



ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: UNVEILING CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

An important aspect that may hinder a foreign language learning is anxiety. This qualitative study attempts to examine the phenomena of speaking anxiety and clarify its causes and treatments. Thirty junior high school students of grade IX (nine) participated in this study. Interviews and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaires were used to collect the data. The findings of this study reveal that the anxiety the students experience when speaking English falls into three distinct categories: low, moderate, and high, with the majority of the students had a high level of anxiety. Furthermore, it was also found that a lack of provisions and preparations to learn English, the fear of making pronunciation and grammatical errors, and feeling insecure around interlocutors who are more proficient in the language are the factors that cause students to feel anxious when speaking English.. In light of the findings of this study, students should continue to practice speaking English and maintain positive thinking when speaking English while teachers can help students manage anxiety by providing the needed support.

Keyword: *English as a foreign language; foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS); Indonesia; junior high school; speaking anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

Being able to speak in a foreign language, particularly in English has become essential for success in the classroom, on the workplace, and in career advancement. The ability to speak is described as "a productive oral process that consists of using cohesive devices, lexical items, phonological rules, and grammatical rules for one to convey one's thoughts and feelings in speech (Hammad et al., 2015). In the realm of education any students find it difficult and



intimidating to have a conversation in English (Macintyre, 2017). This is related to a number of elements that could hamper second or foreign language (S/FL) learning, such as worry and low motivation. The emotion in S/FL learning that has been the subject of the most investigation is acknowledged to be anxiety

The term 'anxiety' itself can be defined as unpleasant emotional states characterized by tension and terror sensations Öztürk and Gurbuz (2014) ; (Spielberger, 1983). According to (Gardner and Macintyre, 1992). In the context of education, an individual's self-reactions, sentiments, and behaviors that are specific to language learning classes and are brought on by the uniqueness of the language learning process are collectively known as language learning anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). He also suggest three connected components for language learning anxiety: fear of communication, dread of unfavorable judgments, and exam anxiety. It is believed that fear of communication is a form of guilt brought on by apprehension or fear when speaking with others. Dread of unfavorable viewpoints is the same as fear of other people's opinions. Exam anxiety is classified as a sort of performance anxiety coming from a fear of failing. Although situation-specific anxiety generally may include anxiety related to learning a foreign language, there are certain concerns among the students that have nothing to do with the current situation (Kayaolu & Salamel, 2013). Furthermore, investigating the fear that some students in a classroom may experience can be done using three main resources: an activity that requires extensive communication, a test, test-related anxiety, and test-related assessment anxiety (Horwitz and Cope, 1986)

According to Krashen's emotional filter hypothesis Krashen (1985), anxiety is known to facilitate language learning, It is less effective for students to hinder language learning when they are less anxious. Foreign language students typically describe feeling stressed, uneasy, or worried when learning to speak the target language. A myriad of recent studies Gosiewska-Turek, (2018); Huashan (2019); Kasap and Power (2019); Lin et al (2019); Milan, (2019);Anggraeni and Saputra (2018) ;Wilang AND Vo (2018) have also reported that speaking is the second or foreign language (S/FL) learning activity that causes students the most anxiety. According to Miskam and Saidalvi (2018), speaking anxiety (SA) is a term that



historically alludes to the anxiety associated with using oral language (Balemir, 2009). SA can range from a moderate feeling of "nervousness" to severe terror. Students who struggle with SA frequently display bodily symptoms of anxiety, including as shaking, sweating, and trembling (Khusnia, 2022). In addition, panic, amnesia, blank stares, butterflies in the stomach, a dry mouth and throat, a racing heart, and abruptly shrill sounds are also reported as the most common signs of SA. As a consequence, excessive anxiousness when speaking can hinder performance, cause focus problems, and make people act reticently (Abbasi and Khaleel, 2019).

