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Vietnamese EFL Students' Anxiety in Foreign Language Classrooms: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing

Le S. Thach
Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

Anh H. Khau*
Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

Abstract—**This study aims to investigate the perceived levels of anxiety experienced by Vietnamese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. An assessment of anxiety levels in each skill was conducted using a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and qualitative interviews with 180 students from a Vietnamese university. The results found that most students experienced a relatively higher level of anxiety in the writing session, and following it are the speaking and listening sessions, where most of them generated pretty high levels of anxiety, with students citing fear of negative evaluations, communication apprehensions, and inadequate preparation as the primary reasons. As opposed to these three language skill sessions, a more moderate level of anxiety was induced in the reading session. The study's findings are consistent with the established theories, such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, highlighting the impacts of emotional states and self-beliefs on language learning performance. With these results, the study has proposed some implications for ameliorating language methodology using approaches to reduce students' anxiety, including consideration of task preparation time, vocabulary support, and employment of small-group work environments. As a result of this study, students' acquisition and performance of foreign languages could be significantly enhanced by addressing foreign language anxiety in a targeted manner. It is recommended that future research should focus on longitudinal studies to track anxiety changes over time and intervention-based research to reduce skill-specific anxiety.**

Index Terms—**foreign languages, language anxiety, language skill sessions, Vietnamese EFL students**

I. Introduction

This study examines the perceived effect of foreign language anxiety on university students' performance in EFL contexts, focusing on Vietnamese speakers. There is a significant correlation between students' language anxiety and their ability to learn speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. In EFL contexts, anxiety can arise during language skills instruction—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. According to Cheng (2017), students may experience anxiety differently depending on language skills, so distinct measures are necessary to assess anxiety. Cheng said speaking anxiety may result from fear of communication. For instance, reading anxiety may be caused by unfamiliar vocabulary. Based on Cheng's work, remedial anxiety-reduction strategies, such as applying classroom activities targeting specific language skills, are needed. Wang et al. (2021) further highlight the need to distinguish between types of language-skill-specific anxieties since they found a significant correlation between L2 anxiety and language learning success, with effects more transparent in specific learning contexts and for certain language skills (such as listening). Recent studies affirm that anxiety is regarded as a 'mental block' that hinders language processing (Chen et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which found that emotional factors can block comprehension. In addition, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) added that different language task requirements are correlated with anxiety, suggesting that anxiety disrupts cognitive processing, especially in more complicated tasks.

In Vietnam, one of the countries belonging to the expanding circle, English is increasingly critical because of its position as a worldwide language (Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018). Despite the developing emphasis on English education, many Vietnamese EFL university students still may suffer from anxiety due to the classroom's performance-oriented nature, as most language teachers prefer to have their students try their foreign language ability in class (Tran et al., 2013a). Hence, Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasised that teachers should understand their students' feelings of loneliness and helplessness to offer concrete advice to make them confident. In the same vein, educators should implement strategies to reduce anxiety in the classroom (Horwitz, 2010; Saito & Samimy, 1996) for students' benefits in learning a foreign language.

* Corresponding Author.

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Framework of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Spielberger (1983) differentiates between state anxiety, which is a temporary response to specific circumstances, and trait anxiety, which refers to a persistent tendency to feel anxious in various contexts. Physical symptoms of anxiety include sweating, trembling, and negative thoughts, as well as behavioural ones (e.g., avoidance). Regarding language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as the distinct anxiety experienced in foreign language classrooms, which can be triggered by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. It is essential to recognise that language anxiety can negatively affect a learner's ability to acquire, retain, and use the target language, creating a significant emotional barrier. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) view anxiety reaction as a response to situations where learners feel vulnerable, such as confusion or fear of social rejection in language learning contexts.

