study assumes a lagged sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The study recruited 132 students as the main data source via a mixed-methods research design that included questionnaires, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed via descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed via thematic analysis. The study findings demonstrated moderate to high levels of speech anxiety due to several factors, such as fear of negative judgment, comparison, and language proficiency. The study contributes to the understanding of how speech anxiety is manifested in Malaysian multilingual and multicultural primary school classrooms. Practice implications recommend that teachers implement confidence-building strategies, offer positive learning environments, and include oral communication lessons according to students' language needs. To address speech anxiety at its initial levels of schooling, the study promotes the building of positive communication competence towards greater overall student development.

Keywords: Speech Anxiety, Primary Pupils, Communication Apprehension, Malaysian Education, Classroom Participation

Introduction

Speech anxiety, or communication apprehension, as it is more correctly termed, is an ancient phenomenon in communication and education research. It has been defined as the fear or anxiety one experiences when he or she is compelled to communicate in the presence of other individuals, either in an informal or formal setting (Nijat et al., 2019). In children, the disorder often manifests as resistance to classroom work, refusal to talk in class, or obvious distress at being asked to talk. The anxiety can be physiological, such as sweating and trembling, or psychological, such as fear of criticism or inadequacy (Idrus, 2021). These early school years are a period during which children are acquiring social and academic skills, and speech anxiety can affect language development, self-esteem, and social relationships with

peers. An understanding of this issue in schools is essential for teachers and policymakers who are interested in fostering communication skills and overall learning attainment.

Globally, student speech anxiety has been long researched at the tertiary level and among adults, with less attention to younger students. Classroom communication apprehension has been found to have a significant impact on class participation and course success, especially in language classes (Yaman & Demirtaş, 2014). Speech anxiety of elementary school children is conditioned by a variety of variables, including developmental stage, peer pressure, teacher behavior, and linguistic demand of the curriculum (Belyaeva, 2022). These anxieties, if left untreated, can persist from the early phase to adolescent life, even into adulthood, making the individuals less competent in communication and career advancement opportunities (Sulaiman, 2024). Thus, the examination of speech anxiety at the primary school level is not only an academic concern but also a critical developmental concern. Malaysian communication apprehension is particularly relevant in light of the multilingual and multicultural nature of the country's educational setting.

Primary students in Malaysia are compelled to learn and use more than one language, including Bahasa Malaysia and English, and a significant number learn Mandarin or Tamil depending on the school. Researchers have found that students get anxious when they are compelled to use the English language due to the difference in ability and geographical and cultural backgrounds (Sulaiman, 2024). Less proficient English learners also don't speak out for fear of being ridiculed by classmates or scolded by their teachers, thus also exhibiting avoidance behavior in speaking activities (Adnan et al., 2014). This also happens because English has stakes in terms of examination, social mobility, and job prospects, increasing the stakes for performing at one's best in speaking activities. Malaysian primary school speech anxiety is therefore not merely a school-based phenomenon but also a socio-cultural phenomenon of national ambition and language policy.

Empirical research on Malaysia has begun to reveal the prevalence and nature of speech anxiety among primary school students. For example, Azarfam and Baki (2012), in a sample of 614 students through a mixed-methods design, found that communication apprehension was influenced by personality, ethnicity, and gender. Students scoring neurotic scored high on anxiety, while those scoring extraverted scored low compared to communication. Observational data also provided behavioral symptoms of anxiety, such as lack of eye contact and fidgeting, which were not noticed by teachers or were not criticized. Even the teachers acknowledged the existence of speech anxiety but attested to receiving little training on how to deal with it. These findings justify the intervention in the Malaysian primary school system to detect and reduce speech anxiety among students.

