

Cultural Content and Foreign Language Public Speaking Anxiety: Contributing Factors and Culture-Based Coping Strategies in EFL Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between cultural content integration and foreign language public speaking anxiety (FLPSA) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The research examines how incorporating Buginese cultural values (*Sipakainga'*, *Sipakalebbi'*, and *Sipakatau'*) affects anxiety levels and provides culture-based coping strategies for 56 Indonesian university students enrolled in Business English Communication program, Universitas Makassar. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzed anxiety patterns, cultural identity impacts, and effectiveness of culturally-responsive pedagogical approaches. Results indicate that students who engaged with familiar cultural content demonstrated significantly lower anxiety levels and improved speaking performance compared to those exposed to purely Western-oriented materials. The findings suggest that integrating local cultural frameworks can serve as effective anxiety-reduction mechanisms while maintaining language learning objectives. This research contributes to understanding culturally-sensitive EFL pedagogy and provides practical implications for educators working with culturally homogeneous student populations.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Public Speaking, Cultural Content

Introduction

Foreign language public speaking anxiety (FLPSA) represents one of the most pervasive challenges facing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students worldwide, particularly in contexts where cultural and linguistic differences create additional layers of complexity (Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This multifaceted anxiety disorder affects millions of language learners globally, creating significant barriers to effective communication and academic achievement. The phenomenon manifests through various psychological, physiological, and behavioral symptoms that can severely impede language acquisition and performance outcomes.

The phenomenon of language anxiety becomes particularly pronounced when students are required to engage in public speaking activities, as these situations combine the cognitive demands of second language processing with the psychological pressure of public performance (Young, 1990). Unlike private language practice or written assignments, public speaking requires real-time linguistic processing, cultural awareness, and confidence management simultaneously. This triple burden often overwhelms EFL learners, leading to

avoidance behaviors, decreased participation, and ultimately hindered language development.

In Indonesian higher education contexts, where English proficiency is increasingly critical for academic and professional success, understanding and addressing FLPSA has become a pedagogical imperative (Lamb, 2004). The globalization of Indonesian universities and their integration into international academic networks has elevated English communication skills as essential competencies for graduates. However, the traditional emphasis on grammar and reading comprehension in Indonesian EFL curricula has left many students unprepared for the communicative demands of higher education and professional environments.

The selection of this research topic stems from observed patterns of heightened anxiety among Indonesian EFL students when engaging in English public speaking activities, particularly those involving culturally unfamiliar content. Preliminary observations in Business English Communication courses revealed that students demonstrated varying levels of comfort and performance depending on the cultural context of speaking tasks. Students appeared more confident and articulate when discussing familiar cultural topics, while experiencing increased anxiety and reduced fluency when addressing Western or international business scenarios.

This phenomenon suggests that cultural familiarity may serve as either a facilitating or debilitating factor in foreign language speaking performance, warranting systematic investigation. The relationship between cultural content and anxiety levels appears to be bidirectional, where familiar cultural contexts may reduce cognitive load and anxiety, while unfamiliar cultural frameworks may exacerbate existing language-related stress. Understanding this dynamic could provide valuable insights for curriculum design and instructional approaches in multicultural educational environments.

Existing research on foreign language anxiety has predominantly focused on general anxiety factors, cognitive processing demands, and individual difference variables (Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). However, significant gaps remain in understanding how cultural content specifically influences anxiety levels and how culturally-grounded coping strategies might be developed and implemented. Previous studies have largely examined anxiety from Western-centric perspectives, with limited attention to non-Western cultural frameworks and their potential therapeutic applications in language learning contexts (Rajab et al., 2012). Furthermore, while extensive research exists on general foreign language anxiety, the specific domain of public speaking anxiety in EFL contexts remains under-researched, particularly regarding cultural mediating factors.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its integration of indigenous cultural values as both analytical framework and pedagogical intervention. By examining the role of Buginese cultural principles—*Sipakainga'* (mutual respect and care), *Sipakalebbi'* (mutual honor and dignity), and *Sipakatau'* (mutual recognition of humanity)—this study provides culturally-grounded insights into anxiety management and speaking performance enhancement. This approach represents a departure from conventional anxiety research by positioning local cultural resources as potential solutions rather than obstacles to language learning success,

thereby acknowledging the strength and wisdom embedded in traditional Indonesian value systems.