Hence, based on these perspectives on Anxiety, FLA can be grounded in the broader subject of second language acquisition (SLA) and is inspired by cognitive, affective, and social factors (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). The State-Trait Anxiety Theory of Spielberger (1983) distinguishes between situational and dispositional tensions. The Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1986) describes learners' ideals regarding their ability to learn languages. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, terrible feelings can hinder language learning. Considering these theories helps us understand how tension manifests in foreign language-mastering contexts and how it impacts learners' general performance. The Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions (Pekrun, 2006, 2014) suggests that perceived control and value determine emotions in educational settings. Teachers may observe heightened anxiety in students who lack control over speaking or listening tasks (e.g., lack of preparation time, fear of spontaneous communication).

B. Foreign Language Anxiety in EFL Classrooms

Due to its significant influence on learners' performance and motivation, FLA has remained a key consideration in language mastering studies (Li, 2022). Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to assess FLA. Recent research has improved upon this work, emphasising that FLA is a multifaceted assembly affecting all four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019). In a study by Dewaele and Li (2020), excessive anxiety levels negatively correlate with overall language performance across various skills. In their study, Shao et al. (2020) speculated that feelings might hamper language acquisition and overall performance, thus reducing stress.

C. Skill-Specific Anxiety: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing

Speaking remains the most tension-upsetting ability for EFL students because of the on-the-spot nature of oral verbal exchange and the worry of negative evaluation (Liu & Hong, 2021). Tóth (2021) observed that speaking anxiety can impact newcomers' willingness to communicate, leading to low participation in classroom activities. Listening anxiety has gained interest because it impacts learners' capacity to recognise spoken language, particularly in natural contexts (Zhang, 2013). The loss of management over listening and worry of false impressions contribute to heightened anxiety (Chen & Chang, 2022). A meta-evaluation with the aid of Zhai (2024) showed that listening anxiety is a considerable predictor of listening performance. Reading anxiety can obstruct learners' recognition of written texts, specifically when encountering strange vocabulary or complicated grammatical systems (Li, 2020). Recent studies have observed that studying anxiety correlates with decreased studying comprehension among EFL learners (Jafarigohar & Behrooznia, 2012). Hwang and Bae (2022) found a positive correlation between reading anxiety and reading comprehension, with text-related anxiety and cognitive anxiety identified as the primary factors contributing to foreign language reading anxiety. Writing anxiety impacts learners' capacity to express themselves correctly in written form. It regularly stems from worry about bad evaluation, grammar, syntax, and the absence of self-belief in writing skills (Rezaei & Jafari, 2022). It is essential to give precise feedback to lessen writing anxiety and enhance students' writing quality (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Huang, 2022). Through path analysis, Haryanti et al. (2022) examined writing anxiety, writing attitude, and language awareness's direct and indirect effects on university students' writing achievement in Indonesia. They found that writing anxiety had a low but significant impact on writing achievement.

D. The Vietnamese Context

Vietnam is a country that is influenced by the Confucian culture, where people are aware of social power distance and respect for senior ones (Truong et al., 2017), and they have adopted a socialist political system since 1945 from the Soviet, leading a bureaucratic norm (Hallinger & Truong, 2016). These cultural and daily norms have been engraved in people's lifestyles. In an investigation of a group of EFL students in a Vietnamese university about their classroom expectations (Western or Oriental classroom culture), Nguyen and Khau (2022) found that they prefer characteristics displayed in the Western classroom culture as this culture gives them more voice in the classroom.

Regarding research on FLA in Vietnam, many scholars have investigated FLA and innovated strategies to reduce language anxiety in EFL settings. Nguyen et al. (2023) found that Vietnamese English-majored students experienced low to moderate levels of reading anxiety, primarily due to a lack of background knowledge of the topic (e.g., lifestyle and cultural differences between Vietnam and other countries) and reading ability (e.g., syntax and vocabulary). The students suggested that English teachers use proper strategies to help them become more confident in their reading class. Khau

