

STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY: LEVELS AND CAUSES

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ABSTRACT

Learning English especially speaking is very difficult for students. There are many components that students must master when learning speaking makes it difficult for students to learn it. Students find many problems when speaking such as speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety is a feeling of excessive anxiety when students speak English. Hence, this study aims to find the levels and factors that cause speaking anxiety among the students. This study was conducted at one of English Education Study Program of a university located in Subang, West Java, Indonesia, which consisted of 20 students from first, second, third, and fourth year. This descriptive study used questionnaire and interview to obtain the data about students' speaking anxiety. In this case, the questionnaire was used to examine the levels of students' speaking anxiety, while the interview was employed to investigate the factors that causing students' speaking anxiety. Results from the questionnaire showed that 4 students (20%) scored low, 9 students (45%) scored moderate, and 7 students (35%) scored high. No semester differences were identified in the level of speaking anxiety. Female students exhibited greater nervousness when speaking English compared to male classmates. The interview results revealed three elements contributing to students' speaking anxiety including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Specifically, study accentuated communication apprehension as the primary element influencing students' speaking anxiety. This study indicates that students need to be aware of their anxiety levels and causes in order to address them. Additionally, they need to possess self-confidence in learning English, particularly in speaking.

Keywords: speaking, anxiety, speaking anxiety, students' speaking anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an action that brings together all of a student's talents, including command of language, sentence structure, and the capacity to connect their thoughts to the will or ability to communicate them (Maulida, 2021). Speaking serves the function of conveying information or ideas. In this case, communication is the exchange of messages or information between two or more individuals to ensure mutual understanding. Furthermore, speaking aids in the process of understanding language (Rusmanayanti et al., 2021).

In learning activities, speaking is needed so that learning activities run well. Speaking is crucial in the educational process to create an optimal teaching and learning environment where teachers and students can gain information from one other (Yulianto, 2015).

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Consequently, proficiency in speaking is essential for all English learners due to its significant importance (Marsevani & Habeebanisya, 2022). In this case, speaking should be taught to pupils during the learning process in order to ensure that they can communicate effectively both orally and in writing (Suparmi, 2018). Teachers should provide speaking assignments to their students so they have the chance to interact with people in the target language (Amsori et al., 2023). Speaking is a language-learning skill that is regularly employed in day-to-day activities, particularly while engaging in conversation with others (Siregar, 2019). When students have mastered speaking, they will understand all aspects of the language. Understanding many different aspects of English is necessary to become fluent in speaking it (Mitha et al., 2018).

However, learning foreign language especially speaking is not easy. Many students find it difficult to learn English. They encompass several speaking challenges: limited vocabulary, weak grammar, inadequate pronunciation, low self-esteem, and anxiety. The problems above make students feel difficult when learning English. There are also some students who just think about it, are already worried. This feeling of worry when speaking English is called Speaking anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is a fear of speaking and performing the language learned in English class. Anxiety greatly affects self-confidence by often resulting in failure to articulate and reflect one's knowledge. Language anxiety is a phenomenon that impacts the success of language learning, whether positively or negatively. (Sutarsyah, 2017). Because anxiety can make students have trouble comprehending and communicating through spoken language, it happens (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students' primary concern is their fear of making mistakes. The students strive to improve their speaking skills but fear ridicule from their peers when speaking in English. (Suparmi, 2018). When they have to perform in front of the class, this feeling makes them anxious and nervous. Excessive anxiety sometimes makes the sufferer unable to do anything (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020).

