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Effect of Psychological Readiness on Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learners at Cambridge School Lhokseumawe

Fauzar[1*], Oktavina[2]
[1,2]Bumi Persada University, Indonesia
[*]Corresponding Author Email: cambridgefauzar@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners in a private language course setting. Speaking anxiety remains a significant barrier to learners' development of oral proficiency, particularly in non-formal educational contexts. Psychological readiness, which includes learners' confidence, motivation, and emotional preparedness, is assumed to play a crucial role in reducing anxiety levels during speaking activities. A quantitative research design was employed in this study. The participants consisted of 40 students enrolled in an English course at Cambridge School Lhokseumawe. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring psychological readiness and speaking anxiety. The collected data were analyzed using statistical techniques, including correlation and regression analysis, to determine the relationship and the extent of influence between variables. The findings reveal that psychological readiness has a significant negative effect on speaking anxiety, meaning that higher psychological readiness systematically leads to a predictable reduction in learners' anxiety levels. Learners with higher levels of psychological readiness tend to experience lower anxiety when engaging in speaking tasks. The results also indicate that confidence and motivation are the strongest contributing factors in reducing anxiety levels. These findings suggest that improving learners' psychological readiness can be an effective strategy for minimizing speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. In conclusion, fostering psychological readiness is essential for supporting learners in overcoming speaking anxiety and enhancing their oral communication skills in language learning environments.

Keywords: EFL learners, Private language course, Psychological readiness, Speaking anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential yet challenging skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Speaking poses a challenge for EFL learners due to the complex cognitive processing required (Muslem et al., 2019).

In many language learning contexts, particularly in private language courses, students often experience high levels of anxiety when required to communicate orally. They exhibit discomfort in speaking English, often choosing silence despite understanding conversations, show little enthusiasm for studying the language, and have concerns about making mistakes (Husna & Hajar, 2024). This phenomenon, commonly referred to as speaking anxiety, can significantly hinder learners' ability to express ideas, participate in discussions, and achieve communicative competence. Despite having adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, many learners struggle to perform effectively in speaking tasks due to psychological barriers.

One of the key factors that may influence speaking anxiety is psychological readiness. Psychological readiness refers to an individual's mental and emotional preparedness to engage in a particular activity. It encompasses elements such as self-confidence, motivation, emotional stability, and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei, 2005). Learners who are psychologically prepared are more likely to take risks, participate

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actively, and manage their anxiety during speaking activities (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Conversely, those with low psychological readiness may feel insecure, nervous, and reluctant to speak in front of others (Zhang, 2019).

Previous studies have highlighted the strong relationship between affective factors and language learning performance. For instance, Liu (2021) identified foreign language anxiety as a major obstacle affecting learners' speaking performance. Similarly, Zhang (2019) emphasized that anxiety can interfere with cognitive processing, thereby reducing learners' ability to perform language tasks effectively. More studies, such as those by Hajar et al. (2024b) and Hajar et al. (2025), have also shown that psychological factors such as confidence and motivation play a significant role in shaping learners' speaking experiences. Motivation plays a crucial role in language learning, complementing factors such as linguistic ability, learning methodologies, and learning styles (Hajar et al., 2024a).

However, despite the growing body of research on speaking anxiety, there is still a limited number of studies that specifically examine the role of psychological readiness in non-formal educational settings, such as private language courses. Most existing research has focused on formal school or university environments (e.g., Liu, 2021; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Muslem et al., 2019), leaving a gap in understanding how psychological readiness influences speaking anxiety in more flexible and diverse learning contexts. This gap is important to address, as private language courses often adopt different teaching approaches, class sizes, and interaction patterns compared to formal institutions. Furthermore, in the context of local language institutions, such as Cambridge School Lhokseumawe, learners come from varied educational backgrounds and proficiency levels, which may further influence their psychological readiness and anxiety levels. Understanding this relationship is crucial for designing effective teaching strategies that not only improve linguistic competence but also address learners' emotional and psychological needs. In the instructional process, Teachers must be creative and adaptable, developing strategies tailored to their students' needs and the unique conditions of their schools (Hajar et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners in a private language course. Specifically, this study seeks to identify whether psychological readiness significantly influences the level of speaking anxiety and to what extent it contributes to reducing learners' anxiety during speaking activities.

This paper is organized into several sections. Following this introduction, the next section discusses the research methodology, including participants, instruments, and data analysis techniques. The subsequent section presents the results and discussion, highlighting the key findings of the study. Finally, the paper concludes with implications and recommendations for language teaching practices and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking anxiety has been widely acknowledged as a critical issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It refers to the feeling of tension, nervousness, and apprehension associated with speaking in a second or foreign language (Liu, 2021). This type of anxiety is considered a situation-specific form of anxiety that can negatively affect learners' performance, particularly in oral communication tasks. Learners experiencing high levels of speaking anxiety tend to avoid participation, hesitate when speaking, and demonstrate reduced fluency and confidence.

