



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***LEVEL OF SPEAKING AND ORAL TEST-TAKING ANXIETIES
EXPERIENCED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS***

NURKARIMAH BINTI YUSOF

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EXPERIENCED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

By

NURKARIMAH BINTI YUSOF

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

August 2014

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the most important persons in my life:

My beloved parents,

Haji Yusof bin Yatim and Hajjah Kelsom binti Othman.

My supportive siblings.

My lovely relatives.

My precious friends.

Special dedication to:

My late uncle, Pak De Ali.

~~YHKKKQDNHFRDIOODODMPPHEN~~

support and advice that had always kept me motivated in completing my Master.

Thank you my beloved uncle. Al- Fatihah.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts

**LEVEL OF SPEAKING AND ORAL TEST-TAKING ANXIETIES
EXPERIENCED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

By

NURKARIMAH BINTI YUSOF

August 2014

Chair: Associate Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

This study was conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the issues of speaking and oral test-taking anxiety among the ESL university students. It is concerned with measuring anxiety of the students with regard to speaking skills and taking an oral test. Specifically, it investigates the relationship between the students' speaking anxiety in English, speaking test anxiety and their speaking test performance. Quantitative data was gathered through a survey questionnaire administered to 900 final year undergraduate students across disciplines who sat for a speaking test. The survey questionnaire was adapted from the FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) developed by E. K. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). Both descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis and independent sample t-test) were employed to analyse the data. The findings from the survey questionnaire suggested that the majority of the students generally experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety. Findings from the correlational analysis revealed that speaking anxiety holds a positive, high, and significant relationship with speaking test anxiety in English. Moreover, speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety were also found to have a significant but negative relationship with the students' speaking test performance which suggests that if the anxiety level increases, the speaking test performance may decrease. Findings from the independent sample t-test analysis showed no significant differences were found between the students' speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety with gender. This indicates that female and male students experienced similar levels of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety in English.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with seven experienced language instructors to investigate their perceptions on the issues of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety among the ESL learners. The interview sessions were conducted around 20-30 minutes each and were audio recorded with the consent of each interviewee. The responses from each interview sessions were then transcribed,

summarized, and categorized in terms of the major themes that can capture notions on “anxiety about learning a second language”, “anxiety towards speaking in the second language”, and “anxiety towards taking a speaking test in English”. Coding, labelling and categorizing was also done to further organize and analyse the interview data. Findings from the interview data showed that most of the instructors were aware of the issues pertaining to speaking and oral test-taking anxiety along with their role in helping the students to cope with anxiety. However, several issues were raised, such as their lack of ability to differentiate the manifestations of anxiety showed by the students. Findings from both the survey questionnaire and interview also found that speaking skills were the most anxiety-provoking for the students compared to the other language skills.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sastera

**TAHAP KEBIMBANGAN PARA PELAJAR TERHADAP PERTUTURAN
DAN PENGAMBILAN UJIAN LISAN DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS**

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Kajian ini telah dijalankan dengan menggunakan kedua-dua pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk menyiasat isu kebimbangan untuk bertutur dan kebimbangan mengambil ujian lisan di kalangan pelajar universiti ESL. Ianya tertumpu untuk mengukur tahap kebimbangan para pelajar terhadap pertuturan dan pengambilan ujian lisan. Ia menyiasat hubungan kebimbangan para pelajar untuk bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris, kebimbangan mengambil ujian lisan dan prestasi ujian lisan para pelajar. Data kuantitatif diperolehi melalui kajian soal selidik yang telah diedarkan kepada 900 pelajar ijazah tahun akhir dalam pelbagai bidang yang menduduki ujian lisan. Kajian soal selidik yang digunakan telah diadaptasi daripada FLCAS (Skala Kebimbangan Kelas Bahasa Asing) yang diperkenalkan oleh E. K Horwitz, Horwitz dan Cope (1986). Statistik deskriptif dan statistik inferensi (ujian korelasi *Pearson* dan ujian sampel bebas *t-test*) telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data. Hasil dapatan daripada tinjauan soal selidik mencadangkan bahawa majoriti pelajar secara keseluruhannya mengalami kebimbangan bertutur dan kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan pada tahap sederhana. Hasil dapatan daripada ujian korelasi pula melaporkan kebimbangan bertutur mempunyai hubungan yang positif, tinggi, dan signifikan dengan kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan dalam bahasa Inggeris. Tambahan lagi, kebimbangan bertutur dan kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan turut didapati mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan akan tetapi, negatif dengan prestasi ujian lisan pelajar yang mencadangkan jika tahap kebimbangan meningkat, maka tahap prestasi ujian berkemungkinan menurun. Hasil kajian daripada ujian sampel bebas *t-test* menunjukkan tiada perbezaan yang signifikan didapati antara kebimbangan para pelajar untuk bertutur dan kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan mengikut jantina. Ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar perempuan dan lelaki mengalami tahap kebimbangan yang sama terhadap pertuturan dan pengambilan ujian lisan.