Furthermore, Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014) identify three levels of speaking anxiety, which include low, moderate, and high anxiety. Low level is a level of people who get a score of less than 54 on the questionnaire results. Those in this stage do not experience anxiety when required to communicate in English. They also think speaking English is not something scary. Moderate level is a level of people who get 54-72 score on questionnaire results. Individuals at this stage may experience anxiety when communicating in English, while simultaneously displaying confidence in their English-speaking abilities at times. The feelings people have at this level usually depend on the situation they are in. High level is a level of people who get more than 72 score on questionnaire results. People at this level have excessive anxiety when they want to speak English. They also usually have a body reaction when speaking English.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three elements that influence speaking anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of poor evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to students' anxieties related to communication. They are afraid because they struggle to comprehend the information offered and have difficulty expressing themselves clearly during communication. This is defined by a timid nature that involves fear or nervousness when interacting with others. Test-anxiety is connected to academic assessment and involves the apprehension of failing a test or exam. Pupils who commonly experience this form of anxiety often have negative past exam experiences that lead to feelings of insecurity and fear of failure during their current tests. This phenomenon can affect all pupils. Fear of unfavourable evaluation is associated with pupils' apprehension of unfavourable judgements and perspectives from their peers. When they speak, they fear receiving an assessment, critique, or negative perception from others. It induces anxiety and leads individuals to avoid such situations.

Multiple research have been carried out on students' speaking nervousness. The study conducted by Umisara, et al. (2021) aims to assess the psychological factors that affect students' nervousness when speaking English. The writers identified three elements that caused students to feel anxious when speaking English: communicative apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of unfavourable evaluation, all of which were influenced by situation-specific

anxiety. Speaking English in class may be emotionally and physically unpleasant for certain pupils. Alnahidh & Altalhab (2020) did a study on the level and sources of foreign language speaking anxiety among Saudi EFL university students. The results indicated that the participants had a modest level of exposure to FLSAS in their English classes. The elements contributing to FLSAS are: forced involvement, lack of vocabulary, lack of practice, lack of grammar, and fear of making mistakes. Participants indicated additional reasons for worry, such as the requirement to provide oral presentations, negative attitudes from teachers, and the fear of mispronouncing words. The most recent research was carried out by Fauziyah et al. (2022) on "Gender Differences in Speaking Anxiety." The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students. Although not statistically significant, the data indicate that females exhibited higher levels of anxiety compared to males.

From the previous related studies, the writer can conclude that in one class there are at least half of the class experiencing anxiety. The factors that cause students' speaking anxiety are internal factors: fear of making mistakes then being criticized, low self-esteem, lack of grammar, lack of practice, etc. The negative attitudes of teacher can also be the additional reason of students speaking anxiety.

Therefore, the objective of this study to find out about English Education students' anxiety, including the level and the factors that cause anxiety. English education students are used to using English in class, however it cannot be denied that they may also have anxiety. Students' anxiety will be grouped according to levels and factors that cause it.

METHODS

This research is a descriptive study. Tavakoli (2012) defines descriptive research as a study that portrays a phenomenon in its natural state, without focusing on the effects of the phenomenon or intervention. Descriptive research involves examining individuals, groups, institutions, methods, and materials to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyse, and interpret the entities and events within their respective fields of study. It deals with current conditions, prevailing practices, established views, viewpoints, ongoing processes, experienced effects, or developing trends. Descriptive research examines the relationship between current conditions or events and earlier influences or events.

The writer employed a descriptive study to assess students' speech anxiety levels, categorise them, and analyse the elements contributing to speaking anxiety using questionnaires and interviews. The writer used descriptive study to determine the level of students' speech anxiety, classifies them and analyzes the factors that cause speaking anxiety through questionnaire and interview. The respondents of this study were students of English Education Study Program of a university located in Subang, West Java, Indonesia. This study involved 20 English Education students, with 5 students from each of the first, second, third, and fourth years. The writer categorised 20 students depending on their anxiety levels. Then, from each of these categories, 7 students were taken as participants in interviews to help the writer answer the research questions. For the purpose of research ethics and to ensure the data confidentiality, the participants' names are displayed in initial.

The writer utilised two instruments for data collection in this study: a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire used is the FLSAS (Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and adapted by Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014). The FLSAS questionnaire was created by choosing 18 items from the 33 items in the FLCAS established by Horwitz et al. (1986). After an extensive literature analysis, these 18 elements were determined to be directly associated with foreign language speaking anxiety (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). The questionnaire distributed on February 8, 2023 via WhatsApp application. Each student must respond to all FLSAS questions on Google Form that was previously sent by the writer. Students filled in one of the five answer scales that have been provided.