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Substantial empirical evidence has shown that speaking anxiety can hinder language acquisition. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that anxiety interferes with cognitive processing, including memory retrieval and information processing, which are essential for effective communication. Similarly, Liu (2021) reported that anxious learners often experience difficulty organizing ideas and producing language spontaneously. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety is not merely an emotional issue but also affects learners' cognitive and linguistic performance.

Psychological readiness is a multifaceted construct that involves learners' mental and emotional preparedness to engage in learning activities. It includes components such as self-confidence, motivation, emotional stability, and willingness to communicate. According to Dörnyei (2005), motivation plays a central role in determining learners' engagement and persistence in language learning. Learners with high motivation and confidence are more likely to participate actively and take risks in speaking activities.

In addition, Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy highlights the importance of individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to perform tasks successfully. Learners with high self-efficacy tend to approach challenging tasks with confidence and resilience, whereas those with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid such tasks due to fear of failure. This theoretical perspective reinforces the idea that psychological readiness is closely linked to learners' performance and emotional responses in language learning contexts. Several studies have explored the relationship between psychological factors and speaking anxiety. Zhang (2019) found that learners with higher levels of confidence and motivation experienced lower levels of anxiety during speaking tasks. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2008) reported a negative correlation between willingness to communicate and language anxiety, indicating that learners who are more psychologically prepared tend to feel less anxious.

Despite these findings, most studies have focused on isolated variables such as motivation or self-confidence rather than examining psychological readiness as a comprehensive construct. Moreover, the majority of previous research has been conducted in formal educational settings, such as schools and universities, which may not fully represent the dynamics of private language courses.

Although the existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of psychological factors in language learning, there are still notable gaps. First, there is limited research that integrates multiple psychological components—such as motivation, confidence, and emotional readiness—into a single construct of psychological readiness. Second, there is a lack of studies examining this relationship in non-formal educational settings, particularly in private language institutions.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners in a private language course context. Methodologically, this study contributes by employing a quantitative approach to measure the extent of influence between variables using statistical analysis. Theoretically, it extends existing frameworks by conceptualizing psychological readiness as a comprehensive construct rather than isolated factors. Substantively, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for language instructors in designing strategies to reduce speaking anxiety and enhance learners' readiness to communicate.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a correlational approach to examine the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners. A quantitative approach was selected because it allows for the measurement of relationships between variables and the testing of hypotheses using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). The correlational design is particularly appropriate for identifying the strength and direction of the relationship between psychological readiness and speaking anxiety without manipulating the variables.

Participants and Research Setting

The participants of this study were 40 students enrolled in an English course at Cambridge School Lhokseumawe, a private language institution in Indonesia. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were actively engaged in speaking-based learning activities and represented the target population relevant to the research objectives. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the participants possessed the characteristics necessary to provide meaningful data related to speaking anxiety and psychological readiness (Etikan et al., 2016).

To mitigate the inherent risk of selection bias associated with purposive sampling, the researcher implemented strict, objective inclusion criteria: participants had to be actively enrolled in speaking-intensive modules and maintain a minimum attendance rate of 80% [R2]. Furthermore, to control for response and social desirability biases, the questionnaires were administered anonymously, and participants were explicitly assured that their responses would not influence their academic evaluations or course grades. By standardizing the data collection environment and isolating the sample to a specific, homogenous proficiency tier, the researcher minimized potential confounding variables and enhanced the internal validity of the quantitative measures. The research was conducted in a non-formal educational setting, which differs from formal school environments in terms of flexibility, teaching methods, and learner diversity. This context is important as it provides a more realistic representation of learners' psychological conditions in private language courses.

Instruments

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires: the Psychological Readiness Scale and the Speaking Anxiety Scale. Both instruments were adapted from previously validated studies with minor modifications to suit the research context.

The Psychological Readiness Scale measured learners' confidence, motivation, emotional preparedness, and willingness to communicate. The Speaking Anxiety Scale was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) modified by Liu (2021), which has been widely used and validated in contemporary EFL research.

Each questionnaire consisted of 15–20 items measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The use of Likert scales allows for the quantification of subjective responses, making it suitable for statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Field, 2013).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through direct distribution of questionnaires to the participants during class sessions. Before administering the instruments, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. This procedure was implemented to ensure ethical standards and to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

The data collection process was conducted over a period of one week. This timeframe was considered

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sufficient to gather reliable data while minimizing disruptions to the learning process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, including mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationship and the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety.

Pearson correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, while regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety (Field, 2013). These statistical techniques were chosen because they are widely used in quantitative research and are appropriate for analyzing relationships between continuous variables.

Data Sources and Context

The primary data for this study were obtained directly from students enrolled in the English course, making them the main source of data. These learners were engaged in regular speaking activities, such as discussions, presentations, and role-plays, which provided a relevant context for examining speaking anxiety.