Anxiety has become the emotion-related subject of the greatest investigation in second and foreign language learning. A large volume of these studies has focused on the causes of anxiety when speaking English, which is influenced by a variety of factors, including linguistic, psychological, physiological, and cultural aspects. According to Horwitz (2001), learners might be affected by comprehension understanding. It is intimately connected to how language is used. In addition to the student-related elements, there are numerous other outside factors that contribute to speaking anxiety, such as the teacher's inadequate assistance, the student's sensitive nature, and individual attention Gu and Day (2013);(Kafes & Siyli, 2015). Furthermore, learners may experience significant levels of anxiety as a result of their limited linguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2015) .

The results of an interview session with 30 Turkish EFL students conducted by Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) unveiled that language anxiety among learners is heightened by issues with word stress, grammar, and pronunciation. Meanwhile, Liu and Jackson (2008) found that speaking anxiety among 547 Chinese ESL students is a reflection of the fear of peer evaluation, which is brought on by behavioral issues in class. Numerous factors, including unpleasant activities, a lack of cooperation, poor teaching techniques, an environment that is very challenging and constrained in the classroom, issues with time management, and irrelevant instructional material, contribute to an increase in students' anxiety levels (Zia and Norrihan, 2015). In Indonesian EFL learning context, speaking anxiety is



increasingly common among junior high school students since English is no longer obligatorily offered at primary level by the Ministry of Education and Culture since the 2013-2014 school year. The goal is for elementary school students to improve their mastery Indonesian skills first. This makes it challenging for students to learn English and has a negative impact on how successfully they adjust to their new learning environment as well as their capacity to meet their academic goals.

Although speaking anxiety has been discussed in a plethora of studies, the foci are usually on the causes underpinning it. There is a lack of robust information on the coping strategies, which are needed for EFL students if they want to overcome the issue for better learning outcome. Geared by the research void, this current study was conducted with the following aims:

1. To examine the phenomena of speech anxiety in in an EFL class of junior high school;
2. To identify the numerous causes that trigger students' speaking anxiety; and
3. To epitomize the coping strategies used to overcome speaking anxiety

The goals of this study were attained using a descriptive qualitative methodology with the utilization the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FICAS) (Howirtz 1986) and interview as instruments for data collection.

METHODS

The descriptive qualitative methodology was utilized in this study to fully understand the causes and strategies for overcoming English speaking anxiety in EFL classes. The research was carried out in a state junior high school in Medan, Indonesia. This study's participants were selected through convenience sampling. Thirty students from one class were invited to participate by completing the Horwitz Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which served as the primary instrument for data collection. The FLCAS consists of 33 closed-ended questions graded on a five-point scale. The point scales are as follows: SD stands for strongly disagree (1); D for disagree (2); N for neither agree nor disagree (3); A for agree (4); and SA for strongly agree (5). Semi-structured interviews were



also employed in the study. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to investigate participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in relation to their questionnaire responses, as well as to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues pertaining the topic under discussion (Berg, 2007; Patton, 1990). Five students were purposefully selected to participate in this session based on their responses to the questionnaire. To avoid ambiguity and miscommunication between the interviewer and interviewees, the interviews were performed in Indonesian and audio recorded with the participants' consent. The records were transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Frequency count and Content Analysis were utilized to examine the collected data. The research questions, theories, and procedures for data segmentation were then used to coordinate and connect the findings to the research context (Emilia, 2011).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Level of Anxiety

The first question of this study is addressing the levels of anxiety the students experienced. Within a context of foreign language learning, certain levels of speaking anxiety are normal and even advantageous in certain situations; however, excessive anxiety can hinder communication and language acquisition. The utilization of the FLCAS questionnaire in this study was intended to provide an overview of the differences between low, moderate, and high levels of English speaking anxiety experienced by the participants and to investigate the implications for cause and prevention.

The analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaire demonstrates that all students ($n = 30$) experienced speaking anxiety when using the language in their class. The details of the students' English speaking anxiety levels are presented in Table 1.



