

**UNVEILING LEARNERS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY FACTORS:  
A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

*(Mengungkap Faktor-Faktor Kecemasan Berbicara dalam Bahasa Asing pada Pembelajar:  
Sebuah Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis)*

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**Abstract**

*This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical evidence from forty Scopus-indexed studies published between 2015 and 2025. This study aims to build comprehensive understanding of factors triggering foreign language speaking anxiety and patterns of these behavioral manifestations. This study follows systematic PRISMA 2020 guidelines with procedures of identification, screening, analysis, and thematic coding of selected studies. Analysis results indicate that foreign language speaking anxiety emerges from six primary thematic domains, namely psychological dispositions and self-belief systems, social-affective pressures and identity concerns, linguistic and communicative competence constraints, performance and evaluation demands, pedagogical practices and instructional design, and contextual-technological conditions. The most frequently identified factor in selected studies was social-affective factors across thirty-one studies. Behavioral manifestations include speech disruption patterns, avoidance behaviors, affective and physiological responses, technology-mediated adaptations, and cognitive interference. The findings of this study underscore that foreign language speaking anxiety emerges through dynamic interactions between internal vulnerabilities and external contextual conditions. This produces a thematic framework for conceptualizing foreign language speaking anxiety more comprehensively. These evidence-based implications support efforts to enhance foreign language learners' speaking abilities.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language speaking anxiety; foreign language learning; oral communication; communicative competence; learner anxiety*

**Abstrak**

Tinjauan literatur sistematis ini menyintesis bukti empiris dari empat puluh studi terindeks Scopus yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2015 dan 2025. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membangun pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang faktor-faktor pemicu kecemasan berbicara bahasa asing dan pola dari manifestasi perilaku tersebut. Penelitian ini mengikuti pedoman PRISMA 2020 yang sistematis dengan prosedur identifikasi, penyaringan, analisis dan pengodean tematik studi terpilih. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara bahasa asing muncul dari enam domain tematik utama yakni disposisi psikologis dan sistem kepercayaan diri, tekanan sosial-afektif dan masalah identitas, kendala kompetensi linguistik dan komunikatif, tuntutan kinerja dan evaluasi, praktik pedagogis dan desain instruksional, dan kondisi kontekstual-teknologi. Faktor paling banyak teridentifikasi dalam studi terpilih adalah faktor sosial-afektif sebanyak tiga puluh satu studi. Manifestasi perilaku termasuk pola gangguan berbicara, perilaku penghindaran, respons afektif dan fisiologis, adaptasi yang dimediasi teknologi, dan interferensi kognitif. Temuan penelitian ini menggarisbawahi bahwa kecemasan berbicara bahasa asing muncul melalui interaksi dinamis antara kerentanan internal dan kondisi kontekstual eksternal. Hal ini menghasilkan kerangka tematik untuk mengonseptualisasikan kecemasan berbahasa asing lebih mendalam. Implikasi berbasis bukti empiris ini mendukung upaya peningkatan kemampuan berbicara pemelajar bahasa asing.

**Kata-kata kunci:** kecemasan berbicara bahasa asing, pembelajaran bahasa asing, komunikasi lisan, kompetensi komunikatif, kecemasan pemelajar

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills have emerged as a central focus in foreign language (FL) studies for their indispensable role that underpins interaction, cognition, and authentic communication. Recent studies highlight speaking as a catalyst for broader foreign language acquisition and learner engagement (Mardieva et al., 2025; Nallamuthu & Gandhimathi, 2025; Pavlovskaya et al., 2022; Sisman-Ugur et al., 2025). Speaking in FL requires integrating memory, attention, and executive function to produce a meaningful communication context (Guerra-Ayala et al., 2025; Gullo et al., 2025; Guttke, 2023). In addition, affective and psychological factors, including self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety, significantly influence learners' speaking performance and their willingness to communicate (Alvarez et al., 2024; Namaziandost et al., 2024; Z. Wang, 2023; Wu & Rose, 2025). The FL learners with elevated anxiety tend to experience reduced cognitive efficiency and less effective speech production, which affects their fluency and impedes authentic communication engagement (Abugaber & Morgan-Short, 2021; Arifin et al., 2024; Kharkhurin et al., 2025; Lichtman, 2021; Rahman & Tomy, 2024). This type of anxiety is widely known as foreign language speaking anxiety.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) is a specific type of anxiety that affects learners' ability to speak fluently in a foreign language. FLSA has become a critical concern in FL instructional settings, as this anxiety may prevent learners' essential processes for their acquisition. It is associated with tension, apprehension, and fear associated with speaking in the target language. FLSA is expressed through learners' behaviours such as fear of negative evaluation, avoidance of participation, and low self-confidence (Alhasan et al., 2024; Hanake, 2024; Rajendran et al., 2025; Stokes, 2025). Within the broader process of FL acquisition, FLSA interferes with retention and production,

reducing learners' engagement and participation in communicative tasks (Al-Mukdad, 2021; Kayhan, 2025; Yasmin et al., 2025).