The integration of Buginese cultural principles into foreign language anxiety management represents a paradigmatic shift from deficit-based to asset-based pedagogical approaches in EFL contexts. The three foundational principles of *Sipakatau* (mutual humanization), *Sipakalebbi* (mutual respect and understanding), and *Sipakainge'* (reminding each other) provide a culturally-responsive framework that reconceptualizes anxiety not as an individual pathology but as a communal challenge requiring collective support and cultural wisdom (Mattulada, 2015; Rahman et al., 2023). This approach diverges from conventional anxiety reduction strategies that typically focus on individual cognitive-behavioral interventions, instead positioning cultural values that emphasize mutual respect, advising each other, and collective support as foundational resources for managing foreign language speaking anxiety (Nurdin & Mappasere, 2024). By incorporating these indigenous knowledge systems, EFL educators can create learning environments that honor students' cultural identities while simultaneously addressing the psychological barriers that impede oral communication performance.

The application of Buginese cultural principles to foreign language anxiety management offers a culturally-sustaining alternative to Western-centric coping strategies that may not resonate with Indonesian learners' worldviews and social orientations. While traditional anxiety reduction approaches focus primarily on individual preparation, relaxation techniques, and positive thinking, the Buginese framework emphasizes relational and communal dimensions of learning through *Sipakatau*'s emphasis on recognizing shared humanity, *Sipakalebbi*'s cultivation of mutual dignity, and *Sipakainge'* s practice of collective guidance and support (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Alrabai, 2015). This cultural framework aligns with recent calls in applied linguistics for decolonizing language education by recognizing and valorizing local knowledge systems rather than perpetuating Western epistemological dominance (Kubota & Lin, 2009). Furthermore, the intercultural communication effectiveness demonstrated through *sipakatau-sipakalebbi* practices among diverse ethnic groups suggests that these principles can serve as bridges between learners' cultural identities and target language acquisition, potentially reducing the identity conflicts that often exacerbate foreign language speaking anxiety (Rahayu & Sofyan, 2023).

The research addresses two primary problem statements that emerged from preliminary observations and literature analysis. First, there is insufficient understanding of how cultural content familiarity influences foreign language public speaking anxiety levels among Indonesian EFL students, particularly those from specific regional cultural backgrounds. Second, limited research exists on the effectiveness of culturally-based coping strategies in reducing FLPSA and improving speaking performance outcomes in Indonesian higher education contexts. These research gaps highlight the need for systematic investigation into the intersection of culture, anxiety, and foreign language performance within the Indonesian educational landscape.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Public Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety, as conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), represents a distinct anxiety construct specifically related to foreign language learning contexts. The authors identified three components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, all of which converge particularly intensely during public speaking activities. MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) seminal work further established anxiety as both a trait and state phenomenon, with situational factors significantly influencing anxiety manifestation. Public speaking anxiety in foreign language contexts represents a complex intersection of linguistic, cognitive, and social factors that can severely impact learning outcomes (Young, 1990).

The cognitive processing model proposed by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) suggests that anxiety interferes with input, processing, and output stages of language learning. During public speaking tasks, this interference becomes particularly pronounced as students must simultaneously manage linguistic processing, content organization, and audience awareness. Pichette (2009) demonstrated that anxiety effects are most severe during spontaneous speaking tasks, where cognitive resources are maximally taxed. These findings underscore the need for interventions that reduce cognitive load while maintaining speaking skill development objectives.

Cultural Factors in Foreign Language Learning

Cultural content integration in foreign language instruction has received increasing attention as educators recognize the inseparable relationship between language and culture (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Research indicates that cultural familiarity can serve as cognitive scaffolding, reducing processing demands and enabling more effective language production (Alptekin, 2002). However, the relationship between cultural content and anxiety levels remains under-explored, particularly in contexts where students share relatively homogeneous cultural backgrounds.

