



Influence of English Conversational Club on English Speaking Anxiety: A Case Study of ISDR-Bukavu English Club

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Abstract: This study sought to determine the level of English speaking anxiety of club members and non-members, the relationship between English conversation club membership and speaking anxiety, and examined whether anxiety levels varied across proficiency levels among English club members. An ex post facto quantitative research design was adopted. Data were collected from 58 students, comprising 29 English club members and 29 non-members. Speaking anxiety was measured using the FLCAS (Cronbach's alpha = .988). Due to non-normal data distribution, non-parametric tests were performed to compare group means. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare anxiety levels between groups on membership variable and the Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc pairwise comparisons was used to examine differences across proficiency levels. The findings revealed that club members experienced lower levels of English speaking anxiety than non-members. Besides, it was found that this difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$). Furthermore, significant differences were observed across proficiency levels, advanced students demonstrating significantly lower anxiety compared to upper-intermediate (Adj. Sig. = .008 < .017) and intermediate (Adj. Sig. < .001). These findings suggest that participation in English conversation clubs may considerably contribute to reducing speaking anxiety and that higher proficiency is associated with lower anxiety. The study highlighted the pedagogical importance of extracurricular speaking activities in EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Speaking Anxiety, English Club, Affective Factors, Communicative Apprehension, Test Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation

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1. Introduction

Speaking a foreign language entails more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules (Shumin, 2002). In the contemporary era of rapid global change, characterised by accelerated global transformations and increasing interconnectivity, communications has assumed a pivotal role in academic, social and professional sectors (Höl & Kasimi, 2022). While reading, listening and writing remain integral components of language proficiency, oral communication occupies a distinctive position because it enables learners to construct and convey meaning in real time. Since English continues to function as a principal medium of internal exchange, strengthening EFL learners' communicative competence, mainly speaking, has become a central pedagogical priority (Höl & Kasimi, 2022; Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021).

Importantly, it is commonly argued among scholars that learning English as a foreign language entails comprehension and production (Ali et al., 2019; Pickering & Garrod, 2013). Comprehension involves cognitive process and decodification of language substance whereas production entails language creativity and generation of thoughts and expressive values using language tools (Pickering & Garrod, 2013; Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Additionally, language learning and teaching are complex processes involving linguistic but also social and psychological factors (Gannoun & Deris, 2023; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). Besides, as posited by Richards & Renandya (2002), the ability to speak a second or foreign language well is a very complex task if we try to understand the nature of what appears to be involved.

Moreover, Richards & Renandya (2002) argued that the ability to speak a foreign language is influenced by a number of factors among which age, listening ability, sociocultural knowledge and affective factors. According to Oxford (1990) cited by Shumin (2002), the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure. Importantly, Shumin (2002) opines that the affective factors related to L2 or foreign language learning are emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation. According to Brown (1994), Foreign language learning is a complex task that is susceptible to human anxiety, which is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, and apprehension.

Many studies have been carried out to find out the relationship between language learning and anxiety as one of the affective variables (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013). Studies in the field of foreign language anxiety (FLA) have repeatedly revealed that of all the language skills, speaking is the most anxiety-provoking to foreign language learners (Melouah, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz,

2013; Vural, 2019). In the same vein, Vural (2019) opines that speaking skill awakens more anxiety than other language skills and is negatively affected by anxiety.

Furthermore, several empirical studies on foreign language speaking anxiety have emphasized that increasing learners' opportunities to speak in supportive and relaxing environments is an effective strategy for reducing speaking anxiety and fostering communicative confidence. For example, Abbasi, Ahmed, Farooqi, & John (2019) and Alnahidh & Altalhab (2020) opine that to reduce English speaking anxiety, ESL students should practice English regularly in daily and academic context. In addition, they should be listening to English news, reading aloud, and actively using new vocabulary and grammar to improve confidence and fluency. At last, they should be encouraged to motivate peers to speak English and to view mistakes as a natural and necessary part of learning process. Moreover, Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009) argue that because language speaking anxiety may stem from fear of making mistake and consequent fear of negative evaluation, and students' perception of low ability in relation to their peers, the first step in reducing anxiety is to actually have students participate in speaking tasks especially through project work as it provide anxious and non-anxious students alike with abundant opportunity to use the language in non-threatening context. Additionally, Hasan (2024) and Hasan, Dehham, & Hasan (2022) postulate that opportunities for real-world communicative interactions are crucial for speaking skill development. Finally, Khusnia (2017) pointed out that students should create a low stress, friendly and supportive environment; and foster proactive role to create an atmosphere of group solidarity and support.

