International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding

http://ijmmu.com
editor@ijmmu.com
ISSN 2364-5369
Volume 12, Issue 11
November, 2025
Pages: 212-220

A Comparative Study on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Level of Female Students in Only-Girl School and Mixed-Sex School in EFL Classroom

Abiyot Mosissa Leta[1]; Sherif Ali Ahmed[2]; Desalegn Tolesa Bonda[2]

[1] Assosa University, Ethiopia

[2] Wollega University, Ethiopia

http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i11.7150

Abstract

This non-experimental, causal-comparative study, sought to find possible variations in foreign language speaking anxiety level among female students in two different educational environments: the mixed-sex Bambassi Secondary School and the all-females Pharo Boarding School.The Foreign Language speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS), Developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), was used to assess foreign language speaking anxiety level of female students within the two environment. This research reveals that Pharo Boarding School and Bambassi Secondary School students ($p = 0.607$) do not differ noticeably in foreign language speaking anxiety. This points to little impact of variables related to school, like teaching techniques, the surroundings of the school, or the kind of institution, on the degree of worry experienced by pupils.

Keywords: *Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety; Anxiety; Single Sex School; Mixed Sex School*

Introduction

English is normally seen in Ethiopia as a means of accessing the international community. The rapid growth of international trade, diplomacy, mass media, telecommunications, Education and scientific research has resulted in a remarkable increase in the importance of the English language. It has appeared as the universal language and is crucial for international communication, and professional development as well. English is even more important in nations like Ethiopia where it is not the primary language. In addition to being widely used as the primary language of instruction in classrooms, it is also a prerequisite for both future employment prospects and academic success. Therefore, encouraging communicative proficiency in English has emerged as a key goal in Ethiopian education.

It has been commonly prominent that speaking is one of the central skills in learning a foreign language which causes anxiety in students. It requires immediate oral production, social interaction, and public performance, which makes students especially subject to harsh evaluations in contrast to reading, listening or writing. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) was first conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as a distinct construct that includes test anxiety, communication anxiety, and

fear of a negative evaluation. These indicators are all most prominent in speaking situations. A large body of research has demonstrated that students who experience greater anxiety when speaking a foreign language tend to avoid conversation, utilize simpler language structures, and implement poorly on oral assessments (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Woodrow, 2006).

One interesting aspect of foreign language speaking anxiety that has caught researchers' attention is the influence of gender. Studies show that female learners often experience higher levels of speaking anxiety compared to their male counterparts. This is largely because they tend to worry more about getting things right and are more sensitive to making mistakes or receiving negative feedback (Park & French, 2013; Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022).

Teachers have perceived that in mixed-gender classrooms, female students are often more unwilling to raise their hands, less inclined to take risks, and can be easily become hopeless by errors. On the flip side, these tendencies seem to disappear in all-girl classrooms, where the lack of male peers helps to lessen stereotype pressures and creates a more supportive and fair environment for participation (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009; Steele, 1997). This brings up an important question whether the type of school (mixed or all-girls) affect how female learners experience speaking anxiety in foreign language classes. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to compare the levels of speaking anxiety among female students in all-girls schools versus those in mixed-gender schools.

The review indicates the gaps as there is a lack of empirical studies that directly compare the speaking anxiety of female students in mixed-sex and single-sex schools

Statement of the Problem

Despite recognizing foreign language speaking anxiety as an impediment to oral proficiency for decades, we are still left with some substantial gaps in understanding how it affects female learners in different types of school settings in Ethiopia. Many teachers communicate that female learners are often shy to participate in oral tasks, but it is unclear if this sense of unwillingness is worsened in mixed gender classrooms in which gender dynamics play role, or if female only schools present safer and more comfortable contexts and therefore diminish the anxiety experienced by female learners. Without empirical evidence, the influence that school type may have on speaking anxiety is only abstract, yet it carries essential complications for pedagogical practice and school policy. Furthermore, while the anxiety-performance link has been constantly established, it remains unclear whether school type is associated with demonstrable differences in English speaking achievement for female learners. If female learners in single-sex schools do achieve better speaking outcomes, in part due to reduced anxiety, this highlights the essentials of classroom context in influencing language learning opportunities.