Given its complex, multidimensional construct, FLSA has expanded into emotional counterparts. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) generally interacts circularly with foreign language enjoyment. This showed in the recent technology-mediated learning environment, such as the virtual reality (VR) (H. L. Huang, 2024; Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023); AI chatbots or Large Language Models (LLMs) (Zheng et al., 2025); and their integration methods (Ai et al., 2025; L. Huang & Liu, 2025; M. Ma et al., 2022). These shifts suggest that enjoyment is a complementary construct and requires a reliable instrument to capture its presence alongside FLSA. The Short-Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) is widely used to assess learners' foreign language enjoyment, with strong psychometric properties and across different cultural contexts (Botes et al., 2021, 2021; Staedtler et al., 2025; Xethakis et al., 2025). Current empirical evidence remains dispersed FLSA through narrow lenses for its affective response, linguistic accuracy, willingness to communicate, or task performance (Alhasan et al., 2024; Borisova et al., 2024; Maher & King, 2023; Sulaiman & Altakhaineh, 2021).

Despite the growing diversification of emotional and technological perspectives, research on FLSA remains conceptually scattered. The field needs a consolidated understanding of the core factors that trigger FLSA and its behavioural characteristics. This fragmentation underscores the need for a systematic synthesis to map recurring patterns, compare findings across studies, and establish a clearer framework of FLSA. This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to draw empirical studies regarding FLSA factors in foreign language instructional settings. The empirical articles analysed

provide a comprehensive synthesis to understand the factors contributing to FLSA. Specifically, we address the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to the emergence of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among learners? RQ2: What learner-related and behavioural characteristics define the manifestation of FLSA in empirical research?

## METHOD

The systematic literature review in this study was guided by Page et al. (2021) and Paul et al. (2021) Frameworks. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines ensure the transparency and methodological rigour of this study (Haddaway et al., 2022).

### Search Strategies

The Scopus database was selected as the primary source of high-quality scientific evidence. The Boolean search string applied to retrieve studies focusing on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) was "foreign language speaking anxiety" OR "learners' speaking anxiety" OR "foreign language apprehension" OR "foreign language acquisition anxiety" OR "speaking foreign language apprehension". In addition, Scopus filters were applied to retrieve only journal articles (DOCTYPE: ar), English-language records, open-access publications, and journal-indexed sources (SRCTYPE:j). The search timeframe was set from 2015 to 2025. Initial searches using this search string yielded 704 total records. After duplicate and ineligible entries were detected through automated screening tools and manual checks, 558 records underwent title and abstract screening, and predefined criteria were applied. Predefined screening criteria ensured that only empirical research relevant to FLSA was retained for full-text review.

### Manual Screening

Titles and abstracts were evaluated to ensure alignment with the research focus on

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). Full texts were then sought for all potentially relevant records. The selected studies are empirical on the FLSA factors in foreign-language contexts (e.g., EFL, ESL, bilingual/immersion settings where the target language is not the learners' mother tongue). As a result, 169 studies were retrieved for full-text assessment.

The included research articles were indexed and retrievable via Scopus, with accessible full text, published in peer-reviewed journals between 2015 and 2025, and the findings were reported in English to ensure analytical coherence and comparability. The methodological and participant details that enable reliable data extraction (e.g., context, sample characteristics, instruments, and analytical procedures) were examined. Full-text evaluation led to the exclusion of 129 studies for not foregrounding FLSA as a primary construct (n=52), being conducted outside foreign language instructional settings (n=31), being non-empirical (n=31), and lacking sufficient methodological information for extraction (n=19). The final sample of 40 empirical studies was included in the qualitative synthesis. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flowchart of the selection process.

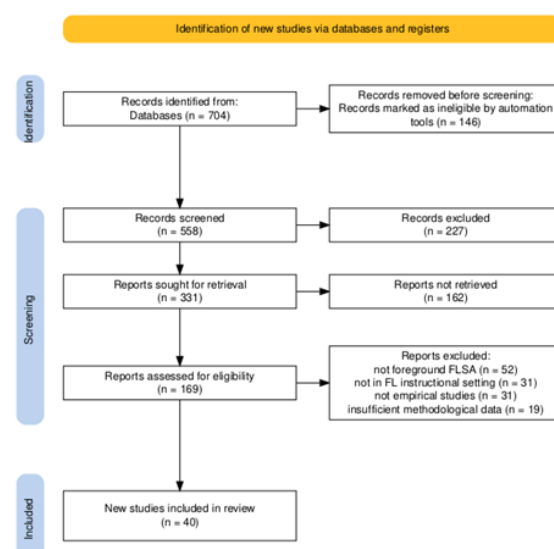


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart for Including Studies to Review

### Inclusion Criteria

Table 1. Inclusion Criteria

Aspect	Criteria
Research Content Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Studies investigate Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), focusing on anxiety levels, antecedents, contributing factors, or characteristic manifestations during speaking activities.</li> <li>2. FLSA learners constitute the primary research focus. Studies that mention anxiety only peripherally or do not foreground speaking anxiety will be excluded.</li> <li>3. Studies conducted in a foreign language learning context, including EFL, ESL, or other foreign language instructional settings.</li> </ol>
Literature Quality Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empirical original research indexed in Scopus.</li> <li>2. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025.</li> <li>3. Full-text access and complete reporting of methodology and participants.</li> <li>4. Studies written in English to ensure analytical coherence.</li> </ol>

### Data Extraction and Coding Procedure

A structured data extraction form was developed to synthesize key study attributes, including publication year, country, participants, research design, instruments, and primary findings related to FLSA. Data extraction and coding were conducted independently and cross-validated to minimise reviewer bias. Each study was coded for FLSA-related factors. Studies with overlapping thematic relevance were assigned to multiple codes to reflect the multidimensional nature of FLSA.