Based on what precedes, it is obvious that researchers have argued that constant exposure to meaningful, low stress and relaxing interaction -such as English clubs-lowers affective barriers and improved oral performance (Young, 1991; Gregersen, 2020; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Khusnia, 2017; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Abbasi, Ahmed, Farooqi, & John 2019; Saraç & Doğan, 2024; Chicho, 2025)

However, there has not been sufficient empirical findings supporting this claim weakening its scientific soundness. A few recent studies have examined the role of English clubs as extracurricular sessions that offer learners additional chances to practise speaking in low stress settings in alleviating English speaking anxiety. For instance we can mention Dayana et al. (2024), Hasan, (2024), Majaliwa et al. (2024), Saraç & Doğan (2024), and Inggris & Sumbawa (2025).

Although previous studies have highlighted the positive influence of English conversational clubs participation on reducing English speaking anxiety, most of them focus on club members without comparing anxiety levels between attendees and non-attendees. Furthermore,

while some studies have examined the relationship between English proficiency and speaking anxiety (e.g. Dung & Hung, 2020; Dana & Aminatun, 2022; Debreli & Demirkan, 2016; Liu, 2006...), these investigations were not specifically conducted within the context of English clubs. Importantly, empirical research addressing this issue within the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains limited, highlighting relevance of this research.

This gap underscores the significance of the present study, which seeks to investigate the relationship between English club membership and speaking anxiety by comparing students who participate in the ISDR-Bukavu English club with those who do not. Additionally, the study aims to determine whether English speaking anxiety levels vary across different proficiency levels among English club members.

1.2. Research questions and hypotheses

With regard to the above stated problem, the present study attempts to answer the following questions:

Question 1. What is the level of English speaking anxiety of ISDR Bukavu club members and that of their non-member peers?

Question 2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of English speaking anxiety between ISDR Bukavu English club members and their non-member peers?

Question 3. Is English speaking anxiety proficiency significantly related to learners' English proficiency level?

In line with the above research questions and the gap identification, the predictions below were formulated:

Prediction 1. It is predicted that ISDR Bukavu English club members and their non-members peers will exhibit moderate level of English speaking anxiety.

Prediction 2. There is no statistically significant difference between the level of English speaking anxiety of ISDR Bukavu club members and that of their non-member peers.

Prediction 3. There is no statistically significant relationship between English speaking anxiety and learners' English proficiency level.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English club

The relationship between English speaking opportunities and English language skills improvement has been a centre of interest among English as a foreign language

practitioners. An English club –one of the speaking opportunity space- is a group of people –group members- who meet regularly to practice speaking, listening, reading and writing in English. It consists of a series of regularly scheduled meetings where members practice English and help the community solve problems (Malu & Smedley, 2018, Majaliwa et al., 2024).

Dayana et al. (2024) opine that English clubs are useful learning spaces and strategies for teachers and students which innovate and promote English-speaking skills in students within or outside the classroom, reducing anxiety levels and causing extensive language learning.

According to Gömleksiz (2014) as cited by Majaliwa et al. (2024), for learners who demonstrate limited classroom participation and low motivation (whether due to shyness, introversion, excessive talkativeness, or limited language proficiency-, English clubs appear to be an effective alternative learning space. By engaging students in collaborative and enjoyable activities with peers, such clubs not only foster active participation but also provide a relaxed and supportive environment where students practice in an enjoyable way developing their skills.