- Do Female Students in Mixed-Sex Secondary Schools Experience Higher Levels of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Than Those in Only-Girl Secondary Schools?

3. Review Literature

Many researchers have looked at how anxiety over words and being a boy or girl relate. They find that anxiety is linked to words, and being a boy or girl are still seen in their own ways.

Some work shows that female students feel more scared than male students in school spots (Pappamihiel 2001, Elkhafaifi 2005). Abu Rabia (2004) found that in classes for foreign languages, females were more on edge than males. More work backs up that females often have big word worries compared to males (Abu Rabia 2004; Bensoussan and Zeidner 1998). Wilson (2006) saw that female students are often more scared in schools and don't do as well. Another work noted females were more

scared in foreign language spots than males. Also, work on writing anxietys found that females felt more stress than males (Cheng 2002).

Yet, some think males are more scared than females in foreign language spots. Shi and Liu (2006) found males were more scared about reading in a foreign language than females. They also thought females do better and feel surer in a foreign language than males (Shi & Liu, 2006). Lynch (2002) saw females view themselves as better readers than males. Na, Zhao (2007) found males more scared than females in English class.

Some work found no big jump in anxiety between males and females in language spots. Shi and Liu (2006) showed no big shift between males and females. Melkamu Firew (2008) also saw no gap, but found they differ in speak anxiety. Other anxiety, like test stress or anxiety of bad speak, showed no gap. Many works noted no big shift in anxiety based on being a boy or girl in language spots (Aida, 1994; Onwuegbuzie et al, 1999). Also, one work in Japan found no shift based on being a boy or girl in class anxietys (Aida, 1994). Elkhafaifi (2005) found that males and females show different anxiety levels, tied to the kind of anxiety felt. They both felt the same anxiety in hearing (Campbell, 1999).

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) has been looked at a lot, mostly in schools with both males and females. Here, students often feel more scared. Reports hint that males in class might make females feel more scared, mainly when they have to speak in front of others. Much work, like that by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) and Aida (1994), told how changes in social setups, such as being with males, raise anxiety levels in learning foreign languages.

Females may feel more wary and scared of what others think, and this anxiety might spike in mixed settings. Yet, schools with only females may be nicer places for them, maybe cutting down their anxiety. Studies by Baker (2006) and Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) say anxiety tends to dip in these places, as social stress drops and support from others is better. In all, even though there are some studies on this anxiety of speaking a foreign language, we still lack big moves to look deeper into this area. So, this work aims to help close this gap.

Males being in class with females can make the females feel more worried in school. Studies show that females are more aware of how they do, mainly when they have to speak in front of others, like in language class. This worry is bigger in places where females are taught to be less bold and not compete with males (Baker, 2006). A big part of this anxiety, called "anxiety of bad reviews," gets worse in such cases, as there is more looking at each other and comparing. To sum up, many studies look into how having males around affects how well females do in school.

In females-only schools, there tend to be less sex-based social pressures. This lets females take part more in language tasks without worry of what males might think. Studies show that females in these schools often feel more sure of themselves and value themselves more (Pahlke, Bigler, & Martin, 2014), which may help them feel less nervous when learning foreign languages. For example, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) saw that females in females-only schools had less anxiety around learning foreign languages. They think this is because those schools support working together and don't focus much on who wins or loses, making leaning better.

Some facts tell us that females in females-only schools do better in school, even in learning foreign languages. This may be because there are no social pressures from males and females get to lead more in class (Baker, 2006). These schools help females join in and try foreign things without anxiety, leading to them getting better at the language. On the other hand, mixed schools have their good points, like giving kids a chance to mix with all kinds of other kids and use the language with both males and females. This can make the learning full of real-life uses, which may help them learn the language better (Simpkins et al., 2006). But, if we only look at learning languages, females in mixed schools might not do as well because they could feel more nervous, as we speaked about before.