(2019) conducted a study using two different scales to measure EFL university students' anxiety in speaking and writing and found moderate anxiety in both language skill classes, and only one student experienced extreme anxiety. As Ngo (2015) found, Vietnamese EFL students were anxious when doing English listening comprehension; factors leading to this include fast speech or unfamiliar words, fear of making mistakes, and time pressure during activities. As a result of limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with topics, cultural factors inhibiting asking questions, and the difficulty of processing spoken English in real time, these challenges are compounded. To determine factors that might influence Vietnamese university students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language at a tertiary institution in the Mekong Delta region, Le and Le (2022) identified a significant correlation between students' attitudes towards learning English and both internal and external factors (such as self-confidence, anxiety, and awareness of the language's importance).

E. Stress-Relief Strategies

Ngo (2015) considered that Vietnamese EFL students struggled to use social/affective strategies more frequently than metacognitive and cognitive strategies and struggled to use strategies flexibly and in combination. Alrabai (2015) found that anxiety-reducing strategies helped reduce learner anxiety among Saudi students. According to Tran et al. (2013a), FLA is a learned response influenced by pedagogy, assessment methods, and relationships between teachers and students. In another study, Tran et al. (2013b) found that approximately two-thirds of students experienced some FLA, suggesting that teachers often underestimated FLA's impact on their learning. Petraki and Nguyen (2016) found that proper jokes, such as spontaneous humour, humorous comments, jokes, and funny stories, can help EFL students learn better. In Vietnam, EFL and CFL (Chinese as a foreign language) students had slightly lower anxiety in online courses than in physical classes. However, most students preferred in-class instruction due to better concentration, easier interaction, and higher learning efficiency (Li, 2024). Nguyen et al. (2024) found it is helpful to promote English extracurricular activities for Vietnamese EFL students since a good integration of these activities into the classroom curriculum can reinforce students' foreign learning value, so teachers should provide a supportive, immersive environment for students to practice their English outside of the classroom.

III. Methodology

A. Research Questions and Design

This study employs mixed-strategies design, combining quantitative survey records with qualitative insights from random interviews to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are university EFL students anxious about their English skill sessions?
2. Is their anxiety level different across the English skill sessions?
3. What are the primary sources of anxiety for each English skill session?
4. What do EFL students think about what their teachers should do to reduce anxiety in their English skill sessions?

The first recognition is quantitative, using a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire to measure tension throughout the four language skills. It has been validated in various studies across different languages and cultural contexts. At the same time, qualitative records offer a more profound understanding of how they felt in their language skill sessions. The investigation took place throughout the second semester of the 2023-2024 instructional year, right after the completion of Module 4 (General English), the last model in a series of four at a Vietnamese university in the southwest of Vietnam. The series includes Module 1: three credits; Module 2: four credits; Module 3: three credits; and Module 4: three credits), making the totality of 12 credits that non-English majors must pass for their graduation requirement.

B. Participants

This research involved university students from 12 instructional disciplines: Economics, Information Technology, Agri-aquaculture, Chemistry, Southern Khmer Language, Arts and Culture, and Medical and Pharmaceutical. They are not separated into different classes, but the university mixes them to study together in the same classes, accommodating around 30 students. However, those who hold a B1 certificate according to the Common European Framework (CEFR) are exempt from all these modules. Their age ranges from 18 to 34 years. While the number of males accounts for 38.9%, that of females is 61.1%. They studied English from primary school (three years), secondary school (four years), and high school (three years).

C. Instruments

The study applied a modified questionnaire of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure students' anxiety levels throughout all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The questionnaire consists of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale, starting from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), assessing three significant elements: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in the foreign language classroom. With its name focusing on general foreign language classroom anxiety, the authors pioneer the use of this questionnaire to examine students' level of anxiety in four English skills. After careful consideration, the authors removed one item from the original; it is Item 14 due to its primary focus on the influence of native speakers on speaking ability, leaving 32 items for investigation. The questionnaire comprises two parts. The first part seeks students'

demographic information (e.g., gender, age, university major), while the second targets measuring their language anxiety in the English language skill sessions.

