



# Speech way and U-Dictionary: Applications for Speaking Anxiety Reduction

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## Abstract

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills in learning foreign language. Several affective factors such as shame and fear of making mistakes and being laughed by others lead students to have anxiety in uttering foreign language. The role of digital media, especially smartphone that becomes a “close friend “of mostly students nowadays is utilized as a media to reduce students’ speaking anxiety. This study aimed to investigate the use of Speech way and U-Dictionary application in reducing students’ speaking anxiety. FLSAS was used to measure students’ speaking anxiety level. The results showed that Hafshawaty University students’ speaking anxiety level were mostly in the level of moderate anxiety. Some were in high anxiety and a few of them were in low anxiety. The use of Speech way and U-Dictionary application significantly contributed to alleviate the students’ speaking anxiety that produced 0% of high anxiety level and low anxiety category encountered a 48.94% increase. However, there are still 14.89% students were still in moderate anxiety level in the end of this study. Indeed, the Speech way and U-Dictionary helped students overcome their speaking anxiety.

**Keywords:** *Speech Way; Speaking Anxiety; U-Dictionary*

## Introduction

Since language is dynamic, discussing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is never lasting. The development of four skills that are part of language learning is still being explored. Speaking is indeed a skill that is always intriguing to talk about. One of the most desired goals of learning a foreign language is being able to communicate verbally in the target language. When EFL students can express their thoughts and ideas clearly through speaking, they are regarded as skilled. According to Aliyu et al. (2019), being able to communicate effectively in English is crucial for success in both academic and professional fields.

However, speaking English is frequently stated as one of the most challenging skills among other three skills, namely writing, reading, and listening. Language learners often perceive their English communication skills negatively. They exhibit their incapacity and constantly state that they do not want to speak English. This occurs because some learners find it difficult to speak English, especially in front of others. Shame, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety when speaking English are some affective domain issues that students face. These factors have perhaps diminished their desire to continue communicating both inside and outside of the classrooms in English as a foreign language (Riasati, 2018; Oflaz, 2019).

According to Samad et al. (2022), language learners of all educational levels consistently suffer anxiety when learning English. Additionally, according to Kasap (2021), among many factors that affect adults' success in learning a foreign language, the emotional component—which includes other related factors like motivation, interest, self-esteem, and anxiety—is the most significant one. This is in accordance with Gregersen et al. (2014), who pointed out that students feel anxious and embarrassed about making mistakes when they are speaking to the entire class. Accordingly, Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) also stated that speaking is apparently seen as the most anxiety-provoking element in the foreign language learning process. The uncomfortable feeling which appears in the form of fear of failure in language learning normally occurs when learners are asked to converse with one another orally while they have not mastered a foreign language fully. Even proficient language learners occasionally experience language anxiety because they worry about making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from their peers, teachers, or listeners.

Additionally, anxiety drives learners to avoid learning new knowledge and to get emotionally stimulated, both of which can result in work avoidance and poor academic achievement (Rosyidah, 2019). Regarding this matter, English teachers have an important role to maintain students' eagerness to learn and use the language and reduce such anxiety. It is in line with the statement of Wienanda & Widiati (2019), that anxiety is crucial for students to manage because it is correlated with language learning outcomes. The higher the level of language anxiety, the lower the outcome of language learning. This statement is in accordance with numerous studies which demonstrated the negative correlation between anxiety and language learning, defining anxiety as debilitating.

The use of language learning media is crucial in attempting to decrease students' anxiety. In the current digital era, when digital media is extensively consumed by people, students will be more interested in the EFL learning process if it involves their smartphone, which is heavily embedded in their everyday lives. Teachers should take advantage of this opportunity to establish a relaxed learning environment where students can have pleasure. Video is one of the digital media that is available. This media grows rapidly since it emphasizes communication skills, which is undoubtedly helpful for both language learners and teachers.