Apart from personality and internal dynamics, structural aspects of the Malaysian education system also trigger speech anxiety. Introduction of programs like the Dual Language Programme (DLP), where certain subjects are taught in English, has further exposed students to the use of the language, but at the same time heightened the stress level of poorer students (Abadi et al., 2022). Similarly, national-level examinations such as the UPSR (dissolved in 2021) have also placed great focus on English and literacy achievement, with stakes that were high enough to exacerbate students' fear of speaking. While policy reform is shifting towards holistic evaluation, classroom practice still places more value on correctness over confidence,

unintentionally fostering speech anxiety. Public school teachers, in particular, find it difficult to provide sufficient syllabus requirements while enhancing the communicative skills of students without embarrassing them. Foreign literature stresses the long-term effects of unmanaged speech anxiety, including fewer school achievements, fewer participations in leadership roles, and lower self-esteem (Haroud et al., 2025; Virgonita, 2023).

Classroom dynamics in collectivist cultures like Malaysia, where teacher-centered teaching and group learning are dominant, can be another source of pressure to conform, avoid mistakes, and maintain social harmony. Such a socio-cultural dynamic can reinforce fear of negative judgment and promote silence within participation. On the other hand, studies have also determined that with appropriate pedagogical practices, such as cooperative learning, positive reinforcement, and the integration of co-curricular speech activities, speech anxiety can be reduced (Hariadi, 2024). This kind of evidence reveals that successful interventions would have to consider both psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. In addition, this study aimed to fill the lack of empirical research on Malaysian primary pupils across year levels, using a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, the current study aimed:

1. To examine whether significant differences exist in levels of speech anxiety across Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6 pupils in a Malaysian public primary school.
2. To determine the overall level and specific manifestations of speech anxiety in English classrooms among the sampled pupils.

Literature Review

Speech Anxiety in Primary School Pupils

Communication apprehension, or commonly referred to as speech anxiety, has been researched widely in the case of university students and adults, but is a relatively unknown field in the case of primary school students. As the fear or apprehension of communicating with or by others (Yaman & Demirtaş, 2014), speech anxiety may have an effect on the confidence, participation, and overall communication ability of students. In the elementary school environment, where oral presentation, class interaction, and peer contact are the pillars of learning and social development, speech anxiety poses significant challenges (Baki & Karakus, 2015). Scholars argue that such anxiety early in life can have a long-lasting effect on the academic journey of children as well as on their social ability if not managed effectively (Christy, 2021).

One of the dominant themes of literature is the prevalence of speech anxiety in novice learners. Studies conducted in Malaysia showed that in-class oral communication activities such as storytelling, show-and-tell, and speech competitions trigger a high level of fear among primary school pupils (Altunkaya, 2018). The findings follow research in Western cultures, in which elementary school pupils also reported nervousness and anxiety when giving presentations to fellow pupils and instructors (Prabhakaran & Yamat, 2017). However, while some researchers theorize that speech anxiety diminishes with age due to increasing exposure and practice (Nijat et al., 2019), others uphold that unless reinforced by targeted interventions, anxiety levels might persevere or even increase in the middle primary years due to increasing scholastic requirements (Subasi, 2010). Such a discrepancy highlights the need to examine speech anxiety across different levels of grades, e.g., Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6.

Another research area investigates the relationship between performance and speech anxiety. According to several studies, greater communication apprehension negatively correlates with oral performance and classroom participation (Hariadi, 2024). Malaysian primary school pupils found to have higher anxiety towards English oral examinations avoided taking part and underperformed relative to their classmates (Adnan et al., 2014). Then again, a different study indicates that mild speech anxiety can be a motivational factor, encouraging students to work harder and perform better (Kuswantoro & Novita, 2024). Such conflicting results propose that the impact of anxiety may not always be negative but varied depending on individual coping strategies and the learning environment.

Gender variation in fear of speaking has also been of concern. In a Malaysian school study, the female students were found to have more communication apprehension compared to the males, particularly in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms (Mohamad & Rashid, 2020). This is also consistent with international findings where girls are more self-conscious when performing oral communication tasks (Azarfam & Baki, 2012). However, in some research, there were no gender differences, and contextual variables such as pedagogy, classroom social organization, and societal pressures may have been responsible for the results (Salem & Al Dyiar, 2014). For example, boys and girls may be equally pressured in collectivist societies to do well on group-oriented tasks and thereby erase gender-based differences in anxiety score levels (Martiningsih et al., 2024). These conflicting results show that studies placed in a cultural and linguistic context are essential.

