Journal of English Language and Education
ISSN 2597- 6850 (Online), 2502-4132 (Print)
Journal Homepage: https://jele.or.id/index.php/jele/index

OPEN ACCESS Article

Speaking Anxiety and Pronunciation Accuracy: A Correlational Study with Indonesian EFL Learners

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v8i2.421

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A B S T R A C T

Language anxiety constitutes a psychological phenomenon that commonly impacts second/foreign language (L2) learning and performance. Although language anxiety has been extensively studied in L2 research, there is a lack of research on the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy. To address this gap, the current study investigates the potential influence of speaking anxiety on pronunciation accuracy in L2 speaking. Data were obtained from 30 Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). These learners completed an L2 speaking task and a questionnaire. The speaking task assessed the learners' ability to pronounce English words, while the questionnaire measured their levels of speaking anxiety. A correlational analysis of the data revealed a very weak correlation between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy among the Indonesian EFL learners, and this correlation was not statistically significant: $\rho(28) = 0.052$, two-tailed $p = 0.785$. These findings suggest that the reported levels of speaking anxiety among the learners do not significantly impact their pronunciation accuracy in the given L2 English speaking task. This study contributes to the existing knowledge by shedding light on the underexplored relationship between L2 speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, Pronunciation Accuracy, Speaking Anxiety

Article History:
Received 02nd September 2023
Accepted 20th October 2023
Published 21st October 2023

INTRODUCTION

Language anxiety is a pervasive issue in second/foreign language (L2) learning (Botes et al., 2020), and numerous studies have highlighted a significant negative correlation between language anxiety and the four primary language skills, including speaking (e.g., Azizifar & Faryadian, 2015; Chen et al., 2022), listening (e.g., Hamzavi & Afshar, 2014), reading (e.g., Sellers, 2000), and writing (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023). These studies consistently demonstrate that higher levels of language anxiety are associated with poorer performance across these skills.

However, there has been limited attention given to the specific relationship between speaking anxiety as a dimension of language anxiety and pronunciation accuracy, which is a critical aspect of L2 speaking skills. The scarcity of studies investigating this specific association highlights a notable gap in the existing literature (for a recent review and meta-analyses see e.g., Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Therefore, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between speaking

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Authors'Contribution: a-Study design; b-Data collection; c-Statistical analysis; d-Manuscript preparation; e-Funds collection.

anxiety and pronunciation accuracy and to potentially elucidate the implications of this connection in L2 teaching and learning contexts.

In the context of L2 research, the term 'speaking anxiety' is usually used to refer to feelings of apprehension, fear or nervousness that L2 learners experience when engaging in L2 oral communication (Horwitz et al., 1986). These feelings may be influenced by learner-external and/or -internal factors, including (1) anticipated negative evaluation from the teacher or peers, (2) the evaluative nature of the L2 communication setting, (3) learners' limited L2 knowledge, and/or (4) learners' unfamiliarity with a given topic or task (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Young, 1990). From a cognitive standpoint, heightened levels of speaking anxiety caused by these factors can contribute to cognitive symptoms that potentially hinder optimal L2 speaking performance. That is, L2 learners experiencing heightened levels of speaking anxiety may struggle to (i) organize ideas coherently, (ii) recall relevant words or grammatical structures while attempting to convey ideas, (iii) pay sufficient attention to the task at hand, and/or (iv) pronounce specific words in the L2 accurately (cf., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Regarding the latter issue (i.e., difficulties in pronouncing target L2 words accurately), L2 learners experiencing heightened levels of speaking anxiety might make more errors compared to those who do not experience such levels of anxiety. It is worth noting, however, that research on this issue is relatively scarce. Thus, relatively little is known about whether this is indeed the case.

In an effort to address the gap, the current study aims to investigate whether speaking anxiety influences pronunciation accuracy in L2 speaking. By examining the relationship between these two variables, the study not only seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in L2 teaching and research but also aims to provide valuable insights into the specific association between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy. Therefore, the research question for this study is formulated as follows: To what extent does speaking anxiety correlate with pronunciation accuracy among Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language?

METHOD

This study employed a correlational research design and collected data through a questionnaire and an L2 speaking task. The questionnaire aimed to measure the levels of speaking anxiety among the participants, while the speaking task assessed their ability to pronounce specific English words.

The participants were thirty Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). They were undergraduate students in an English language teaching program at a private university based in Jember Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years, and their English proficiency ranged from pre-intermediate to intermediate levels as determined by a standardized language assessment. All of these participants were selected through convenience sampling. That is, they were chosen based on their willingness to participate in this study.