Methodology

This study employed a causal-comparative design to find differences in foreign language speaking anxiety between female students attending a mixed-sex school and an all-girl school

In order to determine whether there was a difference in the levels of anxiety related to speaking a foreign language between female students who learn alone and those who learn with male students, a casual comparative research design was employed. The questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data.

Questionnaires

The primary data collection tools for this study was the FLSAS questionnaires. A tool designed especially to measure anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language is the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS). The FLSAS focusses on the particular difficulties and emotional reactions that learners encounter when speaking a foreign language, in contrast to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which looks at different facets of foreign language anxiety. By using a Likert scale format, it allows participants to indicate how strongly they feel in scenarios like speaking in front of an audience, participating in conversations, or interacting with native speakers. The FLSAS can successfully pinpoint particular causes of speaking anxiety, such as nervousness, a anxiety of making mistakes, or a reluctance to participate in class discussions, thanks to this targeted approach.

The FLSAS places a high value on real-world speaking situations, making sure that its items are applicable and useful to students. Because of its adaptability to different cultural and linguistic contexts, it is relevant to a wide range of participant groups. The FLSAS helps teachers develop focused strategies to address students' oral communication difficulties by offering a thorough understanding of speaking-related anxiety. The FLSAS provides a more thorough analysis of speaking-specific problems when combined with the FLCAS, which advances our knowledge of foreign language anxiety. Both tools were used in this study to identify particular speaking anxiety triggers and contrast them with language anxiety in general. This thorough approach produced important insights for creating plans to reduce anxiety and improve students' self-esteem and performance.

Students' information was gathered using the FLSAS questionnaire, which was created by Horwitz et al. (1986). The most popular and recognised research tool in the study of anxiety related to foreign languages is the FLSAS. There were 37 closed-ended questions on the FLSAS questionnaire that used the 5-point Likert scale. These are strongly agreed (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Therefore, the researcher adapted and use this instrument to collect data.

5. Data analysis/Result

In order to determine the differences and similarities between the language anxiety levels of female students attending only-girl schools and female students attending mixed-sex schools, the mean score of each question was compared and contrasted using the independent t-test. This made it easier to calculate the distribution mean and assign students to anxiety levels based on their mean scores. As a result, students with an FLCAS mean score of 1.00–2.51 were classified as low-anxious, those with a mean score of 2.51-3.51 as averagely anxious, and those with a score of 3.51–5.00 as high-anxious (NegassiAbay, 2009). Similarly, it was asserted that three anxiety groups [high, average, and low] could be created by using FLCAS questionnaires.

Many questions of FLCAS were analyzed simply, while some items were scored in reverse. For those questionnaires that were analyzed reversely, the value assigned to the level of agreement was flipped. For instance, strongly disagree, which originally had a value of 1, was changed to 5. Similarly,

strongly agree, which originally had a value of 5, was changed to 1. The same change applied to the other points related to language anxiety in those items.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

Finding replication and reliability are both crucial in quality research. Reputation within a study is referred to as internal reliability and external reputation assesses if findings could be reproduced under replicated conditions by the same or a different researcher (Saunders, Lewin & Thornhill, 2016). In this case, the author achieved reliability through measurement of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, increasing the number of items in the questionnaire, standardizing the way the administration was conducted, and checking to make sure that the questions were relevant and clearly written. In the research by Abbot and Borden in 2018, these steps reduced participant or researcher error and improved the consistency and reproducibility of findings.

Reliability Test

Table 1: reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.804	.795	37

With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.804 for 37 items, the reliability analysis in the above table shows that the instrument has good internal consistency. This value indicates that the items successfully measure the same underlying construct and is within the acceptable range for reliability. Standardisation has little effect on reliability, as evidenced by the slightly lower Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items (0.795), which is still within the "good" range. Reliability is positively impacted by the number of items (37), but efficiency should be ensured by reviewing redundancy. Overall, the findings point to the instrument's reliability and suitability for research use, though more item-level analysis and pilot testing may improve accuracy.

Result and Discussion

The findings are in line with earlier research by Horwitz (2001), who discovered that internal psychological factors, rather than external environments, have a significant impact on language anxiety. Similarly, in order to lessen language learning anxiety, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) stressed the significance of attending to each student's anxiety and perfectionist tendencies.

