

Foreign Language Anxiety in Arabic Speaking: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Interference and Fear of Negative Evaluation

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Abstract: Foreign language anxiety deeply affects oral fluency, creating a significant gap between students' theoretical knowledge and communicative skills. This qualitative descriptive study examines the dynamic interaction between emotional and cognitive factors underlying Arabic speaking anxiety to understand how it subjectively interferes with oral performance. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and analyzed systematically using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings reveal that the fear of negative evaluation emerges as the most dominant source of anxiety, reaching an average of 70%. This emotional burden triggers cognitive overload and compromised attentional control, resulting in sudden mental blocking, severe vocabulary retrieval difficulties, and reduced fluency due to working memory disruption. Critically, these performance breakdowns stem from affective interference rather than an actual deficit in linguistic competence. The study offers a novel conceptual by linking this dominant anxiety to the unique cultural and religious background of Indonesian students, who perceive Arabic as a sacred language, thereby inflating their internal perfectionism and fear of social judgment. This study concludes that pedagogical interventions must shift toward structured, low-stakes speaking environments, explicitly recommending procedural scaffolding such as the Think-Pair-Share activity and somatic grounding exercises.

INTRODUCTION

When the fear of negative judgement dominates the foreign language classroom, the atmosphere is no longer a comfortable place for communication and becomes a source of severe psychological pressure.¹ This fundamental issues highlights a striking contradiction, whereby students with high academic ability often suddenly find themselves at a loss for words and completely unable to speak

¹ Emylia Malik and Istiqomah Nur Rahmawati, "An Analysis of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners ' Problems in Speaking Skills Based on Their Perception at Senior High School" 6, no. 1 (2025): 190–206. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v6i1.1106>

when speaking in public.² Current psycholinguistic research shows that this intense social pressure acts as major cognitive disruptor that actively impairs students working memory. When their minds are burdened by anxiety, the processes of instant word retrieval and sentence formation break down completely, leaving otherwise capable students trapped in a deep silence.

This cognitive impairment is particularly evident in the context of Arabic language learning, where psychological barriers remain a significant challenge for learners. These internal barriers often manifest as emotional stress, which can hinder the smooth processing of a language. One of the main barriers identified is language anxiety.³ Foreign Language Anxiety is a serious threat and obstacle in the process of learning a foreign language, particularly in the context of mastering Arabic.⁴ Foreign Language Anxiety is defined as the feelings of tension, stress, and anxiety that arise when an individual uses a foreign language, especially in speaking situations.⁵ This anxiety, which is often exacerbated by rigid traditional methods, significantly hinders the language acquisition process and undermines students' confidence in speaking in oral contexts.⁶

The anxiety students experience when speaking a foreign language is not merely an individual phenomenon; it can also be influenced by the emotional atmosphere in the classroom, a phenomenon in which emotions can spread among students. Peer pressure can also contribute to the barriers students face in using that foreign language.⁷ Anxiety in foreign language classrooms, comprehensively defined as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, makes it difficult for learners to recall or apply their linguistic knowledge.⁸

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope explain that learners who experience language anxiety often feel such high emotional tension that they have difficulty thinking while in language class.⁹ In fact, in some cases, people come to believe that they

² Sakinah Naziha et al., "Kecemasan Berbicara Bahasa Arab Mahasiswa Pascasarjana Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang," *Paedagogia: Jurnal Kajian, Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Kependidikan* 14, no. 2 (2023): 166–72, <http://journal.ummat.ac.id/index.php/paedagogia/article/view/14029>. <https://doi.org/10.31764/paedagogia.v14i2.14029>

³ Tammy Gregersen, "Dynamic Properties of Language Anxiety" 10, no. 1 (2020): 67–87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.1.4>

⁴ Ahmad Muradi, M Kamil Ramma Oensyar, and Ahmad Arifin, "Students' Difficulties In Arabic : A Study Of The Background Of Students Arabic Language Education" 8, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.18860/ijazarabi.v8i2.32092>

⁵ Fathma Zahara Sholeha and Safiruddin Al Baqi, "Kecemasan Peserta Didik Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab," *Mahira* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.55380/mahira.v2i1.234>

⁶ Menik Mahmudah, "Psycholinguistic Approaches to Enhancing Arabic Speaking Proficiency through Comic Strips" 8, no. 2 (2024): 805–26. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.11349>

⁷ Pia Resnik, "The Role of Positive and Negative Emotions in Foreign Language Learning : A Research Agenda," 2025, 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444825101031>.

