



Beyond the Screen: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Undergraduate Students' Speaking Anxiety Under Strict Technological Deprivation

Abdurrohman Septiadi¹, Riskayadi²

¹Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

²Sastra Inggris, Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-08 Revised: 2026-06-26 Accepted: 2026-06-30 Keywords: speaking anxiety; technological deprivation; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; digital dependency; identity; EFL learning DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.11720 Corresponding Author: Abdurrohman Septiadi septiadi@ubb.ac.id Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Bangka Belitung, Indonesia	<i>Most research on foreign language speaking anxiety has examined it through classroom anxiety scales, public-speaking contexts, or, more recently, online and AI-mediated learning; comparatively little is known about what happens when digital tools are deliberately withdrawn. This study explores how ten undergraduate students in Bangka Belitung Province experienced speaking anxiety during structured English-speaking activities conducted under strict technological deprivation, defined as the intentional, sustained removal of smartphones, chatbot applications, and internet access during a speaking task. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), semi-structured interviews were analyzed idiographically before cross-case synthesis, following Smith and Osborn's procedure. Rather than converging on a single tidy narrative, participants' accounts diverged in intensity, trajectory, and meaning. Five superordinate themes emerged: (1) digital concealment and the fear of being "found out," (2) the body's memory of the phone and the disruption of habitual cognitive routines, (3) uneven reckonings with technological dependency, ranging from reluctant insight to unresolved resentment, (4) biographical echoes, in which participants' anxiety was shaped by earlier, unrelated experiences of evaluation, and (5) divergent trajectories, including a negative case in which repeated exposure did not produce adaptation. The study argues that this form of anxiety is not fully explained by existing communication-apprehension or fear-of-evaluation constructs, and instead proposes viewing digitally mediated learners' phones and applications as an extension of a provisional communicative self, whose withdrawal exposes not only linguistic gaps but also identity-level vulnerabilities shaped by each learner's history. Implications for speaking pedagogy in technology-saturated, regional EFL contexts are discussed alongside the study's methodological limitations.</i>

1. Introduction

Speaking is widely regarded as the most anxiety-provoking language skill among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, largely because it requires spontaneous, real-time production under the scrutiny of listeners (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Foreign language speaking anxiety has consistently been associated with reduced participation, avoidance behavior, and lower achievement in oral communication tasks (MacIntyre, 1995; Woodrow, 2006; Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020). For nearly four decades, this line of research has developed largely around three recurring foci: standardized anxiety scales such as the FLCAS, public-speaking or classroom-evaluation contexts, and, in the last decade, online and remote learning environments (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Huang & Liu, 2025).

Within this last strand, a growing body of work has begun to ask how digital tools reshape speaking anxiety, examining mobile-assisted language learning (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Zhen & Hashim, 2022; Bashori, van Hout, Strik, & Cucchiarini, 2022) and, most recently, AI-mediated practice with chatbots and generative language models (El Shazly, 2021; Chen, 2024; Xu, Chen, & Zhang, 2024). Huang and Liu's (2025) systematic review of 99 empirical studies published between 2004 and 2024 confirms that speaking remains the most studied skill in this literature and that research on artificial intelligence and anxiety is now the fastest-growing subfield.

What unites nearly all of this research, however, is a shared assumption: that technology's relevance to speaking anxiety lies in its presence, use, or design. Comparatively unexamined is the inverse condition, namely what happens to learners' speaking anxiety when digital tools that have become routine supports for language production are deliberately and strictly withdrawn. This question is not merely academic. Some university English programs, including programs in regional Indonesian contexts such as Bangka Belitung Province, have begun experimenting with technology-free or "digital detox" speaking activities, requiring students to complete oral tasks without phones, chatbot software, or search engines. Instructors in these programs report that such conditions provoke a distinctive and often intensified form of anxiety, yet this phenomenon has received no sustained empirical attention, particularly from the first-person, lived-experience perspective of the students themselves.

This gap is compounded by a methodological one. Most FLA research, including recent technology-focused studies, relies on quantitative scales or mixed-methods designs using thematic or content analysis, which are well suited to identifying the prevalence and predictors of anxiety but less suited to capturing how individual learners make sense of an anxiety-provoking experience in relation to their own biography, self-concept, and evolving relationship with technology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) offers a way to attend to this idiographic layer of experience, one case at a time, before cautiously identifying shared patterns. This study uses IPA to explore, in depth, how ten undergraduate students in Bangka Belitung experienced and made meaning of their speaking anxiety under conditions of strict technological deprivation.