The interview questions are from He (2018) which had been adapted to suit the research focus, which was to measure the students' speaking anxiety factors. This interview was conducted semi-structured and overcame the causes by students with high anxiety level. The

questions consisting of 10 questions. Interview was conducted in the third and fourth weeks of February. A face-to-face interview was held in this study. The interview lasted 3-15 minutes. All questions and answers in the interview were recorded using phone.

Students in the study selected one of the five answer scales: SA/Strongly Agree, A/Agree, N/Neutral, D/Disagree, or SD/Strongly Disagree. Students will receive a score of 5 for answering with "Strongly Agree," 4 for "Agree," 3 for "Neutral," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree."

An analysis was conducted on the students' answers using an anxiety-level scale developed by Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014) to assess their anxiety levels. According to Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014), a total score above 72 indicates severe speaking anxiety, a score between 54-72 indicates moderate speaking anxiety, and a score below 54 indicates low foreign language speaking anxiety.

Subsequently, the writer interviewed students with high anxiety levels. This interview was performed using a semi-structured format with face-to-face interaction. Analysing the findings of interviews with students exhibiting high anxiety levels aimed to discover the reason of their fear and determine a suitable method to address high levels of speaking anxiety.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Levels of Students' Speaking Anxiety

This study included 20 participants from the first, second, third, and fourth year of the English Education Study Program at Universitas in Subang. The writer utilised a Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) questionnaire created by Horwitz et al. (1986) and modified by Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014). Here are the questionnaire findings from the 20 students who participated:

Table 1 Students Scoring and Categorizing

No	Name	Gender	Score	Level
1	DAS (1 st)	F	87	High Level
2	AK (1 st)	F	85	High Level
3	RN (1 st)	F	83	High Level
4	MSR (1 st)	M	57	Moderate Level
5	RFA (1 st)	M	49	Low Level
6	IM (2 nd)	F	69	Moderate Level
7	VSH (2 nd)	F	67	Moderate Level
8	TFS (2 nd)	F	62	Moderate Level
9	HM (2 nd)	M	58	Moderate Level
10	KPM (2 nd)	F	56	Moderate Level
11	FAW (3 rd)	F	24	Low Level
12	ENL (3 rd)	F	77	High Level
13	IA (3 rd)	F	76	High Level
14	SNF (3 rd)	F	71	Moderate Level
15	NFA (3 rd)	F	64	Moderate Level
16	DTS (4 th)	F	35	Low Level
17	MNW (4 th)	F	49	Low Level
18	MWF (4 th)	M	57	Moderate Level
19	DS (4 th)	F	80	High Level
20	NW (4 th)	F	73	High Level

Note. 1st = first year student

2nd = second year student

3rd = third year student

4th = fourth year student

Table 2 Classification of FLSAS Results Score and Anxiety Levels

Scale of Students' Speaking Anxiety	Speaking Anxiety Level	Result
<54	Low	4 students (20%)
54-72	Moderate	9 students (45%)
>72	High	7 students (35%)

Based on the data from the questionnaire above, it shows that 4 students (20%) got a score <54 which means they are at a low anxiety level, 9 students (45%) got a score between 54-72 which means they are at a moderate anxiety level, and 7 students (35%) got a score >72 which means they are at a high anxiety level.

From table 2, it can be seen that there were 7 students that achieved the high level, with 3 from the first year, 2 from the third year, and 2 from the fourth year. Then, the students who got the moderate level were 9 students consisting of 1 student from first year, 5 students from second year, 2 students from third, and 1 student from fourth year. In addition, four students had a low level, including one first-year student, one third-year student, and two fourth-year students. Students' level of nervousness in speaking English is not influenced by their semester. The following table illustrates the data elaborated previously.