Temubual berformat struktur separa telah dijalankan dengan tujuh guru bahasa yang berpengalaman untuk menyiasat persepsi mereka dalam isu-isu kebimbangan bertutur dan kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan di kalangan para pelajar

ESL. Sesi temubual ini dijalankan selama 20-30 minit dan direkod setelah mendapat persetujuan daripada setiap guru bahasa yang ditemubual. Penemuan daripada setiap temubual kemudiannya ditranskripikan, diringkaskan dan dikategorikan berdasarkan tema-tema utama iaitu “kebimbangan terhadap pembelajaran bahasa kedua”, “kebimbangan terhadap pertuturan dalam bahasa kedua” dan “kebimbangan terhadap pengambilan ujian lisan”. Proses “coding”, melabel dan mengkategorikan juga telah dilakukan untuk terus menyusun dan menganalisis data temubual ini. Penemuan daripada temubual menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan guru bahasa yang ditemubual mempunyai tahap kesedaran yang tinggi dalam isu-isu kebimbangan pelajar terhadap pertuturan dan ujian lisan, serta dalam peranan mereka untuk membantu para pelajar menghadapi kebimbangan. Walau bagaimanapun, beberapa isu telah dibangkitkan, seperti kekurangan dalam keupayaan mereka untuk membezakan manifestasi kebimbangan yang telah ditunjukkan oleh para pelajar. Penemuan daripada kedua-dua kajian soal selidik dan temubual juga mendapati bahawa kemahiran bertutur adalah pencetus kebimbangan paling tinggi berbanding dengan kemahiran bahasa lain bagi para pelajar.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAT	Alpert-Haber Achievement Test
BALLI	Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
CL	Communication Level
CLA	Communicative Language Ability
CTAS	Children's Test Anxiety Scale
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FLA	Foreign language anxiety
FLCA	Foreign language classroom anxiety
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
FTAS	FRIEDBEN Test Anxiety Scale
GPA	Grade point average
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STABS	Suinn Test Anxiety Behavior Scale

TAI	Test Anxiety Inventory
TAP	Test Anxiety Profile
TAS	Test Anxiety Scale
TAQ	Test Anxiety Questionnaire
TESL	Teaching English as the second language
TOCIE	Test of Communication in English
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter begins with the background of this study which discusses in particular the relationship of anxiety with our daily communication as well as during language testing. Then the issue of anxiety is discussed in the context of the learning situation and performance. The next part of this chapter discusses the statement of the problem for this study, which focuses on the issue of anxiety and how it concerns the acquisition and performance of second language among students at the tertiary level. Objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and limitations of the study are also provided in this chapter. Finally, the last section discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks applied in this study.

1.2 Background of the Study

In our daily lives, communicative events are always relevant for us as we need to communicate with other people in order to exchange information, ideas, and thoughts. Oral communication is also widely acknowledged to be fundamental in our social lives, relationships, and at work. Communication can be generally defined as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.). Furthermore, Savignon (1983) described communication as:

[D]ynamic rather than...static...It depends on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons...[I]t is context specific. Communication takes place in an infinite variety of situations, and success in a particular role depends on one’s understanding of the context and on prior experience of a similar kind. (p. 8-9)

Individuals who have poor communication skills can give off negative or wrong impressions about themselves if they are unable to clearly articulate or deliver their thoughts. Besides that, individuals who are orally competent are often viewed as more attractive and have bigger circles of friends. It is also a well-known fact that oral communication skills are vital for many fresh graduates who are seeking jobs as it is one of the skills that are often sought by employers in most occupations. Often, the very first criterion that employers look for during interviews is the candidates’ ability in their oral communication skills, which encompass the ability to speak

fluently and confidently, especially in English. According to Morreale, Osborn and Pearson (2000), “Employers identify communication as one of the basic competencies every graduate should have, asserting that the ability to communicate is valuable for obtaining employment and maintaining successful job performance” (p. 2).