Two research questions guided the study: (1) How do undergraduate students describe their experience of speaking anxiety when deprived of technological aids during English-speaking activities? (2) What meanings do students attach to this experience in relation to their perceived English competence, their dependency on technology, and their broader sense of self as language learners? By keeping these questions focused, the study aims to produce depth rather than breadth, contributing a phenomenological account that existing scale-based and thematic-analysis studies of technology and speaking anxiety have not yet offered.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety: Established Constructs

Foreign language anxiety is conceptualized by Horwitz et al. (1986) as a distinct, situation-specific anxiety comprising three interrelated components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Speaking is consistently identified as the primary locus of this anxiety because it demands immediate, unrehearsed performance, leaving little room for self-correction (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006).

MacIntyre's (1995) reprocessing model explains that anxiety consumes working memory resources that would otherwise support language processing, producing a self-reinforcing cycle in which anxiety impairs performance and impaired performance heightens anxiety. A large-scale meta-analysis by Botes et al. (2020), synthesizing 99 effect sizes across 14,128 learners, confirmed a moderate, consistent negative correlation between classroom anxiety and academic achievement across reading, writing, listening, and speaking, underscoring how robust and well-established this construct is. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) further nuanced the picture by showing that anxiety and enjoyment are not simple opposites but coexist, complicating any assumption that removing a stressor will straightforwardly improve the learning experience.

Technology as Scaffold: MALL, AI, and the Reshaping of Speaking Practice

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been widely reported to reduce speaking anxiety by offering learners low-stakes rehearsal, immediate feedback, and greater control over pacing (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Zhen & Hashim, 2022; Bashori et al., 2022). Kukulski-Hulme (2013) and Godwin-Jones (2011) similarly describe mobile and computer-assisted tools as forms of linguistic scaffolding that lower the affective barriers historically associated with oral production.

More recently, the emergence of generative AI has intensified this line of inquiry, though with more ambiguous results than MALL research generally reports. Chen (2024) found that frequent ChatGPT use was associated with substantially lower foreign language anxiety among Chinese students in Macau, and Xu et al. (2024) reported that ChatGPT use positively predicted foreign language self-efficacy among Chinese students abroad. Yet El Shazly (2021), in a quasi-experimental study with Egyptian undergraduates, found the opposite pattern: conversationally enhanced AI chatbots slightly intensified learners' foreign language anxiety, with no discernible reduction in speech-related anxiety following chatbot interaction. Huang and Liu's (2025) systematic review situates these mixed findings within a broader pattern: technology's effect on anxiety is not uniform but depends on how learners relate to the tool, not merely on the tool's availability.

This inconsistency is analytically important for the present study. If AI and mobile tools can either reduce or intensify anxiety depending on the learner and context, then it is plausible that the abrupt absence of such tools, after a period of habitual reliance, constitutes its own distinct affective event, one that existing scale-based FLA research, built around presence and use rather than absence and withdrawal, is not designed to capture.

Cognitive Offloading and the Psychology of Digital Dependency

Outside applied linguistics, cognitive science has documented how routinely available external tools change the way people process and retain information, a phenomenon known as cognitive offloading: using an external resource to reduce internal cognitive demand (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). Sparrow, Liu, and Wegner's (2011) foundational study demonstrated that when people expect information to remain accessible externally, for instance through a search engine, they are less likely to encode that information internally,

and more likely to remember where to find it than the information itself, a pattern popularly termed the "Google effect." Subsequent research on offloading has shown that when an external aid is unexpectedly removed, performance on tasks that had come to rely on it is often worse than performance among people who never had access to the aid at all (see Risko & Gilbert, 2016, for a review).

Applied to language learning, this literature suggests that habitual app or dictionary use may not simply supplement a learner's speaking ability but could, over time, restructure how that ability is exercised, such that its sudden absence produces disruption disproportionate to the learner's underlying linguistic competence. This dimension, largely absent from the FLA literature to date, provides an alternative, cognitively grounded explanation for the intensity of anxiety reported under technological deprivation, one this study returns to in the Discussion.