Another underlying critique is the role language proficiency plays in the conceptualization of speech anxiety. In multicultural settings like Malaysia, where students are supposed to be proficient in both English and their mother tongue, low proficiency has been strongly associated with high anxiety (Azarfam & Baki, 2012). Low self-perceived linguistic proficiency students avoid speaking opportunities to save face, and this results in a spiral of silence and low efficacy (Obiweluozo et al., 2021). As an unexpected result, studies in monolingual classrooms such as the United States revealed that speech anxiety remains prevalent in native speakers (Herbein et al., 2018), which shows that anxiety also relies on personality, classroom learning environment, and teaching styles of the teachers.

Intervention studies have varied results on adapting to speech anxiety among elementary students. For example, Nijat et al. (2019) demonstrated that promoting teacher feedback and gradual exposure to speech lessons reduced the anxiety of young learners. Similarly, Altunkaya et al. (2018) showed that group discussion and peer collaboration integrated into lessons lowered communication apprehension compared to solo activities. In Malaysia, the application of newer classroom methods such as role plays and drama has been seen to reduce anxiety among students because it makes oral activities fun but non-threatening (Yaman & Demirtaş, 2014). Not all interventions are created equal; coercive and examination-based oral testing still perpetuates speech anxiety because it increases the stakes of failure and embarrassment in front of others (Adnan et al., 2014).

Speech Anxiety Levels Across Year Groups

Decades of evidence indicate that anxiety regarding oral communication begins in the early school years and is often highly differentiated by grade. McCroskey's initial work on communication apprehension demonstrated that students in Grades 4-6 scored higher on

oral communication anxiety scales than students in Grades K-3, suggesting that upper primary transition is characterized by increasing evaluative pressures and mounting concern regarding performance (Kankam & Boateng, 2017). This developmental pattern has been observed with varied measurement protocols (self-report, observational ratings, physiological responses), which together suggest that the interval between the elementary and late-elementary ages is a sensitive period for the development of speech-related fears. On this basis, inferences between Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6 are theoretically warranted: these year groups span the ages at which most children will be exposed to more high-stakes oral work and peer evaluation capable of reinforcing anxious responding (Blood et al., 2007).

Later research dissipates a simple age-increase explanation by showing that grade difference is strongly vulnerable to classroom climate and exposure to speaking practice. Controlled intervention studies with upper primary school children show that scaffolded training, gradual exposure, and staged training can reduce speech anxiety in Grades 3-4 over short periods of time, indicating that anxiety increases are not inevitable but are a function of instructional factors (Herbein et al., 2018). In particular, where Year 4 students are receiving high frequency, low-stakes talk and comment feedback, their anxiety profiles can be significantly lower than those of Year 5 or Year 6 students in more examination-oriented classrooms. This study highlights the importance of holding teaching practice constant in year-group comparisons: change apparent in Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6 can be a result of varying teaching practices and assessment cultures, rather than maturational change.

Multilingual and examination-centered contextual studies also suggest that students in Year 6 may experience heightened speaking anxiety since school stakes are higher. Primary context studies, particularly where oral ability is linked to end-of-primary testing or selection streaming, suggest that students in Year 6 report higher fear of negative evaluation and avoidance behavior when compared with junior age groups (Garcia Jr et al., 2024). This kind of work suggests that timing the big tests and the following focus on “accuracy” in the oral activity can serve to optimize worry among the Year 6 students, even as communicative ability is increasing. Hence, any year comparison of Year 4-6 children must keep perceived test timing and stakes constant since year-group differences will be a function of assessment calendar and consequences rather than age itself.