With English being dominantly used as the language of international communication all around the world, it is indisputable that individuals who are highly competent at speaking in English face many advantages. In view of the importance of English, it is taught as a second language or foreign language in many developing countries, including Malaysia, from the earliest education levels from primary to the secondary. When students go to the university, they are also taught English as it is important for academic studies.

Along with learning, it has always been a normal part of education systems to assess students’ progress through examinations or tests for almost every subject taught. These evaluations help teachers and educators in determining student performance and help them make decisions about the teaching process in order to match it with the students’ progress. Thus language testing is among the evaluations made on the students. According to Douglas (2010), “A language test is an instrument for measuring language ability” (p. 2). The scores from the language tests are often used as a premise to infer the learners’ language ability and competency in language use. Besides that, in view of the importance of language proficiency, schools, universities, and many other organizations have been using language tests as an effective way of measuring second language learners’ English proficiency levels.

Most language tests comprised of evaluations of the four basic skills in learning a language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. There are also four types of language test, which are placement, diagnostic, achievement and proficiency tests. Among the well-known international proficiency tests that have already been widely recognized are IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). As for Malaysia, the Malaysian Examinations Council has introduced their own language test, MUET (Malaysian University English Test), to specifically evaluate Malaysian pre-tertiary students’ English language proficiency. MUET is a pre-requisite for local university admission and is also recognized by some universities in Singapore. Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), a public university, uses MUET as a prerequisite for student entry.

In addition, there are other local tests which are designed by institutions which see it necessary to implement for their own purposes. Among them is the TOCIE (Test of Communication in English). It also was initiated by Universiti Putra Malaysia as an oral test to test the oral ability of exiting students who are finishing their courses. This is to enable the university to certify that their students have attained a level of oral ability as evidence of workplace readiness. Besides giving information about exit oral language ability, the evaluation is expected to provide feedback, or washback, on second language teaching and learning for new students.

Like any other tests, there are associated concerns that could affect student performance in the oral test. One of the validity issues in language testing is the extraneous variables that act as threats to 'true' performance, among which are motivation, attitude, anxiety, and psychological state of preparedness. In second language learning as well, anxiety is one of the affective domains that can affect the learning process and language performance of second language learners. In addition, it could also reduce learners' motivation to learn and use a second language. Since test scores and grades have always been a determinant of student success, most of them also experience high levels of test anxiety. Moreover, with most industrial and government sector jobs being mostly test performance-oriented, it is obvious that pressure for excellence is high and may provoke anxiety in the students.

Therefore, in view of the role of anxiety as one of the factors that may affect language learning and language performance during language testing, the role of anxiety on the second language learners' oral performance, especially during speaking tests, is deemed to be worth investigating.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In the past years, many researchers have been interested in the studies that revolve around affective factors which have an important influence on second language learning and performance. "Affective factors include motivation, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity, and anxiety, among others" (Ehrman, 2003, p. 319). From an educational perspective, anxiety in learning has long been a prevalent phenomenon among the learners. According to Alpert and Haber (1960), anxiety can either be facilitating or debilitating. Meanwhile, anxiety in second language learning, or specifically, language anxiety, has been proposed to hold a significant, and negative relationship with performance and achievements (Aida, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Wu and Chan; 2004; Young, 1986). Besides that, according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), the arousal of anxiety may interfere with the learners' abilities in acquiring, processing, and producing a target language. This shows that language learners may also be affected by language anxiety negatively.

Meanwhile, based on previously conducted studies, many language learners expressed that language anxiety is felt more strongly when they are subject to highly evaluative situations (Awan et al., 2010; Cheng et al, 1999; Joy, 2012; Park & Lee, 2005; Phillips, 1992). As Zeidner (1998) stated, "many students have the ability to do well on exams, but perform poorly because of their debilitating levels of anxiety" (p. 4). When ask to take a test such as for speaking, learners may feel anxious or nervous as they may perceive themselves as being evaluated and judged during the test, which would result in them experiencing test anxiety. Moreover, Young (1991) in her study also mentioned that being tested for language ability is one of the situations that may contribute to second language anxiety.