Identity, Psychological Safety, and the Extended Self

A further resource for interpreting this phenomenon comes from research on identity and psychological safety. Norton (2013) argues that language learners' investment in speaking is inseparable from their sense of identity and how they wish to be perceived by others, meaning that speaking anxiety is rarely only about linguistic risk; it is also about the risk of an unwanted identity being revealed. Edmondson's (1999) concept of psychological safety, developed in organizational research but increasingly applied to educational settings, describes the shared belief that one will not be embarrassed or judged for admitting a limitation.

If a smartphone or chatbot app allows a learner to privately resolve uncertainty before speaking, it may function less as a learning aid than as a mechanism for preserving perceived psychological safety in front of peers. Philosophically, Clark and Chalmers's (1998) extended mind thesis, which argues that external tools can become functionally continuous with an individual's cognitive processes, offers a provocative frame for this study: for some learners, the phone may not be experienced merely as an aid to speaking but as an extension of a provisional, still-forming communicative self, one whose sudden removal is felt not as an inconvenience but as a form of exposure.

Speaking Anxiety in the Indonesian EFL Context

Within Indonesia, speaking anxiety has been documented across a range of university settings. Subekti (2018), interviewing students and teachers in a general English course, found that fear of negative evaluation and low self-perceived competence were recurring contributors to anxiety, compounded by limited opportunities for authentic oral practice outside class. Idrus (2022) similarly reported that Indonesian students in an international university setting experienced heightened anxiety when speaking English among peers of varying proficiency levels, while Daflizar (2024) found that out-of-class speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students was closely tied to self-perceived speaking skill and vocabulary proficiency.

None of these studies, however, examined the role of digital tools, despite the fact that, as in much of Indonesia, students in these contexts have grown accustomed to using chatbot applications and online dictionaries as a routine part of language study. This omission is particularly salient in provincial contexts like Bangka Belitung, where opportunities for authentic English exposure outside the classroom remain limited and where digital tools may play an outsized role in students' everyday sense of linguistic competence.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the Present Gap

IPA is concerned with how individuals make sense of significant experiences, combining phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Its case-by-case procedure, in which each transcript is analyzed on its own terms before cross-case patterns are cautiously drawn, is particularly suited to a phenomenon like technological deprivation, for which no validated scale yet exists and for which the meaning of the experience is likely to vary with each learner's history, self-concept, and relationship to technology.

Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates a clear, threefold gap: existing FLA research has examined technology's presence but not its withdrawal; cognitive science has examined offloading and its disruption but rarely in the context of oral language production; and identity-oriented theory has rarely been brought into conversation with either. The present study addresses this gap directly.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experience of speaking anxiety among undergraduate students under strict technological deprivation. IPA was selected because the aim was not to measure the degree of anxiety but to understand how participants subjectively interpreted and made meaning of this specific experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Consistent with IPA's commitment to reflexivity, the researchers approached the study as English-language educators with prior experience designing technology-free speaking activities; this positioning motivated the study but was also treated as a potential source of interpretive bias, addressed through the trustworthiness procedures described below.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with an information sheet describing the purpose, procedures, risks, and voluntary nature of participation, and provided written informed consent, including explicit consent to audio recording. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without academic consequence and were offered the option to review their transcript and thematic summary. Pseudonyms (P1–P10) are used throughout to protect anonymity, and identifying details (e.g., specific course names, hometowns) have been removed or generalized.

Participants and Context

Ten undergraduate students ($n = 10$) learning English, especially speaking related course at a university in Bangka Belitung Province participated in this study, selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) enrolled in a speaking-focused course, (b) had participated in at least one structured speaking activity conducted under strict "no-gadget" conditions, and (c) willing to reflect on and verbally articulate their experience. This sample size and homogeneity are consistent with IPA methodological recommendations, which favor small, relatively homogeneous samples that permit depth of analysis over breadth of generalization (Smith et al., 2009). Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Semester	GPA	Self-rated Speaking Proficiency	Prior No-Gadget Exposure
P1	20	Male	4th	3.42	Intermediate	1st exposure
P2	21	Female	6th	3.55	Intermediate	2nd exposure
P3	19	Female	2nd	3.20	Pre-intermediate	1st exposure
P4	20	Male	4th	3.61	Intermediate	1st exposure
P5	22	Female	8th	3.70	Upper-intermediate	3rd exposure
P6	21	Male	6th	3.38	Intermediate	2nd exposure
P7	19	Female	2nd	3.15	Pre-intermediate	1st exposure
P8	20	Male	4th	3.47	Intermediate	1st exposure
P9	21	Female	6th	3.25	Pre-intermediate	2nd exposure
P10	22	Male	8th	3.68	Upper-intermediate	3rd exposure