### Quality Appraisal

The appraisal focused on the clarity of the research aims, the appropriateness of the research design, the transparency of participant and context descriptions, and the adequacy of data collection and analysis procedures. Therefore, the final set of 40 studies represents a body of research with sufficient quality for synthesis.

## RESULT

### Publication Trends and Research Distribution

The distribution of publication years demonstrates a fluctuating yet progressively increasing research interest in FLSA. Although the initial search returned

704 publications, only 40 met the inclusion criteria and explicitly foregrounded FLSA.

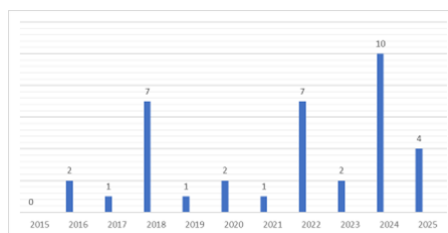


Figure 2. The Distribution of Publication Years

Among the included studies, substantial growth occurred in 2018 and 2022, peaking in 2024. This reflects an intensifying academic focus on FLSA in recent years.

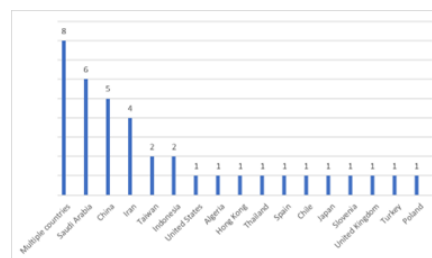


Figure 3. The Distribution of The Research Country

The geographical pattern of publication demonstrates a regionally clustered research landscape. Multi-country studies represent the highest output (n=8), followed by Saudi Arabia (n=6), China (n=5), and Iran (n=4). This reflects a strong research presence in Asia and the Middle East. In contrast, Western European contexts are sparsely represented by Poland, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These disparities suggest that the current empirical understanding of the FLSA is shaped primarily through Asian learners' profiles and instructional contexts.

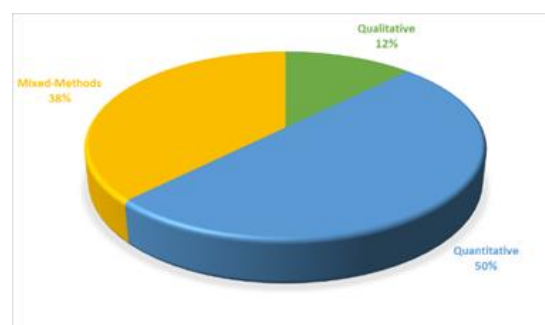


Figure 4. The Distribution of The Research Methodology

The methodological distribution of the 40 included studies indicates a firm reliance on empirical, data-driven approaches in FLSA research. As shown in Figure 4, quantitative designs dominate the field. The researchers predominantly measure anxiety levels numerically through surveys, scales, and statistical modelling. This can quantify the variable correlations and identify predictors of speaking performance. Mixed methods studies represent 38% of the literature, combining statistical measurement with qualitative insight to capture the multidimensional nature of FLSA. These studies employ triangulated data, such as questionnaires, interviews, learning logs, or observations of speaking tasks. This explored the reasons and behavioral manifestations of the FLSA in the FL class. In contrast, qualitative research accounts for only 12% and focuses on in-depth interpretation of patterns, phenomenological, and classroom inquiries in the FLSA context. This methodological imbalance highlights a potential future direction for expanding theory-building studies and classroom-embedded evidence on learner affect.

**Prevailing Themes**

A thematic visualisation of the author-provided keywords was generated using VOSviewer. A minimum threshold of five occurrences clusters studies into topic-based thematic networks. The visualisation below reveals five initial groupings of clusters.

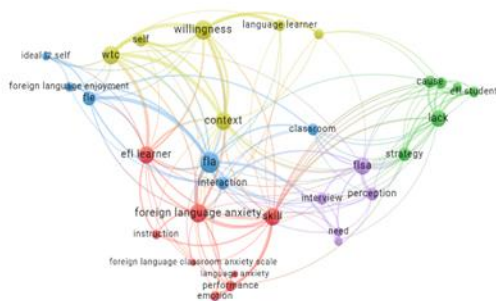


Figure 5. VOSviewer Visualisation of Keyword Co-Occurrence and Thematic Groupings

The visualisation indicates five main thematic patterns that underlie the search

results returned on FLSA. **Cluster 1** was defined by foreign language anxiety, fear, emotion, and performance, indicating basic affective processes that evoke FLSA. **Cluster 2** connected foreign language enjoyment (FLE), willingness to communicate (WTC), ideal L2 self, and self-concept with anxiety terms, demonstrating a dual-affective structure of tension/enjoyment. **Cluster 3** showed the terms confidence, lack, and learner-labelling terms (EFL learner/student), indicating a statement of incompetence and self-perceived inadequacy. **Cluster 4** included class context, teaching methods, skill training, and strategy use, and it is clear from the content of these categories that this category reflects learning environmental and pedagogic effects. **Cluster 5** included gender, perception, interview research, and minority learner groups, representing methodological orientation and variables to account for FLSA variation.

