

The Impact of Language Anxiety on Arabic Speaking Performance Among Arabic Literature Students at the University of North Sumatra in 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of language anxiety on the speaking performance of students enrolled in the Arabic Literature program at Universitas Sumatera Utara, class of 2022. Employing a descriptive quantitative approach, the research involved 60 participants, consisting of 38 students with a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) background and 22 from general school backgrounds. Data were collected using a validated and reliable questionnaire, and analyzed through simple linear regression. The results revealed a regression coefficient of $B = 0.801$ with a significance level of $p < .001$ and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.450. This indicates that 45% of the variance in speaking performance can be explained by language anxiety. The findings suggest that language anxiety among the participants functioned as facilitative anxiety, wherein higher levels of anxiety motivated greater preparation and the use of adaptive coping strategies, ultimately enhancing speaking performance. The pesantren background played a contributory role in shaping students' coping mechanisms toward anxiety, thereby supporting their oral proficiency. The study concludes that language anxiety does not necessarily act as a debilitating factor; rather, it can serve as a motivational force that promotes the development of Arabic speaking skills when managed effectively.

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency is one of the essential components in mastering a foreign language, including Arabic. This skill encompasses not only pronunciation but also linguistic aspects such as vocabulary mastery, grammatical structure, intonation, and pragmatic elements involving contextually appropriate expressions (Brown & Lee, 2015). For students majoring in Arabic Literature, speaking competence is particularly crucial, as they are expected to use Arabic effectively in both academic and social contexts. However, field observations indicate that many students face emotional challenges, particularly anxiety when speaking in a foreign language, which ultimately hinders optimal performance.

Language anxiety—defined as the feeling of fear, nervousness, or discomfort experienced when required to speak in a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001)—can have either negative (debilitative) or positive (facilitative) effects, depending on how individuals perceive and manage it. While numerous prior studies associate language anxiety with diminished speaking ability due to its interference with cognitive processing and language production (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Horwitz, 2001), other research suggests a more nuanced role. For instance, Manda and Irawati (2021) found a significant negative correlation between speaking anxiety and oral performance among Indonesian high school students, indicating that higher anxiety levels correspond to lower speaking scores.

Conversely, some scholars argue that anxiety can function as a motivational catalyst. Horwitz (2001) asserts that “learner anxiety can be either facilitative or debilitating” (p. 114). At moderate levels, anxiety may increase alertness, encourage thorough preparation, and promote consistent practice. Shaharuddin, Kamal, and Aziz (2024) observed that Arabic language students in Malaysia who perceived anxiety as a challenge rather than a threat demonstrated better speaking performance due to increased motivation and practice. Similarly, Rongxi and Yuxi (2024) found that Chinese university students with high anxiety but positive mindsets toward it achieved higher oral English scores, suggesting that anxiety, when constructively interpreted, can enhance performance.

In the context of Islamic education, particularly pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), Arabic is commonly used in daily religious practices and scriptural studies. Students from such backgrounds often have early and practical exposure to Arabic, which may influence how they respond to language anxiety in formal academic settings. As AbuSahyon, Al-Shahhan, and Al-Ghamdi (2023) note, students’ perceptions of language anxiety are significantly shaped by prior learning experiences and developed coping strategies (p. 52). Thus, differences in educational background—pesantren versus general schools—may play a critical role in shaping anxiety responses and their impact on speaking performance.

To date, research specifically exploring the relationship between language anxiety and speaking skills among Arabic Literature students in Indonesia remains limited, particularly studies employing quantitative methods and considering educational background as a variable. Most existing studies focus on English language learning and general student populations, not Arabic majors. Given the unique religious and academic context of Arabic Literature students, a tailored research approach is warranted. Preliminary findings from this study indicate a positive correlation between anxiety and speaking performance, potentially supporting the concept of facilitative anxiety, contrary to the common assumption that anxiety is inherently detrimental.

Based on this background, this study is titled: “The Impact of Language Anxiety on Arabic Speaking Performance Among 2022 Cohort Arabic Literature Students at Universitas Sumatera Utara.” The objectives are as follows:

- To examine the relationship between language anxiety levels and speaking performance among Arabic Literature students.
- To determine whether the anxiety experienced is primarily facilitative or debilitative.
- To compare anxiety patterns and speaking performance between students from pesantren and general school backgrounds.