Empirical research in Malaysian primary settings attests to the interaction of classroom practice and grade level. One recent mixed-methods study of 11-12-year-old Malaysian students (approximately Year 5-6) documented overt behavioral signs of communication apprehension, such as eye contact avoidance, fidgeting, and monosyllabic answers, and reported that teachers were clearly sensitive to such behavior but lacked the confidence to address it (Bin et al., 2024). The thesis further claimed that whereas teacher questioning remained correction- and evaluation-oriented, upper-primary student anxiety persisted, but in classrooms that engaged in regular formative oral activities, pupil anxiety levels were lower in relation to pupils of the same age. These findings imply that comparisons between Year 4-6 Malaysian public schools should control for teacher questioning style, feedback conventions, and provision of scaffolded speech as covariates in any comparison of grade differences.

Ebenezer et al. (2022) examined lecturers' perceptions of public speaking anxiety (PSA) of ESL students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), with the aim of ascertaining contributing factors and how to mitigate its impact. The study adopted a quantitative research design, utilizing the PRPSA questionnaire on 135 students across four faculties and subjected the data to reliability testing, factor analysis, and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that students recorded high levels of anxiety related to nervousness, fear, lack of confidence, and physical symptoms such as trembling and a racing heart. Factor analysis categorized PSA into dimensions of feeling nervous, fearful, anxious, and physical symptoms of apprehension. The study concluded that pedagogical support and practice opportunities are especially important in buffering PSA. Therefore, this study makes a noteworthy contribution through the presentation of empirical evidence on PSA among Malaysian ESL undergraduates with a demand for anxiety-sensitive pedagogy.

Ghazali et al. (2020) examined second language anxiety among Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college ESL students to identify significant anxiety factors affecting students' class performance. Through a quantitative survey design, they adapted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) instrument and collected data from 236 Polytechnics, Community Colleges, and GIATMARA students. The findings determined three principal causes of anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and communication apprehension. Students manifested speaking task anxiety, terror of being called on to speak unprepared, and fear of criticism by peers or the instructor, testifying that speaking was the most intimidating task. Test anxiety also emerged strongly, with most of the students being afraid of failing and being corrected all the time. The study showed that TVET ESL instructors have to address the affective needs of students to build proficiency. Therefore, this paper provides strong empirical support for the historical role of anxiety as a barrier to ESL achievement in vocational contexts.

Measurement issues also cloud grade-level trend interpretation: most commonly used measures were normed on older kids or on larger constructs (e.g., foreign language anxiety) and aren't necessarily standardized for young kids or for fine year-to-year comparisons. Measure reviews note that PRCA-type measures and speaking-specific subscales must be language- and age-adapted for Year 4-6 students, and that scale wording or mode of administration changes (e.g., self-report vs. teacher rating) can result in non-congruent age trends (Badrasawi et al., 2020). Thus, for a comparison of speech anxiety across Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6, researchers should initially prioritize established child-friendly measures and, wherever possible, cross-validate self-reporting with behavioral ratings or teacher ratings to rule out measurement artifacts.

Therefore, synthesis of the literature suggests year-group differences in speech anxiety are optimally explained as the interaction between three forces: developmental maturation (cognitive and emotional regulation development), pedagogical exposure (quality and amount of speaking practice), and assessment/sociocultural pressure (stakes, language policy, peer norm). Where maturation and practice coincide, older students experiencing positive regular speaking practice, fear can decline with grade. Where remedial pedagogy and test pressure dominate, particularly in Year 6, nervousness may increase with growing competence. In empirical research comparing Year 4-6, this implies a research plan that monitors classroom practices and perceived stakes across age/year to untangle which

processes are accountable for differences observed; without such controls, direct comparisons may provide spurious proof of developmental alteration in speech anxiety.

Gender Differences in Speech Anxiety

Speech anxiety studies have all along pointed to gender as a significant variable that affects the level of anxiety among communication students. Research in educational psychology has established that female students show speech anxiety at a higher rate compared to their male peers when delivering oral presentations or presenting orally in class (Hz, 2022). This variation is best attributed to socialization patterns that encourage boys to be violent and girls to be cautious and conformity, and therefore could strengthen their fear of rejection. In the context of a Malaysian primary school culture in a research work, classroom participation dynamics and cultural norms could further strengthen these gendered experiences of fear (Grossman et al., 2001).

