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Adaptation and Validation of Second Language Students' Speaking Anxiety Scale

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Abstract. Understanding the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety is essential for vocational students, as this anxiety factor can significantly impact their speaking performance in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. However, validated instruments tailored to this subject remain limited. This study aimed to adapt and validate the Students' Speaking Anxiety Scale (SSAS) for 274 students enrolled at the six vocational colleges (VC) in Sarawak, Malaysia, with the goal of identifying the factors these students perceived as contributing to their speaking anxiety. The adaptation and validation process were conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify the three potential dimensions of the scale: Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety. Phase 2 applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the scale's robust overall fit. The results showed high internal consistency, along with strong construct, convergent and discriminant validity. Overall, these findings offer empirical evidence supporting the SSAS as a reliable and valid instrument for assessing speaking anxiety among VC students and guiding future efforts to improve their speaking performance in ESL settings.

Keywords: Students' Speaking Anxiety; English as a Second Language; Adaptation; Validation

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language and is a compulsory subject across all levels of education, as outlined in the Malaysian National Education Policy (Adickalam & Md Yunus, 2022). However, many students continue to encounter difficulties in speaking English, often showing reluctance and minimal engagement in speaking tasks (Nadesan & Md. Shah, 2020). Despite 11 years of formal education in English from primary (6 years) through secondary school (5 years), many students fail to achieve the expected level of fluency (Che Musa et al., 2012; Kannan, 2009; Mat & Yunus, 2014) due to their lack of confidence to speak the language fluently (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Nadesan & Md. Shah, 2020).

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The lack of speaking proficiency among Malaysian students is of great concern as the ability to speak English proficiently has become increasingly important in the job market (Ne'Matullah et al., 2023). This is further supported by previous research (Abdul Latif, 2021; Francis et al., 2020; McGunagle & Zizka, 2020; Mehar Singh, 2021; Mulyono et al., 2023; Ne'Matullah et al., 2023; Singh & Harun, 2020), which highlights that strong English speaking and communication skills are highly sought after by employers and are crucial for success across various professional fields (Ting et al., 2017).

In Malaysia, this issue also affects vocational college (VC) students, as they are recruited from mainstream secondary schools after completing three years of secondary education. Vocational colleges are managed and operated by the Vocational Technical Education & Training Division (TVET), Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) (Jamil et al., 2023) and offer students the opportunity to begin TVET education as early as 16 years old and to graduate with a diploma (Syed Chear & Arifin, 2024).

Since 2012, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) has implemented the Vocational Education Transformation (TPV) to elevate vocational education as a primary education pathway (Latif, 2020). The transformation is one of the positive efforts to uplift education so as to be a fit for the Industrial Revolution 4.0 in the technical and vocational fields (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2011; Nasir et al., 2020). Changes to the technical and vocational fields have led to the specialisation of vocational colleges to focus on producing the best graduates to become highly skilled workers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2011).

Hence, as one of the educational institutions under TVET, VC carries a big responsibility to harness human resources to develop knowledgeable, skilled and qualified individuals who are recognised by the industries and possess high employability skills (Kandar, 2014) in alignment with National TVET Policy 2030 (Secretariat of the National TVET Council, 2024). To possess high employability, the ability to speak English proficiently is of the utmost important (Ne'Matullah et al., 2023) while, vice versa, deficiencies in communication skills, particularly in speaking, present a significant obstacle for fresh graduates, often hindering them from securing jobs within 3-6 months after completing their studies (Krishnan et al., 2019).

Many graduates, whether from TVET or non-TVET backgrounds, continue to face challenges in securing employment. TVET graduates, in the opinion of industry experts, need to possess strong social and communication skills. At the college level, these abilities must be acquired both directly and indirectly (Nayan & Nayan, 2024). The employability skill constructs and dimensions as proposed by Rahmat et al. (2016) emphasise various aspects of communication skills, including effective listening and speaking techniques, as well as strong reading and writing strategies. However, this study focuses specifically on speaking skills due to their importance for the employability of TVET graduates, particularly in successfully passing job interviews (Krishnan et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2017, in contrast to other

English language skills. Speaking, after all, is recognised as a core component of communication (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Since VC students are learners of a second language, they are therefore susceptible to difficulties in developing effective speaking skills (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Nadesan & Md. Shah, 2020).