Table 1. FLCAS Result

No	Responden	Score	Level of anxiety
1	Student 1	89	Moderate
2	Student 2	126	High
3	Student 3	120	High
4	Student 4	71	Moderate
5	Student 5	119	High
6	Student 6	121	High
7	Student 7	119	High
8	Student 8	120	High
9	Student 9	117	High
10	Student 10	61	Low
11	Student 11	87	Moderate
12	Student 12	83	Moderate
13	Student 13	121	High
14	Student 14	141	High
15	Student 15	107	High
16	Student 16	119	High
17	Student 17	139	High
18	Student 18	87	Moderate
19	Student 19	85	Moderate
20	Student 20	148	High
21	Student 21	145	High
22	Student 22	43	Low
23	Student 23	86	Moderate
24	Student 24	116	High
25	Student 25	139	High
26	Student 26	112	High
27	Student 27	119	High
28	Student 28	121	High
29	Student 29	67	Low
30	Student 30	132	High

Based on the data in Table 1, it can be concluded that the majority ($n = 20$) of the participants had high anxiety. Seven students were identified to have moderate anxiety and only 3 students had low anxiety. A closer look at the data



reveals that those who experienced high anxiety scored between in their FALCA response. Students with moderate anxiety typically scores between 70 to 89. Students with low anxiety only scored between 33 to 69. For a clearer portrayal, Figure 1 shows the demography of levels of anxiety that the students experienced.

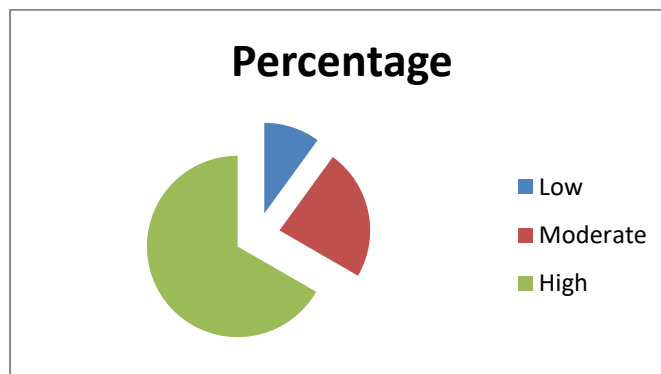


Figure 1. Demography of Students' Speaking Anxiety Levels

Understanding the distinctions between low, moderate, and high levels of English speaking anxiety can assist educators in identifying and treating speaking anxiety that their students experience. Low English speaking anxiety can motivate individuals to prepare and perform well, but if it persists or increases in intensity, it may indicate the need for additional support or treatment. At the low end of the spectrum, EFL students who have low anxiety may feel a slight nervousness or discomfort when speaking English, but it does not significantly interfere with their ability to communicate (Bandura, 1997). In contrast to the results of this study, a study by Horwitz (2001) found that many language learners experience this level of anxiety.

EFL students with moderate English-speaking anxiety may experience physical symptoms such as perspiration, trembling, and concentration difficulties. Communication and language acquisition may be hampered by moderate English-speaking apprehension. This level of anxiety can interfere with communication and social interactions, leading to missed opportunities in both academic and professional settings (Stowell & Bennett, 2010). A study by Leow (2001) found



that moderate levels of anxiety were associated with decreased fluency and accuracy in English speaking.

EFL students with high English-speaking anxiety may avoid conversing in English entirely, which can impair language acquisition and academic or occupational performance (Horwitz, 2001). This level of anxiety can significantly impact daily life and lead to social isolation, academic difficulties, and career limitations (Frommer, 1987). In contrast to the results of this study, a study by Huang & Naerssen (1987) found that only some language learners experience severe levels of anxiety, which can be debilitating.

2. Cause of Anxiety

The second research question is regarding the causes of the students' speaking anxiety. To answer the question, the data collected through interviews were analysed and the results show that there are four causes of speaking anxiety, which can be described as follows:

Lack of Confidence

The majority of students reported that they felt anxious when speaking in English because they either had low or no confidence in their own ability to use the target language. It could be seen in the following excerpts:

Students 3: "The thing that makes me experience anxiety when I speak English is that I am not confident in the English skills I have"

Students 5 "What often makes me experience anxiety when speaking English is that I feel inferior and not confident with my friends who are better at speaking English."