Empirical studies, however, record mixed outcomes on the extent of such gender variations. Anuardi et al. (2023), for instance, found that Japanese primary school female students were more anxious than their male peers speaking foreign languages. In line with this, Fauzi et al. (2025) observed in a Malaysian study that girls were more anxious to speak in class, especially in English. These findings concur with international studies, such as Carrillo et al. (2001), which indicate that higher levels of anxiety among girls tend to be the result of fear of judgments by peers and pressure to be linguistically accurate.

On the contrary, other research would suggest that the disparity between female and male students may not have been emphasized so much. For example, Hasan and Fatimah (2014) in the Indonesian environment suggested that both genders experienced speech anxiety to an equal extent, where situational characteristics such as teacher evaluation, classroom environment, and topic familiarity were more of an influence than gender. In a similar vein, Marzec-Stawiarska (2014) argued that male students could also feel more anxious while presenting to authorities, and therefore gender may not always be assumed to be more anxious. That implies even if gender is important, it could interact with broader contextual and situational factors to affect anxiety outcomes.

Besides, more recent studies provide evidence of closure of the speech anxiety difference between boys and girls among younger learners. For example, Baki and Karakus (2015) reported that a change in classroom practice enabling cooperative learning and student-centered activity has the power to improve boys' and girls' confidence in speaking in public. In Malaysia, group discussions, narratives, and dramatic activities interventions have reduced anxiety to the same extent for both girls and boys (Bin et al., 2024). These findings suggest that conducive learning environments and classrooms can counteract gender differences.

Therefore, despite the large body of evidence supporting the higher propensity of girls to report more speech anxiety than boys, the result is not a universal one. Pedagogical style, cultural values, and situational milieus all have a role in the manner in which gender is infused with anxiety in communication. For Malaysian primary school children, pedagogies of the classroom and cultural norms must be considered in defining differences as gender. This emphasis on the critical highlights the need for school intervention that not only targets

general speech anxiety, but also the insidious way gender restricts students' communication experience.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis is the basis of the rationale in one conceptualization of the psychological processes involved in second language acquisition. Based on the hypothesis, affective variables can help or hinder learning as a "filter" that functions to regulate the extent to which input in the language is being internally processed. More specifically, Krashen prescribes three affective variables: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. If the students are very confident and motivated, the affective filter is "low," and there is increased linguistic intake. High anxiety, however, raises the affective filter, thus preventing the student from being able to intake and store language effectively. This theoretical argument works extremely well with children in primary school, whose expanding cognitive and affective profiles put them especially vulnerable to affective barriers such as speech anxiety. Understanding the impact of the affective filter helps teachers design comforting classroom environments that minimize anxiety and result in language learning achievement (Krashen, 1982).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a lagged sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2018), with the qualitative phase lagging behind the quantitative phase in order to contextualize and explain statistical results. The rationale was that the lag aimed to use pupils' accounts to question findings of patterns in the ANOVA, that is, why certain year-level differences were significant or non-significant. The combination of the two stages gave methodological triangulation, which improved the validity of the results, as well as presenting a holistic image of the way speech anxiety is understood and varies across the various stages of primary school.

The study employed a stratified random sample of 132 students, and further description improves methodological rigor. Schools were first randomly selected from the district to cover representation from different school environments. Students within each school were stratified by year group (Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6), where participants across each stratum were randomly sampled to provide balance at the three levels. This approach reduced sampling bias to a minimum and enhanced the results' generalizability. Ethical standards were also followed: formal permission from the Ministry of Education and relevant school officials was sought before data collection. Written informed consent was sought from the parents or guardians, with verbal assent requested from the pupils themselves. These steps ensured that participation was voluntary and ethically right, and hence assisted the credibility and integrity of the research design.

Research Instrument

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with two instruments: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) of Horwitz et al. (1986), which measures communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation on 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. To render it suitable for primary school students, items were

reworded, translated into Malay, and pilot-tested for understandability, read aloud by the teachers to poorer readers for their administration.