Note. GPA (IPK) is self-reported on a 4.00 scale. Self-rated proficiency was based on participants' own description during screening, cross-checked informally against their most recent speaking course grade.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes per participant, conducted in Indonesian and English according to participants' preference and later translated where necessary. The interview guide combined descriptive prompts (e.g., "Can you walk me through what happened, step by step?") with more interpretively oriented prompts intended to elicit biographical and identity-related material (e.g., "Does this experience remind you of anything else you've been through?" and "What does this make you think about who you are as an English speaker?"), in line with IPA's emphasis on meaning-making rather than mere description (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following the IPA procedure outlined by Smith and Osborn (2008): (1) repeated reading and initial noting of each transcript to capture descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments; (2) development of emergent themes for each individual case, treated in full before moving to the next; (3) searching for connections across emergent themes within each case to form subordinate themes; (4) moving to the next case while bracketing prior insights; and (5) looking for patterns and divergences across all ten cases to develop superordinate themes. Consistent with IPA's idiographic commitment, cases that did not fit the emerging pattern were retained and analyzed as negative or deviant cases rather than smoothed into the majority pattern, a decision that shaped Theme 5 in particular.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through four concrete procedures. First, peer debriefing was conducted after each stage of analysis with a qualitative-methods colleague not otherwise involved in the study, who reviewed emergent themes against raw transcript excerpts and challenged interpretations that appeared to over-generalize across cases.

Second, an audit trail was maintained consisting of the initial noting sheets, emergent-theme lists for each case, and a decision log documenting how and why subordinate themes were merged or renamed during cross-case synthesis, allowing the analytic process to be traced from raw data to final themes. Third, member checking was conducted with six of the ten participants (P1, P3, P5, P7, P9, P10), who were sent a two-page plain-language summary of the themes most relevant to their own transcript and asked whether the summary resonated with their experience; two participants (P7 and P9) requested minor clarifications, which are reflected in the theme descriptions below, particularly the framing of Theme 4 and the negative case in Theme 5. Fourth, reflexive memos were kept throughout data collection and analysis to document the researchers' own reactions and assumptions, which were revisited during peer debriefing to guard against imposing a preconceived "anxiety-to-adaptation" narrative on cases that did not follow that trajectory.

3. Result

Analysis proceeded idiographically: each of the ten transcripts was analyzed as a complete case before any cross-case comparison was attempted. While five superordinate themes were ultimately identified across the group, participants did not converge on a single uniform trajectory. Two participants (P4, P6) described only mild anxiety from the outset; one participant (P9) remained highly anxious even after a second exposure to the no-gadget condition, in contrast to the more common pattern of gradual adaptation. This heterogeneity is treated as substantive data in its own right rather than noise to be smoothed over, and is discussed explicitly under Theme 5.

Theme 1: Digital Concealment and the Fear of Being "Found Out"

For most participants, the moment of realizing that no digital aid would be available triggered an intense, often bodily, spike in self-consciousness. Central to this theme is not anxiety about speaking, but anxiety about a specific, private practice of impression management being suddenly disabled.

"Usually, even if I don't say it out loud, I already asked chatbot AI under the table, then just read it out like I thought of it myself. When I couldn't do that anymore, I suddenly felt like everyone could see that my English wasn't as good as I pretended it to be." (P3)

"My hands were cold and my mind went completely blank. I felt like I was standing there naked, without my phone as my shield." (P7)

"It's not that I forgot the grammar. I think I was more afraid that my friends would realize I've been faking it a little, that my English isn't as fluent live as it looks when I've had time to check it first." (P8)

"Honestly, I felt relieved in a strange way. I never use ChatGPT anyway because I don't trust it, so for me it was just a normal speaking task, maybe a bit quieter without everyone's phone buzzing." (P4)