⁸ Shaden Attia and Muath Algazo, "Foreign Language Anxiety in EFL Classrooms : Teachers' Perceptions , Challenges , and Strategies for Mitigation," 2023. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1614353>

⁹ Elaine K Horwitz et al., "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety" 70, no. 2 (2012): 125–32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>

have a specific inability to learn foreign languages. This suggests that language anxiety not only affects emotional aspects but also influences the cognitive processes involved in language use, particularly when speaking.

Studies on second language acquisition also show that speaking in a foreign language is a process that requires a high cognitive load.¹⁰ That's because learners must simultaneously think about what they want to convey, choose the right vocabulary, and construct sentence structures within a limited time. This ongoing process, which takes place in real time, becomes increasingly susceptible to disruption when learners are under stress or feeling anxious, thereby affecting their fluency and confidence when speaking.¹¹

In the context of Arabic language learning in Indonesia, the dynamics of speaking anxiety cannot be separated from the way students view the Arabic language itself. Arifah and Zulharby show that some Muslim students at non-religious universities view Arabic primarily as a sacred language associated with religious practices, rather than as a language of everyday communication.¹² This perception has implications for a learning approach that places greater emphasis on text comprehension and formal linguistic aspects, while speaking practice as a communicative activity is often not given sufficient attention.

Anxiety about public speaking has been widely discussed at various levels of Arabic language education. Existing research generally falls into two categories, studies that examine anxiety by academic level, and those that analyse psychological variables or linguistic structural. In the first category, Basith observed that students on intensive programmes struggle greatly with the fear of negative assessment.¹³ Meanwhile, Alfian, Niswah and Masykur demonstrated how this anxiety directly impairs the oral performance of undergraduate students.¹⁴

¹⁰ Putu Wia and Rosita Dewi, "Cognitive Load in English as a Foreign Language Speaking Competency of Vocational High School Students" 9, no. 1 (2025): 37–57. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v1i1.71702>

¹¹ University of Modena and Reggio Emilia Bram Bulté, a Alex Housen, a Gabriele Pallotti b aBrussels Centre for Language Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, b Department of Education and Human Sciences and CRediT, "Complexity and Difficulty in Second Language Acquisition: A Theoretical and Methodological Overview Bram" 34, no. 2024 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12669>

¹² Fatwa Arifah et al., *Is Arabic a Sacred Language or a Foreign Language? A Survey of Muslim Student's Belief in Non-Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia* (Atlantis Press International BV, 2024), https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-376-4_21.

¹³ Abdul Basith, "Kecemasan Berbicara Bahasa Arab Siswa Program Intensif Bahasa Arab," *TADRIS AL-ARABIYAT: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 1, no. 02 (2021): 264–80, <https://doi.org/10.30739/arabiyat.v1i02.1191>

¹⁴ Muhammad Ivan Alfian, Nujumun Niswah, and Muhammad Zakki Masykur, "Kecemasan Berbahasa Untuk Ketrampilan Berbicara Bahasa Arab Pada Tingkatan Perguruan Tinggi," *Arabia* 14, no. 1 (2022): 53, <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/arabia.v14i1.14887>.

Even at postgraduate level, where students already possess a strong linguistic background, speaking anxiety remains a persistent problem.¹⁵ In the second category, Wulandari, Garzita and Nasution emphasise that personal factors such as self confidence and motivation, combined with the complexity of Arabic grammar, significantly increase the psychological pressure felt by students when presenting in class.¹⁶

Although these studies confirm that anxiety is a real problem, they share the same limitations. They tend to treat anxiety as a static emotional state. Most studies rely solely on general summaries of symptoms rather than exploring how anxiety actually manifests in real life situations. There remains a clear gap in our understanding of how specific emotions, such as fear or shame, directly influence cognitive processes such as vocabulary recall and sentence formation. This study addresses this gap by mapping how emotional disturbances and cognitive impairments interact in university students.