On the other hand, among the four language skills, speaking appears to be the main source of anxiety as it has always been considered as ‘anxiety producing’ and is the “most anxiety-provoking language skill in a foreign language learning situation” (SubaÇı, 2010, p. 32). Moreover, studies such as Phillips (1992) found that anxiety also negatively affected the students oral examination performance. Woodrow (2006) also found that there were significant negative correlations between both in-class and out-of-class speaking anxiety with the students’ oral performance. Therefore, language learners who may already have some anxiety towards the second language, when being subject to a test, specifically a speaking test, may experience not just one anxiety in particular, but more anxieties such as test anxiety and speaking anxiety. Noting this crucial effects of anxiety during testing, particularly for the speaking skills, it is thought that it is necessary to further examine the nature of general anxiety and also anxiety towards speaking in English, particularly in an evaluative situation.

Moreover, despite the growing interest on the issue of anxiety, most of the existing research only centred on students’ perspectives and, many only focused on the issue of foreign language anxiety during classroom learning, rather than in evaluative situations. Insights on test anxiety, also, have only been largely available from psychological studies rather than second language studies for the past few decades. Therefore, along with the consideration to provide second language views on the issues of test anxiety, this study hopefully will be able to give additional insights to both learners and teachers in understanding the construct of anxiety and in developing better oral ability among the learners.

1.4 Objectives

The central aim of this study is to explore Malaysian ESL students’ perspective concerning anxiety in relation to speaking skills. Since there have been many studies that proposed language anxiety has a significant, and negative relationship with performance and achievements, (Aida, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Wu and Chan; 2004; Young, 1986), it is thought that it is also important to identify the levels of anxiety among the ESL students.

Another aim of this study is to explore the instructors’ perceptions on the issues of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety among ESL tertiary learners. It also seeks to investigate the roles of instructors in coping with students’ speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the objectives identified above, the following research questions have been formulated:

- 1) What are the levels of anxiety towards speaking in English among ESL final year undergraduate students of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)?
- 2) What are the anxiety levels of these students in taking an English speaking test?
- 3) Is there a significant difference between male and female students in
 - a) levels of speaking anxiety?
 - b) levels of speaking test anxiety?
- 4) What are the relationships between
 - a) speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety?
 - b) speaking anxiety and speaking test performance?
 - c) speaking test anxiety and speaking test performance?
- 5) What are the instructors' perceptions on the issue of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety among ESL tertiary learners?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is primarily important in that it can help to give insights about the level of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety experienced by ESL learners, particularly in Universiti Putra Malaysia. It also helps to explain how anxiety might affect ESL students in speaking English and whether test taking anxiety as a specific affective variable is a significant factor in the students' speaking performance. Besides that, through this study, the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety is also examined to see whether the results in this study will be in lined with Horwitz's (2010) and Horwitz et al.'s (1986) proposition that foreign language anxiety is also related to test anxiety.

Since most of the existing research only centred on students' perspectives and language anxiety issues during classroom learning, this study hopefully will be able to fill in the gaps by providing additional findings giving a wider range of insights on the issue of speaking anxiety. Additionally, the perceptions and strategies used by the instructors in dealing with the issue of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety will provide deeper insights and understanding. Furthermore, the findings from this study may also be useful for educators and language instructors for improving students' language learning processes in the classroom and enhancing student performance.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted by using only a small representative sample of the overall population of students in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in regard to concerns about the issue of anxiety among ESL tertiary students. The participants involved in this study only consisted of final year undergraduate students. Data gained from these students, hence, may not be generalizable to the entire population of UPM students from all semesters.