Read together, these accounts suggest that for participants who had habitually used tools to privately verify or rehearse their speech, the smartphone had come to function less as a learning tool than as a mechanism for managing how their competence appeared to others, closer to Norton's (2013) account of identity-protective investment than to a simple study aid. P4's account, by contrast, is instructive precisely because it does not fit this pattern: for a participant who had never relied on such tools, deprivation carried no identity threat and was experienced as comparatively unremarkable. This divergence indicates that the intensity of this theme is not a direct function of the deprivation itself, but of each participant's pre-existing relationship with the tool being removed, a relationship shaped,

in turn, by how much of their perceived fluency had come to depend on concealed technological mediation.

Theme 2: The Body's Memory of the Phone

Several participants described a habitual, semi-automatic reliance on brief pauses to consult a phone, and the disruption of this embodied habit produced a distinct, almost physical, disorientation once the option was removed, independent of the linguistic demand of the task itself.

"Normally when I forget a word, I just glance at my phone for two seconds. That time, I kept reaching for my pocket out of habit, and realizing it wasn't there made me panic even more, like I lost my safety net in the middle of the ocean." (P1)

"There was a word, 'volunteer,' and I completely blanked. My hand actually moved toward my pocket before my brain caught up and reminded me the phone wasn't there." (P4)

"I knew what I wanted to say in Indonesian, but the English words just would not come out. Normally I would type it to ChatGPT, but this time my brain just froze." (P9)

"Keeping up with the speed was the hardest part. Without the app to confirm my grammar, I was not sure if what I was saying was correct, and that uncertainty made me slower and more anxious, which made me even less sure." (P8)

This theme resonates closely with research on cognitive offloading (Sparrow, Liu, & Wegner, 2011; Risko & Gilbert, 2016), which shows that when an external aid is unexpectedly withdrawn, performance on tasks that had come to rely on it often suffers more than it would for someone who never had access to the aid. What these accounts add to that literature is a bodily dimension rarely captured in laboratory offloading studies: several participants described the automatic hand movement toward a pocket as itself a

source of alarm, suggesting that the habit of offloading had become embodied and semi-automatic rather than a deliberate, conscious strategy. For these participants, the anxiety in the moment was not only "I don't know the word" but "the tool I automatically reach for is not there," a layered disruption that existing FLA constructs such as communication apprehension do not clearly distinguish.

Theme 3: Uneven Reckonings with Technological Dependency

A striking, and notably non-uniform, feature of participants' narratives was the emergence of reflective insight into their own dependency on technology. Crucially, this insight did not follow a single script: for some it arrived quickly and was accepted; for others it arrived only partially, or was actively resisted.

"At first I was angry, why can't we just use our phones like usual? But afterwards I realized, maybe I have been relying on chatbot apps so much that I never really trained my own speaking." (P5)

"It made me question whether my English score actually reflects my real ability, or just my ability to use ChatGPT quickly." (P10)

"I still think it's a bit unfair, honestly. In real life I would just use my phone, so why does removing it prove anything about my 'real' ability? Maybe using tools well is also a skill." (P9)

"I don't think I depend on it that much, but the activity made me feel like I should double check that belief, which is uncomfortable in itself." (P6)

P5 and P10's accounts show a movement from resentment toward reluctant acceptance of dependency, consistent with what might be expected from a straightforward exposure narrative. P9's account, however, resists this resolution altogether, reframing tool

use as a legitimate competence in its own right rather than a deficiency to be corrected, a position that finds some support in Huang and Liu's (2025) observation that learners' relationships with technology are not uniformly negative or dependency-driven. P6's comment illustrates a third, more unsettled position: neither denial nor acceptance, but a kind of induced self-doubt about one's own self-assessment. Rather than treating this variation as inconsistency to be resolved, it is read here as evidence that "dependency" is not a fixed trait that deprivation simply reveals, but a relationship each learner is actively, and differently, negotiating in the moment of being interviewed about it.

Theme 4: Biographical Echoes

For several participants, the intensity or particular flavor of their anxiety during the no-gadget task appeared, on closer reading, to be shaped by earlier experiences unrelated to technology, which the deprivation seemed to reactivate rather than newly create. This theme emerged from the more interpretively oriented interview prompts and reflects IPA's hermeneutic aim of understanding not just what participants felt, but why it took the particular shape it did for them specifically.