Based on observations in the Arabic Language Education Program at Prof. Dr. Hamka Muhammadiyah University, which indicate variations in speaking ability that do not always align with theoretical knowledge, this study aims to explore the dynamics of students' language anxiety when facing the challenges of speaking Arabic. A deep understanding of students' subjective experiences and mental processes is expected to contribute to the development of more effective learning strategies and the creation of a learning environment that optimally supports the development of Arabic speaking skills.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design.¹⁷ This approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an understanding of students' subjective experiences, particularly the emotional and cognitive dynamics they experience when speaking Arabic. The primary focus of this study is not on statistically measuring relationships between variables, but rather on describing the mental and affective processes that arise in classroom situations involving Arabic speech.

To select the subjects for the study, a purposive sampling technique was used.¹⁸ In this study, the Foreign Language Anxiety Classroom Scale was used solely as a screening tool to identify participants with high levels of anxiety,

¹⁵ Naziha et al., "Kecemasan Berbicara Bahasa Arab Mahasiswa Pascasarjana Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang." <https://doi.org/10.29303/paedagogia.v14i2.14029>

¹⁶ Tria Wulandari, Regina Valda Garzita, and Sahkholid Nasution, "Faktor Psikologis Yang Mempengaruhi Maharah Kalam Mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN SU Medan" 3 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.61132/sadewa.v3i1.1517>

¹⁷ J. D. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (6th Ed.)*, SAGE Publications, 2023.

¹⁸ Putu Gede Subhaktiyasa, "Menentukan Populasi Dan Sampel : Pendekatan Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif Dan Kualitatif" 9 (2024): 2721–31. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v9i4.2657>

ensuring that the data collected through interviews would be rich in information. The criteria for selecting participants included students identified as having high levels of foreign language anxiety, as well as students who were willing and able to verbally express their internal experiences, feelings, and cognitive processes. This technique was used to ensure that the data collected was relevant and rich in information regarding the phenomenon of language anxiety.

To identify the research subjects, the researcher first distributed a foreign language anxiety questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.¹⁹ The questionnaire consists of 24 Likert-scale items covering three main indicators: linguistic communication anxiety, language test anxiety, and negative attitudes toward the use of Arabic. The use of the questionnaire in this study is not intended as a quantitative analysis tool, but rather as an initial screening instrument to identify students with relatively high levels of language anxiety who are potential interview participants.²⁰

Based on the results of the screening, a number of students were selected as potential interview participants. Primary data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed the researcher to explore the students' emotional experiences, cognitive responses, and strategies used when engaging in Arabic speaking activities.²¹ In addition to interviews, data collection was also supported by observations during the learning process to gain a contextual understanding of the classroom situation and student behavior during speaking activities.

Data Analysis Using the Interactive Model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana.²² It comprises three main components: first, during the data reduction phase, all raw interview transcripts from the eight participants were sorted, summarized, and focused through an open coding process to identify the smallest units of meaning related to anxiety symptoms. Next, axial coding was performed to group these codes into three main categories according to the questionnaire indicators, namely fear of negative evaluation, communication anxiety, and test anxiety.

Second, in the data display stage, the reduced data were systematically presented in a thematic matrix to cross-reference the percentages from the initial quantitative screening results with the students' subjective narratives and direct interview quotes, thereby clearly revealing the patterns of interaction between emotional and cognitive factors. Third, in the conclusion-drawing stage, the

¹⁹ Horwitz et al., "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>

²⁰ M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. (Sage Publications, 2023).

²¹ Heather L. Stuckey Peyrot Elizabeth J, Tisdell, Sharan B. Merriam, "Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation, 5th Edition," 2025, 138.

²² J. Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, "Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (4th Ed.).," *SAGE Publications*, 2020.

researcher formulates final findings regarding the dynamics of language anxiety experienced by students and conducts conceptual verification to ensure that the conclusions are valid, transparent, and have high scientific readability.