Table 3. Classification of Levels Speaking Anxiety According to Semester

No.	Anxiety level	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year	Total
1	Low	1	-	1	2	4
2	Moderate	1	5	2	1	9
3	High	3	-	2	2	7
	Total	5	5	5	5	20

In addition, 7 students who got a high level were female students. Meanwhile, male students got a moderate level and a low level. 3 male students got a moderate level, and 1 male student got a low level. It means, the result of the questionnaire stated that more female students felt anxiety in speaking English than male students. Then, male students are considered to have more confidence in speaking English than female students. Fauziyah et al., (2022) reported that female students frequently encountered higher levels of anxiousness than male students while speaking English in the classroom. The table below illustrates the data elaborated previously.

Table 4. Classification of Levels Speaking Anxiety According to Gender

No.	Anxiety level	Male	Female	Total
1	Low	1	3	4
2	Moderate	3	6	9
3	High	-	7	7
	Total	4	16	20

4 students who got a low level are students who do not see speaking English as something scary and they like to enjoy learning English in classroom. This is evidenced in the results of the questionnaires that have been distributed, they answered more disagree or strongly disagree with the questions in the questionnaire.

Then, 9 students have a moderate anxiety level, it can be said that students at this level are rarely feel anxious or afraid of speaking. However, sometimes they find anxiety in speaking, but it did not happen excessively.

Excerpt 1

VSH "I get frightened when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English."

(Saya menjadi takut ketika saya tidak mengerti apa yang guru sedang bicarakan dalam bahasa Inggris)

SNF "I feel nervous while speaking English with native speakers."

(Saya merasa gugup saat berbicara bahasa Inggris dengan penutur asli.)

Lastly, 7 students have a high anxiety level, it can be said that students at this level excessive worries and lack self-confidence. Students perceive that speaking English as something difficult and scary. The following excerpts were:

Excerpt 2

AK "I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English classes."

(Saya bisa merasakan jantung saya berdebar kencang ketika saya akan dipanggil di kelas bahasa Inggris.)

IA "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English classes."

(Saya mulai panik ketika saya harus berbicara tanpa persiapan di kelas bahasa Inggris)

RN "I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in English classes."

(Saya gemetar ketika saya tahu bahwa saya akan dipanggil di kelas bahasa Inggris.)

From the result of the questionnaire 7 students from the category of the students with high anxiety level have been selected to be interviewed. Students with high anxiety were interviewed to find out the factors that cause speaking anxiety as well as answer research questions.

The Causes of Students' Speaking Anxiety

This study identified three variables contributing to speaking anxiety among students: communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of unfavourable evaluation. Those variables were notably evident when students communicate in English during class.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension, as defined by Horwitz et al. (1986), is the concern about a student's ability to engage with others in a foreign language. Speaking anxiety had an effect on the students' ability to control their speech, and this resulted in the element of communication anxiety. Students with communication apprehension are usually difficult to communicate with other students, because they feel less confident and feel a lack of skills in speaking.

In this study, 7 high level students felt that they were shy and did not dare to speak English. More specifically, 4 students said that they were not confident to speak English.

Excerpt 3

IA "Karena ngerasa ada orang lain yang lebih bisa, jadi kalo ngucap salah, jadi malu. Karena malu sih. Kalo ngucap suatu kata trus mikir, kayanya pronunciation nya salah, jadi yaudah deh mending ga usah ngomong, karena takut malu."

(Because I feel that there are other people who are more capable, so if I say something wrong, I feel ashamed. Because I am ashamed. If I say a word and then think about it, I think the pronunciation is wrong, so it is better not to say it, for fear of embarrassment.)

DS *"Ya susah aja mengungkapkan isi hati."*

(Yes, it is hard to express what I want to say)

Apart from feeling insecure, the students also felt that they did not have enough skills to speak English in class. Lack of knowledge makes them choose to be silent, rather than mispronouncing words in English.