Additionally, five students were invited for the interview to learn more about what language skill sessions they might tend to feel anxious about and what factors might make them anxious. In addition, their suggestions on what English teachers should do to help reduce anxiety in each session were encouraged. Their responses were recorded for analysis based on content analysis proposed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), as this would offer a subjective interpretation of their responses through the systematic classification process of coding and locating keywords and themes.

D. Data Collection Procedure

After making some improvements based on the pilot test's result with a group of students, the authors distributed a survey link through an online platform, targeting a network of students previously taught by the first author of this paper and his colleagues. Two hundred invitations were sent out, and 180 students accepted the survey, reaching a response rate of 90%.

E. Data Analysis

The following steps involved analysing the data using SPSS version 24. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the four skill questionnaires. The authors tested the mean scores and standard deviations across the four skills for each set of items. The authors examined mean differences by analysing a One-Sample T-Test to address the first research question by comparing anxiety levels across the four language skills. For interview script analysis, thematic analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to identify common themes in the interviews concerning sources of anxiety for each skill to address the second research question.

TABLE 1
RELIABILITY INDEXES

Listening's Cronbach's Alpha (32 items)	Speaking's Cronbach's Alpha (32 items)	Readings' Cronbach's Alpha (32 items)	Writing's Cronbach's Alpha (32 items)
.915	.949	.954	.949

The Cronbach Alpha values are 0.915 for Listening, 0.949 for speaking, 0.954 for reading, and 0.949 for writing, which are considered very high (Field, 2009). Hence, the indexes are reliable for further analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Statistic Results

Table 2 presents the statistical results of students' anxiety in the four language skill sessions. The number of participants is 180. There are four sets of questionnaires sent to students for their responses to each language skill session; however, the present paper, for convenient reference, presents the data of the participant's responses in one table, as shown in Table 2, with the mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each language skill session. Therefore, the participants would choose one language skill session according to their questionnaire as the sample provided. For example, "I never feel quite sure of myself when I *listen/speak/read/writing* my foreign language class.", which means that in the actual questionnaire, the participants would choose only one proper word, e.g., *listen, speak, read, or write*" for this statement. Yamashita and Millar (2021) say that (1) $M > 3.66$ is high, (2) $2.34 \leq M < 3.67$ is Moderate, and (3) $M < 2.34$ is Low. Thus, the authors use this suggestion as a criterion for discussion. Although Items 2, 5, 8, 11, 16, 17, 21, and 27 do not reflect students' anxiety, the authors did not reverse their mean scores because they are around 3.00 (ranging from 2.63 to 3.28), indicating a moderate response.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

