

The Saigon International University



Saigon International University Graduation Thesis

The Saigon International University



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University
Graduation Thesis

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THESIS PROPOSAL

Major

English Language

Topic

An Investigation into Foreign Language Speaking

Anxiety (FLSA) among English as a Foreign

Language Learners

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DECLARATION

I am Nguyen Thi Minh Thu, and I hereby declare that the Graduation Thesis is my own work; the data and materials are collected and prepared independently by me.

I also certify this report is only used for my university study, not for other purposes.

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NGUYEN THI MINH THU

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate EFL students' experiences with FLSA in terms of their levels of FLSA and the causes of their FLSA. Forty-nine non-English major students from two non-specialized English classes at The Saigon International University were involved in this study. The mixed methods research approach was adopted in which quantitative data was collected with a questionnaire and qualitative data was collected through interviews. This study is expected to provide insight into how EFL students experience FLSA and what the main contributors are. The findings revealed that most students experience low levels of FLSA. Concerning the causes, low self-confidence was the main factor, however, it was only slightly above fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension. Students' FLSA levels are mainly influenced by feeling inferior to their peers, lacking lexical and topical knowledge, providing improvised answers, making mistakes, being overwhelmed by the number of rules in English. These findings led to recommendations for language educators. The researcher advised educators to encourage all students to participate in classroom discussions, create a supportive classroom environment, and provide clear feedback.

Keywords: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Low Self-Confidence

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis titled “An Investigation into Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among English as a Foreign Language Learners”. The first section of the chapter focuses on background and issues, which highlights the importance of speaking skills in language learning, as well as the impacts that FLSA can have on students' academic achievements and motivation to learn. This chapter also provides a [brief](#) overview of previous research on FLSA, including studies on [learners' levels of FLSA](#), impacts, and causes of FLSA. The chapter then presents the rationale of the research, [research objectives](#), its scope, importance, research questions, and the structure of the study.

1.1. The rationale of the study

Speaking is a crucial component in language learning, especially for English learners. According to research by Brown (1994), speaking skills should be given equal importance as other language skills such as reading, writing, and listening, as it is an essential skill for communication. Non-native English speakers who develop their speaking skills can build their confidence, improve fluency, and enhance their ability to communicate effectively in English.

When developing speaking, there are many different factors that influence English students' success, such as affect, linguistic knowledge, feedback during activities, classroom dynamics, and psychology (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). One of the factors that has received more interest from previous scholars is Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, which refers to feelings of nervousness and worry that students get when speaking a foreign language (Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). FLSA can be a major problem for a student, which is emphasized by Awan et al. (2010), who stated that FLSA can cause a decline in students' academic achievement. In addition, Liu and Huang (2011) found that higher levels of FLSA are associated with lower levels of

motivation to learn, as well as performance in English. Similarly, Dewaele et al. (2018) found that low levels of anxiety are linked to positive attitudes towards learning English.

In summary, high levels of FLSA can lead to reduced academic achievement, lower motivation to learn, and negative attitudes towards learning English. In this regard, research into the levels of FLSA experienced by students, as well as the causes, is essential as high levels of FLSA can dramatically impact their abilities to communicate effectively. Research that helps students and teachers identify the main causes of FLSA, can provide guidelines towards solutions for addressing these causes, thereby allowing the students to overcome their speaking anxiety and effectively develop their speaking abilities. If students are expected to become effective communicators, they must be aware of the factors that contribute to their FLSA and have a clear understanding of how these factors, such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence, impact their communication abilities.

Numerous studies have been done on FLSA among EFL students, particularly on the impacts of FLSA. Researchers such as Merç and Özalp (2022), Rastegar and Karami (2015), and Manipuspika (2018) found that FLSA has a negative impact on students' willingness to communicate. However, some studies (Bensalem, 2021; Ghelichli, 2022) found no significant impact. Some studies found that speaking anxiety negatively impacts motivation (Liu & Huang, 2011), performance in English (Ramarow & Hassan, 2021) and enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018).

In addition, some researchers, including Cagatay (2015) and Suleimenova (2013), have examined the levels of FLSA among EFL students. Cagatay (2015) made two significant findings with this research: the first findings showed that EFL students **experienced** a moderate level of FLSA. The second finding revealed that FLSA increases when the non-native English

speaking participants communicate with native speakers. In contrast, their FLSA decreased when communicating with their non-native peers. Moreover, Suleimenova (2013) found that most students in a Kazakhstani foreign language classroom experience some degree of FLSA. The author also found that students had extremely negative experiences with speaking activities in a foreign language class. Since FLSA levels vary in different situations, it is necessary to investigate the degree of anxiety that students experience to gain more insights into learners' levels of anxiety and its causes in other learning contexts.

To better understand why students experience FLSA, several studies have investigated the factors that influence levels of FLSA. Fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension were the primary factors investigated across numerous studies, such as those conducted by Zia and Sulan (2015) and Miskam and Saidalvi (2018). Communication apprehension refers to anxiety experienced when communicating with others and fear of negative evaluation refers to the fear of the student regarding receiving negative feedback. Zia and Sulan (2015) found that fear of negative evaluation significantly contributes to FLSA, while Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) found that communication apprehension was the main contributor. Additionally, Toubot et al. (2018) investigated the aforementioned factors alongside low self-confidence, which refers to a lack of confidence that students have in their speaking abilities. This author found that low self-confidence greatly contributed to FLSA. Overall, several previous studies have investigated students' levels FLSA, the impacts thereof on their speaking ability, and the causes of FLSA. However, much of previous research on FLSA has been conducted in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. There is a lack of studies carried out in EFL contexts in general and in Vietnam in particular.