During data collection, the participants engaged in a speaking task followed by completing the questionnaire. The speaking task involved spontaneous conversation between the participants and the first author/researcher. The conversation mainly focused on the participants' personal lives and daily activities. The conversations were audio recorded for the purpose of analyzing the participants' pronunciation accuracy. The scores of pronunciation accuracy were calculated by dividing the number of accurately pronounced words by the total number of words produced during the speaking task, multiplied by one hundred.

With respect to the questionnaire, the participants were asked to self-report their anxiety levels by indicating their agreement with statements using a Likert scale. The statements were derived from established scales adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986). The scale options included "strongly disagree" (1), "disagree" (2), "agree" (3) and "strongly agree" (4). The questionnaire was administered online to the

participants via the Google Form. The scores of the participants' speaking anxiety levels were calculated by dividing the total number of scales reported by the participants by the maximum possible scale score, multiplied by one hundred.

Finally, the collected data, which included the scores of participants' speaking anxiety levels and their pronunciation accuracy, were analysed using correlational analysis in SPSS to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between these two variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The scores achieved by the participants in terms of speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants' scores of speaking anxiety levels and pronunciation accuracy

Variables	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation
Speaking Anxiety	30	60.07	18.97
Pronunciation Accuracy	30	93.23	4.88

To determine the appropriate statistical analysis, the data were initially screened for assumptions of linearity and normal distribution. However, these assumptions were not met. Therefore, the Spearman rank-order correlation (ρ) was selected as the suitable statistical analysis for examining the data in this study.

The results of the analysis indicate a very weak correlation between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy among Indonesian EFL learners, and this correlation is not statistically significant: $\rho(28) = 0.052$, two-tailed $p = 0.785$. These findings suggest that the reported levels of speaking anxiety among the participants do not appear to have a significant influence on their pronunciation accuracy in the given L2 English speaking task.

Given the findings, the current study appears to contradict numerous studies on language anxiety that have consistently shown significant negative correlations between language anxiety and the four primary L2 skills (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Hamzavi & Afshar, 2014; Sellers, 2000). Moreover, the studies have suggested that higher levels of language anxiety tend to have an adverse impact on L2 speaking performance (Azizifar & Faryadian, 2015; Chen et al., 2022).

The disparities between the current study and the previous ones raise several important considerations. One plausible explanation for these differences could be the specific focus on pronunciation accuracy as a distinct aspect of L2 speaking in the current study. That is, while previous studies have examined the broader construct of language anxiety, encompassing multiple dimensions and skills, few studies have specifically investigated the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy (Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019) Therefore, the unique focus on pronunciation accuracy in the current study may have contributed to these contrasting results.

It is important to note, however, that pronunciation accuracy, although crucial for effective communication, represents only one linguistic component within L2 speaking. It involves the ability to articulate sounds, stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm in a manner that is intelligible to native and/or proficient non-native speakers (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Other factors, such as lexical mastery, grammatical proficiency, and fluency, might also play significant roles in overall L2 speaking performance. Thus, it is plausible that the influence of speaking anxiety on different aspects of L2 speaking may vary, and the current study specifically highlights the limited impact of speaking anxiety on pronunciation accuracy.

In addition, it is important to consider the cultural or contextual factors that may have influenced the results (cf., Young, 1990). As noted earlier, the participants in the current study were Indonesian learners of L2 English. With this in mind, their experiences of speaking anxiety and its relationship to their pronunciation accuracy may be influenced by sociocultural and contextual factors specific to these participants. Future research, therefore, is needed to explore the potential influence of sociocultural and contextual variables on the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the sample size of the current study. That is, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 30 Indonesian learners of L2 English, making the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of EFL learners need to be approached with caution. Future studies with a larger and more diverse sample are needed to further elucidate the complex relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy. Additionally, employing multiple assessment methods may also prove fruitful to enable a more comprehensive exploration of the factors that may contribute to the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy in specific L2 learning contexts. Despite these limitations, the findings of the current study provide valuable insights into the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy by specifically highlighting the limited association between these two variables.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study has investigated the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy among Indonesian EFL learners. The findings indicate that the levels of speaking anxiety reported by the participants do not have a significant influence on their pronunciation accuracy in the given L2 English speaking task. These findings contrast with previous studies on language anxiety, which consistently showed negative correlations between language anxiety and various L2 skills. This discrepancy suggests that the impact of speaking anxiety on pronunciation accuracy may differ from its typical influence on overall L2 skills, including speaking. The findings have implications for L2 teaching and learning contexts in that they emphasize the need to consider pronunciation accuracy as a distinct aspect within the broader construct of language or speaking anxiety. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between speaking anxiety and pronunciation accuracy, further research is necessary. Future studies should consider cultural, contextual, and educational factors that may influence the relationship between the two

variables. Additionally, employing a larger sample size and using multiple assessment methods would enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you JELE for publishing this article.

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