No	Statements	Listening anxiety		Speaking anxiety		Reading anxiety		Writing anxiety	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I *listen/speak/read/write* in my foreign language class.	3.71	1.02	3.70	.890	3.51	.972	3.69	.986
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	2.89	1.25	2.99	1.11	3.16	1.04	3.11	1.13
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.69	1.09	3.60	1.01	3.55	.947	3.73	.789
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.79	1.02	3.76	.855	3.56	.964	3.61	.906
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	3.07	1.25	3.79	.824	3.63	.928	3.64	.876
6	During my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the session. (-)	3.06	1.10	3.04	1.09	3.13	1.07	3.23	1.05
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at *listening/speaking/reading/writing* than I am.	3.87	.884	3.76	.856	3.76	.809	3.81	.785
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	2.63	1.04	3.04	.991	3.31	.929	3.07	1.07
9	I start to panic when I have to complete tasks in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session without preparation.	4.01	.974	3.77	.871	3.72	.859	3.86	.820
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* tests.	4.09	.854	3.95	.821	3.84	.851	3.89	.804
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over the *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	3.29	.989	3.37	.910	3.41	.908	3.28	.873
12	In my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.96	.988	3.62	.992	3.56	.964	3.75	.902
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.14	1.10	3.31	1.03	3.31	.965	3.54	.971
14	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.37	1.14	3.47	1.01	3.50	.900	3.59	.908
15	Even if I am well prepared for my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session, I feel anxious about it.	3.95	.854	3.69	.905	3.62	.916	3.79	.841
16	I often feel like not going to my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	2.98	1.11	3.01	1.10	3.09	1.03	3.20	1.09
17	I feel confident when I *listen/speak/read/write* in my English class. (-)	2.76	1.09	2.98	.989	3.15	.942	3.01	1.05
18	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	2.98	1.16	3.11	1.05	3.23	.992	3.27	1.02
19	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.77	.980	3.62	.910	3.59	.926	3.68	.868
20	The more I study for a *listening/speaking/reading/writing* test, the more confused I get.	3.42	1.12	3.34	.975	3.41	.961	3.53	.960
21	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session. (-)	3.28	1.14	3.33	1.00	3.36	.973	3.40	1.02
22	I always feel that the other students *listen to/speak/read/write* English better than I do.								
23	I feel very self-conscious about my performance in front of other students in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	2.72	1.10	3.07	1.03	3.13	.963	3.10	1.05
24	English lessons in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session move so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	3.66	.935 47	3.62	.928	3.47	.918	3.49	.894
25	I feel more tense and nervous in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* than in other language skill sessions.	3.70	.985	3.57	.928	3.43	.928	3.54	.917
26	I get nervous and confused when I am asked to complete tasks in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.62	1.04	3.68	.901	3.51	.912	3.70	.915
27	When I'm on my way to my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session, I feel very sure and relaxed. (-)	3.08	1.00	3.29	.930	3.28	.878	3.31	.946
28	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.73	.881	3.69	.880	3.58	.884	3.73	.843
29	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to *listen/speak/read/write* well in English class.	3.73	.896	3.64	.869	3.65	.894	3.71	.868
30	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at my performance in *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.66	.999	3.53	.942	3.55	.935	3.63	.909
32	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance in my *listening/speaking/reading/writing* session.	3.87	.887	3.79	.775	3.73	.823	3.71	.875
	Total	3.41	.545	3.45	.592	3.44	.603	3.50	.586

The results presented in Table 2 show the descriptive statistics of students' anxiety levels across the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The overall mean score of each session is as follows: speaking session (3.41), speaking (3.45), reading (3.44), and writing (3.50). These indexes indicate that the students generally show moderate anxiety in all these English skill sessions.

The paper first examined all the items that obtained high mean scores for the listening session. Many items achieved high mean scores, ranging from 3.69 to 4.09. They are Items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19, 25, 29, and 32. No items have

mean scores below 2.34, which indicates that the students experienced a moderate to high level of anxiety in the English listening session.

Regarding the speaking session, items that received high mean scores are Items 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 26, 28, and 32. The mean scores range from 3.68 to 3.95. No items are observed to have mean scores below 2.34, indicating that the students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety in their English-speaking sessions.

Regarding the reading session, the items receiving high mean scores are Items 7, 9, 10, and 32. No items are observed to have mean scores below 2.34, suggesting that students underwent moderate to high levels of anxiety. Of note is that few items with high mean scores are observed while the range of the mean scores of the rest in this group is moderate, from 3.09 to 3.65.

Regarding the writing session, the items having the highest mean scores are Items 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19, 26, 28, 29, and 32, ranging from 3.68 to 3.89. The mean scores of the rest in this group range from 3.01 to 3.63. The result indicates that the students experienced moderate to higher levels of anxiety in the English writing session. The authors use the One-Sample T Test to examine if the language skills' mean scores are significantly statistically different. Table 3 illustrates this information.