Studies examining cultural factors in language learning anxiety have produced mixed results. While some research suggests that culturally familiar content reduces anxiety by providing conceptual anchoring (Krashen, 1982), other studies indicate that excessive reliance on native culture may impede target language cultural competence development (Alptekin, 2002). This tension highlights the need for research examining optimal approaches to cultural content integration that simultaneously reduce anxiety and promote language learning objectives.

Indigenous Cultural Frameworks in Education

The integration of indigenous cultural frameworks in educational contexts has gained recognition as both culturally responsive and pedagogically effective (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In Indonesian contexts, traditional cultural values have been increasingly recognized as resources for educational innovation rather than obstacles to modernization (Alwasilah, 2013). The Buginese cultural framework, with its emphasis on mutual respect (*Sipakainga'*), honor (*Sipakalebbi'*), and humanity recognition (*Sipakata'*), provides a particularly relevant context for examining anxiety reduction mechanisms.

Research on culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that incorporating familiar cultural frameworks can enhance student engagement, reduce anxiety, and improve learning outcomes (Gay, 2010). However, limited research has specifically examined how indigenous cultural values might serve as coping mechanisms for foreign language anxiety. This gap is particularly significant in Indonesian contexts, where cultural diversity provides rich resources for pedagogical innovation yet remains underutilized in foreign language instruction.

This research adopts Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as its primary theoretical framework, emphasizing the role of cultural tools and social interaction in cognitive development. Within this framework, cultural content serves as a mediating artifact that facilitates language learning by providing familiar conceptual structures for organizing new linguistic knowledge. The zone of proximal development concept is particularly relevant, suggesting that culturally familiar content may enable students to operate at higher linguistic levels than would be possible with unfamiliar cultural contexts.

The study also incorporates elements of Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence influence language acquisition effectiveness. By examining how cultural content affects affective variables, this research contributes to understanding mechanisms through which anxiety impacts language learning and how culturally-responsive interventions might lower affective barriers.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining quantitative measurements of anxiety levels and speaking performance with qualitative exploration of student experiences and coping strategies. The mixed-methods approach was selected to provide comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between cultural content, anxiety, and speaking performance while capturing both measurable outcomes and lived experiences of participants.

Participants

The study involved 56 third-semester students enrolled in the Business English Communication program at Universitas Negeri Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participant group consisted of 42 female students (75%) and 14 male students (25%), aged 19-20 years. Approximately 80% of participants originated from South Sulawesi, with the majority identifying as ethnically Buginese. This demographic composition provided an ideal context for examining the role of shared cultural background in foreign language anxiety and coping strategy development.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on enrollment in the Public Speaking course and willingness to participate in the research study. All participants had completed at least four semesters of English language instruction and demonstrated intermediate proficiency levels as assessed through institutional placement examinations. The relatively homogeneous cultural background of participants enabled focused examination of specific cultural content effects while controlling for cultural diversity variables.

Data Collection Instruments

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The study utilized Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, adapted specifically for public speaking contexts. The 33-item Likert-scale instrument measures communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The Indonesian version of FLCAS, validated by Subekti (2018), demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.89$) in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Public Speaking Performance Rubric. Speaking performance was assessed using a holistic rubric examining fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, content organization, and cultural appropriateness. The rubric was developed based on established public speaking assessment criteria and validated through expert review by three experienced EFL instructors. Inter-rater reliability was established through pilot testing with a separate student group ($r = 0.84$).

Semi-structured Interview Protocol. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews exploring student experiences with culturally familiar versus unfamiliar content, anxiety coping strategies, and perceptions of cultural content effectiveness. The interview protocol was developed based on literature review and pilot testing with five students from a similar population.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over an eight-week period during the regular Public Speaking course. Students were randomly assigned to two groups: the experimental group engaging with Buginese cultural content integrated with English public speaking tasks, and the control group working with conventional, culturally neutral speaking materials. Both groups completed identical pre- and post-intervention FLCAS assessments and speaking performance evaluations.