To ensure validity and reliability, a data source triangulation approach was used.²³ Data from interviews regarding subjective experiences were compared, matched, and cross checked with observational data and secondary data (initial anxiety scores) to ensure that the findings were truly credible. This study has a methodological scope limited to exploring the internal dynamics of purposefully selected Arabic Language Education students at Prof. Dr. Hamka Muhammadiyah University; thus, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to the entire student population, but they provide a deep understanding of that specific context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To establish a clear problem statement, this study began by screening 75 current students from the Arabic Language Education Programme at Muhammadiyah University Prof Dr Hamka using an adapted version of the foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Preliminary descriptive data indicate that 4 students experienced low levels of anxiety, 29 students were at a moderate level, 39 students fell into the high anxiety group, and 8 students exhibited very high levels of anxiety.

To understand the operational roots of this anxiety, the survey data was categorised into three main indicators: fear of negative evaluation, communication anxiety, and exam anxiety, as detailed below

Table 1. Question Indicators

Indicator	Question Number	Average
Fear of Negative Evaluation	5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22	70%
Communication Anxiety (linguistics)	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23	67%
Test Anxiety	8, 10, 15, 24	67%

Based on the percentages shown in the table above, the scores for these three indicators are actually very close. However, fear of negative evaluation clearly emerges as the main trigger, with an average score of 70%, whilst exam anxiety and communication anxiety both stand at 67%. Although this 3% difference may seem small at first glance, the figures reveal a profound qualitative reality regarding the state of the class. The psychological burden actually borne by these students when speaking Arabic does not stem primarily from the objective difficulty of formal exams or complex grammatical concepts. Rather, it

²³ Wiyanda Vera Nurfajriani et al., "Triangulasi Data Dalam Analisis Data Kualitatif" 10, no. September (2024): 826–33. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13929272>

is largely driven by social anxiety. Students operate under a constant sense of worry about how they are perceived directly by their lecturers and classmates. This heightened social scrutiny creates a defensive emotional atmosphere where the fear of looking incompetent, making a pronunciation error, or being silently judge by classmates carries far more psychological weight than the structural difficulty of the language itself.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the qualitative phase, the table below outlines the demographic profiles, specific anxiety scores, primary manifestations, and a sample of explanatory quotes observed among selected interview participants:

Table 2. Interview Participant Profiles

Participant ID	FLCAS Score	Anxiety Category	Primary Manifestation	Sample Quote Excerpt
R1	89,17%	Very High	Anticipatory fear and mental freeze	"...even though it hasn't happened yet, I'm already really scared"
R2	85,00%	High	a deep fear of being judged by classmates and an excessive tendency to censor one's own speech	"I'm afraid of being judge or something like that by other people and my classmates .."
R3	80,83%	High	Low self confidence due to limited exposure to the language in the past	"If only I had known Arabic from the start, I'm sure I'd be more confident"
R4	80,00%	High	Physical discomfort and severe trembling in the hands during oral presentations	"I was so nervous that my hands were shaking"
R5	78,33%	High	The physical tension caused by the stares or gaze of the class.	"... because a lot of people were looking at me and my hands started to shake"
R6	75,83%	High	Anxiety about sudden assignments and feelings of inferiority toward classmates.	"when things happen so suddenly, I get really nervous, my mind goes blank, like 'oh no what am I supposed to say?' I have to ask my friend first"
R7	74,17%	High	Anxiety caused by the audience and distraction	"when I have to speak in front of a large audience, that's when my anxiety kicks in, so I end up sounding nervous and I lose my concentration"
R8	72,50%	High	a lack of self confidence and complete memory loss.	"when I get nervous, I blank out. I actually meant to say that earlier, but I was so nervous I forgot"

To gain a clearer picture of how this fear manifests in practice, we conducted semi-structured interviews with participants who scored in the high and very high anxiety groups. Qualitative data revealed that the fear of being judged wrong often caused an instant mental block, forcing students' minds to go completely blank even before they had a chance to utter a single word in Arabic. For example, Respondent R1 (anxiety score 89.17%) shared how deep-seated fear creates anticipatory stress that completely disrupts students' emotional balance. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this phenomenon of sudden forgetfulness cannot be dismissed merely as a lack of vocabulary preparation or poor study habits.²⁴ What R1 experienced demonstrates how an anxious mind can completely overload a student's working memory capacity, thereby preventing them from spontaneously retrieving words when needed.