Hence, the focus of study is to delve into the challenges faced by them and to identify the factors affecting their speaking performance in ESL classrooms. For vocational colleges in Malaysia, speaking is emphasised as part of the diploma programme to produce VC graduates competent in spoken English through the MPU 2222 English for Communication course. The course syllabus is designed to enhance communication skills in English through practical activities, enabling students to effectively use the language in various contexts, engaging in conversations, and delivering oral presentations.

It emphasises role-playing, group work and discussions to ensure a significant amount of speaking practice and aims to foster students' confidence in speaking in English by promoting active participation in class (Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Division in Malaysia, 2018). It consists of three continuous assessments carried out throughout the semester as stipulated in the Course Outline whereby the students are expected to present verbally a well-organised presentation on a selected topic using visual aids and to demonstrate effective speaking skills in groups through role play.

Based on the course syllabus and Course Outline mentioned above, it clearly indicates that VC students in Malaysia are bound to participate actively in a high number of oral communicative activities in ESL classrooms while attending the MPU 2222 English for Communication Course. However, as second language learners, speaking is a challenging task to them in their meeting the course requirement (Bergmann et al., 2015; Idrus & Salleh, 2017; Khasbani, 2018; Savaşçı, 2014; Siripipatthanakul et al., 2023) and, therefore, this study is interested to develop and validate a scale to identify the factors that could contribute to VC students' speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms based on their perceptions.

2. Literature Review

Notwithstanding there are many factors affecting students' speaking performance, this study only focuses on anxiety as a pertinent factor that could affect VC students' speaking abilities in ESL classrooms. In the field of foreign language teaching, understanding, and measuring students' anxiety is crucial to facilitate effective learning. This form of anxiety, specifically associated with the context of learning a second language, manifests through tension, nervousness and worry in situations perceived as stressful, such as speaking skills (Huang, 2014).

Anxiety is an important variable directly related to success in language learning. Specifically, language anxiety "encompasses the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue" (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 103). Its impact extends across various areas, such as social interactions, professional development

and academic endeavours. Furthermore, anxiety presents a significant hurdle in the realm of second language acquisition and its detrimental impact is widely recognised and holds s a central role among the factors influencing language acquisition (Kianinezhad, 2014). Although anxiety can appear in various situations, the kind that arises during language learning is considered unique (Zamri & Hashim, 2023).

Horwitz et al. (1986) share a similar perspective whereby they consider language anxiety to be "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning" (p. 128). Anxiety causes learners to be apprehensive and fearful, which leads to their poor oral performances (Felicity, 2018). Such feelings of fear, stress or nervousness are considered as speaking anxiety that could hamper students' learning of the language (Felicity, 2018).

Hence, speaking anxiety is commonly seen as a major barrier to effective speaking performances and has been thoroughly examined by many scholars (Achanan et al., 2021; Anthony, 2023; Bahadur & Hashim, 2024; Sim et al., 2020; Zamri & Hashim, 2023). These studies show that students may experience physical and psychological symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, low self-esteem, anxiety about speaking English in front of others, wariness of interaction in class, fear of evaluation from peers, and worry about poor performance during assessments.

Therefore, it can be concluded that speaking anxiety is a common challenge faced by ESL learners during speaking activities in ESL classrooms. Students who regularly make errors because of speaking anxiety tend to lose their self-confidence and are reluctant to take the opportunity to speak again when it arises (Kucuk, 2023). As a result, they develop a quiet presence in the classroom, and overcoming this fear becomes a challenging and difficult journey for them (Kucuk & Daskan, 2023).

Given that speaking anxiety had the potential to impact VC students' speaking performance negatively, this study therefore aimed to adapt and validate a tool to identify the key factors contributing to such anxiety among VC students from six vocational colleges in Sarawak, as based on their perceptions. The study employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), who were among the first to introduce a scale designed to assess anxiety in foreign language learning contexts.