The findings are expected to contribute to more effective Arabic language teaching approaches, particularly in managing language anxiety. If anxiety is shown to have a productive role, pedagogical strategies should not merely aim to reduce it but also harness it as a motivational resource to enhance speaking performance, enabling students to develop oral skills optimally in supportive learning environments.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between language anxiety and Arabic speaking performance among the 2022 cohort of Arabic Literature students at Universitas Sumatera Utara. According to Sugiyono (2019), quantitative research, grounded in positivist philosophy, involves studying specific populations or samples, collecting data through standardized instruments, and analyzing data statistically to test predefined hypotheses.

The population consisted of Arabic Literature students who had completed the muhadatsah (Arabic conversation) course—specifically, the 2022 cohort (N = 70). A sample of 60 students was selected using Slovin’s formula, ensuring representativeness and statistical reliability. The sample included 38 students with a pesantren background and 22 from general secondary schools (SMA/SMK).

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire based on the Foreign Language Anxiety Theory (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), comprising 20 items measured on a five-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neutral, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree. Ten items measured language anxiety (X), and ten assessed speaking performance (Y). The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms, distributed through WhatsApp class groups. Participants had seven days to respond. Data were exported to spreadsheets and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, distribution) and inferential statistics.

- **Validity and Reliability**

Validity was assessed using Pearson's product-moment correlation. An item was deemed valid if its r -calculated value exceeded the r -table value (0.2144 at $p < 0.05$, $df = 58$). All 20 items showed r -calculated $>$ r -table, confirming validity (see Table 1). Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α). An instrument is considered reliable if $\alpha \geq 0.70$. The anxiety scale yielded $\alpha = 0.786$, and the speaking performance scale $\alpha = 0.794$, both indicating high internal consistency and reliability.

- **Data Analysis**

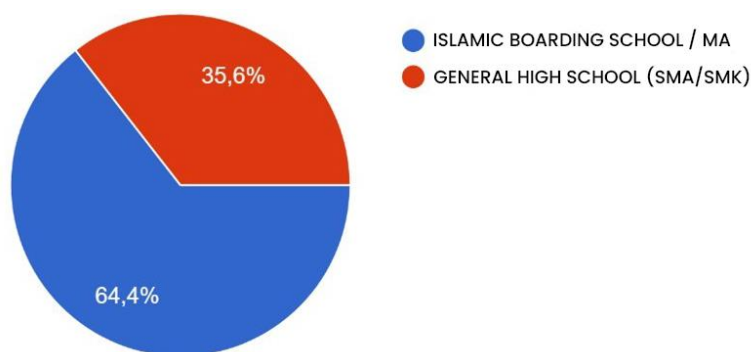
Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between language anxiety (independent variable, X) and speaking performance (dependent variable, Y). The regression model was used to test the hypothesis and calculate the coefficient of determination (R^2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Respondent Background

In this study, a questionnaire consisting of 20 items was employed to measure the variables of language anxiety (X) and speaking performance (Y). Each item was presented on a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." Respondents were instructed to select the answer that best reflected their personal experience or perception.

Figure 1.
Respondent Background



Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results (2025)

In the diagram above, which illustrates the comparison of student numbers based on different educational backgrounds, blue represents students with an educational background from Islamic boarding schools (Pondok Pesantren) or Madrasah Aliyah, where Arabic language learning is part of the curriculum. The orange color represents students with a general school background (SMA/SMK), where Arabic is not typically taught. From the total of 60 respondents, it can be observed that 64.4% (38 students) have an Islamic boarding school background, while 35.6% (22 students) come from general high schools (SMA/SMK) and do not have a foundation in Arabic.

b. Validity Test

Table 1.
Data Validity Test Results

NO.	Variable	Item	R Count	R Table	Description
1.	The Effects of Anxiety (X)	X.1	0,457	0,2144	Valid
		X.2	0,493	0,2144	Valid
		X.3	0,424	0,2144	Valid
		X.4	0,363	0,2144	Valid
		X.5	0,449	0,2144	Valid
		X.6	0,789	0,2144	Valid
		X.7	0,825	0,2144	Valid
		X.8	0,795	0,2144	Valid
		X.9	0,701	0,2144	Valid
		X.10	0,640	0,2144	Valid
2.	Arabic Language Performance (Y)	Y.1	0,316	0,2144	Valid
		Y.2	0,262	0,2144	Valid
		Y.3	0,422	0,2144	Valid
		Y.4	0,315	0,2144	Valid
		Y.5	0,347	0,2144	Valid
		Y.6	0,763	0,2144	Valid
		Y.7	0,811	0,2144	Valid
		Y.8	0,827	0,2144	Valid
		Y.9	0,816	0,2144	Valid
		Y.10	0,817	0,2144	Valid

Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results (2025)

The criteria for determining the validity of a questionnaire are as follows:

1. If $r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$, then the question is valid.
2. If $r\text{-count} < r\text{-table}$, then the question is invalid.