The experimental group engaged in speaking activities explicitly incorporating Buginese cultural values of sipakainga, sipakalebbi, and sipakatau. Topics included presenting traditional Buginese leadership principles in business contexts, discussing cultural conflict resolution mechanisms, and analyzing indigenous knowledge systems. The control group engaged with standard Business English speaking topics such as marketing strategies, organizational behavior, and international business practices.

All speaking performances were video-recorded and assessed by trained raters using the established rubric. Post-intervention interviews were conducted with 20 randomly selected participants (10 from each group) to explore qualitative dimensions of the cultural content experience.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Descriptive statistics characterized participant demographics and baseline anxiety levels. Independent samples t-tests compared anxiety levels and speaking performance between experimental and control groups. Paired samples t-tests examined pre-post intervention changes within groups. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d to determine practical significance of observed differences.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. Initial coding identified recurring patterns in student experiences, followed by theme development and refinement. Data triangulation combined

quantitative and qualitative findings to provide comprehensive understanding of cultural content effects on foreign language public speaking anxiety

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Quantitative Results

Anxiety Level Comparisons. Pre-intervention FLCAS scores revealed no significant differences between experimental ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.67$) and control groups ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(54) = 0.39$, $p = 0.70$, confirming successful randomization. Post-intervention results demonstrated significantly lower anxiety levels in the experimental group ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.58$) compared to the control group ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.71$), $t(54) = 2.89$, $p = 0.005$, $d = 0.78$, representing a large effect size.

Within-group analyses revealed significant anxiety reduction in the experimental group from pre- to post-intervention, $t(27) = 3.45$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.73$. The control group showed no significant change in anxiety levels, $t(27) = 0.28$, $p = 0.78$, suggesting that conventional instruction methods did not impact anxiety levels over the study period.

Speaking Performance Outcomes. Post-intervention speaking performance scores were significantly higher in the experimental group ($M = 78.5$, $SD = 8.2$) compared to the control group ($M = 72.1$, $SD = 9.7$), $t(54) = 2.67$, $p = 0.01$, $d = 0.72$. The experimental group demonstrated particular improvements in content organization ($d = 0.85$) and cultural appropriateness ($d = 1.12$) dimensions, while fluency and accuracy improvements were more modest ($d = 0.42$ and $d = 0.38$, respectively).

Correlation analyses revealed significant negative relationships between post-intervention anxiety levels and speaking performance scores ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the established relationship between anxiety reduction and improved performance outcomes.

Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Cultural Familiarity as Cognitive Scaffolding. Students in the experimental group consistently reported that incorporating Buginese cultural content provided conceptual frameworks that facilitated English language expression. One participant noted, "*When I talk about sipakatau, I already understand the concept deeply, so I can focus more on finding the right English words rather than trying to understand what I'm talking about.*" This finding supports sociocultural theory predictions that familiar cultural tools can serve as mediating artifacts in language learning.

Theme 2: Reduced Fear of Cultural Missteps. Experimental group participants expressed decreased anxiety about cultural appropriateness when discussing familiar cultural contexts. A female participant explained, "*I don't worry about saying something culturally wrong when I'm talking about our own culture. I know the values, so I can concentrate on the English.*" This theme suggests that cultural content familiarity reduces one component of foreign language anxiety by eliminating cultural uncertainty.

Theme 3: Enhanced Motivation through Cultural Relevance. Students demonstrated increased engagement and motivation when discussing culturally relevant topics. One participant stated, "*It feels meaningful to share our culture in English. Usually, we just practice with*

Western examples, but this time we can show our own wisdom." This finding indicates that cultural content integration may address motivational factors that influence language learning success.

Theme 4: Development of Cultural Pride and Confidence. Experimental group participants reported increased confidence in their cultural identity and its value in international communication contexts. A participant observed, "*I realized that our Buginese values are actually very sophisticated and can contribute to global discussions about leadership and human relationships.*" This theme suggests that culturally-responsive pedagogy may have broader identity and confidence benefits beyond anxiety reduction.