2.2 English speaking anxiety

Making reference to Krashen's Input Hypothesis - excessive anxiety in EFL levels hinders the natural acquisition and retrieval of vocabulary, thereby impairing speaking fluency- and Gardner's Socio-educational Model -fear of unfavourable judgement and diminished self-confidence intensify language anxiety, hindering learners' participation in oral tasks-, Chicho (2025) states that language anxiety is a significant factor in language learning which hinders the effective processing of language input and influences learning outcomes.

Importantly, language anxiety is a negative notion that refers to a condition of uneasiness caused by learning a new language (Setyaning, Ping, & Asih, 2024; Dana & Aminatun, 2022). English speaking anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the English as a foreign language learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Elaldi, 2016; Zheng, 2008).

Drawn from an empirical study on student of the University of Texas in 1983, Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) identified a few symptoms of foreign (English) language anxiety namely; freezing in class, standing out the door trying to summon up enough courage to enter, going back prior to tests, tenseness, trembling, perspiring, palpitations, and sleep disturbance.

Importantly, English speaking anxiety has consistently been a significant area of interest in the language learning process because it is an important block for English -as a

foreign language- learning that student must overcome (Zheng, 2008; Elaldi, 2016).

Elaldi (2016) argues that foreign language speaking anxiety –English speaking anxiety for this study- has been classified into three components namely: (a) Communicative apprehension which arises from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas; (b) fear of negative social evaluation which stems from learner's need to make a positive social impression on others; and (c) test anxiety which is an apprehension about academic evaluation. It is exactly from this perspective that English speaking anxiety is apprehended in the present study.

2.3 English speaking anxiety scales

Researchers in Psycholinguistics have developed several instruments or scales to measure foreign language - English language for the present study- speaking anxiety. Yaikhong & Usaha (2012) identify four major language speaking anxiety scales, namely:

- the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986);
- the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) developed by McCroskey (1970);
- the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA-34) developed by McCroskey (1970, 1972); and
- the Speaker Anxiety Scale developed by Clevenger and Halvorson (1992).

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design using an ex post facto method -a type of research that attempts to determine the causes for, or the consequences of differences that already exist in groups of individuals (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2019). This approach was corroborated by documentary analysis, which consisted of reviewing the existing literature pertaining to the English clubs and English speaking anxiety.

3.1 Participants

The present study involved fifty-eight EFL students from Bukavu College of Rural Development (ISDR-Bukavu), located in Bukavu town, South Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The participants were divided into two groups: twenty-one English club members and twenty-one non-members. The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 25 years (Mean=20.03 and Standard deviation=2.135). In terms of gender, the participants comprised thirteen females and twenty-nine males. The non- members group was selected purposefully to match the English club

members' academic profiles, particularly their academic level -gender was not considered as a matching criterion.

To measure the significance of the relationship between proficiency level and speaking anxiety, the participants were assigned to three groups -stratified sampling technique- based on their scores on the English proficiency test -Quick Placement Test (version 1)- namely intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced after having scored respectively between 41-60, 61-80 and 81-100.

3.2 Instrument

The present study employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), as it is the most widely used instrument in quantitative research for measuring foreign language anxiety (Lu & Liu, 2011).

FLCAS is a 33-items self-report instrument designed to assess learner's anxiety specifically associated with foreign classroom situations. The FLCAS, was designed to assess three core dimensions of foreign language classroom anxiety namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Lu & Liu, 2011). Additionally, Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) go on stating that communicative apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people or difficulty in speaking in dyads or groups (oral communication anxiety) or in public ("stage fright"), or in listening to or learning a spoken message. Test anxiety, on the other side, refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure resulting in unrealistic demands on oneself. Lastly, fear of negative evaluation is understood as apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively.