Based on the instrument, they proposed a three-factor model that included the three domains, namely Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. They argued that these three forms of anxiety are fundamental to the concept of foreign language anxiety and together cause language learning to be a daunting task for a learner. With this view of language anxiety, they devised an instrument called the FLCAS, constructed based on self-reports from students and their own clinical experiences. The finalised version of the FLCAS contained 33 items which employs 5-point Likert-type scales with selections ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Past studies

have significantly shown that FLCAS can be used as a tool to identify the factors contributing to speaking anxiety problems among the students (Achanan et al., 2021; Anthony, 2023; Bahadur & Hashim, 2024; Sim et al., 2020; Zamri & Hashim, 2023). All these studies indicated that the three elements of FLCAS as proposed by Horwtiz et al. (1986) were responsible for contributing to speaking anxiety among the students.

Tools like the FLCAS as developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) are used for measuring students' anxiety in second language learning (Huang, 2014) and, since its introduction, the FLCAS has gained significant recognition in academic research, becoming a widely used resource for assessing anxiety in language classrooms (Botes et al., 2022). Over time, this questionnaire has undergone extensive psychometric research, including adaptations and abbreviated versions, to ensure its relevance and applicability across different linguistic and educational contexts (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2016; Liu & Huang, 2011).

The adaptation process of the FLCAS has involved its translation into various languages including Hungarian, Persian, Arabic, Thai and Spanish, reflecting its global applicability in countries as diverse as Spain, Chile, Japan, Korea, France and Serbia (Alidoost et al., 2013; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Pérez-Paredes & Martínez-Sánchez, 2001; Riquelme-mella et al, 2015; Tanielian, 2014; Tóth, 2008). Validation of FLCAS has been previously carried out prior to this study; however, these studies were few in number and most were done overseas and from different perceptions. For instance, those by Zhang and Lai (2023) and Wang and Liu (2024) were done in China and from perceptions of university and high school students, respectively.

In the same vein, a study carried out by Quispe-Sanca et al. (2024) was based on secondary school students' perception in Peru. The variability in the anxiety experiences among different student populations reinforces the importance of carefully adapted and validated measurement tools to accurately reflect the realities of students in different educational contexts (Quispe-Sanca et al., 2024). However, the fact that all the previous studies were done overseas and not in the context of VC Sarawak, Malaysia, highlights a research gap as different educational contexts may lead to different interpretations or experiences of FLCAS (Ahmed et al., 2025), which could limit its applicability in the context of VC students in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Hence, adapting and validating the FLCAS in the context of Sarawak's vocational colleges is essential, as current tools may not adequately represent the distinctive speaking anxiety issues encountered by VC students in this setting. Thus, this study aims to identify whether the 3-factor models, like that advocated by Horwitz et al.'s (1986) original model, namely CA, TA and FNE, are responsible for students' speaking anxiety. The newly developed scale can provide an insight into the contributing factors of speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms based on students' perception. A clearer understanding of these elements will then support the design of more precise and effective strategies to improve students' speaking performance in ESL environments, while also filling an important gap in the local

academic literature. For validation purposes, both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted, both of which are standard statistical procedures in psychometric research to assess the validity of measured variables (Fuad et al., 2025). The study employed EFA to explore and assess the usefulness of the items measuring the construct, and CFA to validate the measurement of the construct to ensure scale model fitness (Baistaman et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2029). EFA was carried out using data from the pilot study while CFA used field study data (Baistaman et al., 2020).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach using the survey method, which is well-suited for collecting numerical data from a broad population. The survey technique is widely used to obtain insights on various topics, such as individuals' attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Participants

This study involved a population of 555 diploma-level students from six vocational colleges in Sarawak, Malaysia. The sample size was determined following the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, which recommends that, for population between 555 and 600, a sample size of 226 to 234 is appropriate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). However, to obtain a more precise figure, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was applied assuming a population proportion of 0.5, a 5% margin of error, and a 95% confidence level (Uakarn et al., 2021), yielding a calculated sample size of 227. To mitigate potential issues such as non-responses, incomplete data and questionnaire returns, a 40% increase was applied to the initial sample size, following recommendations by and Enders (2003) and Salkind (2012). This brought the final required sample size to 318.