Discussion

The significant reduction in foreign language public speaking anxiety among students exposed to culturally familiar content supports the hypothesis that cultural familiarity serves as an anxiety-reducing mechanism in EFL contexts. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, suggesting that culturally responsive content lowers affective barriers to language learning. The large effect size ($d = 0.78$) indicates that cultural content integration represents a practically significant intervention for anxiety reduction.

The improvement in speaking performance among experimental group participants provides evidence that anxiety reduction translates into improved learning outcomes. The particularly strong effects on content organization and cultural appropriateness suggest that familiar cultural frameworks provide cognitive scaffolding that enables more sophisticated language use. These findings support Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development concept, demonstrating how cultural tools can enable students to operate at higher linguistic levels.

The qualitative findings illuminate mechanisms through which cultural content affects anxiety and performance. The identification of cognitive scaffolding, reduced cultural uncertainty, enhanced motivation, and increased confidence provides a comprehensive understanding of how culturally-responsive pedagogy influences multiple dimensions of language learning experience. These themes suggest that cultural content integration addresses affective, cognitive, and motivational factors simultaneously.

The research contributes to understanding culturally-responsive foreign language pedagogy by demonstrating that indigenous cultural frameworks can serve as effective anxiety-reduction mechanisms without compromising language learning objectives. The specific incorporation of Buginese values (*Sipakainga'*, *Sipakalebbi'*, and *Sipakatau'*) provides a model for utilizing local cultural resources in international language education contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that integrating culturally familiar content significantly reduces foreign language public speaking anxiety and improves performance outcomes among Indonesian EFL students. The study provides evidence that Buginese cultural values can serve as effective cognitive and affective scaffolding mechanisms in English language learning contexts. Students who engaged with culturally familiar content demonstrated lower

anxiety levels, improved speaking performance, and increased confidence in using English for international communication.

The findings contribute to foreign language anxiety literature by identifying cultural content as a specific anxiety-reducing mechanism and providing empirical evidence for culturally-responsive pedagogical approaches in EFL contexts. The research also advances understanding of how indigenous cultural frameworks can be leveraged as educational resources rather than viewed as obstacles to internationalization.

EFL instructors should consider incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into speaking activities while maintaining target language learning objectives. The integration of local cultural values and knowledge systems can provide familiar conceptual frameworks that reduce anxiety and enhance speaking performance. Professional development programs should emphasize culturally-responsive pedagogy principles and provide training in cultural content adaptation techniques.

English language curricula should include opportunities for students to explore and express their cultural identities through the target language. Materials development should balance international content with locally relevant cultural themes that enable students to serve as cultural ambassadors while developing linguistic competence.

Higher education institutions should recognize the value of indigenous cultural knowledge in international education contexts and support faculty efforts to develop culturally-responsive pedagogical approaches. Policies should encourage rather than discourage the integration of local cultural content in foreign language instruction.

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting these findings. The study's focus on a culturally homogeneous population from South Sulawesi limits generalizability to other Indonesian cultural contexts or international EFL populations. The eight-week intervention period, while sufficient to demonstrate significant effects, may not capture long-term impacts of culturally-responsive instruction on anxiety and performance outcomes.

The research design did not include a delayed post-test, preventing assessment of intervention sustainability over time. Additionally, the study examined only one specific cultural framework (Buginese values), limiting understanding of how other indigenous cultural systems might function as anxiety-reducing mechanisms.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of culturally-responsive approaches across diverse Indonesian cultural groups and examine optimal ratios of familiar versus unfamiliar cultural content for maximizing both anxiety reduction and intercultural competence development. Longitudinal studies should explore the sustained effects of cultural content integration on language learning outcomes and examine how culturally-responsive pedagogy influences students' long-term language learning motivation and identity development.

Cross-cultural comparative studies would enhance understanding of how different cultural frameworks function as cognitive and affective scaffolding mechanisms in foreign language learning contexts. Additionally, research examining the effectiveness of culturally-responsive approaches in online and technology-mediated language learning environments would provide valuable insights for contemporary educational contexts.

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