Table 2.
R-Table Results

r-Table Formula (Simple Correlation Coefficient)	df= N-2 with significance of 0.05%
N = 60	
df 60-2 = 58; 0,05	0,2144

Source: Junaidi (2010)

Based on the guidelines in the table and the theory above, it can be said that data validity is valid if the $r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$ with a significance of 0.05 or 5%. The results of the table above show that the anxiety impact indicator and speech performance indicator are valid from the validity test.

c. Reliability Test

Reliability testing was conducted to determine the extent to which the questionnaire is reliable in measuring the variables under investigation. If the results of the instrument testing demonstrate relatively consistent outcomes, the instrument is considered to have a high level of reliability. Therefore, the accuracy of the results is closely related to the issue of instrument reliability. Reliability testing is used to assess the stability of a measurement instrument. In this study, reliability was assessed using the internal consistency reliability approach, employing the Cronbach's alpha technique to determine the degree of stability in the relationships among the items within the research instrument. The following are the criteria for reliability testing:

1. If the reliability coefficient > 0.6 , then the tested instrument is reliable.
2. If the reliability coefficient < 0.6 , then the tested instrument is not reliable.

Table 3.
Language Anxiety Reliability Test Results (X)

Reliability Statistic	
<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	N of Items
.786	10

Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results (2025)

Based on Table 3, after conducting the reliability test, the reliability coefficient for the variable "impact of anxiety" (X) was found to be 0.786. This indicates that the value of variable X has a coefficient greater than 0.6; therefore, the instrument for this variable is considered reliable.

Table 4.
Speech Performance Reliability Test Results (Y)

Reliability Statistic	
<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	N of Items
.794	10

Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results (2025)

Based on Table 4, after conducting a reliability test, the reliability coefficient for the speaking performance variable was 0.794. This means that the value of variable Y has a coefficient greater than 0.10, so it can be said to be reliable.

d. Simple Linear Regression Test

Simple linear regression analysis is performed to determine the direction of the relationship between the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y), whether it is positive or negative, and to predict the upward or downward trend in the values of both variables. The data used in this analysis has an interval or ratio scale. The following is the simple linear regression formula:

$$Y = a + bX$$

$$Y = 6.642 + 0.884$$

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Test Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.777	2.636		2.951	.005
	The Impact of Anxiety	.801	.116	.671	6.888	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Speaking Performance

Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results (2025)

From the results of the simple linear regression test above, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the impact of anxiety (X) on Arabic speaking performance (Y) among 2022 Arabic Literature students at the University of North Sumatra.

e. Research Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant positive correlation between language anxiety and speaking ability among students in the Arabic Literature Program at the University of North Sumatra, class of 2022 ($B = 0.801$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.450$). Although most literature suggests that anxiety in the context of language learning tends to have a negative impact on oral skills, the findings of this study indicate a different direction. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of facilitative anxiety as proposed by Horwitz (2001).

Horwitz (2001) states that “learning anxiety can be either facilitative or debilitating” (p. 114). This means that, to a certain extent, anxiety can serve as a motivator for students to prepare more thoroughly, thereby enhancing their speaking abilities. In the context of this study, the majority of participants (63.3%) came from an Islamic boarding school educational environment that emphasizes values such as discipline and perseverance in learning Arabic. Therefore, the anxiety that arises can

serve as a motivator rather than an obstacle in facing speaking activities in the classroom.

More specifically, students with high anxiety levels based on the instrument used did not show a decline in performance. Instead, they tended to adopt more effective compensation strategies: preparing materials thoroughly, diligently practicing pronunciation and vocabulary, and actively seeking guidance from lecturers or peers. This pattern aligns with the findings of Shaharuddin, Kamal, and Aziz (2024), who state that “Arabic language students who view speaking anxiety as a challenge rather than a threat tend to have better oral performance” (p. 198). Within Horwitz’s framework, this condition reflects anxiety functioning as a facilitator by pushing students out of their comfort zones through thorough preparation.