Thematic information was manually coded during the data extraction stage. The convergence between the automated and manual approaches was used to triangulate and strengthen the reliability of the thematic themes. This process enabled a comprehensive depiction of the dominant research areas and topic trends across the reviewed studies.

Table 2. Thematic Clusters (Codes) and VOSviewer Thematic Groupings

Code	Thematic Cluster	Empirical Basis from 40 Studies	VOSviewer Keyword Support
T1	Psychological & Self-Belief Factors	low self-efficacy, perfectionism, negative self-appraisal, over-monitoring speech, cognitive load	self, confidence, lack, perception, ideal L2 self
T2	Social-Affective & Identity Pressure	fear of judgement, peer comparison, face-loss threat, emotional vulnerability in speaking	fear, emotion, cause, WTC, willingness
T3	Linguistic & Communicative Competence Constraints	limited vocabulary recall, pronunciation insecurity, turn-taking difficulty, breakdown in discourse	skill, fluency, interaction, communicative ability
T4	Performance & Evaluation Anxiety	oral exams, graded presentations, high-stakes speaking tasks, time pressure	performance, anxiety, breakdown
T5	Pedagogical & Instructional Practices	public correction, accuracy-over-meaning teaching, limited	classroom, instruction, participation, FLCAS

T6	Contextual & Technological Conditions	speaking opportunity, teacher authority, collectivist norms, power distance, camera anxiety, online speaking unfamiliarity, reduced non-verbal cues	context, strategy, technology/V R/LLM
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**Table 3.** Thematic Distributions of Review

Thematic Code	Number of Studies	Included Reviews (References)
T1	23	(Alnaeem, 2025; Alqarni, 2021; Bai, 2023; Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Fathi & Behzadpoor, 2025; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Liu, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Muroya, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2024; Ölmez & Genç İlter, 2025; Paraguas, 2025; Tai & Wang, 2024; M. Wang et al., 2022a)
T2	31	(Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alnaeem, 2025; Alqarni, 2021; Bai, 2023; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022; Effiong, 2016; Enferad et al., 2025; Fathi et al., 2023; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kelsen & Liang, 2024; Kim, 2018; Kruk, 2018; Liu, 2018; Malik et al., 2024; Moafa, 2024; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Muroya, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2024; Ölmez & Genç İlter, 2025; Paraguas, 2025; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Tai & Wang, 2024; D. Wang et al., 2025; M. Wang et al., 2022a)

T3	21	(Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alqarni, 2021; Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; Chou, 2018; Diep et al., 2022; Fathi et al., 2023; Hanake, 2024; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kelsen & Liang, 2024; Kim, 2018; Kruk, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025)
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T4	24	(Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alnaeem, 2025; Bai, 2023, 2023; Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kelsen & Liang, 2024; Kim, 2018; Liu, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024; Moafa, 2024; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Paraguas, 2025; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Tai & Wang, 2024; M. Wang et al., 2022a)
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T5	29	(Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alqarni, 2021; Bai, 2023; Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Čepon, 2022; Chou, 2018, 2018; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022; Effiong, 2016; Enferad et al., 2025; Fathi et al., 2023; García-Pastor & Miller, 2019; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kim, 2018; Kruk, 2018; Liu, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Paraguas, 2025; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Universidad Andres Bello et al., 2024; D. Wang et al., 2025; M. Wang et al., 2022a)
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T6	6	(Alqarni, 2021; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; Hanake, 2024; Kruk, 2018)
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The distribution in Table 3 demonstrates that social-affective and identity pressures (T2) and psychological factors (1) dominate the empirical landscape. This implies that FLSA is primarily rooted in interpersonal and intrapersonal conditions. Linguistic communicative constraints (T3), and performance-related anxiety also reinforce their central role in shaping speaking difficulties for FL learners. The contextual-technological conditions (T6) appear in fewer studies, suggesting that the digital learning context remains an emerging area of inquiry. These patterns provide the foundation for the thematic discussion that follows.

## DISCUSSION

### Factors Contributing to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The systematic synthesis of forty empirical studies reveals that Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety emerges from a complex constellation of interrelated factors operating across six thematic domains. Rather than functioning as isolated variables, these factors demonstrate intricate patterns of interaction that collectively shape the intensity and persistence of speaking anxiety across diverse instructional contexts. The thematic distribution analysis identified six primary clusters with varying empirical representation:

social-affective pressures (31 studies), pedagogical practices (29 studies), performance anxiety (24 studies), psychological vulnerabilities (23 studies), linguistic constraints (21 studies), and contextual-technological conditions (6 studies). This distribution pattern underscores the fundamentally interpersonal and environmentally-mediated nature of speaking anxiety, wherein internal dispositions operate within and respond to external social and instructional conditions.