When a person lacks confidence in their ability to communicate in English, they may experience apprehension when required to do so. This anxiety can manifest in a variety of ways, including avoiding all English conversations,



struggling to find the right words, and reluctance to participate in group discussions. These sentiments of inadequacy and fear of failure can be detrimental to a person's English language development and overall health.

Studies demonstrate that confidence and self-efficacy play a crucial role in language learning and acquisition (Bandura, 1997). When a person has confidence in their language skills, they are more likely to take risks, engage in conversations, and learn from their errors. In contrast, when a person lacks confidence, they may hold themselves back, avoid opportunities to practice, and become disheartened.

Fear of Mispronouncing Words

Fear of making mistakes is particularly prevalent among language learners. The same holds true for the students in this study. As seen in the following excerpts, a number of them claimed that they frequently suffer anxiety when speaking English because they are so concerned with mispronouncing word.

Students 5: "I often feel afraid of saying the wrong word in English and it makes me have anxiety in speaking English."

Students 1: "When I speak in English I am very afraid of making mistakes in the pronunciation of vocabulary in English and that may make me experience anxiety in speaking English".

One of the primary reasons why students fear mispronouncing words when speaking is because their listeners will likely misunderstand them. Mispronunciation of an English word can alter its meaning or make it difficult for the listener to comprehend, resulting in perplexity and frustration. This dread can be exacerbated by the pressure to communicate successfully in English in academic or professional settings. Empirical evidence shows that fear of being misunderstood can have a substantial impact on language learners' willingness to communicate and engage in conversations (Phillips, 1992). In addition, fear of



others' negative judgements can also lead to greater anxiety and avoidance of English communication (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Lack of Preparation

Many students who experience language anxiety have inadequate resources and preparation for studying English. This lack of preparation and provisions may be closely tied to the fact that English classes in primary school have been eliminated from the national curriculum in Indonesia since 2013, as revealed in the following excerpts:

Student 2: "I have anxiety in speaking English because I don't know much about English"

Student 3: "I have anxiety in English because I never learned English before, I just found an English lesson when I was in junior high school".

Research indicates that preparation is the most essential factor for reducing anxiety when speaking English (Dewaele, 2012). Insufficient preparation can result in feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, which can then impede effective communication (Peter et al., 1994). One of the primary causes of anxiety associated with poor preparation is a lack of confidence in one's ability to successfully use the language. This lack of confidence can originate from a variety of factors, such as a deficiency in vocabulary, grammar knowledge, or pronunciation abilities (Kondo et al., 2017). Kondo et al. (2017), for example discovered that Japanese students with a higher level of English proficiency and extensive preparation for an English presentation experienced less anxiety than those with less preparation. This suggests that preparation can have a substantial role in minimizing anxiety related with speaking English.

Lack of Motivation

The majority of students who experience anxiety in English have very little motivation to study the language due to contextual and other supporting factors.



As seen in the following extracts, students in this study were also found to have low motivation, which is one of the causes of their speaking anxiety:

Student 1: "I don't have the motivation to learn English which makes me not want to try to speak English and experience anxiety when taken care of speaking in English"

Student 5: "I was not motivated to learn to speak English and caused me anxiety when the teacher asked me to speak in English".

Motivation is a crucial factor in language acquisition and proficiency (Dornyei, 2005). A lack of motivation can result in a lack of effort and engagement, which can impede language development and contribute to anxiety associated with speaking English (Peter et al., 1994). For instance, Peng and Woodrow (2010) found that Chinese English language learners with higher levels of motivation and interest in the language had lower levels of speaking anxiety. This indicates that motivation can also play a significant role in reducing anxiety associated with speaking English.

3. The Coping Strategies

As previously stated, language anxiety is a common phenomenon when learning a new language. No student is immune to this condition. However, as severe anxiety can impede language acquisition, students must identify the most effective treatments for their anxiety. Regarding this issue, the third research question sought to determine how the students in this study dealt with their speaking anxiety.

Continuing to Practice Speaking English

The majority of the students indicated that continuing to practice speaking English is an effective solution that can assist them in overcoming speaking anxiety.