General Mean of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Level

A summary of the mean anxiety levels is as follows:

Table 4: The mean of foreign language anxiety level of the two school

Group Statistics					
	Name of the school	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean	Pharo boarding school	36	2.9775	.54506	.09084
	Bambassi secondary school	56	3.0328	.47179	.06305

The aforementioned table demonstrated that although Bambassi Secondary School had a slightly higher average, the difference was insignificant. The independent-samples t-test was used to compare the anxiety levels of foreign language speakers in the two schools in order to ascertain whether this difference is statistically significant.

Independent Samples Test to Compare the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Levels between the Two Schools

Table 5: Independent Samples Test to compare the foreign language speaking anxiety levels between the two schools

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Mean	Equal variances assumed	.466	.496	-.517	90	.607	-.05534	.10714	-.26820	.15752
	Equal variances not assumed			-.500	66.951	.618	-.05534	.11058	-.27606	.16537

The results of an Independent Samples t-test comparing the anxiety levels of foreign language speakers at two different schools are shown in this table. The null hypothesis of Levene's test cannot be rejected because the P-value is higher than 0.05. Compared to the usual significance level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.607 is significantly higher. This indicates that the mean anxiety levels related to speaking a foreign language are not statistically different between the two schools. This suggests that there is no significant difference between the two groups' variances, so we can assume that the t-test will yield equal variances.

The two groups' anxiety levels when speaking a foreign language are fairly close, with Pharo Boarding School benefiting from a slight difference, as indicated by the mean difference of -0.05534. This disparity is not substantial, though. The 95% CI falls between -0.26820 and 0.15752. The conclusion that there is no discernible difference between the two groups is further supported by the fact that this range includes 0. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Pharo Boarding School and Bambassi Secondary School do not differ statistically significantly in their levels of anxiety when speaking a foreign language. The anxiety levels of both groups when speaking a foreign language are comparable, and the slight difference that is seen is probably the result of chance rather than a significant impact.

Students at the two schools appear to have similar levels of anxiety when speaking a foreign language, according to this analysis. The fact that there was no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.607$) suggests that in this situation, school-related elements like the setting or instructional strategies might not have a significant impact on anxiety levels. This result is consistent with previous research showing that psychological and personal factors (such as self-confidence and anxiety of making mistakes) have a greater impact on foreign language speaking anxiety than do external factors like school type (Horwitz, 2001).

The results imply that anxiety levels related to speaking a foreign language are similar in the two schools, supporting the notion that internal, student-specific factors may be more important than external ones like the school environment. Regardless of the educational environment, it will be advantageous to keep working to help students overcome their language anxiety.

These findings are in line with earlier research by Horwitz (2001), who discovered that internal psychological factors, rather than external environments, have a significant impact on language anxiety. Similarly, in order to lessen language learning anxiety, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) stressed the significance of attending to each student's anxietys and perfectionist tendencies.

Conclusion

This study looked at the anxiety levels of female students speaking foreign languages in two distinct educational settings: a mixed-sex secondary school and an all-girls boarding school. There was no statistically significant difference in speaking anxiety levels between the two groups, according to the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) ($p = .607$). The mixed-sex school's mean score was marginally higher than the all-girls schools, but the difference was not significant.

The results imply that the type of school may not be the only factor influencing the speaking anxiety of female foreign language learners. Rather, learners' anxiety levels seem to be more influenced by internal factors like self-confidence, fear of receiving a poor grade, and perfectionist tendencies than by external factors like the teaching context or classroom environment. This result is consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), which highlight the importance of psychological and individual characteristics in determining anxiety related to foreign languages.

In summary, female students' speaking anxiety levels are largely the same whether they attend mixed-sex or single-sex schools. Interventions aimed at lowering anxiety related to speaking a foreign language should therefore concentrate more on addressing the unique characteristics of each learner and less on the kind of school.