Considering the importance of effective communication in English, this study investigated the levels of FLSA among students in Vietnam. English is becoming increasingly important in Vietnam and many students are required to learn and use English in their studies and future careers. By understanding FLSA among non-native English speakers in Vietnam, this study can provide valuable information to educators and students alike. Moreover, the vast majority of studies on FLSA were mainly conducted outside of Vietnam. Therefore, there is a lack of research that can provide insight into FLSA of students in a Vietnamese context. Such research is important since each country is unique with its own cultural and educational environment. Therefore, educators cannot rely only on the findings about students in other countries, but must have access to local research to make better-informed decisions. Accordingly, this study has identified this lack of research and has decided to investigate FLSA among Vietnamese university students based on the frameworks that have been provided by previous studies, such as Horwitz et al. (1986) and Toubot et al. (2018).

1.2. Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate EFL students' experiences with FLSA. The first aim is to determine the levels of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) that EFL students experience in the classroom. Furthermore, the study aims to discover the major causes of FLSA as reported by EFL students.

1.3. Research questions

Based on the primary research aims, the following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the levels of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety that EFL students experience in the classroom?

2. What are the major causes of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety reported by EFL students?

1.4. The significance of the research

The study will **examine** the levels of FLSA that EFL **learners** experience inside the classroom. In addition, the study will identify the major causes of FLSA **from the perspectives of learners**. By understanding the levels and causes, insight will be gained into how EFL students experience FLSA and what the main contributors are. This study is important because effective communication in English is becoming increasingly important in Vietnam and the study can provide valuable information to teachers and students about how FLSA exists among EFL students.

1.5. The scope of the study

The study involved 49 non-English major students at a university in Vietnam. Questionnaires were distributed to the students to **investigate** their levels of FLSA. Moreover, interviews were conducted with the participation of five students to collect detailed information about their levels and causes of FLSA.

1.6. The organization of the study

This study is divided into five main chapters:

Chapter 1: This chapter is titled ‘Introduction and Background of the Study’ and consists of the background of the study, overview of previous research, rationale, research scope, importance of the research, research questions, and the structure of the study.

Chapter 2: This chapter is titled 'Literature Review' and focuses on the concepts of L2 speaking and foreign language speaking anxiety. The chapter presents previous studies related to the research topic, specifically the impacts of FLSA, levels of FLSA, and causes of FLSA.

Chapter 3: This chapter is titled 'Methodology' and consists of the research design, research tools, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Chapter 4: This chapter is titled 'Findings and Discussion' and presents both the findings of the research and discusses the findings.

Chapter 5: This chapter is titled 'Conclusion'. This chapter provides a summary on the key findings, limitations of the research, and recommendations for language educators and future researchers.

The references as well as appendices are provided at the end of the paper.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of relevant concepts and studies related to foreign language speaking anxiety. The first section focuses on L2 speaking and its characteristics and importance in second language learning and teaching. It then introduces the definition and components of FLSA, defining it and discussing its components. The chapter also discusses previous studies on the impact of FLSA on students' speaking abilities, as well as the levels and causes of FLSA among EFL learners.

2.1. L2 speaking

2.1.1. *Definition of L2 speaking*

According to Ilham et al. (2020), speaking is “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (p. 34). Rickheit and Strohner (2008) define speaking as the formulation of utterances with the goal of having intentions recognized. This requires not only basic linguistic competence, but also the ability to translate intentions into words in such a way that they will be recognized by recipients, as well as the ability of recipients to engage in reasoning processes to recognize the speaker's intention. In addition, Burns (2013) argues that speaking is a complicated ability that demands the speaker's prompt engagement of knowledge and skills in real-time. It requires numerous cognitive, physiological, and socio-cultural processes to be activated simultaneously. Furthermore, Celce-Murcia (2014) defines speaking as the ability to express oneself verbally in a clear and coherent way, which is a crucial skill for effective communication.

2.1.2. *Characteristics of speaking*

Harris (1969) asserted that speaking requires a range of different abilities, which develop independently from one another. There are five components of speaking including

pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Harmer (2001) proposed four elements which are deemed essential for spoken production. The first is ‘connected speech’. Connected speech involves the modification, omission, addition, and weakening of sounds in order to speak fluently. The second element is ‘expressive devices’. This relates to changing pitch and stress in utterances, varying volume and speed, and expressing emotion through physical and non-verbal means. The third element is ‘lexis and grammar’. This involves the knowledge of common lexical phrases which can be used in spontaneous speech. The final element is ‘negotiation language’. This refers to language used to “seek clarification and to show the structure of what we are saying” (Harmer, 2001, p. 269).

According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2018) there are various types of speaking. These include imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive speaking. Imitative speaking involves the ability to simply repeat a word, phrase, or sentence. Intensive speaking involves the production of short stretches of oral language to demonstrate competence in a narrow area of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. Responsive speaking involves simple interactions that test comprehension, such as standard greetings, small talk, and basic requests and comments. Interactive speaking is more complex, involving longer and more involved interactions with multiple participants. Finally, extensive speaking includes speeches, presentations, and storytelling, during which listeners have limited or no opportunity for interaction.

2.1.3. Importance of speaking skill

Ilham et al. (2020) stated that speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Similarly, Leong and Ahmadi (2017) expressed that speaking is the most important macro skill for an English speaker to possess, as it is integral to communication. Farabi et al.