In numerous researches, various digital media have been used as tools in an effort to lessen language anxiety. Hapsari et al. (2022) investigated how students perceived voice notes to reduce their speaking anxiety. The study showed that voice notes offer a novel teaching method that is less demanding in an online environment and can encourage students to speak up with confidence. Additionally, York et al. (2021) investigated the potential effects of voice, video, and virtual reality (VR) on the anxiety associated with learning a foreign language in EFL students. The findings implied that virtual reality (VR) was the most enjoyable, effective, and simple environment for language acquisition. Further, a study by Bashori et al. (2020) examined whether web-based language learning might help to reduce speaking anxiety. The findings revealed that web-based language learning could help students overcome their speaking anxiety. Shamsi et al. (2019) also conducted research on the use of m-learning in decreasing speaking anxiety for EFL learners. The results showed that m-learning has significantly decreased the learners' anxiety in speaking English as a foreign language.

However, none of these earlier studies presents a simple media that might significantly affect lowering anxiety due to the method's clarity, applicability, and accessibility. The goal of the current study is to close this gap by providing Speech way and U-Dictionary, two tools that can help students who are anxious about speaking. Speech way is a free mobile teleprompter application that helps users seem more natural when speaking. U-Dictionary, while a digital dictionary, offers a number of features to help users improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and listening abilities. These two applications were chosen over others due to their unique capabilities in addressing specific language learning needs and their ease of use.

It is intended that these two applications would help students overcome their speaking anxiety, which is one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome in learning English. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of Speech way and U-Dictionary in reducing speaking anxiety and improving speaking confidence among EFL students.

### **Method**

This study was designed as a pre-experimental one-group pre-test post-test research design. This design was chosen to observe the direct effects of the interventions on the same group of students over time. However, it is important to note the limitation of this design, such as the absence of a control group, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

The study targeted 47 nursing students from Hafshawaty University. Nursing students were selected as the target population due to the critical importance of communication skills in their field. Effective communication is essential for nursing students to interact with patients and healthcare professionals, making them a relevant group for this research. Focusing on nursing students allows for specific

insights into the application of language learning tools in a health-related context, which could be generalized to other similar fields.

The materials used in this study, including speeches and short texts, were aligned with nursing and health topics to ensure relevance and applicability to the students' field. This alignment emphasizes the practical use of language skills in their professional environment.

The Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scales (FLSAS) from Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) was employed as the instrument to measure students' anxieties in both pre and post-tests. FLSAS is an 18-item questionnaire adapted from a 33-item version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) created by Horwitz et al. in 1986. According to Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014), they selected 18 of the FLCAS Horwitz scale's 33 items, which are directly related to foreign language speaking anxiety. To help the respondents understand the questionnaire, FLSAS was translated into Indonesian before being given to the students. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5 ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree').

The length of the experiment was 5 weeks, which included the first week of pre-test and the fifth week of post-test. There were 2 video recordings per week for each student to submit, taking 3 weeks to see the effect of Speech way and U-Dictionary usage. Each recording from the Speech way application consisted of a one-to three-minute individual reading. The first recording submission time was on Saturday, and the second one was on Tuesday. After taking the video recording, the students were made aware of their weaknesses, leading them to evaluate (self-assess) their own performance before submitting to the lecturer. After self-assessment and potentially retaking a better video recording, the video was sent to the lecturer. A day after submitting the recording, on Sunday and Wednesday, the lecturer gave feedback on the recording with several suggestions for better performance. The materials used by students in their video recordings were speeches or short texts about health and education.

The total score based on each respondent's responses to each question on the Likert scale was calculated in the first week after taking the pre-test. As a result, the overall score for the 18 items ranged from 18 to 90 for each respondent (one point for each item equals 18 points minimum score, whereas five points for each item equals 90 maximum score). According to Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014), a total score above 72 indicates a high level of speaking anxiety, a total score between 54 and 72 indicates a moderate level of speaking anxiety, and a total score below 54 indicates a low level of speaking anxiety. The researcher determined the level of significance for both tests by comparing the mean scores from the pre- and post-tests after obtaining the means of both tests by utilizing SPSS. The researcher then used the data to draw a conclusion.