An additional 40% was included to account for potential challenges in data collection, due to the use of a postal survey method and the extensive geographical distribution of the six vocational colleges, which could lead to a lower response rate. In total, 318 respondents were involved and ultimately 274 questionnaires were returned representing 86.7% of the response rate, which is considered high by Clark and Creswell (2015). This exceeded the minimum threshold of 200 participants typically recommended for structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis (Kline, 2005; Muda et al., 2018), thereby ensuring sufficient representation and robust analytical outcomes.

This study employed the simple random sampling method, which guaranteed that every member of the population had an equal probability of being selected. This approach ensured that participant selection was entirely random, thereby reducing the likelihood of bias (Awang, 2012; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Moreover, the respondents for this study are homogenous because all of them are from the same group of students, studying at the six vocational colleges in Sarawak. Furthermore, it is compulsory for them to take MPU 2222 English for Communication course during the second semester of their diploma programme.

An online random number generator was used to select the participants randomly (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

3.3 Research Instrument and Method of Analysis

The researcher designed the Students' Speaking Anxiety Scale (SSAS) based on items taken from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) advocated by Horwitz et al. (1986). The development of FLCAS was related to the profound effects of anxiety on foreign language learning whereby learners reported that they were afraid to speak in the foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Adaptation and validation of SSAS allowed for an in-depth exploration of elements that might lead to students' speaking anxiety during the MPU 2222 English for Communication Course in vocational colleges (VC) settings. The three related performance-anxiety dimensions namely Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation served as sub-constructs in this study and formed the basis for developing a suitable SSSA to identify the factors contributing to vocational college students' speaking anxiety in ESL learning environments.

In this study, the researcher assessed the variables using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale used in this study was an interval scale designed to fulfil the requirements for parametric analysis (Awang et al., 2023). Prior to conducting the pilot study, the content and face validity evaluation of the instrument was carried out to ensure its quality. Face validity refers to the subjective evaluation by researchers on whether the items in a measurement tool seem suitable, clear and relevant to the concept being assessed (Oluwatayo, 2012).

In contrast, content validity relates to how well the items or questions in the instrument fully and appropriately capture the key aspects of the concept being studied (Sangoseni et al., 2013). According to Polit and Beck (2006), the content validity index must be evaluated by a minimum of three experts. This group of experts must determine (i) if the proposed item was appropriate; (ii) if the number of items were appropriate; (iii) if the correct language, sentence structure, and terminology were used; and (iv) evaluate the items on 5-point Likert scale (Zakaria & Hanid, 2023). In this study, the content and face validity procedures involved three experts in Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) studies.

Based on the expert review, no items were removed from SSAS, and the total items remained at 33. Subsequently, SSAS was submitted to the experts for the translation process. Research using a foreign language version of the questionnaire (English language) needs to go through forward-translation and back-translation, which means translating twice from the original language (English language) to Malay and then back to English language (Sireci & Berberoglu, 2000). This is done because Malay language is the national language of Malaysia whilst English language is the second language being taught in Malaysian schools. In this study, the forward and backward translations were

done by two School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC+) experts in Malay and English language, respectively. The expert panel's responses and feedback were used to improve the research instrument development process (Mohd Rodzi et al., 2023). Subsequently, a pilot test of the revised and translated questionnaire was then conducted with the target population (Muda et al., 2018).

4. Results

4.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using IBM-SPSS version 25.0. to identify the underlying factors that influenced variables and to examine the variance they share (Costello & Obsorne, 2005). Before performing analysis, it was essential to determine if the data set was appropriate for this type of analysis. As shown in Table 1, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.849, which surpassed the minimum requirement of 0.7 (Kaiser, 1974), indicating the adequacy of the sample. In addition, the significance value for Bartlett's test of sphericity was 0.000, meeting the required significance level of less than 0.05 (Hoque & Awang, 2016; Hoque et al., 2018; Muda et al., 2018). Therefore, the data were considered appropriate for conducting factor analysis.

Table 1: The KMO and Bartlett's Test Score

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.849
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3801.431
	Df	528
	Sig.	.000

The EFA revealed three distinct factors, each with eigenvalue greater than 1, which is considered acceptable based on the criterion that components should have eigenvalue above 1 (Shkeer & Awang, 2019), as presented in Table 2. After rotation, these factors explained 34.515%, 14.501% and 11.508% of the variance, respectively, resulting in a total cumulative variance of 60.524%. This level of explained variance is deemed acceptable, as it surpasses the minimum threshold of 60% (Rahlin et al., 2019).