In addition, as has been explained above, this study investigated the relationship of anxiety and students' language performance. However, it is undeniable that there are also other possible factors that can affect students' second language performance other than speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety, such as the attitudes and learning strategies of the students. Furthermore, since language anxiety itself is a very complex and multidimensional domain, issues that can be seen as related and contributing to language anxiety, such as social anxiety and existential anxiety shall not be discussed in this thesis. The scope of this study is limited to assessing the levels of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety among ESL tertiary learners, and the relationship between both anxiety levels and students' oral performance levels. Additional input is obtained from instructors to give further insights on the matter.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frameworks are referred to here to explain the concept of anxiety. The study basically evaluates anxiety in the context of language learning and testing. It does not seek to target anxiety as an outcome of any manipulation on learning. Rather it examines the state of anxiety as manifested through an exposure of natural experiences, which are not harnessed to examine cause and effect. However, to explain this natural state of experience, it is important to trace and account for how anxiety can come about in order to understand the phenomenon in relation to language learning and use. Thus, this study resorts to three relevant theoretical frameworks that have a bearing on the construct under study. The three models are Tobias's model (1986) on the effects of anxiety on learning, Spielberger and Vagg's transactional model of test anxiety (1995), and Bachman and Palmer's language ability model (1996).

1.8.1 Model of Cognitive Effects of Anxiety on Learning from Instruction

According to Tobias's model of cognitive effects of anxiety on learning from instruction (1986), he proposed that anxiety can be seen in three stages, which are

input, processing, and output. Following this model, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) postulated that foreign language anxiety may also occur in these three stages. The Input stage is concerned with the learners' initial new information in memory.

At this stage, external stimuli are encountered and internal representations are made; attention, concentration, and encoding occur. Because fewer items are available for processing or later retrieval, anxiety-arousal at this stage has an impact on all subsequent stages, unless the missing input can be recovered. (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 286)

On the other hand, the Processing stage involves the cognitive operations which consist of encoding, organization, storage, and assimilation of the information or material learned from the earlier input stage. There are three important factors that have been suggested by Tobias (1986) that can affect the cognitive processing of instruction (or learning), which are the difficulty level of the task, reliance on memory, and task organization. He suggested that tasks which consist of higher difficulty and required heavy reliance on memory can produce greater effects of anxiety on processing materials. Besides that, poor task organization also contributes to higher levels of anxiety as compared to well task organization. All these will result in interference with the processing of new information, which will also lead to increasing demands on processing time, along with the anxiety arousal.

At the Output stage, anxiety may interfere with the production or retrieval of previously learned materials from the previous two stages. This stage is seen as an important stage for the learner as it is at this stage that the performance of the learner of what has been learned will be evaluated. For example, in second language acquisition, this is the stage where learners are required to demonstrate their acquisition of second language, such as their English speaking performance. One of the examples of the effects of anxiety in this stage is that students may experience 'freezing' and perform badly during a test, although they were well prepared.

1.8.2 Transactional Model of Test Anxiety

Two classical models of test anxiety — the interference models and deficit models — have been postulated in early research in the area of test anxiety. The concept of interference models is based on the idea that test performance is influenced and interrupted by interference with memory retrieval and information processing. Furthermore, also according to this model, worry and emotionality are also factors that interfere with normal performance (Cizek & Burg, 2006).

Deficit models advocate that there are other factors that contribute to the detrimental effects of test anxiety, which involve the test takers knowledge or skills important for accomplishing their actual performance during the evaluation. For example, if a test taker is lacking in learning strategies and test-taking skills, this would contribute towards deficits in their performance.

However, Spielberger and Vagg (1995) synthesized and introduced a transactional model of test anxiety since interference models and deficit models alone cannot explain the complex constructs of test anxiety. The term 'transactional' is used to emphasize that "test anxiety is best thought of as a process or cycle of thoughts, behaviors, and responses" (Cizek & Burg, 2006, p. 18). The transactional model (see Figure 1.1) explains how test anxiety operates, which involves the students' background characteristics, elements of the testing situations, and details about information processing.

The transactional model consists of six possible stages, which are presented as in Figure 3.2. According to this model, the process of test anxiety begins when

- (I) An individual is required to perform a task, for instance, a test.
- (II) The individual then would form initial perceptions about the test and his preparation (whether the individual is prepared or not to take the test, and the level of knowledge the individual has about the test) and test-taking skills.
- (III) The individual would analyse the accuracy of his perceptions
- (IV) The increasing of worry and emotionality might occur if the individual's anxiety is aroused to a high level.
- (V) The increasing of worry and emotionality would then interfere with the cognitive process.
- (VI) The interference would affect a response which can result in two possible outcomes: either it can cause (VIa) a relevant response about the test, in which the individual accomplishes his actual performance without being really affected by the anxiety, or (VIb) an irrelevant response where debilitating effects can be seen in the individual's responses, resulting in poor performance as compared to the individual's actual performance.