TABLE 3
ONE-SAMPLE T-TEST

	Test Value = 0					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Listening	83.96	179	.000	3.41	3.33	3.49
Speaking	78.27	179	.000	3.45	3.36	3.54
Reading	76.62	179	.000	3.44	3.35	3.53
Writing	80.04	179	.000	3.50	3.41	3.58

Table 3 depicts the results obtained from a One-Sample T-Test, which compares the anxiety levels across the four English skills. The mean scores for the listening session ($M = 3.41$, $t = 83.96$, $p < .001$), the speaking session ($M = 3.45$, $t = 78.27$, $p < .001$), reading ($M = 3.44$, $t = 76.62$, $p < .001$), and writing ($M = 3.50$, $t = 80.04$, $p < .001$), respectively advise that anxiety is statistically significant across all skills, with no skill showing a clear advantage over the others in terms of reduced anxiety. The results underscore that students' anxiety levels are at the end of the extreme of the moderate level and consistent within the four English language skills. Though minor variations depend on certain specific activities, there is no clear reduction tendency of anxiety in any language skill sessions.

B. Regarding the Interview Responses

The paper collected all the keywords in the interviewees' responses based on interview questions. After the greeting parts and the student's declaration of willingness to participate in the interview, the authors made commitments not to reveal their personal information, and their responses are used for this research only. The questions used in the interview are "Which skill do you think causes you more anxiety?", "Why do you think so?" "What do you want your teacher to do in your class so that you can feel more comfortable studying with him or her?".

Responses to these questions are classified into three groups based on Vietnamese news. Hence, the authors translated their interviews and responses into English and proofread them carefully before analysing them according to themes and keywords. A back-translation (Brislin, 1980) method was used to determine the accuracy of the texts. Below are their responses translated into English. The scripts show that four out of five participants confess that speaking is the most nervous skill that they experience. Only one student is concerned about her listening ability, causing her stress. Interestingly, no students mentioned writing and reading anxiety.

Student A: I think speaking is the most crucial skill because we must speak when we meet native speakers. However, I feel very stressed when I meet them; I cannot use my English well to talk to them. In my class, I feel anxious when my teacher calls on my name. I started to tremble. I don't know why I cannot use words fluently to express ideas. I cannot make myself clear enough. Therefore, my teacher needs to help me give me some vocabulary when finding words to express my ideas. Moreover, he has to understand our speaking abilities because speaking skills are almost ignored in high school's curriculum.

Student B: Listening is the most challenging skill because when you are asked to do comprehension listening tests, you have to attend very much to pick up the answers. Then, your teacher invites you to present your answer, so I think it's more nervous than other skills. I don't know why I cannot recognise the words I hear, but I know most when my teacher writes them on the board. Hence, my teacher should use some keywords and practice pronouncing them before listening.

Student C: Speaking is the most nervous skill, so I feel nervous when my teacher invites me to role-play in front of the class. I usually feel better if I plan my answers, but I feel nervous if my teacher suddenly asks me, so my teacher should give me the topic and time to prepare my answers first.

Student D: Speaking is the most nervous skill. I think so because I feel shy around my friends and teachers. I was afraid of speaking because I needed to practice it better in high school, and when I came to this university, my teacher did not spend much time on speaking. He must spend time on other skills and prepare us for the final tests. Hence, my teacher should train us to speak only in small groups. I don't like to speak in front of everyone.

Student E: Speaking is the most nervous skill, so I often fear this session. I cannot pronounce well, so I fear using my words orally during my speaking performance. Hence, my teacher should let us practice reading aloud often.

As seen, except for one student, the other students agree that the speaking session is the most nervous. Factors that cause them anxiety are due to a lack of fluency, intelligibility issues, being weak at spontaneous use of English, less exposure to speaking practice, and pronunciation problems. The one student who confesses that listening is the most nervous said that she has a problem with word recognition of words in listening scripts. Hence, she suggested that the English teacher introduce the class to new words related to the topics and practice reading them correctly before having students listen to the passages.