"This might sound unrelated, but it reminded me of junior high, when a teacher made me repeat a sentence in front of the class because I mispronounced something, and everyone laughed. I hadn't thought about that in years, but I felt the same heat in my face during the no-gadget activity." (P3)

"In my family, being 'pintar' [smart] is very important, especially in English because my parents can't speak it and are proud that I can. So when I froze, it wasn't just embarrassing in front of friends, it felt like I was failing something bigger than the task." (P7)

"I don't really have a story like that. I think I just get nervous about the task itself, not about what it says about me." (P1)

P3's and P7's accounts suggest that the deprivation activity did not simply create anxiety in a vacuum; it intersected with pre-existing, biographically rooted sensitivities around public linguistic failure and family expectation, echoing Norton's (2013) argument that language anxiety is bound up with identity investments that extend well beyond the immediate classroom. P1's contrasting account, obtained through the same biographically oriented prompt, is analytically important precisely because it did not yield a similar echo: for P1, the anxiety appeared more task-bound and less identity-laden, a reminder that not every participant's experience carries this deeper layer, and that IPA's idiographic commitment requires reporting this absence rather than searching for a biographical narrative that was not there.

Theme 5: Divergent Trajectories, Including a Negative Case

Despite the intensity of initial anxiety described across Themes 1–2, several participants described a process of adaptation within or across repeated exposures. This trajectory, however, was not universal, and one case in particular diverges sharply enough from the pattern to warrant treatment as a negative case rather than an outlier to be discounted.

"After a few minutes I just gave up trying to find the perfect word and used a simpler sentence instead. It was not elegant, but people understood me, and that gave me a strange kind of confidence." (P2)

"The second time we did the no-gadget speaking activity, I was still nervous, but not as panicked. I think my brain had started to trust itself a little more." (P6)

"Honestly, the second time was almost worse. I think because the first time I told myself it was a one-time thing I could survive, but realizing it would keep happening made me feel like I would never actually be ready. I still avoid volunteering to speak first even now." (P9)

P2 and P6's accounts describe compensatory strategies, most notably a shift toward accepting imperfection, and a self-reported increase in confidence with repetition, a pattern broadly consistent with exposure-based accounts of anxiety reduction. P9's account, drawn from the same repeated-exposure design, complicates any assumption that repetition reliably produces adaptation. For P9, repetition instead confirmed a fear that the difficulty was chronic rather than a one-time hurdle, a reading reinforced by her continued resentment in Theme 3 and her unresolved biographical material in Theme 4. Read across these three themes, P9's case suggests that adaptation may depend less on the number of exposures alone than on whether a participant has also reached some reconciliation with the dependency and identity dimensions described above, a possibility that a themes-only, quote-light presentation would have obscured.

4. Discussion

The five themes reported above resist collapsing into a single tidy arc from fear to mastery. Read together, however, they support an argument that goes beyond restating existing constructs of foreign language anxiety, and that engages directly with the contemporary literature on technology, cognition, and identity in language learning reviewed above.

First, this study suggests that the strand of FLA research examining technology's effects on anxiety has so far looked in only one direction. Chen (2024) and Xu et al. (2024) found that AI tool use reduced anxiety and increased self-efficacy, while El Shazly (2021) found that AI chatbot use slightly increased anxiety. On the surface, these findings appear contradictory. The present findings suggest a way of reconciling them: what matters may not be whether a digital tool is present or absent, used or unused, but whether the learner experiences a shift in autonomy and control over how their communicative self is presented.

For participants in Theme 1 who had used chatbot apps to privately manage the gap between their perceived and performed competence, deprivation was destabilizing not because a convenient resource disappeared, but because a mechanism of impression management, in Norton's (2013) sense of identity investment, was suddenly withdrawn without warning or choice. This reframes technology-related anxiety less as a property of tools themselves and more as a function of abrupt, involuntary shifts in a learner's sense of control over their own linguistic self-presentation, a dimension that scale-based FLA measures, built around presence and use, are not designed to detect.