### ***T1: Psychological and Self-Belief Factors***

This first factor constituted foundational contributors documented across twenty-three studies, operating through interconnected mechanisms including self-efficacy deficits, perfectionism, negative self-appraisal, speech monitoring hypervigilance, and cognitive load challenges. Research across Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American contexts consistently demonstrated that perceived competence exerted stronger influence than actual proficiency on anxiety outcomes (Alqarni, 2021; Bai, 2023; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Liu, 2018; Malik et al., 2024), establishing that subjective self-assessment mediates relationships between linguistic capability and emotional responses. The ought-to L2 self emerged as the strongest positive predictor of anxiety, indicating that externally-imposed expectations generate greater anxiogenic effects than intrinsic motivation or ideal self-conceptions (Ölmez & Genç İter, 2025). Perfectionism created debilitating cognitive-affective loops wherein unrealistic performance standards proved incompatible with spontaneous communication demands (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Cancino & Cabello, 2024). Speech monitoring hypervigilance paradoxically reduced fluency by diverting cognitive resources toward real-time error correction (Fathi et al., 2023; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018). Trait emotional intelligence research revealed that well-being and emotionality dimensions significantly predicted anxiety through their influence on self-evaluation tendencies (Chen et al., 2024).

Negative self-appraisal patterns distorting learners' interpretations of communicative experiences and transforming normal challenges into evidence of fundamental inadequacy (Cheng & Xu, 2022; Tai & Wang, 2024). Dynamic systems investigations documented moment-to-moment anxiety fluctuations corresponding to cognitive load variations, with processing complexity peaks triggering acute distress episodes (Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017). The convergence of evidence across diverse methodological traditions establishes psychological factors as more powerful predictors than objective competence measures, underscoring the primacy of internal psychological architecture in shaping emotional experiences during foreign language speaking.

### ***T2: Social-Affective and Identity Pressures***

The social-affective and identity pressures represented the most extensively documented anxiety domain across thirty-one studies, encompassing fear of negative evaluation, peer comparison, face-threat concerns, and identity negotiation challenges. Fear of negative evaluation emerged as the most robust predictor, with learners demonstrating hypervigilance to others' reactions and over-interpretation of neutral feedback as critical judgment (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2024). Cultural embeddedness proved particularly salient in Asian and Middle Eastern contexts where collectivist norms and high power distance amplified sensitivity to public evaluation, with face-saving concerns and reputation protection intensifying distress during visible error-making (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Diep et al., 2022; Liu, 2018). Peer comparison dynamics generated anxiety through upward social comparison to more proficient classmates, undermining confidence and triggering avoidance behaviors (Čepon, 2022; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Muroya, 2022). Identity vulnerability during public performance created feelings of emotional exposure, particularly when

linguistic limitations contradicted learners' desired self-presentation or threatened their perceived expertise (Fathi et al., 2023; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kim, 2018; Kruk, 2018).

Neurophysiological evidence established biological correlates of social-evaluative anxiety, with frontal EEG alpha asymmetry revealing heightened right-sided activation associated with withdrawal motivation during L2 speaking (Kelsen & Liang, 2024). Teacher-student interpersonal dynamics significantly moderated anxiety levels, with authoritarian styles intensifying evaluative concerns while supportive approaches buffered emotional distress (Enferad et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2024; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Ölmez & Genç İltir, 2025; Paraguas, 2025). Technology-mediated contexts introduced novel social-affective pressures including camera anxiety and reduced nonverbal cues, though some learners reported decreased anxiety through psychological distance from immediate peer observation (Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Tai & Wang, 2024; D. Wang et al., 2025; M. Wang et al., 2022a). The preponderance of evidence demonstrates that social-affective factors consistently predicted anxiety more strongly than linguistic competence variables, establishing speaking anxiety as fundamentally a social-emotional rather than purely cognitive-linguistic phenomenon.

### ***T3: Linguistic and Communicative Competence Constraints***

Twenty-one studies shows that tangible skill deficiencies for learners frequently internalized as personal inadequacies, encompassing vocabulary limitations, pronunciation insecurity, grammatical challenges, discourse management difficulties, and turn-taking coordination problems. Limited vocabulary knowledge created cascading challenges during real-time production, forcing extended pauses and communication breakdowns that heightened self-consciousness (Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Cancino &

Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; Chou, 2018; Diep et al., 2022). Pronunciation concerns proved particularly anxiety-inducing due to high visibility and self-correction difficulties during spontaneous speech, with phonological inaccuracy fears creating reluctance even when learners possessed adequate vocabulary and grammar (Fathi et al., 2023; Hanake, 2024; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017). Grammatical encoding demands increased cognitive load and error visibility, generating tension between accuracy requirements and limited processing time (Kruk, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024). Discourse management and turn-taking coordination challenges extended beyond sentence-level production to include sustained speech organization and pragmatic-interactional competencies (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alqarni, 2021; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Čepon, 2022; Chou, 2018; Diep et al., 2022). Critically, perceived linguistic competence consistently predicted anxiety more strongly than objective proficiency assessments, with learners' subjective evaluations mediating relationships between linguistic skills and emotional responses (Fathi et al., 2023; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Malik et al., 2024). This pattern suggests linguistic constraints constitute enabling conditions that interact with other anxiety factors rather than operating as independent causal mechanisms, with competence limitations generating minimal distress in supportive environments but triggering acute anxiety when combined with evaluative pressures or unsupportive social contexts (Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025).