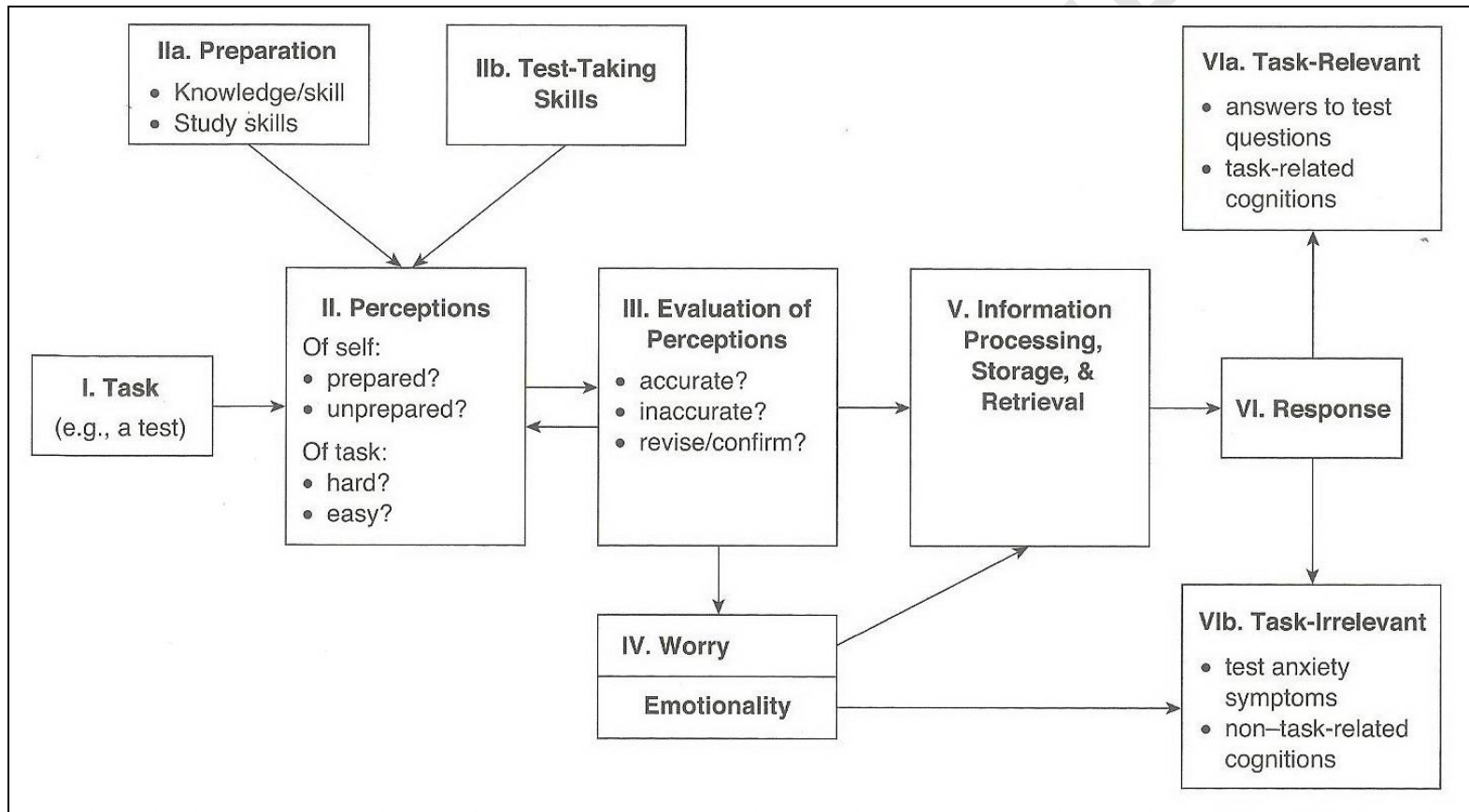


Figure 1.1 Transactional Model of Test Anxiety
 (Source: Cizek & Burg, 2006)

1.8.3 Language Ability Model

As situational-specific language anxiety is hypothesized to be closely related to state-like test anxiety, students' actual performance is likely to be highly affected during testing situations. In fact, many studies on the effects of test anxiety have revealed that high levels of test anxiety can cause a deficit students' actual performance during evaluation situations (Cizek & Burg, 2006; Zeidner, 1998).