Recommendation

1. Put an emphasis on psychological support: Teachers should teach students how to deal with perfectionism, fear of making mistakes, and low self-esteem because these individual characteristics seem to have a bigger influence on speaking anxiety than school type.

2. Use teaching strategies that reduce anxiety: To make the classroom environment less intimidating, use interactive and encouraging teaching strategies like pair work, small group discussions, and low-stakes speaking exercises.

3. Train teachers: Language instructors should be trained by professional development programs to identify symptoms of speaking anxiety and use efficient teaching strategies that reduce students' stress when completing oral assignments.

4. Promote a positive classroom culture: Teachers in all-girls and mixed-sex schools should create a safe space that encourages effort, lessens peer pressure, and accepts making mistakes as a necessary part of learning.

Reference

Abu-Rabia, S. (2004). Teachers' role, learners' gender differences, and FL anxiety among seventh-grade students studying English as a foreign language. *Educational Psychology, 24*(5), 711–721. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341042000263006.

Aida, Y. (1994). Examination of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students of Japanese. *The Modern Language Journal, 78*(2), 155–168. https://doi.org/10.2307/329005.

Baker, D. (2006). Gendered experiences of learning science. *International Journal of Science Education, 28*(4), 491–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500690500404646.

Bensoussan, M., & Zeidner, M. (1989). Anxiety effects in English reading comprehension. *Educational Psychology, 9*(1), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341890090104

Campbell, C. M. (1999). Language anxiety in men and women: Dealing with gender difference in the language classroom. In D. J. Young (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere* (pp. 191–215). McGraw-Hill.

Cheng, Y.-S. (2002). Factors associated with foreign language writing anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals, 35*(6), 647–656. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2002.tb01903.x.

Elkhafaifi, H. (2005). Listening comprehension and anxiety in the Arabic language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 89*(2), 206–220. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2005.00275.x.

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(4), 562–570. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00161.

Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21,* 112–126. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000071.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x.

Kondo, D. S., & Ying-Ling, Y. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal, 58*(3), 258–265. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258.

Lynch, A. (2002). The relationship between second language reading comprehension and first language reading ability: Evidence from Spanish-speaking ESL students. *Reading Psychology, 23*(4), 283–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/02702710290181636.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature. *Language Learning, 41*(1), 85–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00677.x.

Na, Z. (2007). A study of high school students' English learning anxiety. *Asian EFL Journal, 9*(3), 22–34.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Bailey, P., & Daley, C. E. (1999). Factors associated with foreign language anxiety. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 20*(2), 217–239. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716499002039

Pahlke, E., Bigler, R. S., & Martin, C. L. (2014). Can single-sex education boost the achievement of girls and boys? An American perspective. *Sex Roles, 69*(7–8), 393–400. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0375-6

Pappamihiel, N. E. (2001). Moving from the ESL classroom into the mainstream: An investigation of English language anxiety in Mexican girls. *Bilingual Research Journal, 25*(1–2), 31–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2001.10162783.

Park, G.-P., & French, B. F. (2013). Gender differences in the foreign language classroom anxiety scale. *System, 41*(2), 462–471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.04.001.

Piniel, K., & Zólyomi, D. (2022). Foreign language anxiety: Understanding its roots and remedies. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning, 4*(1), 41–61.

Sadker, D., & Zittleman, K. (2009). Still failing at fairness: How gender bias cheats girls and boys in school and what we can do about it. Scribner.

Shi, Y., & Liu, Z. (2006). Foreign language reading anxiety in a Chinese as a foreign language context. *The Modern Language Journal, 90*(2), 274–286. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2006.00495.x.

Simpkins, S. D., Davis-Kean, P. E., & Eccles, J. S. (2006). Math and science motivation: A longitudinal examination of the links between choices and beliefs. *Developmental Psychology, 42*(1), 70–83. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.1.70.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52*(6), 613–629. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.6.613

Wilson, J. T. S. (2006). Anxiety in learning English as a foreign language: Its associations with student variables, with overall proficiency, and with performance on an oral test. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation.* Universidad de Granada, Spain.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal, 37*(3), 308–328. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315.

Copyrights