### ***T4: Performance and Evaluation Anxiety***

The forth factor appeared across twenty-four studies as a distinct factor linked to high-stakes speaking contexts, formal assessments, and public presentation demands. Oral examinations, graded presentations, and timed tasks consistently elicited elevated anxiety due to their consequential nature and reduced error-correction opportunities (Bai, 2023;

Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepon, 2022; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kim, 2018). Temporal pressure intensified cognitive load and triggered physiological stress responses including trembling, voice instability, and momentary speech blockage (Cheng & Xu, 2022; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017). Anticipatory anxiety activated distress even when learners felt adequately prepared, suggesting performance anxiety operates through both cognitive appraisal and conditioned emotional responses (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alnaeem, 2025; Kelsen & Liang, 2024). Formative versus summative assessment distinctions proved significant, with grade-bearing evaluations generating substantially higher anxiety than low-stakes practice activities (Liu, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024; Moafa, 2024). The public nature of oral assessment amplified evaluative threat through simultaneous peer observation, transforming individual performance anxiety into compounded social-evaluative anxiety (Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022; Paraguas, 2025; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025; Tai & Wang, 2024; M. Wang et al., 2022a). The interaction between test anxiety and communication apprehension created multiplicative rather than additive effects, wherein learners feared both assessment failure and audience judgment simultaneously.

#### ***T5: Pedagogical and Instructional Practices***

The environmental factors within educators' sphere of influence, encompassing teacher-centered instruction, error correction approaches, task design, classroom atmosphere, and teacher characteristics emerged across twenty-nine studies. Limited communicative opportunities and accuracy-emphasis instruction restricted learners' chances for oral proficiency development through practice (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Alqarni, 2021; Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Effiong, 2016). Public error correction triggered face-threat and reinforced fear of negative evaluation, with correction manner

proving more influential than correction occurrence (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Bosmans & Hurd, 2016; Čepon, 2022; Chou, 2018; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022). Instructional ambiguity and insufficient preparation time heightened uncertainty and apprehension, particularly when spontaneous production was demanded (Enferad et al., 2025; Fathi et al., 2023; García-Pastor & Miller, 2019; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017).

Classroom atmosphere mediated anxiety responses, with supportive environments facilitating risk-taking while competitive climates intensified protective withdrawal (Kim, 2018; Kruk, 2018; Liu, 2018; Y. Ma, 2022; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022). Teacher characteristics including formality, age, and communication style influenced learner comfort, with formal presentation and perceived authority distance associated with elevated (Effiong, 2016; Paraguas, 2025; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025). These findings underscore that pedagogical choices extend beyond content delivery to encompass affective dimensions fundamentally shaping emotional experiences during oral communication (D. Wang et al., 2025; M. Wang et al., 2022a).

#### ***T6: Contextual and Technological Conditions***

This factor represented emerging factors documented in six studies, reflecting evolving instructional landscapes. Emergency remote teaching exposed novel anxiety sources including camera exposure, recording features, and absent nonverbal cues (Alqarni, 2021; Čepon, 2022; Hanake, 2024; Kruk, 2018). Learners unaccustomed to virtual participation reported heightened self-consciousness regarding physical appearance and home environment visibility compounding linguistic anxiety. However, technological mediation demonstrated dual effects, with some learners experiencing reduced anxiety through decreased social presence and anonymous participation opportunities. Cultural context interacted with

technology factors, as collectivist-background learners showed particular vulnerability to camera-on requirements intensifying public exposure. These patterns indicate technological conditions introduce both novel triggers and potential affordances for anxiety modulation through modified communicative contexts.

The synthesis across six thematic domains demonstrates that Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety emerges through dynamic interplay between internal dispositions, interpersonal climates, linguistic readiness, evaluative pressures, instructional practices, and contextual conditions. Social-affective factors and psychological vulnerabilities exerted primary influence based on frequency and predictive strength across reviewed studies, though relative contribution varies according to learner profiles, cultural contexts, and instructional settings. The convergence of multiple anxiety sources creates cumulative burden potentially overwhelming learners' coping capacities, particularly when psychological vulnerabilities intersect with unsupportive pedagogical environments or high-stakes evaluative contexts.

### **Learners' Behavioural Manifestations of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (RQ2)**

Across reviewed studies, anxiety manifested through consistent behavioral patterns reflecting attempts to minimize communicative risk and manage emotional distress. These manifestations operated across cognitive, affective, physiological, and strategic dimensions, creating observable indicators for identifying anxiety presence and intensity.