Table 2: Total Variance Explained for Every Component

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	11.390	34.515	34.515	11.390	34.515	34.515	8.342	25.278	25.278
2	4.785	14.501	49.016	4.785	14.501	49.016	6.959	21.089	46.367
3	3.798	11.508	60.524	3.798	11.508	60.524	4.672	14.157	60.524

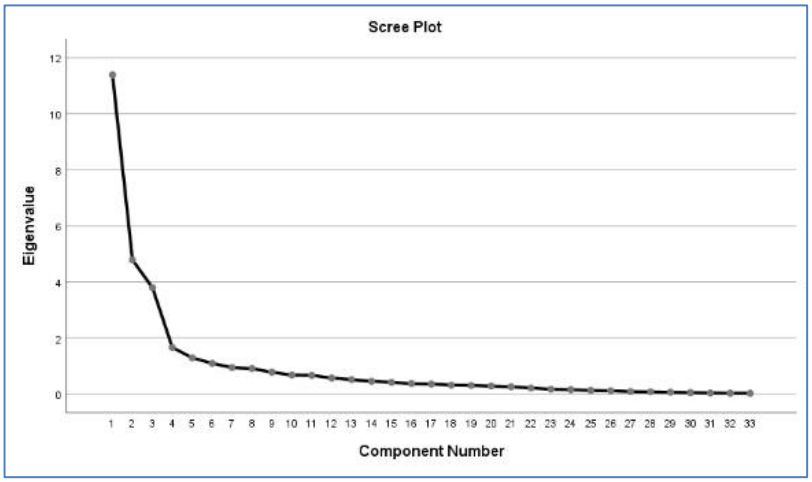

Figure 1: The Scree Plot for Students' Speaking Anxiety Construct

Regarding the scree plot, Figure 1 illustrates that three components emerged with 33 measuring items divided into three distinctive components.

Table 3: The Rotated Component Matrix for Students' Speaking Anxiety Construct

	Component		
	1	2	3
CA1	.836		
CA2	.892		
CA3	.820		
CA6	.921		
CA8	.937		
CA12	.847		
CA14	.830		
CA15	.925		
CA16	.629		
FNE1		.934	
FNE2		.522	
FNE3		.909	
FNE4		.901	
FNE5		.856	
FNE6		.866	
FNE7		.847	
TA1			.931
TA3			.906
TA5			.873
TA6			.892
TA8			.914

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation

Subsequently, the number of items for each component was determined using rotated component matrix. As shown in Table 3, 21 items were grouped into three distinct factors. The first component consisted of nine items which was named as 'Communication Apprehension', the second component included seven items

and was named as 'Fear of Negative Evaluation', and the third component comprised five items and was named as 'Test Anxiety'. Out of the original 33 items, 21 items were retained, while 12 items were excluded due to low factor loadings (below 0.50) in accordance with the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2019).

Finally, the study concluded by evaluating the internal reliability of the measurement items using Cronbach's alpha. All three components recorded Cronbach's alpha values of 0.921 which was considered excellent since it exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Table 4: The Internal Reliability Value for Students' Speaking Anxiety Scale

Reliability Statistics		
Component	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
All Items	21	0.921

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Once the items and their components were determined through EFA, the 21 items with factor loading greater than 0.5 were used to collect data from the field study. Using these data, the study employed CFA to validate the Students' Speaking Anxiety construct. The CFA would thus determine the validity and reliability of the instruments for measuring the construct (Mohamad et al., 2019). For this study, CFA as carried out using IBM-SPSS-Amos version 24.0. and necessitates three types of validity: Construct Validity, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity (Awang et al., 2023; Muda et al., 2018; Yusof et al., 2017).

4.2.1. Construct Validity Assessment

According to 2023), construct validity is assessed through the fitness indexes. There are three fit categories to fulfill namely, Absolute Fit, Incremental Fit and Parsimonious Fit. In this regard, the acceptable indexes for CFA are normed Chi-square (ChiSq/df) < 3.0, comparative fit index (CFA) > 0.90, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08 (Awang et al., 2023; Baharum et al., 2023; Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023). These three fitness indexes obtained from the CFA results in Figure 2 are presented in Table 5.