Second, Theme 2's embodied, semi-automatic reaching for an absent phone extends cognitive-offloading research (Sparrow et al., 2011; Risko & Gilbert, 2016) into a domain, real-time oral production, where its consequences are immediately and publicly visible, unlike the private recall tasks typical of offloading experiments. This suggests that habitual app use in speaking preparation may not be cognitively neutral scaffolding, as much of the MALL literature implicitly assumes (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Zhen & Hashim, 2022), but may, for some learners, restructure the retrieval routines underlying spontaneous speech itself. If so, the pedagogical question is not simply whether to permit or restrict technology, but how to help learners build retrieval routines that do not silently depend on an external aid whose sudden absence, whether due to a dead battery, a lost signal, or a future workplace expectation, could reproduce the disruption observed here.

Third, and most speculatively, Clark and Chalmers's (1998) extended mind thesis offers a productive, if provocative, frame for Theme 1's concealment narratives. If a learner's phone has become functionally continuous with how they compose and verify speech before producing it, as several participants' descriptions of pre-typing sentences under the table suggest, then its removal may be phenomenologically closer to losing a cognitive resource than to losing a convenience, which would help explain why the reported distress in this study, described in bodily terms such as "naked," "cold hands," and "shield," reads as more acute than typical descriptions of ordinary classroom speaking anxiety in prior Indonesian studies (Subekti, 2018; Idrus, 2022; Daflizar, 2024).

This same lens, applied to Edmondson's (1999) concept of psychological safety, suggests that the phone may have functioned for some participants as a private substitute for a psychologically safe classroom, allowing them to take linguistic risks without immediate exposure; its withdrawal did not create fear of evaluation so much as remove a coping structure that had been quietly compensating for its absence.

Fourth, Theme 4's biographical echoes and Theme 5's negative case together argue against treating technological deprivation as a self-contained pedagogical intervention whose effects can be predicted from the activity design alone. P3's and P7's accounts suggest that for some learners, the activity's emotional intensity draws on evaluation-related experiences that long predate any exposure to technology, while P9's case shows that repeated exposure, often assumed to be therapeutic by default in exposure-based models of anxiety, can instead consolidate avoidance when it is not accompanied by some reconciliation with the identity and dependency dimensions surfaced in Themes 1 and 3. This is consistent with, and extends, Subekti's (2018) finding that Indonesian students' anxiety is shaped by teacher and peer dynamics beyond the immediate task, suggesting that technological deprivation should be understood as an activity that interacts with, rather than operates independently of, each learner's prior evaluative history.

Taken together, these arguments suggest a modest theoretical contribution that a subtype of state anxiety, provisionally termed digital scaffolding withdrawal anxiety, may be a useful addition to the vocabulary of foreign language anxiety research, distinct from, but overlapping with, Horwitz et al.'s (1986) three original components. Unlike communication apprehension or fear of negative evaluation, which are typically theorized as more stable dispositions, this anxiety appears specifically tied to the sudden, involuntary loss of a routinized coping tool, is shaped by each learner's biography, and does not resolve in a uniform way with repetition. This study cannot establish this as a validated construct on the basis of ten interviews; that would require the kind of scale-development work exemplified by Botes et al.'s (2020) meta-analytic work on the FLCAS. What the present findings do offer is a phenomenologically grounded rationale for why such a construct might be worth developing and testing in future, larger-scale research.

5. Conclusion

This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore how ten undergraduate students in Bangka Belitung Province experienced speaking anxiety under strict technological deprivation, analyzing each case ideographically before identifying five superordinate themes: digital concealment and fear of exposure, the body's memory of the phone, uneven reckonings with dependency, biographical echoes, and divergent trajectories that include a negative case of persistent, unresolved anxiety.

Rather than converging on a single, tidy narrative of fear followed by growth, the findings show a genuinely heterogeneous set of experiences shaped by each participant's prior relationship with technology, identity investments, and evaluative history. The study

proposes that this pattern points toward a distinct, if provisional, form of state anxiety tied to the sudden withdrawal of habitual digital scaffolding, and argues that this anxiety is best understood through the combined lenses of cognitive offloading, identity, and psychological safety rather than through existing FLA constructs alone.

Pedagogically, the findings caution against treating technology-free speaking activities as a uniformly beneficial, one-size-fits-all exposure exercise. Instructors in similarly resourced regional contexts might instead consider preparing students for the identity-level as well as linguistic demands of such activities, checking in individually with students for whom repeated exposure (as with P9) may be consolidating avoidance rather than resolving it, and pairing technology-free practice with explicit discussion of students' own relationship with chatbots and AI tools, rather than assuming that removing the tool alone will build resilience.