Excerpt 4

DAS *"Karena mungkin kekurangan latihan, kekurangan wawasan, jadi kita taunya di situ situ aja. Kaya saya kan, waktu di pesantren cuma belajar Bahasa Inggris seminggu sekali, pas sekarang kuliah banyak, jadi saya merasa masih kurang, makanya takut."*

(Because maybe there is a lack of practicing, a lack of knowledge, so we just know a little. When I was at Islamic boarding school, I only studied English once a week, right now there are a lot of lectures, so I feel I am still lacking, that is why I am afraid.)

Another reason is their lack of speaking skills, they are afraid of being wrong to speak English. The fear of being wrong makes them prefer silence.

Excerpt 5

DAS *"Itu ngebuat aku jadi pesimis, jadi kaya yaudahlah diem aja ngomong juga takut salah. Jadi lebih banyak diem aja, jadi ga pede, dan takut salah terus, padahal mungkin bisa tapi udah diselimuti takut salah."*

(That makes me pessimistic, so I am like, just keep quiet and I am afraid of being wrong. So, I just keep quiet, I do not feel confident, and I am always afraid of being wrong, even though maybe I can but I am already covered in fear of being wrong.)

ENL *"Paling takut sama speaking. Karena takut salah aja nyebutnya."*

(Most afraid of is speaking. For fear of saying the wrong thing.)

The writer observed that there are multiple students experiencing communication fear. Some pupils experience humiliation and a lack of confidence in speaking because they dread making mistakes. Some individuals believed they were deficient in knowledge and experience. Some individuals believed that their acquaintances were more proficient in English than they were. Those reasons ultimately led them to choose silence. According to Umisara et al. (2021), pupils in the classroom struggle with speaking English, leading to shyness and lack of confidence. This example was also identified in the research conducted by Damayanti & Listyani (2020). They said that Communication Apprehension is a form of shyness marked by dread and anxiety while conversing with others due to a lack of proficiency in English.

Test-anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined test anxiety as performance anxiety caused by the fear of failure and making errors. It caused discomfort among pupils during the speaking class. Anxious students during speaking exams often interpreted their mistakes as indicators of failure. This happens because this factor is prevalent in pupils' English-speaking mindset. One of these characteristics can also arise from negative experiences pupils have had.

From the interview, there was 1 student who felt that she was afraid and embarrassed to take the speaking test. The reason was because she did not answer a question from her teacher, after that she felt embarrassed until now.

Excerpt 6

AK *“Ada beberapa kosakata yang ga aku ngerti, dosennya nanya nya ke aku, trus aku ga bisa jawab, kaya takut.”*

(There were some vocabularies that I did not understand, when the lecturer asked me, I could not answer, I was afraid.)

Test anxiety had a higher psychological influence on students, as it made them fear punishment, testing, receiving poor grades, getting reprimanded by their parents, and not being promoted to the following grade. Because of the aforementioned factors, the students felt under pressure and forced to talk in English. This finding was also supported by Mitha et al., (2018). They found that students were very afraid of failing their speaking class because they thought they couldn't speak English, they didn't have enough vocabulary, they had anxiety, and other negative thoughts that could lead to failure.

Fear of negative evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is a prominent aspect of speaking anxiety as it manifests in various scenarios such social interactions, speaking engagements, and oral assessments (Horwitz et al., 1986). It was also discovered that there are four students that have a dread of bad criticism. Three of them felt significant distress from their past experiences while speaking English and subsequently received negative comments. The following statements are:

Excerpt 7

AK *“Aku pernah salah malah diomongin. Di situ aku kan belum lancar ya, pas dia nanya, aku bilang “kamu tadi nanya apa sih? Aku kurang paham” dia malah bilang “masa sih Bahasa Inggris ga ngerti? Kamu ngapain ngambil prodi Bahasa Inggris kalo ga ngerti?” abis itu dia ngetawain aku*

(I was once told the wrong thing. I was not fluent at that time. When she asked to the lecturer, I asked “what did you ask? I do not understand” she instead said “how come you do not understand English? Why are you taking an English study program if you do not understand?” After that she laughed at me.)