This cognitive impairment is significantly exacerbated when students are faced with unexpected speaking tasks or when they are plagued by internal doubts about their own linguistic competence. This reality is vividly described by Respondent R6 (anxiety score 75.83%), who emphasized how surprise interactions disrupt their cognitive flow "When it's spontaneous like that, I get really nervous... My mind goes blank, like 'oh, what am I supposed to say?' I have to ask a friend first..." Similarly, Respondent R8 (anxiety score 72.50%) highlighted that when emotional nervousness takes over, it leads to a complete loss of cognitive recall "...when I get nervous, everything goes blank, I wanted to say this earlier, but I got too caught up in the nervousness, so it just vanished." The experiences of R6 and R8 reveal a crucial psycholinguistic pattern in which anxiety acts as a disruptive filter. Even when vocabulary has been technically mastered during self-directed learning, a sudden psychological shock can wipe out the student's entire internal linguistic scheme, thereby hindering the smooth process of language production.

These psychological barriers, linked to social pressure and peer evaluation, remain a dominant theme that emerges repeatedly. Respondent R2 (anxiety score of 85%) is particularly concerned about the opinions of their classmates, constantly over monitoring themselves and questioning whether what they say will be accepted by others. The experiences of R1, R2, R6, and R8 demonstrate that concerns about classmates' judgments have the potential to lower self-confidence and undermine the ability to speak naturally. Additionally, Participant R3 (anxiety score 80.83%) noted that this low self-confidence often stems from a lack of prior experience or exposure to the language: "If only I had been familiar with Arabic from the start, I'm sure I would be more confident." This suggests that

²⁴ Hafara Nurisra and Nurul Huda, "Gangguan Berbahasa Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Proses Kognitif: Studi Psikolinguistik Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Islam Riau" 3, no. 1 (2026): 635–47. <https://doi.org/10.61722/jirs.v3i1.8864>

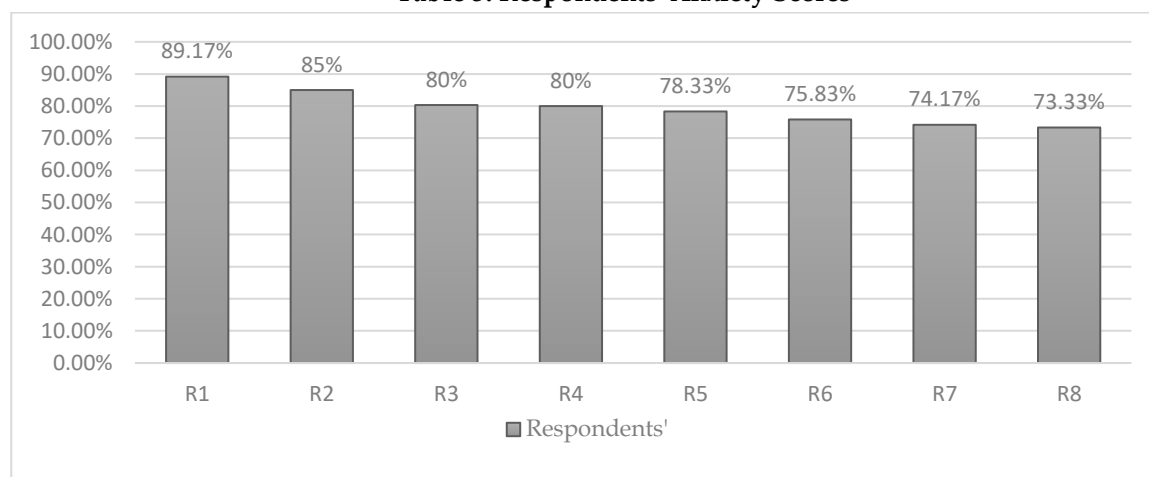
negative self-perceptions, formed over the years due to limited language experience, act as an additional weakness that exacerbates mental barriers when speaking in class.

Physical Symptoms and Cultural Aspects of Arabic Anxiety

Interviews and classroom observations indicate that anxiety when speaking is not merely a psychological issue, it triggers tangible physical reactions that affect how students present material. Respondent R4 (anxiety score of 80%) and Respondent R5 (anxiety score of 78.33%) both described how pressure from the classroom audience caused physical tension, such as severe hand tremors. Additionally, Respondent R6 also experienced vocal and physical tremors when in highly stressful situations. This issue was also raised by Respondent R7 (anxiety score 74.17%), who directly linked their physical anxiety to the size of the audience or crowd, rather than the mere presence of the instructor: "If, for example, I'm just speaking face to face with the instructor, I might not be that anxious. But because I have to speak in front of a lot of people, that's where the anxiety comes from it turns into fear." R7 added that being exposed to this crowd disrupts their focus. Their voice trembles, and they feel a deep sense of dissatisfaction because the material they had carefully prepared fails to come across effectively.