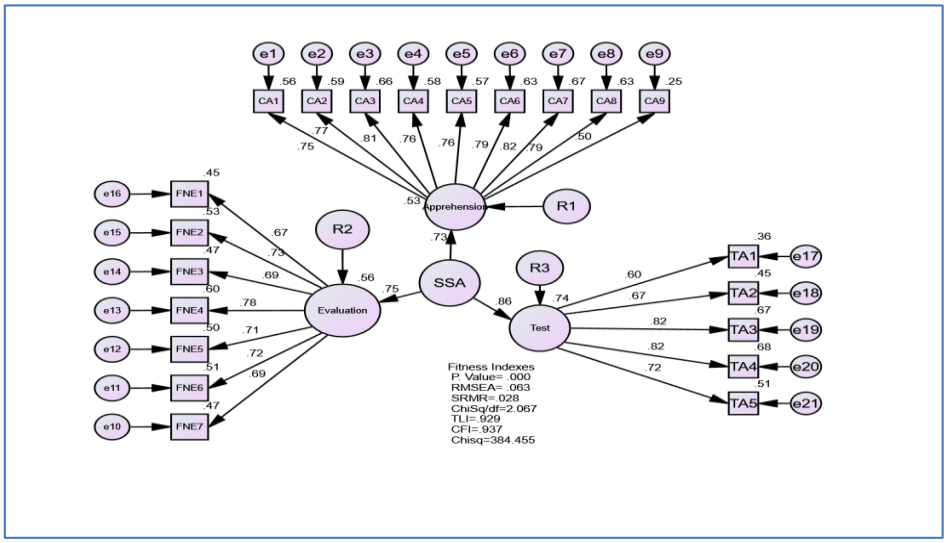

Figure 2: The Measurement Model for SSA Construct

Table 5: The Assessment for Construct Validity

Name of category	Name of index	Level of acceptance	Results	Comment
Absolute Fit Index	**RMSEA**	RMSEA < 0.08	0.063	Achieved
Incremental Fit Index	**CFI**	CFI > 0.90	0.937	Achieved
Parsimonious Fit Index	**ChiSq /df**	Chi-Square/ df < 3.0,	2.067	Achieved

In this study, the fitness indexes in Table 5 have achieved the requirement of construct validity with ChiSq/df = 2.067 (<3.0), CFI = 0.937 (>0.90), and RMSEA = 0.063 (<0.08). Thus, we can conclude that SSA is a valid construct.

4.2.2. Convergent Validity

In CFA, convergent validity is evaluated through composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). CR measures the overall reliability of a set of items loaded on a latent variable (Traymbak et al., 2022) and AVE measures the variance attributed to the construct in relation to the measurement error (Yang et al., 2025). The acceptable values for both CR and AVE are exceeding 0.60 and 0.5, respectively (Hair et al., 2019; Safiih & Nor Azreen, 2016; Triwidyati & Tentama, 2020). In this research, CFA was carried out on three factors encompassing 21 items. According to the results in Table 6, all three factors showed CR values exceeding 0.60 and AVE values above 0.50, demonstrating strong convergent validity. These outcomes suggest that the developed instruments consistently evaluate the SSA construct and effectively measure the intended aspects (Khanal & Chhetri, 2024).

Table 6: The Assessment for AVE and CR

Construct	Item		Factor Loading	CR (Above 0.6)	AVE (Above 0.5)
SSA	Apprehension		.73	**.825**	**.612**
	Evaluation		.75		
	Test		.86		

4.2.3. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is another condition for validity and involves analysing the strength of the correlation between the three components. The discriminant validity of SSA construct is achieved if the coefficient of correlation among the components does not exceed 0.85 (Dani et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2015).