C. Discussion

As seen, except for one student, the other students agree that the speaking session is the most nervous. Factors that cause them anxiety are due to a lack of fluency, intelligibility issues, being weak at spontaneous use of English, less exposure to speaking practice, and pronunciation problems. The one student who confesses that listening is the most nervous said that she has a problem with word recognition of words in listening scripts. She suggested that the English teacher should introduce the class to new words related to the topics and practice reading them correctly before having students listen to the passages.

The findings of this study confirm that Vietnamese EFL students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety across the four primary language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These results are consistent with previous research in foreign FLA and offer valuable insights into the factors contributing to language learning anxiety in a classroom setting.

Students reported the highest levels of anxiety during speaking and listening tasks, which aligns with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) framework of FLCA. The students' fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension were particularly evident in the interviews, where many participants highlighted their anxiety about speaking in front of others or misunderstanding spoken language. These findings suggest that anxiety is not equally distributed across language skills, with speaking anxiety being the most intense due to the immediate and interactive nature of oral communication (Liu & Hong, 2021).

Furthermore, these results can be effectively analysed through Spielberger's (1983) State-Trait Anxiety Theory. Many students in this study demonstrated situational or state anxiety, especially when performing spontaneous speaking tasks or listening to unfamiliar words. This situational anxiety may stem from the unpredictability of classroom interactions, where students fear embarrassment or failure. Interestingly, no student reported feeling consistently anxious across all skills, suggesting that the anxiety they experience is more state based, linked to specific language tasks, rather than an enduring trait of their personality.

The study also supports Bandura's (1986) Self-Efficacy Theory, as students who expressed lower confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks (e.g., speaking in front of native speakers) were more likely to experience higher anxiety. It is particularly evident in students' hesitation to speak during class or their fear of being unable to express themselves fluently. In this context, students' lack of self-efficacy appears to exacerbate their language anxiety, particularly in speaking and listening, where they perceive a higher risk of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated.

Additionally, Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis provides an insightful lens to understand the negative impact of anxiety on language acquisition. The high levels of speaking and listening anxiety reported by students likely act as an affective filter, hindering their ability to process and produce language effectively. This theory may explain why students expressed a need for more structured preparation time before speaking tasks to lower their anxiety and improve their performance.

The Control-Value Theory (Pekrun, 2006, 2014) also helps to explain why speaking and listening tasks triggered higher anxiety than reading and writing. Students' emotional responses were likely driven by their perception of limited control over these tasks, particularly spontaneous speaking or encountering unfamiliar listening content. Moreover, the high value placed on speaking and listening proficiency in real-life communication likely intensified these emotional responses, resulting in more significant anxiety during these sessions. In short, the present study's findings are consistent with previous works (e.g., Dewaele & Li, 2020; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Liu & Hong, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2019; Tóth, 2021) as most participants experienced anxiety across language skill sessions.

V. Conclusions

A. Findings

This study sheds light on the anxiety experienced by Vietnamese EFL students across the four core language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, which underscores that while anxiety is present across all skills, it is most pronounced in speaking, listening, and writing. These results echo the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986). The study confirms that foreign language anxiety remains a significant barrier to effective language learning. It affects students' ability to perform in class, reducing their confidence and hindering their progress. The fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and lack of preparation contribute to heightened anxiety, especially during spontaneous speaking tasks and comprehension-based listening activities.

Furthermore, the implications of these findings suggest that targeted interventions are needed to reduce anxiety, particularly in the areas of speaking and listening. Strategies such as providing more preparation time, practising vocabulary and pronunciation before listening tasks, and encouraging small group work for speaking exercises can help alleviate some of the anxiety associated with these skills. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of understanding and addressing anxiety in EFL classrooms. Educators can create more supportive and effective learning environments by adopting a more anxiety-sensitive approach to teaching and learning, ultimately improving language acquisition and student outcomes. Future research should continue to explore the dynamic relationship between anxiety, emotional factors, and language performance, with a focus on developing and testing practical interventions tailored to specific language skills.