Losing concentration and experiencing tremors in both voice and body in such situations is a direct physical reaction to feeling exposed or threatened by a large crowd.²⁵ When a student must divide their attention between trying to calm physical stress responses such as trembling hands or a shaky voice and the anxious stares directed at them, their ability to maintain focus temporarily diminishes. This excessive cognitive load drains their mental energy. As seen in the case of R7, the stress-inducing effects of this environment completely disrupt the focus needed to systematically construct Arabic sentence structures while standing in front of the class.

Table 3. Respondents' Anxiety Scores



²⁵ Weam Mohamed et al., "Public Speaking Anxiety and Self - Efficacy among Sudanese Medical Students : A Cross - Sectional Study," 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02958-9>.

The findings of this study directly support the theoretical statement of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety framework developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, which states that the language acquisition process is significantly hindered when learners experience communicative anxiety, test anxiety, and a generalized fear of negative evaluation. In this study, the assessment of speaking ability took place within a highly conspicuous social context, where the presence of peers transformed classroom dynamics into a performance. This high social risk factor appears to be the distinguishing factor between public oral production and low-risk face-to-face interactions, where interpersonal fear is minimized as much as possible.

Our findings are consistent with those of Bulté and colleagues (2023), who demonstrated that complex linguistic tasks can easily overwhelm students' limited processing capacity.²⁶ Although their framework focuses strictly on cognitive difficulty levels, our research indicates that this cognitive load becomes significantly heavier when combined with the emotional stress of public speaking. This dynamic is particularly evident in Islamic universities in Indonesia, an environment rarely explored in mainstream anxiety research, which largely focuses on Western English as a second language (ESL) programs. Ultimately, this relationship demonstrates that speaking anxiety is not merely about grammatical deficiencies. Rather, it is closely tied to cultural and academic pressures within formal Islamic classrooms, where Arabic carries unique sociolinguistic and spiritual weight.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Dewaele (2020), who found that language anxiety tends to remain stable regardless of who is teaching.²⁷ This indicates that the fear is driven by the general social pressure of the classroom rather than the instructor's personal traits. This pattern matches R7 experience perfectly, she explained that her nerves did not stem from the lecturee, but rather from the large number of classmates watching them. Their case provides concrete evidence that even a supportive teacher cannot easily offset demonstrate that language anxiety acts as an independent emotional barrier that is automatically triggered during social evaluation, regardless of who is leading the class. This study expands on this idea by showing that the same rules apply in formal Islamic higher education. In this specific environment, the teacher's academic authority combines with the sacred status of the Arabic language, thereby creating a unique emotional pressure for students.

²⁶ Bram Bulté, a Alex Housen, a Gabriele Pallotti b aBrussels Centre for Language Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, b Department of Education and Human Sciences and CRediT, "Complexity and Difficulty in Second Language Acquisition: A Theoretical and Methodological Overview Bram." <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12669>

²⁷ Jean-marc Dewaele and Livia Dewaele, "Are Foreign Language Learners' Enjoyment and Anxiety Specific to the Teacher? An Investigation into the Dynamics of Learners' Classroom Emotions" 10, no. 1 (2020): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.1.3>

Our research findings are strongly consistent with Nainggolan (2023) study, which shows that anxiety about speaking in class depends heavily on interpersonal relationships and the environment, rather than merely on basic language skills.²⁸ This dynamic is clearly evident in Respondent R6's account. Seeing their peers speak fluently triggers deep feelings of insecurity and envy, illustrating how social competition directly erodes a student's self-confidence. Ultimately, both studies reveal a clear reality: when a large audience is combined with peer pressure, the psychological impact is amplified.