According to Amengual-Pizarro (2018), the items: 1, 4, 9, 14,15,18,24,27,29,30, and 32; the items: 3,5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28; and the items 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33 are respectively related to communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Importantly, as opined by (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), this scale has demonstrated internal reliability, achieving an alpha coefficient of .93 with all items producing significant corrected item-total scale correlation. Additionally, for the present study, the internal reliability of the FLCAS was examined through Cronbach's alpha. The analysis yielded a reliability coefficient $\alpha=.988$ indicating excellent internal consistency among the 33 items of the scale. This very high coefficient suggests that the items of the scale consistently measure the same underlying construct, which is English language speaking anxiety. Therefore, the instrument was considered highly reliable for assessing levels of anxiety among participants.

Additionally, to assess the variability of speaking anxiety among proficiency groups, this study utilised the Quick Placement Test (QPT) in order to ensure homogeneity within each stratum. QPT is a proficiency measurement tool that was proposed by the Oxford University Press and the University of Cambridge Local examinations Syndicate in 2001 (Willy et al., 2025). Importantly, as opined by Rashidi & Mirsalari (2016), it is an adaptable proficiency test developed to ensure a reliable and time-saving method of measuring learners' level of English language proficiency.

In line with the third research questions, the QPT was used only with the English club members to measure the significance of the difference of speaking anxiety across the three proficiency levels.

3.3 Data collection and analysis techniques

A close-ended questionnaire was administered to the participants comprising ISDR Bukavu club members and their non-member peers. The academic profiles of club members guided the selection of non-member participants to ensure compatibility between groups. Data were collected using the FLCAS administered through KoboToolBox link, which permitted accurate and efficient data management. In order to ensure clarity and minimize potential misinterpretation, the questionnaire was translated into French, which is the language of instruction in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (DR Congo). The translated version underwent several careful reviews to preserve the original meaning of the Likert-scale items.

Additionally, the Quick Placement Test (QPT) was used to assign club members to proficiency groups based on their test scores.

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 25. Both descriptive (means, standard deviation, etc.) and inferential statistics were computed. Based on Normality test results, which rejected H_0 for the second and third research questions, non-parametric tests, namely Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests, were performed to compare membership, proficiency variables and anxiety levels. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for positively worded items. For negatively worded items, scores were reverse-coded before analysis, that is, they were rated on a scale ranged from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree). Reverse scoring was applied to nine items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32), consistent with standard FLCAS scoring procedures.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1 Speaking Anxiety levels of English Club Members and Non-Members

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Anxiety levels of English Club Members

Components of English speaking anxiety	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Communication apprehension	29	1.18	3.36	1.7555	.42090	.07816
Test anxiety	29	1.20	2.53	1.6897	.33251	.06175
Fear of negative evaluation	29	1.14	2.86	1.5714	.45336	.08419
Overall anxiety	29	1.18	2.85	1.6865	.36176	.06718

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of English speaking anxiety among English club members across the three dimensions of foreign language speaking anxiety as well as the overall anxiety score. The results indicate that the overall anxiety mean score was 1.6865 (SD = .36176), which falls within the very low anxiety category on the five-point Likert scale. Among the three components, communication apprehension recorded the highest mean score (M = 1.7555, SD = .42090), although it still remains within the very low anxiety range. This

implies that while some nervousness related to oral communication exists, it is not substantial. Test anxiety followed closely (M = 1.6897, SD = .33251), indicating that the club members experience very limited tension during language assessments. Fear of negative evaluation yielded the lowest mean score (M = 1.5714, SD = .45336), reflecting very low concern about being judged by classmates or instructors. Overall, these findings indicate that members of the ISDR-Bukavu English club experience low levels of English speaking anxiety.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Anxiety levels of English Club Non-Members

Components of English speaking anxiety	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Communication apprehension	29	4.27	4.55	4.4326	.06722	.01248
Test anxiety	29	4.13	4.47	4.4276	.07871	.01462
Fear of negative evaluation	29	4.71	5.00	4.9113	.13452	.02498
Overall anxiety	29	4.39	4.58	4.5319	.05528	.01026