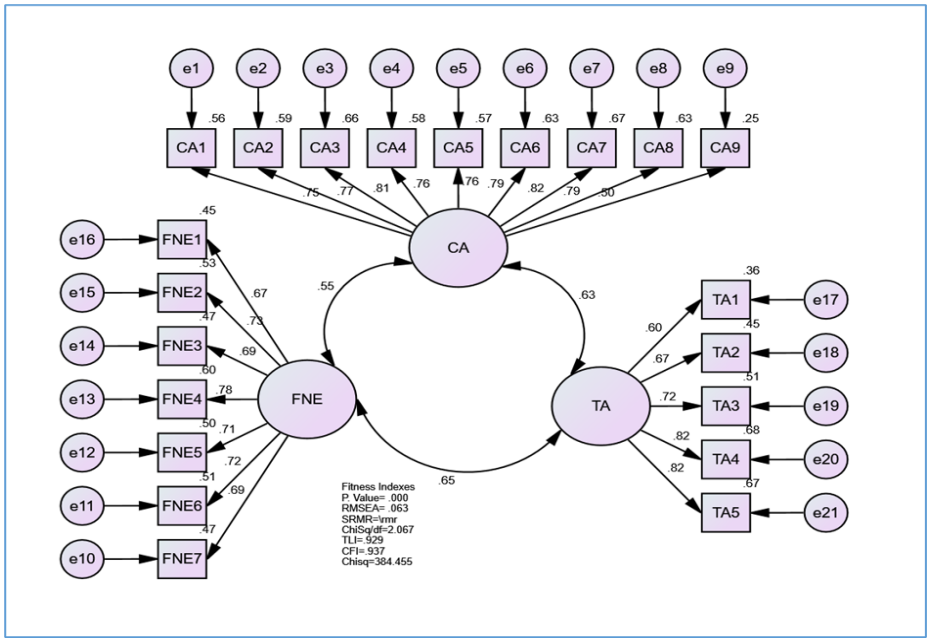

Figure 3: The Assessment for Discriminant Validity

Figure 3 presents the assessment of discriminant validity for the Students' Speaking Anxiety (SSA) construct. The analysis showed that all correlation coefficients between the components were below the 0.85 threshold, indicating that discriminant validity was established for the SSA construct. In particular, the correlation between communication apprehension (CA) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) was .55, between CA and test anxiety (TA) was .63, and between TA and FNE was .65. Since all correlation values are below 0.85, it can be concluded that the items are not redundant (Safiih & Nor Azreen, 2016).

5. Discussion

The objective of this study was to adapt and validate an instrument that could measure students' speaking anxiety in VC Sarawak. The adaptation and validation of the SSAS demonstrated strong psychometric properties, confirming its reliability and validity for assessing students' speaking anxiety within the VC Sarawak context. The rigorous adaptation process, which encompassed expert evaluation, translation, pilot testing and field study, ensured that the scale retained both linguistic and contextual relevance while preserving the conceptual

integrity of the original instrument. Data analysis results confirmed that the developed instrument was deemed valid, reliable and suitable for use in vocational colleges settings, as shown by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.921, which exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Furthermore, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) yielded acceptable fit indices, with all fitness indexes met, with RMSEA = 0.063, CFI = 0.937, and Chi-square/df = 2.067. The AVE and CR values for all three factors were above 0.50 and 0.60, respectively, showing that the data exhibited good convergent validity. This showed that the constructs were measured reliably and that the scale effectively captured the dimensions it intended to measure (Yang et al., 2025).

Clearly, accurate and contextual relevant measurement scales are essential for ensuring the validity of research findings in various educational contexts. The adaptation of the SSSA in VC Sarawak improves measurement accuracy by incorporating localised nuances. By refining its psychometric properties through validation studies, it has made SSAS a robust tool for assessing students' speaking anxiety in the VC Sarawak context. A major advantage of adapting SSAS measurement tools is to increase its contextual relevance because measurement tools must be sensitive to the contexts in which they are applied (Reichenheim & Moraes, 2007). The adaptation of SSAS ensures that the tool captures local educational practices, leading to more accurate data collection and meaningful insights into the factors affecting VC students' speaking performance in ESL classrooms.

Moreover, the findings of the present study corroborated with past studies (Achanan et al., 2021; Anthony, 2023; Bahadur & Hashim, 2024; Sim et al., 2020; Zamri & Hashim, 2023) that significantly demonstrated that FLCAS could be used as a tool to identify the factors contributing to speaking anxiety problems among the students. In addition, all these studies also indicated that three elements of FLCAS as proposed by Horwtiz et al. (1986) were responsible for contributing speaking anxiety among the students, similar to the findings of the present study.