This study is limited in several respects. Its small, purposive sample from a small landscape is appropriate to IPA's idiographic aims but does not permit statistical generalization, and the retrospective, interview-based design relies on participants' post-hoc accounts rather than in-the-moment measurement of anxiety. The proposed construct of digital scaffolding withdrawal anxiety is offered as a grounded hypothesis rather than a validated one.

Future research could combine IPA with physiological or scale-based anxiety measures administered immediately before and after technological deprivation, track a larger cohort longitudinally across repeated exposures to examine whether P9's negative-case pattern is common or rare, and extend this line of inquiry to AI-mediated speaking practice specifically, given the mixed findings reported by Chen (2024), Xu et al. (2024), and El Shazly (2021).

6. References

- Bashori, M., van Hout, R., Strik, H., & Cucchiarini, C. (2022). Web-based language learning and speaking anxiety. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(5–6), 1058–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1770293>
- Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2020). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and academic achievement: An overview of the prevailing literature and a meta-analysis. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning*, 2(1), 26–56. <https://doi.org/10.52598/jpll/2/1/3>
- Chen, Y. (2024). Exploring the impact of ChatGPT on Chinese students' foreign language anxiety in Macau's EMI higher education. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 39, 346–355. <https://doi.org/10.54097/psy0yy79>
- Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. (1998). The extended mind. *Analysis*, 58(1), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1093/analysis/58.1.7>
- Daflizar. (2024). Out-of-class speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students and its relationship with self-perceived speaking skills, vocabulary proficiency, and gender. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*.
- Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 237–274. doi: 10.14746/ssl2014.4.2.5
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- El Shazly, R. (2021). Effects of artificial intelligence on English speaking anxiety and speaking performance: A case study. *Expert Systems*, 38(3), e12667. <https://doi.org/10.1111/exsy.12667>
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2011). Mobile apps for language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15(2), 2–11.

- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
- Huang, L., Liu, M. The impact of technology on foreign language anxiety: A systematic review of empirical studies from 2004 to 2024. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 12, 1665 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05921-6>
- Idrus, M. (2022). Speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian students in an international university. *Interference: Journal of Language, Literature, and Linguistics*, 3(1), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.26858/interference.v3i1.31407>
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2013). *Re-Skilling Language Learners for a Mobile World*. Monterey, CA: The International Research Foundation for English Language Education. <https://www.tirfonline.org/english-in-the-workforce/mobile-assisted-language-learning/>
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1995). How does anxiety affect second language learning? A reply to Sparks and Ganschow. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(1), 90–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1995.tb05418.x>
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283–305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x> Digital Object Identifier (DOI)
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Rajendran, T., & Yunus, M. M. (2021). A systematic literature review on the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) for enhancing speaking skills among ESL and EFL learners. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(1), 586–609. DOI:10.6007/IJARPE/v10-i1/8939
- Risko, E.F. and Gilbert, S.J. (2016) Cognitive Offloading. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 20, 676–688. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.07.002>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880903340091>
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 53–80). Sage Publications. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9780470776278.ch10>
- Sparrow, B., Liu, J., & Wegner, D. M. (2011). Google effects on memory: Cognitive consequences of having information at our fingertips. *Science*, 333(6043), 776–778. DOI: 10.1126/science.1207745
- Subekti, A. S. (2018). AN EXPLORATION OF LEARNERS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: LEARNERS' AND TEACHERS' VOICES. *TEFLIN Journal*, 29(2), 219–244. Retrieved from <https://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal/article/view/590>
- Warschauer, M. (2013). Technological Change and the Future of CALL. *New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms*, 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410610775-7>
- Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal*, 37(3), 308–328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315>
- Xu, S., Chen, P., & Zhang, G. (2024). Exploring the impact of the use of ChatGPT on foreign language self-efficacy among Chinese students studying abroad: The mediating role of foreign language enjoyment. *Heliyon*, 10(21), e39845. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39845>
- Zhen, L. S., & Hashim, H. (2022). The usage of MALL in learners' readiness to speak English. *Sustainability*, 14(23), 16227. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142316227>