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the speaking anxiety levels of ISDR-Bukavu English club non-members across the three components of the English language speaking anxiety and the overall score. The findings showed that English club non-members reported high levels of overall English speaking anxiety ($M = 4.5319$, $SD = .01026$) on the five-point Likert scale. Communication apprehension yielded a mean score of 4.4326 ($SD = .06722$), which falls within the high anxiety range. These results suggests that English club non-members experience considerable nervousness and discomfort during oral communication activities. Similarly, test anxiety recorded a high mean score ($M = 4.4276$, $SD = .07871$), indicating substantial worry and tension related to English language assessments. Notably, fear of negative evaluation showed the highest mean among all components ($M = 4.9113$, $SD = .13452$), falling within the very high levels of anxiety. This

suggests that English club non-members are particularly concerned about being judged, criticized, or negatively evaluated by peers and teachers. Overall, these findings demonstrate that ISDR-Bukavu English club non-members experience high levels of English speaking anxiety.

In response to the first research question, the descriptive results revealed that while English club members reported low levels of English speaking anxiety, non-members exhibited high levels of English speaking anxiety. Hence, the first prediction according to which both ISDR-Bukavu club members and their non-member peers would exhibit moderate levels of English speaking anxiety is rejected.

4.1.2 Statistical Significance of English Speaking Anxiety levels Difference between English Club Members and their Non-member Peers

Table 3: Normality test

English club membership		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Overall anxiety	English club members	.246	29	.000	.780	29	.000
	English club non-members	.304	29	.000	.778	29	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3 presents the results of normality tests conducted to determine whether the overall English speaking anxiety scores were normally distributed in both groups. Since each group comprised 29 participants ($n < 50$), the Shapiro-Wilk test was considered the most appropriate test of normality. The results showed that for English club members, $W = .780$, $p < .001$, and for non-members,

$W = .778$, $p < .001$. Because the p-values were below the .05 significance level, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected for both group. Given this violation of the normality assumption, a non-parametric test was -the Mann-Whitney U test- was used to compare the English speaking anxiety of both groups.

Table 4. Statistical Difference Significance of Speaking Anxiety Levels of English Club Members and Non-Members using the Mann-Whitney U test

Test Statistics ^a	
	Overall anxiety
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	435.000
Z	-6.606
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: English club membership

On basis of the normality test results, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted to compare overall speaking anxiety levels between English club members and non-members. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The Mann-Whitney U value was .000, with a Wilcoxon W of 435.000, a Z value of -6.606, and a two-tailed p-value of less than .001. Since $p < .001$, the null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups was rejected. These results indicate that English club non-members exhibited significantly higher anxiety levels of English speaking anxiety than members. The rank mean scores further confirmed the anxiety levels were consistently higher among non-

members. Therefore, prediction 2, which stated that there would be no statistically significant difference between ISDR-Bukavu English club members and non-members, is not supported. These findings suggest that participation in the English club is associated with lower levels of English speaking anxiety, highlighting the potential of extracurricular language activities in reducing foreign language speaking anxiety and promoting learners' confidence in oral communication.

Comparison of Speaking Anxiety Levels of English Club Members with Regard to Proficiency Levels

Table 5. Test of Normality

Proficiency levels		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Overall anxiety	Advanced	.422	8	.000	.654	8	.001
	Upper-intermediate	.133	15	.200*	.951	15	.548
	Intermediate	.230	6	.200*	.911	6	.441

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The above table displays the results normality tests for overall English speaking scores across different proficiency levels of ISDR-Bukavu English club members. Considering the sample sizes in each group are less than 50, the Shapiro-Wilk test was considered as being the most appropriate and reliable indicator of normality. For advanced group, $W = .654, p = .001 < .05$,

indicating significant deviation from normality assumption. The Upper-intermediate group, $W = .951, p = .548 > .05$, and the Intermediate group, $W = .911, p = .441 > .05$, did not significantly deviate from normality assumption. Given, one of the groups violated normality assumption, a non-parametric test was required to compare groups.