FLCAS was adapted for use among primary school children to accommodate age-suited understanding and context-based application. Adaptation involved simplifying items' vocabulary to that of primary school children and translating items into Bahasa Malaysia without altering the communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation original measures. In order to assess content validity, the new items were also examined by a panel of expert TESL professionals, educational psychologists, and primary teachers, and received their comments on clarity, cultural appropriateness, and correspondence with the construed meanings. A pilot test was subsequently administered to a small group of students ($n \approx 30$) to identify potential ambiguities and disambiguate item wording. This was also established through Cronbach's alpha, which indicated that construct validity and reliability were established and indicated that the scaled adapted instrument was a genuine measure of the underlying constructs of speech anxiety for the targeted population. Reliability analysis indicated high internal consistency (total $\alpha = 0.90$), with acceptable subscale values, in support of its suitability for this group.

Quantitative data were quantitatively analyzed by descriptive statistics and ANOVA through SPSS. The study was conducted in casual school settings and audio-recorded for transcription; the interviews provided rich data. Combined, both instruments delivered strong, complementary findings on speech anxiety among Malaysian primary school students.

The qualitative element, comprising six group interviews, was designed to complement and illuminate the quantitative findings rather than run in parallel. Participants for the interviews were purposively sampled from the survey respondents to achieve representation by Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6, and gender balance. This purposive sampling enabled exploration of themes emerging in the quantitative phase, i.e., differences in speech anxiety between year groups and between girls and boys. Group interviews were chosen as a means of offering a supportive and interactive environment in which pupils might talk and reflect more openly, reducing formality, potentially increasing personal anxiety. The qualitative data produced dense data regarding students' life worlds, coping strategies, and sense-making of classroom speaking activities, thereby placing the numeric trends identified by the survey in context. By doing so, the qualitative stage supplemented the result interpretation and the explanatory power of the study.

Analysis and Results

Demographic Information

The table below shows the demographic information of the participants who took part in the study.

Table 1

Demographic Information

		Count	Column N %
Gender	Female	74	56.1%
	Male	58	43.9%
Year	Year 4	47	35.6%
	Year 5	47	35.6%
	Year 6	38	28.8%

Related to the demographic information of the study, the research focused on the gender of the participating primary school pupils and the year level they belong to. The distribution of the participants by their gender revealed that there were more female students, 56.1 % as compared to male students 43.9%, thus, there is a slightly higher female representation in the study undertakings.

Overall, in terms of year level, Year 4 has 35.6% of the total participants, while 35.6% of the total participants came from Year 5, and the remaining 28.8% from Year 6. This implies that though the number of participants from all three years was fairly adequate, the number of participants from Year 6 was slightly low compared to that of the lower years. The availability of the sample ensures that there is a fair gender and age distribution and hence enables comparison in the research (Althubaiti, 2023).

In general, the demographic coverage may provide a suitable sample for determining the possible correlation between the gender and grade level and FLCAS among primary school children.

Normality Test

The tables below aim at analysing the Normality test for anxiety scores.

Table 2

Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Anxiety_Scores	.064	132	.200*	.979	132	.036

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The distribution of the respondents' FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) ratings may be inferred from the results of the normality tests. With a significance value of .200, over the .05 cutoff, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test suggests that there is no discernible deviation from normalcy in the score distribution. The Shapiro-Wilk test, on the other hand, indicates a possible deviation from normalcy with a significance of .036, which is less than 0.05. The Shapiro-Wilk test is frequently seen to be more accurate for smaller sample sizes ($n < 2000$), hence, this finding implies that there may be some non-normality in the dataset.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

		Statistic	Std. Error
Anxiety Scores	Skewness	.128	.211
	Kurtosis	1.560	.419

This view is further supported by the descriptive statistics. Given that the skewness is almost zero, the skewness value of .128 with a standard error of .211 suggests a roughly symmetrical distribution. However, the distribution appears to be slightly leptokurtic, or more peaked than a normal distribution, based on the kurtosis value of 1.560 and the standard error of .419, respectively. This suggests that scores have heavier tails and are grouped around the mean. Overall, even if the data displays slight departures from normalcy, especially in kurtosis, there aren't any serious infractions; therefore, parametric testing could still be justified.