Speech disruption patterns emerged as primary behavioral indicators, with learners exhibiting hesitation markers, prolonged pauses, reduced utterance length, and reliance on memorized (Alamri & Qasem, 2024; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Čepón, 2022; Effiong, 2016; Kim, 2018). These behaviors reflected cognitive overload and self-monitoring processes creating fragmented speech patterns. Dynamic systems

investigations captured moment-to-moment fluency fluctuations corresponding to anxiety peaks, establishing direct relationships between emotional states and production quality (García-Pastor & Miller, 2019; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Kruk, 2018). Avoidance behaviors constituted strategic withdrawal from communicative opportunities across classroom and assessment contexts. Learners demonstrated reluctance to volunteer, refused participation, decreased willingness to communicate, and engaged in selective mutism (Alqarni, 2021; Bai, 2023; Cheng & Xu, 2022; Darmawangsa et al., 2020; Diep et al., 2022; Liu, 2018; Muroya, 2022; M. Wang et al., 2022b). Avoidance extended beyond immediate tasks to broader language learning contexts, with anxious learners avoiding courses, practice opportunities, and native speaker interaction. Research revealed avoidance proved particularly pronounced in collectivist settings where face-saving concerns amplified withdrawal tendencies (Chou, 2018; Fathi et al., 2023; Hanake, 2024).

Affective and physiological responses manifested as observable emotional and somatic indicators including visible tension, trembling hands, shaky voice, accelerated heartbeat, sweating, and stomach discomfort (Alnaeem, 2025; Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Chen et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2024; Moafa, 2024; Paraguas, 2025). Neurophysiological research documented frontal brain asymmetry patterns associated with withdrawal motivation during anxious episodes (Kelsen & Liang, 2024). Technology-mediated behavioral adaptations emerged in digital environments, with learners turning off cameras, muting themselves, or engaging through text-based channels to manage face-threat (Alqarni, 2021; Cancino & Cabello, 2024; Hanake, 2024).

The relationship proved complex, with some learners experiencing reduced anxiety through psychological distance while others faced heightened distress from recording features (Kruk, 2018; D. Wang et al., 2025). Cognitive interference patterns reflected

anxiety's impact on attentional control and working memory, with anxious learners experiencing mental blanking, content forgetting, vocabulary retrieval failures, and disrupted discourse organization (Cheng & Xu, 2022; Enferad et al., 2025; Fathi et al., 2023; H.-T. D. Huang, 2018; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Y. Ma, 2022; Malik et al., 2024; Ölmez & Genç İlter, 2025). The behavioral manifestations collectively revealed a self-perpetuating cycle wherein initial anxiety triggered behaviors reducing practice opportunities, thereby preventing skill development and confidence building necessary for anxiety reduction. This pattern underscores the necessity for interventions addressing both emotional regulation and behavioral engagement.

The synthesis generates actionable implications for language educators, curriculum designers, and institutional decision-makers operating across individual, instructional, and systemic levels. Effective anxiety reduction requires creating emotion-safe learning environments through private feedback mechanisms, scaffolding strategies providing linguistic and cognitive support, and communication-focused pedagogies utilizing pair work and collaborative tasks that lower evaluative pressure. Fostering psychological resilience through self-efficacy building, emotional intelligence training, and culturally responsive pedagogy addressing context-specific anxiety patterns proves essential for supporting diverse learner populations. These implications underscore pedagogical responsibility to foster environments where learners feel psychologically safe, linguistically supported, and socially empowered to engage in spoken interaction.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of this systematic review warrant acknowledgment and contextualization. The inclusion criteria restricting analysis to Scopus-indexed, English-language, open-access publications may have excluded relevant research published in other databases, languages, or access formats. This methodological decision,

while ensuring quality standards and analytical feasibility, potentially limits the comprehensiveness of the evidence base, particularly regarding research conducted in non-English-dominant contexts or published in regional journals not indexed by Scopus. The predominance of studies from Asian and Middle Eastern regions creates geographic imbalance that may skew findings toward anxiety patterns characteristic of these cultural contexts, with Western European, African, and Latin American perspectives underrepresented. The sample of forty studies, while analytically rich and methodologically diverse, represents a subset of broader FLSA scholarship. The systematic search strategy and rigorous inclusion criteria ensured relevance and quality but inevitably excluded studies addressing related constructs such as general foreign language anxiety without specific speaking focus, classroom anxiety in non-instructional contexts, or speaking-adjacent phenomena like presentation anxiety in professional settings. The coding process, though systematic and triangulated through multiple validation procedures, incorporates interpretive judgment in thematic classification. Studies exhibiting multidimensional relevance were assigned to multiple thematic codes to reflect complexity, yet the discrete categorization system may obscure fluid boundaries between anxiety factor domains that operate interactively in practice.

The relatively small representation of studies addressing technological contexts (six studies in T6) limits confidence in conclusions regarding digital-era anxiety. This pattern reflects the emerging nature of technology-mediated language learning research rather than review methodology shortcomings, yet it constrains the evidence base for contemporary instructional contexts increasingly characterized by blended and fully online delivery formats. The review's focus on factor identification and manifestation description provides foundation for intervention development but does not evaluate specific anxiety-reduction strategies' effectiveness, leaving questions about pedagogical

implications' empirical support partially unresolved. The predominance of quantitative and mixed-methods designs (88% combined) over purely qualitative approaches suggests potential underrepresentation of rich descriptive accounts capturing anxiety's experiential dimensions and contextual nuances.