Table 6. Statistical Difference Significance of Speaking Anxiety Levels of English Club Members with Regard to Proficiency Levels

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Overall anxiety
Kruskal-Wallis H	22.834
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Proficiency levels

The Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to examine differences in overall anxiety across proficiency levels among English club members. The test revealed a statistically significant difference between groups, $H(2)=22.834$, $p<.001$, indicating that at least one proficiency group differed from the other in terms of anxiety levels.

However, the Kruskal-Wallis tests do not indicate which specific groups differ, so post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted to identify these differences. Since performing multiple comparisons increases the risk of Type I error, that is, incorrect rejection of null hypothesis

of no difference, when it is actually true, which could lead to false positive (Akobeng, 2016), a Bonferroni correction was applied to adjust the significance threshold.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted to determine which proficiency groups differed significantly from one another. To control for Type I error associated with multiple comparisons, the alpha value was adjusted using the Bonferroni correction, resulting in a more conservative significant threshold of $.05/3 = .017$.

Table 7. Pairwise Comparisons English Speaking Anxiety Levels of Proficiency Groups

Group1-Group2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Advanced-Upper-intermediate	-11.117	3.716	-2.991	.003	.008
Advanced-Intermediate	-21.750	4.584	-4.744	.000	.000
Upper-intermediate-Intermediate	-10.633	4.100	-2.593	.010	.029

After applying the Bonferroni correction to control for Type I error, a more conservative significance threshold of .017 was used. The results showed that the Advanced group exhibited significantly lower anxiety levels than both the upper-intermediate (Adj. Sig. = .008) and intermediate (Adj. Sig. < .001) groups. Contrarily, the difference between the Upper-intermediate and Intermediate groups was not statistically significant after adjustment (Adj. Sig. = .029 > .017).

These findings suggest that the English speaking anxiety decreases as proficiency increases, with the most pronounced differences observed between the highest proficiency group and the lower proficiency groups. Consequently, based on these results, the third prediction, which stated that there would be no statistically significant relationship between English speaking anxiety and learners' English proficiency levels, is not supported.

4.2 Discussion

With regard to the first research question which sought to describe the levels of English speaking anxiety of ISDR-Bukavu English club members and non-members, the study revealed that, in the three dimensions of English speaking anxiety as measured by FLCAS namely communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, English club members reported low levels of speaking anxiety whereas non-members exhibited high levels of speaking anxiety. These findings underscore the arguments posited in the literature regarding the importance of supportive and low-stress environment (Young, 1991; Shumin, 2002; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Khusnia, 2017). Importantly, the findings are consistent with prior

empirical studies. Hasan (2024), Saraç & Doğan (2024), Dayanna et al.(2024) and Majaliwa et al. (2024) concluded that participation in English club contributes to reducing speaking anxiety and improving learners' confidence. These findings rejected the first prediction.

The second research question sought to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in English speaking anxiety between ISDR-Bukavu English club members and their non-member peers. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test revealed a highly significant difference between the two groups (p -values < .001), indicating that English club non-members experienced substantially higher levels of speaking anxiety than club members. These findings are in contradiction with Hasan (2024) who found no statistically significant difference in English speaking anxiety levels between students who participate in extracurricular English clubs and those who do, that is, accepted H_0 and rejected H_1 . However, they align with recent empirical studies. Majaliwa et al. (2024) who reported that a strong correlation between joining an English club and students speaking abilities and revealed, through multiple linear regression analysis, that joining an English club contribute to the improvement of performance in English speaking. Similarly, Dayana et al. (2024), through a qualitative research design, found that though speech anxiety negatively affects language acquisition, its impact can be mitigated by engaging students in topics of personal interest and implementing varied communicative activities. Therefore, students exposed to these methods demonstrated increased confidence, improved participation, and enhanced linguistic skills. These authors concluded that conversational English clubs serve as effective tools for reducing speech anxiety by fostering a relaxed and

interactive learning environment. Based on these findings, H_1 was supported.