Similar findings were reported by Rongxi and Yuxi (2024) in a study on English language learning in China. They found that although speaking anxiety levels were quite high, some students were able to transform anxiety into motivation, which had a positive impact on their oral performance (Rongxi & Yuxi, 2024, p. 118). This shows that facilitative anxiety can trigger adaptive coping strategies, such as regular practice and actively seeking feedback. It is likely that a similar pattern also occurs among Arabic Literature students of the 2022 cohort at the University of North Sumatra, especially those who come from an Islamic boarding school background or a school environment that supports the direct practice of Arabic.

Differences in educational backgrounds also influence how students interpret anxiety. Students from Islamic boarding schools are generally accustomed to using Arabic from an early age in a religious context, so when they experience anxiety during college, they interpret it as an important indicator of preparation, not as an obstacle. Conversely, students from public schools may be more prone to debilitating anxiety. However, based on regression results, the “Anxiety Impact” measurement instrument in this study likely reflects coping ability with anxiety rather than the intensity of anxiety itself. Therefore, “high anxiety scores” can be interpreted as “high efforts in managing anxiety,” which actually has a positive impact on speaking performance (AbuSahyon, Al-Shahhan, & Al-Ghamdi, 2023, p. 52).

In addition to background factors, the subjective aspect of assessing oral performance should also be considered. If assessment is conducted through self-assessment or instruments that allow students to evaluate themselves, students with high anxiety awareness may tend to give more positive evaluations of their performance. Manda and Irawati (2021) also note that “self-perceptions of improved speaking ability among anxious students often stem from high levels of preparation and self-monitoring, rather than low levels of anxiety” (p. 42). In other words, high performance scores may reflect the effects of successfully applied coping strategies.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that language anxiety among Arabic Literature

students at the University of North Sumatra in the 2022 cohort tends to be facilitative. Therefore, the role of educators is crucial in helping students distinguish between anxiety that is motivating and anxiety that is hindering. Interventions such as anxiety management training and relaxation techniques before presentations can be effective strategies to utilize anxiety as a source of performance enhancement rather than as a hindering factor.

CONCLUSION

Based on quantitative data analysis involving 60 Arabic Literature students from the University of North Sumatra class of 2022, this study reveals a number of crucial findings related to the link between language anxiety and speaking ability in Arabic language learning.

- Simple linear regression analysis shows a significant positive correlation between language anxiety (variable X) and speaking performance (variable Y), with a regression coefficient of $B = 0.801$, a significance value of $p = 0.000$, and a coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.450$. This indicates that 45% of the variability in speaking performance can be explained by the anxiety felt by the students.
 - Previous theories generally classify anxiety as a factor that hinders speaking skills (debilitative anxiety), but the results of this study show the opposite. The anxiety experienced by the respondents appears to have a constructive or facilitative nature, encouraging students to prepare more intensively to improve their speaking performance.
 - This finding is reinforced by the profile of the respondents, the majority of whom (63.3%) come from an Islamic boarding school educational background. The boarding school environment, which emphasizes the use of Arabic in daily life, is believed to foster more mature patterns of adaptation and anxiety management strategies. Thus, the anxiety experienced becomes an internal motivator for students to perform optimally when speaking in class.
 - High scores obtained from the “Impact of Anxiety” measurement instrument do not necessarily reflect high anxiety intensity alone, but can also be interpreted as indicators of alertness, self-awareness, and readiness to face speaking pressure. Students with higher anxiety levels appear to be more organized and motivated in carrying out their oral tasks.
 - These findings are consistent with the Facilitative Anxiety theoretical framework proposed by Horwitz (2001) and reinforced by recent studies by AbuSahyon et al. (2023), Shaharuddin et al. (2024), and Rongxi and Yuxi (2024), which all highlight that anxiety can positively contribute to speaking performance, depending on how individuals perceive and manage it.
- In conclusion, language anxiety is not always a hindrance. In certain contexts, particularly

when addressed with effective coping strategies and supported by a conducive academic environment, anxiety can actually serve as a catalyst that enhances students' speaking performance.

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