Student 5: "I think, to overcome anxiety in speaking English, I need to practice a lot to get used to speaking English"



Student 3: "I think, with a lot of English speaking exercises like following an English club, it will help reduce my anxiety in speaking English"

Exposure therapy, which involves repeated exposure to anxiety-inducing situations, can be an effective method for reducing anxiety (Hofmann et al., 2012). This means that, in the context of speaking English, continued practice and exposure to English-speaking situations can help learners become more comfortable with the language and reduce their anxiety.

To begin speaking English, students may find a language exchange partner, attend English conversation clubs or meetups, or participate in online conversation groups. Additionally, they can practice speaking English with friends or family members who are proficient in the language. Continued practice can help English language learners overcome their anxiety and gain confidence when speaking.

Concentrating on improving pronunciation and intonation is another effective way to practice speaking English. Numerous language learners worry about their accent or pronunciation, which can undermine their confidence and make it difficult for them to communicate effectively. By focusing on improving pronunciation and intonation, students can develop greater confidence and fluency when speaking English.

Having Positive thinking

Many students say that positive thinking is a solution they can apply to overcome their English speaking anxiety.

Student 3: "I think my English speaking anxiety can be overcome by not thinking about the negative things that will happen such as fear of being wrong, fear of being ridiculed, and others"

Student 5: "I think thinking positively so as not to feel afraid of being wrong, will reduce my anxiety in speaking English"

Positive thinking involves concentrating on the positive aspects of a situation, as opposed to ruminating on the negative. By focusing on what could go well, as opposed to what could go awry, individuals can reduce their anxiety and feel more confident when speaking English. Positive thinking has also been shown



to be an effective strategy for reducing public speaking apprehension, according to research. Positive self-talk can substantially reduce anxiety levels in English language learners, according to a study published in the Journal of Language Teaching and Research (Kang et al., 2020). Another study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology found that positive affirmations can increase language learners' self-efficacy beliefs and decrease their anxiety (Jiang et al., 2018). Positive thinking can be an effective strategy for overcoming English speaking apprehension. By focusing on the positive aspects of the situation, students can reduce their anxiety and gain confidence in their English-speaking skills.

Teacher Support

Students revealed that they felt they would be able to speak English better and feel less anxious when speaking English if they have the needed support from their teacher. Teachers play an important role in encouraging students to use the target language.

Student 1: "I feel anxious when I speak English because I don't want my friends laugh at me when I make mistake... but my teacher always gives me great support, give me praise even when I don't speak correctly "

Student 3: "my English speaking anxiety would probably be worse if my teacher was so judgmental. But she is not. She always says 'nice' or 'good job'. I feel appreciated"

Research indicates that teacher support can have a significant impact on lowering English speaking anxiety and boosting motivation among language learners. A study by Gkonou (2014) found that teacher support and encouragement can increase language learners' self-efficacy beliefs and decrease their anxiety. Similarly Kim and Song (2016) reported that teacher support can increase English speaking tasks' motivation and engagement. Therefore, teacher support can be an effective method for overcoming English speaking anxiety in language learning. By providing practice opportunities, constructive feedback, a secure environment, and attainable objectives, teachers can help students build confidence and reduce their anxiety.



CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to pinpoint the aspects of speaking English that give students fear and to describe the many strategies that can be used to lessen that worry. This study applies qualitative descriptive research methods by employing questionnaires and interviews as research tools. The findings show that the majority of the students suffer from high anxiety. Four factors are identified as the causes, namely lack of confidence, fear of mispronouncing words, lack of preparation, and lack of motivation. Continuing to practice speaking English, maintaining positive thinking, and increasing motivation with the support from teacher can be effective strategies to overcome anxiety when speaking.

It is highly hoped that the information presented in this study will aid EFL teachers in identifying the most appropriate Speaking Anxiety reduction interventions. This study is expected to enlighten and motivate teachers, pre-service teachers, and instructors to overcome Speaking Anxiety in order to create a more relaxed learning environment tailored to the requirements of their students. Ultimately, based on the findings of this study, we recommend the most suitable solution based on the causes that have been investigated with EFL junior high students.

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