Significant Difference in the Level of Anxiety among the Students in the Different Years

The table below shows the One-Way ANOVA calculation of the respondents and data obtained from the participants who took part in the study.

Table 2

ANOVA for Anxiety Scores

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	478.482	2	239.241	1.051	.353
Within Groups	29362.510	129	227.616		
Total	29840.992	131			

The results from one-way ANOVA gathered data about the significant differences that exist in student anxiety levels through their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) scores across multiple academic years. The analytic results show 478.482 square units of between-group sums and 29,362.510 square units of within-group sums, which amount to 29,840.992 total sum of squares. The between-groups degrees of freedom evaluate to 2 points, and the within-groups degrees of freedom measure 129, which totals 131 points. The obtained F-value reaches 1.051 with a p-value amounting to .353.

Research findings indicate no statistically significant difference exists in student anxiety levels throughout different academic years because the p-value (.353) rises above the accepted .05 threshold. The measurement of student anxiety at various developmental stages reveals no significant variations of statistical importance. The large amount of within-group variation (227.616) measures significantly more than between-group variation (239.241), which indicates individual variables drive anxiety changes above group membership variables.

Research findings demonstrate that English-language anxiety shows no correlation with the primary school year level of students. Each student has unique personality traits that, alongside their educational approach and their learning setting, prove to be more influential when it comes to their foreign language anxiety (Han et al. 2022). Additional research should examine additional elements, such as learning styles and teacher-student interaction, together with gender variables, to discover what factors lead to anxiety in language education.

The qualitative data revealed that test pressure manifests both cognitively and physically among pupils, shaping their experiences of foreign language learning in different ways depending on age and year level. Pupils consistently describe anxiety before speaking tests, often reporting stress, nervousness, or physical sensations such as “butterflies in the stomach.” While these responses occur across all year groups, younger pupils appear more acutely affected, whereas older pupils demonstrate emerging resilience and coping strategies.

The Overall Anxiety Level for The Students in the Years

The table below shows the descriptive statistics of the overall anxiety scores for all the students who participated in the study.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Overall Anxiety Scores

		Anxiety_Scores
		Mean
Year	Year 4	105.66
	Year 5	105.28
	Year 6	109.66

The purpose of this study was to determine the overall anxiety level of primary school students from different year levels using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Descriptive statistics and mean anxiety scores for students in Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6 are indicated, as the students are likely to be extremely anxious in learning English as a foreign language.

The average anxiety scores for the three years are very similar to each other, from Year 4 at 105.66, Year 5 at 105.28, and Year 6 at 109.66. To interpret FLCAS, foreign language anxiety will be high when there are scores above 100. Therefore, the results suggest that students across all three years’ experience significant anxiety in their English classrooms. Year 6 pupils (109.66) reported the highest mean anxiety level, indicating that anxiety might increase as students progress through primary school (Oldfield, 2024). This could be due to greater academic expectations, increased assessment pressure, and the anticipation of transitioning to secondary school.

The qualitative analysis highlighted the coexistence of positive and negative emotions when pupils speak English, such as excitement, pride, joy, and nervousness or fear. The majority of pupils describe a dual experience where the thrill of using English is tempered by anxiety about performance, indicating that speech anxiety is a pervasive issue across the sample. This theme underscores that anxiety is not solely negative but is often intertwined with positive feelings, contributing to a moderate to high overall anxiety level.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety Scores	132	105.00	60.00	165.00	106.6742	15.09284
Valid N (listwise)	132					

Overall assessment data demonstrates that 106.67 marks represent the total student experience of substantial nervousness and discomfort in their English classes at this public school. Standard deviation at 15.09 demonstrates that student anxiety scores differ, but the majority of participants reveal similar levels of anxiety. The anxiety levels of students extended from 60 to 165 as shown by the recorded range values (105), which demonstrates that pupils exhibit varying degrees of anxiety, with some feeling moderately anxious and others experiencing intense anxiety that disrupts their language acquisition (Almukhailid, 2023).