This combination disrupts students' focus to such an extent that language practice alone is insufficient to overcome this panic. What makes our research unique is the demonstration that this heightened anxiety applies directly to Arabic language learning. Unlike secular foreign languages in general, Arabic carries deep spiritual reverence, meaning these students possess a unique emotional attachment that reshapes how they experience stress in the classroom. Recent research Greiff (2025) reinforces our findings regarding the development of theories of foreign language anxiety. They conclude that social pressure and the fear of being judged are the primary factors that most consistently interfere with fluent communication in various situations.²⁹

The similarity of these results suggests that speaking anxiety actually stems from the threat of social evaluation itself, rather than simply because students lack mastery of grammar. However, there is a unique cultural and religious element that serves as a novelty in our study of university students in Indonesia. For them, Arabic is not merely an ordinary foreign language like English, but rather the sacred language of religion and the Qur'an. This perspective ultimately fuels a perfectionism. Students feel that pronouncing a word incorrectly or misapplying Arabic grammar is no longer just a common academic mistake, but a major failure that could damage their spiritual reputation. It is this emotional fear mixed with religious reverence that is often overlooked in discussions of standard language anxiety models.

Overall, the data above indicates a mutually reinforcing cause and effect relationship. This issue stems from socio religious factors that make students feel pressured to perform perfectly, which then manifests as fear that arises even before they begin speaking. This mental burden immediately strains their limited working memory, triggering a mental freeze, as experienced by R6 and R8. Ultimately, this psychological pressure has a direct impact on physical conditions,

²⁸ Andani Nainggolan. dan frenky Albert Timotius Reynhard Malau, Yohanes Yappo, Rendy Parnando, Maria Veronica, "Motivation, Emotion, and Systemic Factors in Second Language Acquisition: A Narrative Review," *Lingua: Journal of Linguistics and Language* 1, no. 1 (2023): 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.61978/lingua.v3i3.1046>

²⁹ Samuel Greiff, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Foreign Language Anxiety : Theoretical and Methodological Developments" 15, no. 4 (2025): 701–13. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.50363>

such as trembling hands and an unstable voice. As students' concentration is divided between calming their trembling bodies and worrying about the audience, they lose control of their attention entirely, causing their ability to speak to collapse in front of the class.

In addition to contributing a new theory, the findings of this study offer practical solutions that teachers can immediately apply in the classroom. Field data indicate that the phenomenon of students suddenly forgetting things in class is not actually due to their poor Arabic language skills. The main issue is momentary mental pressure caused by sudden stress. Teachers should therefore start to avoid the habit of calling on pupils suddenly without warning. Instead, they can begin lessons with informal, non-assessed speaking activities, such as a brief icebreaker game or a one minute informal conversation. This simple approach is far more effective in helping pupils feel more relaxed and less anxious right from the start of the lesson.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study offers practical solutions that lecturers can directly implement in the classroom. Our field data indicate that when students suddenly experience a mental freeze in class, it is not actually caused by poor Arabic language skills. Instead, the root cause is temporary mental pressure triggered by sudden stress. Lecturers should therefore avoid cold calling students without warning. Instead, they can open lessons with low-stakes, ungraded speaking activities, such as a brief icebreaker or a one minute casual chat. This simple adjustment is far more effective in helping students feel relaxed and comfortable right from the start of the session.

To support this relaxed environment, the core teaching methodology must also change. Lecturers should move away from rigid grammatical drilling and instead adopt interactive frameworks like Think, Pair, and Share (TPS) originally proposed by Frank Lyman (1981). This framework systematically decompresses a learner's cognitive load through scaffolded preparation phases. While international literature indicates that the final "Share" phase requires careful management to avoid triggering unexpected whole-group anxiety.³⁰ Local pedagogical evidence in Indonesia demonstrates that structured TPS implementations consistently build student confidence and oral proficiency.³¹ Ensuring that students are provided with these structured preparation buffers allows them to activate their working memory effectively before facing public exposure.

³⁰ Katelyn M Cooper, Jeffrey N Schinske, and Kimberly D Tanner, "Reconsidering the Share of a Think – Pair – Share : Emerging Limitations , Alternatives , and Opportunities for Research," 2021, 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-08-0200>.