Explanations regarding the relationships between test anxiety and students' performance have been interpreted by many researchers to be influenced by irrelevant thinking and heightened worry, which intrude on the conscious thoughts of students during evaluation sessions. Thus, the retrieval-blocking process occurs and inhibits students' actual performance (Cassady, 2004). In making the link between the models that explain anxiety and language performance, Bachman's (1990) Communicative Language Ability (CLA) model in addition could elucidate the manifestation of anxiety and its impact specifically on communicative language ability. Bachman defines language ability as

[C]onsisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communication language use. (p. 84)

There are three components in the framework of CLA: language competence, strategic competence, and the psychophysiological mechanism. Language competence has been described as specific knowledge content about the language, comprising its form and meaning. Individuals who are linguistically competent will possess knowledge of such aspects as spelling, pronunciation, grammatical structure, sentence structure, vocabulary, and linguistic semantics and be able to use this knowledge in communicative language. Strategic competence can be described as the ability to solve communication problems when the individual's linguistic competence is inadequate. Strategic competence is also among the four elements of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). The psychophysiological mechanism was explained by Bachman (1990) as "the neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon" (p. 84).

Not long after that, Bachman and Palmer (1996) amended and restructured the CLA model and came out with a new model of language ability. In their new model of language ability, they proposed that there are four sets of individual characteristics that may affect language ability as in test performance. These individual characteristics include the test takers' personal characteristics, topical knowledge of the test task, affective schemata, and their language ability.

The test takers' personal characteristics such as their age, sex, level and type of general education, native language, and their nationality are individual attributes of the test takers that might affect their performance in a language test. Meanwhile, the topical knowledge possessed by test takers is sometimes referred to as knowledge schemata, or real world knowledge which is usually kept in long term memory. Test tasks that are based on the topical knowledge of the test takers will give an advantage to the test takers since it will be easier for them to face the testing because they possess the required knowledge, as compared to those who do not. For example, an engineering student may debate better on topics such as combustion of biomass or clinical technologies as the topics are within their scope of knowledge and interests, which, by comparison, is not necessarily true for medical students during a speaking test.

On the other hand, affective factors or individuals' affective schemata can either facilitate or debilitate language use in the context of the characteristics of particular test tasks. Bachman and Palmer (1996) described affective schemata as "affective or emotional correlates of topical knowledge" (p. 65). In evaluative situations, an individuals' affective schemata may influence their cognitive processing of the instructions during the testing, which may influence the testing outcome. The model proposed can be summed up as below:

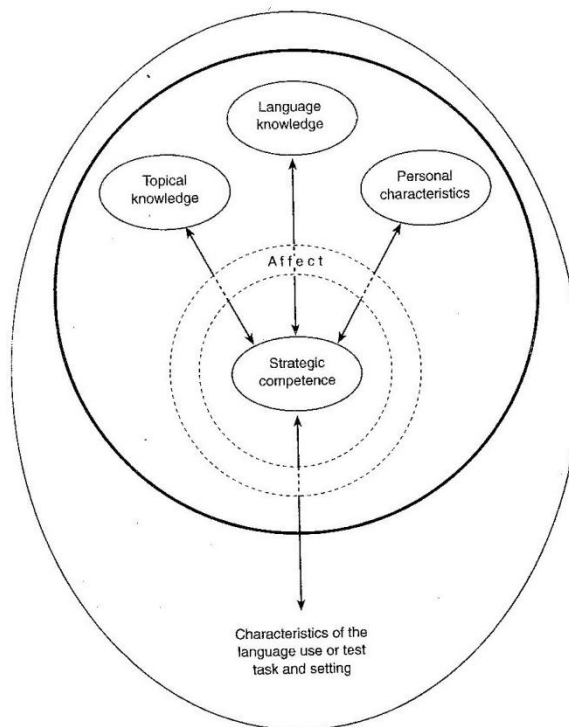


Figure 1.2 Some Components of Language Use and Language Test Performance in the Language Ability Model

(Source: Bachman & Palmer, 1996)

1.9 Conceptual Framework

The theories reviewed above give an understanding about how anxiety can affect the communicative language ability performance. The conceptual framework will be helpful in showing how the study is driven by specific variables to answer relevant answers raised in the investigation.