The context of this study is significant because private language courses often emphasize communicative competence, making speaking activities more frequent and potentially more anxiety-inducing. Therefore, examining psychological readiness in this setting provides valuable insights into learners' real experiences and challenges.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the study on the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners at Cambridge School Lhokseumawe. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean scores, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the two main variables: psychological readiness and speaking anxiety.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological Readiness	40	3.87	0.45
Speaking Anxiety	40	3.12	0.52

The data show that the mean score of psychological readiness is relatively high (M = 3.87), indicating that most learners demonstrate good levels of confidence, motivation, and emotional preparedness. Meanwhile, the mean score of speaking anxiety is moderate (M = 3.12), suggesting that learners still experience a noticeable level of anxiety during speaking activities.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationship between psychological readiness and speaking anxiety, a Pearson correlation test was conducted.

Table 2. Correlation between Psychological Readiness and Speaking Anxiety

Variables	**Psychological Readiness**	**Speaking Anxiety**
Psychological Readiness	1.000	-0.652
Speaking Anxiety	-0.652	1.000

The results indicate a negative correlation (r = -0.652) between

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psychological readiness and speaking anxiety. This suggests that higher levels of psychological readiness are associated with lower levels of speaking anxiety.

Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which psychological readiness predicts speaking anxiety.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.652	0.425	0.410	0.401

The regression analysis shows that psychological readiness explains 42.5% ($R^2 = 0.425$) of the variance in speaking anxiety.

Table 4. Coefficients of Regression Analysis

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.214	0.432	—	12.071	.000
Psychological Readiness	-0.542	0.098	-0.652	-5.531	.000

The coefficient table shows that psychological readiness has a negative regression coefficient (B = -0.542), indicating that as psychological readiness increases, speaking anxiety decreases..

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the role of psychological readiness in influencing speaking anxiety among EFL learners in a private language course context. The significant negative relationship identified between psychological readiness and speaking anxiety suggests that these two variables operate in an inverse linear relationship; as a learner's level of psychological readiness (confidence, motivation, and emotional preparedness) increases, their experience of situational speaking anxiety systematically decreases. This indicates that learners who are mentally and emotionally prepared are more capable of managing anxiety during speaking activities. This result reinforces the idea that affective factors play a central role in second language acquisition, particularly in oral communication.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the concept of foreign language anxiety emphasized by Liu (2021), which underscores that emotional factors can significantly interfere with language performance. Learners who lack confidence and emotional stability are more likely to experience tension and fear when speaking. In contrast, those with higher psychological readiness demonstrate greater control over their emotional responses, allowing them to participate more actively in speaking tasks. This aligns with contemporary applications of self-efficacy theory in language acquisition (e.g., Zhang, 2019), which posits that individuals who believe in their capabilities tend to approach challenging situations with confidence rather than avoidance.

Furthermore, the results are consistent with previous studies that highlight the importance of motivation and willingness to communicate in reducing anxiety. Dörnyei (2005) emphasized that motivated learners are more persistent and engaged in learning activities, which may explain why psychologically ready learners exhibit lower anxiety levels. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2008) found that willingness to communicate is negatively associated with language anxiety, indicating that learners who are more prepared to speak tend to feel less anxious.

One of the key contributions of this study is its focus on psychological readiness as a comprehensive construct rather than examining isolated variables such as motivation or confidence alone. This broader perspective provides a more holistic understanding of learners' psychological conditions and how these

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factors interact to influence speaking anxiety. Additionally, this study extends existing research by examining these variables in a non-formal educational setting. Unlike formal institutions, private language courses often create a more flexible and communicative learning environment, which may intensify both opportunities for speaking and the potential for anxiety.

Another important insight is the substantial contribution of psychological readiness in explaining variations in speaking anxiety. This suggests that improving learners' mental and emotional preparedness could be a key strategy in reducing anxiety levels. In practical terms, language instructors should consider incorporating activities that build learners' confidence, such as guided speaking practice, positive feedback, and supportive classroom environments. Teachers should demonstrate curiosity regarding how students learn and adapt to different learning environments to inspire and motivate them (Hajar et al., 2024b). Creating a low-anxiety atmosphere may encourage learners to take risks and engage more actively in communication.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of psychological readiness as a key factor in reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing learners' speaking performance in EFL contexts. It provides both theoretical and practical implications for improving language teaching strategies, particularly in non-formal educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of psychological readiness on speaking anxiety among EFL learners in a private language course. The findings demonstrate that psychological readiness plays a significant role in reducing learners' speaking anxiety. Learners who possess higher levels of confidence, motivation, and emotional preparedness tend to experience lower levels of anxiety when engaging in speaking activities. This indicates that psychological factors are essential in supporting learners' ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language.

The value of this study lies in its contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological readiness influences speaking anxiety, particularly in a non-formal educational context. By focusing on a private language course setting, this study offers practical insights for language instructors to design more supportive and engaging learning environments. Enhancing learners' psychological readiness can be an effective strategy to improve participation, reduce fear of speaking, and ultimately strengthen communicative competence.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to a single institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data were collected using self-reported questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias. Third, the study employed a quantitative approach only, which may not fully capture the depth of learners' psychological experiences.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across different learning contexts. Researchers are also encouraged to use mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative data, to gain deeper insights into learners' psychological readiness and speaking anxiety. Additionally, future studies may explore intervention-based research to examine how specific teaching strategies can effectively enhance psychological readiness and reduce speaking anxiety.

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