The findings suggest speech anxiety is a persistent issue. The elevated level of anxiety among students between Year 4 and Year 6 stems from several major factors involving enhanced English proficiency requirements, higher performance benchmarks in language subjects, concerns about mistakes, and testing-related stress. High anxiety levels among students might result from communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, which represent the main dimensions of the FLCAS (Dilsat, 2024).

Intervention programs need to be established for the purpose of helping students manage their language anxiety. The effective intervention includes teachers utilizing student-friendly educational practices along with developing positive learning spaces and providing assistance to students who fear English communication (Trail, 2024). The decrease in assessment pressure and implementation of team-based educational practices will assist students in feeling less stressed while developing enjoyable English education outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the levels of speech anxiety in primary school students learning English as a second language, concentrating on three principal research questions: variations in anxiety levels across Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6; overall anxiety levels among these year groups; and the impact of gender on anxiety. The findings disclosed numerous significant insights that enhance the comprehension of speech anxiety in young language learners. The One-Way ANOVA analysis revealed no statistically significant changes in anxiety levels among the various year levels. Despite Year 6 students displaying the highest average anxiety scores, these differences lacked statistical significance, indicating that elements beyond year level, such as individual personality traits, learning environments, and instructional methodologies, have a more considerable influence on students' anxiety experiences. Anxiety ratings for each year were elevated across the board, with students being exceedingly distressed when they were giving an English speech. Mean anxiety ratings were 105.66 for Year 4, 105.28 for Year 5, and 109.66 for Year 6, showing that speech anxiety was a significant concern throughout the primary school years. This result would suggest that, overall, across

groups, students' anxiety is very stable across year groups. A trend was observed in the mean score, indicating that Year 6 children appeared to exhibit slightly more anxiety, but this difference was not statistically significant. It is not more likely to interpret this as a clear development trend but rather to regard this as an emerging tendency worthy of further investigation. The qualitative findings are useful for contextualizing the numerical pattern: Year 6 children were more likely to report greater pressure regarding exam preparation and a greater fear of peer disapproval. These results suggest that while statistical evidence does not support year-group differences, child reports reveal contextual factors, like test pressures, that can explain why Year 6 children report greater anxiety.

Gender was also a significant influence, where female students reported greater anxiety than male students, as has been identified in earlier research. This gender difference highlights the necessity of specific therapies that solve the special problems of female students in language anxiety reduction. It demonstrates that there is still a phenomenon of speech anxiety among young English language learners and the necessity of early prevention thereof in education. In an attempt to reverse the undesirable impact of anxiety on language learning, instructors must devise methods that foster a supportive learning environment. These can be achieved through the establishment of anxiety-reduction strategies, reinforcement, practice, and affirmation towards confidence. Given the multifaceted nature of speech anxiety, further studies must examine other variables such as learning styles, teacher-student relationships, and classroom dynamics in order to specify more causes and solutions. Moreover, proper enactment of high-quality intervention programs can reduce anxiety and enhance the communicative competence of students, thus providing improved language learning outcomes. In conclusion, though English primary school learners' speech anxiety is not an uncommon phenomenon, knowing its causative factors and aligning intervention programs towards correcting the same can bring a substantial positive contribution to young language learners' learning experience and academic performance.

This study offers a valuable contribution to linguistic and contextual information in language learning and communication apprehension. Theoretically, it extends Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and McCroskey's (1977) communication apprehension theory to the primary school level, a grade typically overlooked by anxiety studies targeting adolescents or adults. In establishing a Child version of the FLCAS, the research also contributes methodological rigour to the assurance that anxiety construct measures in children are valid. Locally, the research contributes to Malaysian primary schooling's sparse empirical foundation regarding speech anxiety, with an analysis of the ways in which local factors of exam culture, language policy, and classroom practice intersect with students' emotional lives. The application of both qualitative and quantitative stages also provides subtle remarks on how anxiety is experienced, thereby enlightening teachers and policy-makers on how to develop age-sensitive and culturally appropriate interventions.

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