### **Future Research Directions**

The systematic synthesis identifies several critical directions for advancing FLSA research work. Geographic and cultural diversification represents an immediate priority to generalize globally or reflect culturally specific manifestations requiring tailored theoretical frameworks and interventions. Cross-cultural comparative studies employing consistent instrumentation and analytical approaches would enable direct assessment of cultural moderators and boundary conditions for established anxiety-factor relationships. Investigation of psychological-linguistic interaction mechanisms through longitudinal and mixed-method designs would illuminate developmental trajectories and bidirectional relationships between evolving competence and anxiety. Current evidence predominantly reflects cross-sectional associations unable to establish causal direction or trace temporal dynamics of anxiety-competence reciprocity. Intervention research represents a critical gap, with reviewed studies predominantly descriptive rather than evaluative regarding anxiety-reduction strategies.

Experimental and quasi-experimental designs testing specific interventions such as structured feedback models, graduated task sequencing, affective strategy training, or technology-mediated practice formats would establish evidence-based best practices. Comparative effectiveness research examining differential intervention impacts across learner profiles, proficiency levels, and cultural contexts would enable precision matching of strategies to learner characteristics. Particular attention should address whether digital natives experience qualitatively different anxiety profiles than

previous generations and whether technology-mediated contexts fundamentally alter anxiety mechanisms or merely provide new manifestation channels for established patterns.

Behavioral manifestation analysis through multimodal methods including EEG, eye-tracking, speech analytics, and physiological monitoring would provide objective indicators complementing self-report measures. Teacher belief and classroom discourse examination remains underrepresented despite evidence suggesting pedagogical practices strongly predict T5-related anxiety. Research investigating teachers' anxiety conceptualizations, instructional decision-making regarding anxious learners, and moment-by-moment discourse moves either amplifying or alleviating anxiety would inform teacher education and professional development.

These research directions collectively offer pathways to deepen theoretical understanding of FLSA mechanisms while developing empirically grounded, pedagogically actionable solutions supporting learners in oral communication development. The convergence of basic research illuminating anxiety architecture with applied research evaluating intervention effectiveness would establish comprehensive knowledge base enabling evidence-based practice in foreign language speaking instruction.

### **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review synthesized empirical evidence from forty Scopus-indexed studies published between 2015 and 2025 to examine factors contributing to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and behavioral manifestations emerging across diverse instructional contexts. The review establishes FLSA as a multidimensional construct shaped by dynamic interactions among six primary domains: psychological dispositions and self-belief systems, social-affective pressures and identity concerns, linguistic and communicative competence constraints, performance and evaluation demands, pedagogical practices and

instructional design, and contextual-technological conditions. Social-affective and psychological factors consistently emerged as dominant triggers across methodologically diverse investigations. This highlights the central role of interpersonal judgment, identity sensitivity, and self-belief architecture in shaping learners' emotional responses during speaking tasks. Learners experiencing heightened anxiety exhibited consistent behavioral patterns including speech disruption, communicative avoidance, reduced participation, excessive monitoring, and physiological symptoms. These manifestations reveal that FLSA disrupts communicative performance by overwhelming cognitive and affective resources, creating self-perpetuating cycles wherein anxiety-driven avoidance prevents practice and skill development necessary for anxiety reduction. The pedagogical interventions addressing both environmental conditions and individual vulnerabilities can meaningfully reduce anxiety and support confident oral communication development.

The review contributes a consolidated six-cluster thematic framework integrating previously fragmented perspectives across psychological, social, linguistic, evaluative, pedagogical, and technological domains. This taxonomy provides researchers and practitioners with systematic structure for identifying anxiety sources and designing targeted interventions. The evidence-based synthesis offers actionable insights including emotion-safe learning environments, linguistic and cognitive scaffolding, communication-focused pedagogies reducing evaluative pressure, strategic technology-enhanced design, and culturally responsive practices. These implications extend beyond individual classroom practice to encompass curriculum design, teacher education, and institutional policy shaping affective dimensions of foreign language instruction.

This study underscores the necessity for holistic approaches integrating affective, cognitive, social, and pedagogical dimensions. As foreign language education evolves through technological innovation and cultural diversity, sustained scholarly attention to speaking anxiety remains essential for supporting learners in developing oral communication competencies central to successful language acquisition and authentic intercultural interaction. Critical gaps remain constraining comprehensive understanding. Geographic concentration in Asian and Middle Eastern contexts limits generalizability, necessitating cross-cultural research establishing universal versus culture-specific patterns. Technology-mediated anxiety research requires substantial expansion given accelerating shifts toward digital and hybrid formats. Methodological imbalances restrict capacity to capture developmental trajectories and experiential dimensions. Future inquiry should prioritize intervention effectiveness research, multimodal behavioral assessment, and psychological-linguistic interaction mechanisms to establish evidence-based practices.

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