However, most of the earlier studies on FLCAS validation were carried out in countries such as China and Peru, and they mainly explored the perception of university, secondary and high school students, with little attention given to the perception of diploma-level students. Hence, this study successfully filled the research gap by adapting and validating a scale that delved into the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety in the context of VC Sarawak.

6. Conclusion

This research achieved its primary goal of establishing the validity and reliability of the SSAS instrument. The thorough investigation focused on how the three performance-anxiety factors, namely CA, TA and FNE. could affect VC students' speaking performance in ESL classrooms based on their perception. Beyond validation of the scale, this study presents valuable pedagogical insights. It highlights the needs for English lecturers at vocational colleges in Sarawak to acknowledge the existence of speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms. They should be

aware that speaking difficulties may arise from speaking anxiety than from a genuine lack of capability to speak the language itself.

Given this, lecturers are encouraged to tailor and employ engaging and supportive teaching strategies that foster motivation among VC students, particularly in Sarawak. For example, English lecturers can motivate students by acknowledging their efforts in the ESL classroom instead of focusing solely on their language learning abilities. Moreover, English lecturers can also organise group work through collaborative activities to improve students' speaking skills, by exchanging information, fostering confidence through peer interactions and creating a supportive learning environment.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations as it confined to six VCs in Sarawak and does not encompass VCs from other states in Malaysia, namely Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. Consequently, the results may not be generalisable to the broader population of VC students in Malaysia, especially in terms of their perceptions of the factors causing speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms. Therefore, future researchers with similar interests can extend their studies to different contexts or countries to determine whether the findings of this study are applicable or not in those settings.

In addition, this study concentrates solely on anxiety as the primary factor affecting VC students' speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms. Future researchers with related interests might explore other contributing factors such as the role of their first language, linguistic components and other relevant influences. Doing so could lead to a more comprehensive insight into the underlying causes of speaking anxiety among VC students in Malaysia. Future researchers could also undertake a comprehensive longitudinal study to observe how SSAS develop over an extended timeframe.

7. References

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8. Declaration

Original Work: This is the original written work of the authors, and the authors hereby certify that the manuscript has not previously been published elsewhere.

Multiple Submissions: The authors hereby certify that the manuscript is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

Authorship of the Paper: The authors collectively contributed to the conceptualisation, design, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Authenticity of Data: The authors hereby state that all raw data in the paper are real and authentic.

Conflict of Interest: The authors hereby declared that there was no conflict of interest that could affect the results in the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI Use: The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely to enhance the language and clarity of the manuscript. All content was reviewed, edited and remains the responsibility of the authors.

APPENDIX 1

Students' Speaking Anxiety Scale

Instruction: The following are statements related to the students' speaking performance in ESL classroom. Please indicate your level of agreement on the given statements. You can rate each of the statement below from 1 to 5; Score 1 indicates Strongly Disagree while Score 5 indicates Strongly Agree.

As a student of MPU 2222 English for Communication, while attending English class, I …						
No.	Communication Apprehension	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1.	never feel quite sure of my speaking performance.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	tremble when I am asked to speak.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	get frightened when I don't understand what the lecturer says.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	get so nervous that I forget what to say.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	feel nervous when I am asked to speak.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	get nervous for not understanding what the lecturer says.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	am panic to speak without preparation.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	feel anxious even if I am well-prepared to speak.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	would not be nervous speaking to students with good oral proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
Fear of Negative Evaluation						
10.	feel conscious speaking in front of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	keep thinking that other students are better in English than I am.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	feel embarrass to volunteer answers in front of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	always feel other students speak better English than me.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	feel worry for not being able to catch up with other students in learning spoken English.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	am afraid other students will laugh at me when I am speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	get nervous to answer lecturer's questions without preparation.	1	2	3	4	5
Test Anxiety						
17.	don't worry about making mistakes while speaking.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	am usually at ease during the assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	get upset for not understanding the lecturer's correction on speaking error.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	am afraid my lecturer will correct all my speaking errors.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	feel overwhelmed by the number of rules to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5