Quantitative data was analyzed using t-test (independent-sample and paired-sample) and descriptive statistics. In conjunction with the qualitative data tool, semi-structured interviews were also used to explore how students responded to Speech way and U-Dictionary as tools to reduce students' speaking anxiety. The qualitative data, including interview results and the researcher's reflection journal, were analyzed through content analysis.

## Results

This study was conducted to offer a coping strategy to decrease students' speaking anxiety. To determine whether the use of Speech way and U-Dictionary was effective in alleviating students' speaking anxiety, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz (1986) was used, adapted and shortened by Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) to form an 18-question survey. This survey, in the form of a Google Form questionnaire, was distributed to students to answer in pre-test and post-test. The results of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Students' Pre-Test and Post Test Mean Score*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	63.702	47	9.2804	1.3537
	Post-test	49.127	47	6.88608	1.00444

Table 1 indicates that the students' pre-test mean score is 63.702, which is considered as moderate anxiety (in the range of 54-72) according to Ozturk's (2014) categorization. In contrast, the mean score of the students' post-test is 49.127, which falls below 54 and is categorized as low anxiety level.

The results from SPSS 24 show that the sig value (2-tailed) is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This suggests a significant difference between anxiety levels before and after the intervention with Speech way and U-Dictionary. The detailed results of the questionnaire after using these two applications are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2. Students' Anxiety Level*

Level of Anxiety	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High anxiety	14	29.79	0	0.00
Moderate anxiety	26	55.32	7	14.89
Low anxiety	7	14.89	30	63.83

Table 2 highlights a significant shift in the students' anxiety levels. In the pre-test, 29.79% of students were categorized as having high anxiety, which dropped to 0% in the post-test. Meanwhile, those with moderate anxiety decreased from 55.32% to 14.89%. Most notably, the low anxiety category saw an increase from 14.89% in the pre-test to 63.83% in the post-test. This shift indicates that the use of Speech way and U-Dictionary was effective in reducing speaking anxiety among students.

In addition to the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several participants to explore their responses to the use of Speech way and U-Dictionary as tools to reduce speaking anxiety.

**Student 1:**

*"When I enter English class, I definitely feel uncomfortable. This is because I feel that I don't understand English. I am worried the lecturer will ask me questions, I am afraid of being told to answer suddenly or being told to come forward."*

*"After knowing speech way application, I feel better. I try to learn speaking by reading the text. It's fun when I look like I'm talking normally while I'm actually reading."*

**Student 2:**

*"I am confused about how to pronounce English terms because I don't understand them. English is difficult and annoyed since the pronunciation is different from the writing. But it gradually changes when I was told to try using U-Dictionary."*

*"With this application, I can hear the right pronunciation of words that I am difficult to express. I was also introduced by Speech way application as media for me to train myself talking by reading text that leads me to be like English presenter or vlogger that naturally speak."*

**Student 3:**

*"I feel like I have no confidence at all when I'm told to say English terms. I'm afraid of being corrected since it must be wrong."*

*"Using U-Dictionary can help me to know the words' pronunciation that I was difficult to utter. Then I feel more enjoyable whenever my lecturer asks me to pronouncing an English word, I can look it up in U-Dictionary. For Speech way application, it is also helpful for me because I can train myself to read the text several times and the result is that I look like I am speaking. Perhaps, later this will make me really like presenter that is really fluent in speaking English."*

**Student 4:**

*"I don't feel anxious at all, it's just a simple thing. Even though I don't understand what the lecturer is saying, it's just like learning. Even though my friends laugh at me whenever I make mistakes, I just enjoy it."*

*"Using Speech way and U-Dictionary is helpful as practice tools for me to know the correct pronunciation and to record myself while reading but look like I am speaking. So, it is useful for me to improve my English."*

The results of interviews reflected the anxiety students experienced was caused by their lack of understanding of English language material and also a lack of knowledge input. Also, their lack of motivation to learn English because of boredom since English has been studied since they were in elementary school and the way they got English material which is very monotone. However, some students conveyed that they did not ever feel anxious or nervous in English class even though their English skill was under standard. After the intervention with the use of Speechway and U-Dictionary, the students felt their anxiety was decreased. They also felt that they have more confidence to utter English word. U-Dictionary really helped them in correcting their pronunciation.