RN *“Pernah aku kaya salah pengucapan gitu, trus malah diledekin abis-abisan gitu “kamu salah loh, sok sok an banget pake kalimat kaya gitu, padahal kamu gatau itu”. Jadi itu ngebuat aku kurang percaya diri banget.”*

(I mispronounced something, then I was even teased like “you are wrong, you really pretend to use sentences like that, even though you do not know that”. So that makes me really insecure.)

ENL *“kan waktu SD aku pernah kursus Bahasa Inggris tapi Cuma sebentar, trus waktu di SMA nyoba nyoba ngomong Bahasa Inggris, nah diledekin sama temen, kaya “sok Inggris”. Waktu itu posisinya aku ga salah, tapi diledeking. Sampe sekarang aku jadi malu buat ngomong Bahasa Inggris.”*

“When I was in elementary school, I took an English course but only for a while, then when I was in high school, I tried to speak English, so my friend made fun of me, like “sok Inggris”. At that time, I was not in the wrong position, but I was teased. Until now, I am embarrassed to speak English”

The trauma they felt when learning English is even be the main reason they are not confident in speaking English until now. The feeling left an imprint on them. The following excerpt were:

Excerpt 8

AK *“Berefek sih dari omongan dia gitu, aku dari sekarang jadinya lebih hati-hati dan belajar lagi tiap kosakata nya. Kalo dia nanya juga, aku rada gugup buat jawab.”*

(The effect of what she said was like that, from now on I will be more careful and learn more about each of vocabulary. If she asks me too, I am a bit nervous to answer)

ENL *"Sampe sekarang efeknya kerasa banget, jadi takut buat ngomong inggris."*

"Until now the effect is really felt, so I am afraid to speak English."

Students experience speaking anxiety due to their fear of bad evaluation. Some pupils fear receiving a poor evaluation because of insufficient vocabulary and practice. Furthermore, certain students have received adverse assessments that have caused them trauma and instilled a fear of speaking English. Previously stated, they were fearful of receiving poor evaluations from professors or peers since it could diminish their enthusiasm to learn speaking (Umisara et al., 2021)

CONCLUSION

According to the data analysis, students in the English Education Study Program exhibit three levels of anxiousness. 4 students (20%) got <54 score which means they are at low level, 9 students (45%) got 54-72 score which means they are at a moderate level, and 7 students (35%) got >72 score which means they are at a high level. 7 students who got high level are male students, it means female students have a bigger anxiety than male students. Furthermore, there are factor that causes speaking anxiety, those are: communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Communication anxiety is a concern for students' proficiency in the target language, which stresses interpersonal communication. Ineffective communication and performance are two factors that have an impact on this. The difficulties the pupils have had comprehending vocabulary, their fear of ridicule, their fear of making mistakes, and their dissatisfaction with their performance are some of the factors that have contributed to their anxiety.

Test anxiety is the next factor that causing speaking anxiety. The students' unease with their experiences in language classes is a result of their fear of failing and making mistakes. It encompasses the dread of tests in all academic endeavors. In order to make the pupils disinterested in learning activities, it led them to believe that speaking was difficult. Students were affected by test anxiety, specifically the dread of being punished, tested poorly, reprimanded, and not advanced to the following grade.

Fear of negative evaluation has a larger range because it can occur in a variety of contexts, including social events, speaking tasks, and speaking exams. It entails anxiety about how other people will judge you, avoiding circumstances where you might be evaluated, and anticipating a bad evaluation from others. These develop as a result of students' inability to communicate their ideas verbally.

However, speaking anxiety in students may come from many causes. It may come from the student, or from the teacher. This should not only be a problem for students, but also for teachers. It is expected that teachers can be understand students' conditions in the process of learning English in class. In addition, the writer hopes that in the future, this study will be continued. The writer suggests that other writers look up for more data in speaking anxiety in classroom. Thus, the writer hopes that other writers can find new discoveries related to this topic.

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