³¹ Maria Goreti et al., "Efektivitas Model Pembelajaran Think Pair Share Dalam Mengasah Keterampilan Berbicara Siswa Kelas IV Di SDN 6 Kesiman" 9 (2025): 16280–87. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v9i2.28282>

These practical recommendations will yield maximum impact if integrated into the study program's long term curriculum design. Pairing language competencies with students' emotional well being becomes much more sustainable when backed by a structured learning ecosystem. If communicative competence in Arabic is a primary educational objective, cultivating a low anxiety learning space will naturally accelerate student progress. This can be achieved by developing collaborative teaching modules and adapting assessment structures that balance communicative confidence with grammatical precision.

The novelty of this study lies in shifting the perspective on speaking anxiety from a vague emotional barrier to a specific cognitive overload. While existing literature often stops at correlating anxiety scores with academic grades, this research exposes the exact mechanics behind a student's mental freeze. Sudden pressure in the classroom directly disrupts students' working memory, thereby temporarily hindering their true linguistic abilities. Based on these findings, we do not offer general, theoretical motivational advice, but rather a tactical framework combining an icebreaker to calm the mind and the Think-Pair-Share stage as a thinking break before students begin speaking.

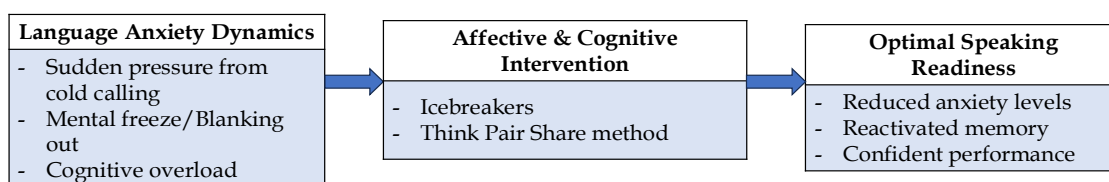


Figure 1. Affective & Cognitive Framework for Arabic Speaking Anxiety.

This study certainly has several limitations that should be noted. Since this qualitative study collected data from only eight students in Arabic Language Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof Dr Hamka, the results cannot be directly generalized to all universities in Indonesia. Our focus was limited to exploring deep seated psychological anxiety through interviews and classroom observations. This method can only capture students' emotional state at that specific moment, so it cannot yet track whether that anxiety will change over the long term. Another limitation is that this study only examined speaking skills. Further research is needed to determine whether this specific type of socio-religious pressure also triggers similar mental barriers in the ability to read, write, or listen to Arabic.

Subsequent investigations can build upon these limitations by expanding this line of inquiry and replicating the research across multiple universities and regions with a larger participant pool. Longitudinal tracking would also reveal whether anxiety reduction is sustained over time or merely temporary. Additionally, exploring how lecturer variables such as their emotional awareness

and pedagogical flexibility influence student anxiety represents a promising next step.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' language anxiety is not only influenced by emotional factors but is also closely related to impairments in cognitive function. Theoretically, the concept of cognitive load serves as a psycholinguistic mechanism that bridges the fear of negative evaluation with actual oral failure. Therefore, future approaches to Arabic language learning must comprehensively integrate the affective and cognitive dimensions, rather than merely emphasizing superficial emotional aspects, to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying students' fluency.

From an affective perspective, the Arabic language curriculum should be designed to employ strategies that reduce procedural cognitive load in order to address perfectionism and anxiety regarding grammatical errors. Instructors are encouraged to incorporate low-risk speaking activities, such as informal, ungraded discussions at the beginning of class sessions, and to gradually implement the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) method. Through this method, students are given the opportunity to think independently when constructing sentences, practice in comfortable small groups, and finally present in front of the class. This approach can be reinforced with guided breathing exercises before oral presentations to alleviate excessive activity in the autonomic nervous system, such as trembling hands, before the language cognitive process begins.

Although it makes an important contribution, this study is limited by a small sample size, obtained through purposive sampling at Prof. Dr. Hamka Muhammadiyah University, so the results are contextual and cannot be statistically generalized. Future research is recommended to use a larger and more diverse sample size across various universities, as well as to combine it with quantitative approaches or mixed-methods. A mixed-methods approach is crucial for experimentally testing the effectiveness of the proposed teaching interventions, such as the TPS method, in order to improve the quality of Arabic speaking skills instruction.

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