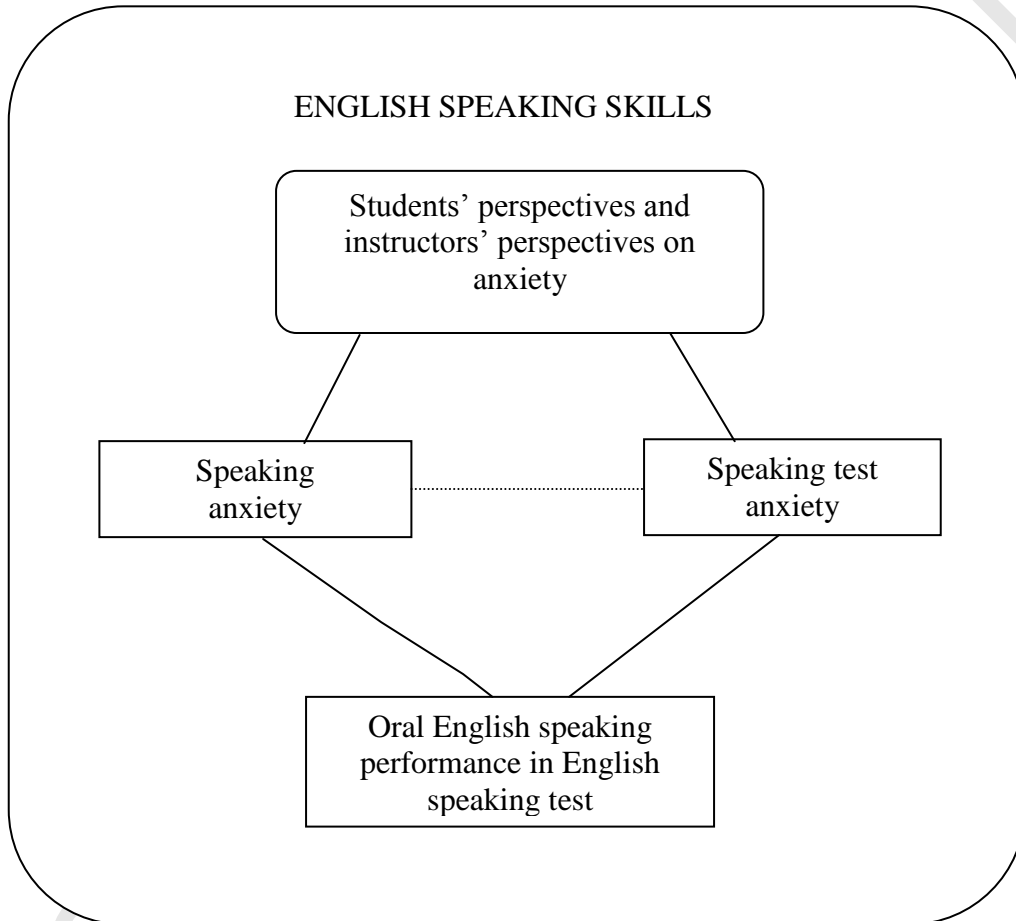


Figure 1.3. Conceptual Framework for this Study

Figure 1.3, above, presents the conceptual framework that has been constructed for this study. The main purpose of this study was to explore Malaysian ESL students' level of anxiety and their instructors' experience and perspectives concerning anxiety in relation to speaking skills during testing situations. In order to examine these perspectives, the relationships between speaking anxiety and, specifically, speaking test anxiety was also investigated. According to Horwitz (2010), test anxiety is said to be related to foreign

language anxiety. To establish this relationship, the levels of speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety among students were examined. Besides that, many past studies found students' performance was affected by anxiety. (Joy, 2013; Awan, Azher, Anwar and Naz, 2010; Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Horwitz, 1986). Thus, the relationship between both speaking anxiety and speaking test anxiety levels with the students' performance during an English speaking test were also examined in this study. To complete the picture, instructors' views are sought about the construct so as to give the input about the state of anxiety that might be experienced by students during language learning especially in the learning of the speaking skills.



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