Concerning the third research question as to whether the speaking anxiety levels would vary across English club members' proficiency levels, the results revealed, through Kruskal-Wallis test, that there was significant difference within groups ($H(2)=22.834$, $p<.001$ supporting H_1). However, these tests did not specify which groups differed from each other. Therefore, a Kruskal-Wallis one way ANOVA tests with Bonferroni correction was performed to identify group differences. It was thus found that the advanced group experienced significantly lower anxiety than Upper-intermediate (Adj. Sig. = .008 < Bonferroni corrected significance threshold = .017) and Intermediate groups (Adj. Sig. = .000 < Bonferroni corrected significance threshold = .017), indicating H_0 rejection. Conversely, no significant difference was demonstrated Upper-intermediate and Intermediate groups (Adj. Sig. = .029 > Bonferroni corrected significance threshold = .017), indicating H_1 rejection. These findings resonate with Dana & Aminatun (2022), Dung & Hung (2020) and Liu (2006), who demonstrated empirical evidence of relationship between English speaking anxiety and proficiency levels. They concluded that students with high proficiency levels experience low levels of English speaking anxiety. On the contrary, the findings contradict Debreli & Demirkan (2016), who unexpectedly concluded that pre-intermediate level students experienced higher English speaking anxiety levels than their elementary peers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between English club membership and speaking anxiety among ISDR-Bukavu students. It recruited 58 students comprising 29 English club members and 29 non-members. It set out to determine the levels of English speaking anxiety at the three dimensions measured by the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale -communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation-, investigated the statistical significance of the differences in the speaking anxiety levels of English club members and non-members and sought to determine whether there was statistically significance differences among the proficiency levels -advanced, upper-intermediate and intermediate- of club members. Data were collected through French translated version of FLCAS generated in KoboToolBox and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .988, indicating strong internal consistency. A quantitative ex post facto research design was employed. The findings revealed that students who participate in the English club reported lower levels whereas those who do not participate in English club exhibited higher levels of English speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U tests ($p < .001$) showed that English club members experienced significantly lower levels of

speaking anxiety than their non-member peers. Lastly, Kruskal-Wallis tests ($H(2)=22.834$, $p < .001$) indicating that at least one group significantly differed from the others. To complete the Kruskal-Wallis tests, the Kruskal-Wallis one way ANOVA tests indicated that the advanced group reported significantly lower anxiety levels than upper-intermediate and intermediate (Adj. Sig. = .008 < .017 and Adj. Sig. < .001 respectively).

These findings suggest that structured, supportive and interactive extracurricular speaking environments may play an important role in alleviating language related anxiety. In addition, they align with the view that increased linguistic mastery enhances self-confidence and reduces fear during oral communication.

Taken altogether, the findings highlight the valuable importance of both experiential exposure and linguistic development in addressing English speaking anxiety. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo context, this study contributes to the growing body of research in foreign language anxiety by providing empirical evidence to understand how extracurricular engagement influence language performance.

5.2 Recommendations

While making a sound contribution to the existing literature, this article did not examine differences in the three components of foreign language anxiety as measured by the FLCAS and it recruited a relatively small sample. Similarly, it did not compare different English club members for consistency of the claims formulated. These limitations may hinder generalizability of the results. Future research on foreign language speaking anxiety may address these limitations by examining differences in each dimension, recruiting larger samples and comparing two or more English clubs.

These findings entail solid pedagogical implications for EFL teaching context. First, universities and language departments should actively support the establishment and sustainability of English conversational clubs. Second, classroom teachers should consider integrating anxiety reducing strategies that mirror the supportive atmosphere of English conversational club. Also they should create a psychologically safe learning environment that can help reduce fear of negative evaluation and encourage participation through the principle "errors are not always errors."

Finally, teachers and instructional programs should be characterised by scaffolded speaking activities, gradual task progression, constructive feedback and confidence-building for a more inclusive instruction by mitigating anxiety while promoting linguistic development.

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