**Discussion**

The results of the questionnaire and interview revealed that most students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Pre-test data showed that more than half of the students (55.32%) experienced moderate anxiety. This result aligns with prior studies that suggest even a moderate level of anxiety is alarming and needs to be addressed carefully. This level of anxiety might seem acceptable at first glance; however, it can discourage students from expressing their thoughts in English, affect their willingness to communicate, and hinder the development of communicative competence in the long run (Wu & Lin, 2014).

In this study, the use of Speech way and U-Dictionary was found to have a significant effect in reducing students' speaking anxiety levels. This is reflected in the data analysis, which shows that post-test scores are lower than pre-test scores. Specifically, the high anxiety level was reduced to 0%, and the low anxiety level increased to 63.83%. The data indicate that some students with high anxiety levels decreased to moderate or low levels, and those with moderate anxiety levels decreased to low levels, although some remained at moderate levels but with a reduced number.

Using Speech way helps students become more comfortable reading English texts, which may have been challenging for them before, making it difficult to pronounce and recognize a wide variety of words. Prior research has indicated that students' speaking abilities also increase when they develop the practice of reading

aloud. According to Müller (2015), reading aloud improves pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and comprehension of material. This argument is supported by Syiyami (2018), who found that students' speaking skills can be enhanced by teaching them to talk aloud using the reading aloud approach. Reading aloud allows students to use multiple senses simultaneously, helping them to internalize the information they read and become more accustomed to pronouncing English words fluently.

Besides the use of Speech way, students were also supported by the usage of U-Dictionary, which helped them learn pronunciation and meaning, thereby enriching their vocabulary. This application helps minimize errors in pronunciation and allows students to emulate native speakers due to its voice translation function. This supports Anjasmara's (2023) research, which stated that when students read aloud, they can hear their own voices and recognize their ability to pronounce English words correctly.

In this study, students did not just record videos using the teleprompter once to achieve the best results. They often retook the recordings multiple times, similar to when publishing work on social media, to achieve the best results. Anjasmara (2023) supports that reading aloud requires repetition as fostering self-confidence requires effort that varies between learners. According to interviews with several students, their responses typically indicated that they would retake the test 2-3 times before submitting. As a result, repeated exposure to English input, pronunciation, and vocabulary led students to gain new intellectual information. This aligns with previous research indicating that intensive foreign language practice and reduced psychological inhibitions are effective in relieving foreign language anxiety (MacIntyre, 1995; Král'ová et al., forthcoming; Král'ová, 2016).

Seeing videos of themselves speaking naturally and repeatedly assessing them to achieve better results helped students gain confidence. This gradually reduced their anxiety about speaking. Anjasmara (2023) states that regular practice of reading aloud can enhance pronunciation and intonation, increasing confidence in speaking English. Directly educating their tongues to pronounce English words helps students speak more fluently (Supraba et al., 2020).

Regarding students who still experience moderate anxiety, this could be related to the character of most students who are Pandalungan people, similar to Madurese, who have hard character traits. Rahmasari et al. (2023) found that Madurese natives have a sense of self-esteem known as *ajina abha*, meaning hot-tempered, hardworking, and overly confident. They tend not to be shy and are brave in expressing their opinions, maintaining their self-esteem. As a result, even if they did not fully comprehend the lecturer's points in English, they did not experience a great deal of anxiety. The intervention did not significantly influence some students who exhibited this behavior. This aligns with research indicating that individual personality differences affect learners' anxiety levels when



speaking foreign languages (Furnham & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2004; Rammstedt et al., 2018; Vural, 2019).

### Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations, including a small sample size and the lack of long-term follow-up to assess the sustained impact of the interventions. Future research should consider testing these tools in different educational contexts or with other language skills such as writing or listening to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness.

Moreover, it would be beneficial to explore how teachers and institutions can systematically integrate these applications into their curricula. Providing structured training and support for both students and educators can maximize the potential benefits of these tools. Despite the limitations, this study highlights the significant role that AI-based language learning applications can play in reducing anxiety and enhancing language proficiency among students.

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