B. Implications

The findings from this study have several critical implications for English language teaching, particularly in the context of Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Understanding the sources and levels of anxiety that students experience across different language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—can help educators develop targeted strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance learning outcomes. First, Skill-Specific Pedagogical Approaches, as Vygotsky (1978) mentioned, can help. The high levels of anxiety reported in speaking and listening suggest that traditional teaching methods may not adequately address the emotional barriers students face in these areas. Teachers should consider implementing more communicative and supportive classroom practices, such as structured group work, role-playing, and real-life simulations. Second, according to Bandura's (1986) Self-Efficacy Theory, students who lack confidence in their abilities are more likely to experience anxiety. Teachers should focus on building students' self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback, breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts, and celebrating small successes in the classroom.

Moreover, confidence-building activities such as guided practice, peer feedback, and low-stakes oral presentations can be practical. Third, Krashen (1982) advised that reducing anxiety is crucial for language acquisition. Teachers can lessen students' affective filter by creating a supportive, low-stress classroom environment, allowing more preparation time before speaking tasks, offering vocabulary and pronunciation support before listening activities, and allowing students to work in pairs or small groups before presenting to the entire class. Fourth, the findings reveal that students experience varying levels of anxiety across different language skills, with speaking, listening, and writing being the most anxiety-inducing. Teachers should consider customising anxiety reduction strategies for each language skill, such as scaffolded discussions and samples. For listening, pre-listening activities such as vocabulary building or predicting content can help students feel more prepared and less anxious about comprehension tasks. Fifth, Spielberger's (1983) State-Trait Anxiety Theory emphasises the situational nature of anxiety; teachers can incorporate emotional regulation techniques, such as mindfulness practices, before presentations or listening tests. Finally, technology Integration for Anxiety Reduction can help. For instance, students can use language learning apps and online platforms to practice language skills.

C. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One limitation is its relatively small sample size of 180 students, all from a single university in southern Vietnam. While this sample provides valuable insights into the anxiety levels of Vietnamese EFL students, the results may not be fully generalisable to students in other regions or countries. Future research can consider a diverse sample and a larger sample. Another limitation can be based mainly on quantitative data. Although qualitative interviews provided additional insights, the small number of interview participants may limit important information about factors and solutions to solving anxiety in EFL classes.

A cross-section design is needed because language anxiety can fluctuate over time due to increased exposure to the language or changes in teaching methods. A longitudinal study for this case can help. Another limitation is the need to investigate other influential external factors, such as students' family pressure, social expectations, or cultural attitudes toward English learning (Khau & Huynh, 2022). Finally, the instrument used in this study, adapted from FLCA, tends to focus on more communicative aspects of language skills. The study can adapt different scaled instruments like the Daly-Miller Test proposed by Daly and Miller (1975), which measures students' anxiety in writing. Moreover, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire proposed by Zhai and Aryadoust (2024) to measure listening and the Cognitive, Metacognitive, and Classroom Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale by Hamada and Takaki (2021) can also be considered. Hence, it is plausible that a study can use four different measurements to measure EFL students' anxiety without exhausting them by answering the questionnaire.

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Le Son Thach is working at the School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University (TVU), Vietnam. He received his Master's Degree in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) at Hawai'i Pacific University, Honolulu City, Hawai'i State, USA. His research background mainly focuses on English skills, English pronunciation, written translation and motivation. He has several publications on the national and international journals.

Anh Hoang Khau is working at the School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University (TVU), Vietnam. He received his master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to speakers of other languages) at California State University, Fullerton, USA, and is currently doing his doctorate in Bilingual Education at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. His research background mainly focuses on English Education, English skills, motivation, and translation. He has many publications in several prestigious journals and international conferences, such as Heliyon, Language Testing in Asia, International Journal of Instruction, GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies, International Journal of Education and Practice, International Journal of Higher Education, Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Journal of Siberian Federal University - Humanities & Social Sciences, Vietnam Journal of Education, and others, and so on.