

Unravelling the Veil of Speaking Anxiety: A Comprehensive Study of Indonesian EFL Learners at the Undergraduate Level

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine students' anxiety in speaking: the students' anxiety level, the differences between genders, and the factors contributing to it. It was a quantitative study that employed a survey method. Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate the data, which were obtained using a closed-ended questionnaire disseminated using Google Forms. The finding revealed that most of the third-semester students of the English Department at a state university had speaking anxiety at a moderate level. Furthermore, it was reported that the anxiety that female and male students experienced did not significantly differ. However, male students were more anxious compared to female students. In addition, it was also found that the factor contributing the most was communication apprehension. In conclusion, the study has identified that students experienced anxious feelings in speaking class. Therefore, lecturers must be able to select teaching techniques that work effectively and create a safe space where students feel comfortable to speak.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English could be learned through receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Speaking is considered an essential skill that takes an important part in human life, particularly in academic fields. Speaking emerges as the most crucial ability in learning English as a second language. According to Hanifa (2018), Acquiring fluency in a foreign language is the primary objective of learning it. Through speaking, students could communicate their ideas with their friends, teachers, or lecturers during the class discussion so that they could experience a better learning process. Nevertheless, some foreign language learners still have obstacles while speaking. They discover that developing communication competence is challenging as it is impacted by numerous variables, including anxiousness. According to Altun (2023), speaking becomes the most important component of a foreign language in the target language, and if students are nervous, it might be very difficult for them to build communicative competence.

Anxiety is defined as a dreadful and vague worry that is only indirectly connected to something (Huang, 2012). Actually, it is natural to have anxiety since everyone sometimes experiences it (Sari, 2017).

However, exaggerated anxious feelings hinder someone from being able to do particular things. There are three different categories of anxiety: situation-specific anxiety, trait anxiety, and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is a condition where a person easily feels intimidated by various situations which are actually innocuous (Delfia Mitha et al., 2018). It is due to an individual's personality. Furthermore, according to MacIntyre et al. in (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020), anxiety is a temporary tendency of anxious feeling because of a certain circumstance. In other words, a person who has this type would feel anxious due to particular difficulties such as fear of English, mathematics, etc. Moreover, situation-specific anxiety refers to the possibility of experiencing anxiety in specific situations, like situations during the tests (mathematical, linguistic, etc.). This type is also considered as an anxious feeling which is consistently increased over time when dealing with a particular situation (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). In other words, situation-specific anxiety is an apprehensive feeling that steadily worsens over time when addressing a certain problem

Language learners often experience anxiety, fear, nervousness, and apprehension when studying and speaking a foreign language. This phenomenon is referred to as Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), and it is a broad psychological phenomenon. These feelings are considered as negative potential and destructive effects that influence their ability to communicate in their target language. The students who have high levels of FLSA would be inhibited to speak the language precisely (Bashori et al., 2022). This occurred because the students were terrified of speaking the target language improperly and lacked confidence in their ability to speak English.

Furthermore, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and communication apprehension are the three main components of foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), according to Horwitz et al. (1986). Communication apprehension is an anxious feeling about speaking or listening to someone speak, whether in a group or in public. Performance anxiety is caused by a worry of experiencing failure is known as test anxiety. On the other hand, fear of negative evaluation is the state in which an individual avoids evaluation because they believe others will see them negatively. Based on these three essential elements, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was developed and suggested by Horwitz et al. (1986), is specifically used to determine whether language anxiety is present.

Daud et al. (2019) suggest 3 main factors of speaking anxiety: social factor, linguistic factor, and individual factor. Social factor describes how students respond to other people's comments while they practice speaking. This is thought to be the primary cause of speech anxiety. This factor has to do with the dynamics between teachers and students as well as the possibility of embarrassment from making mistakes. Furthermore, linguistic factors are related to linguistic issues such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation when they speak. Moreover, another factor is personal problems.

The emergence of speaking anxiety in language learners has attracted the interest of numerous researchers who were looking at this issue. The first study was carried out by Handayani et al. (2020). This study utilized a descriptive and quantitative method. This study involved 41 students from English Language and Literature Department. Open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires were distributed as part of the data collection process. This study revealed that speaking anxiety was reported by 65.85% of students at a high level. This study also showed that classroom practices are the main contributor to anxious feeling of speaking. Moreover, Toubot et al. (2018) also carried out the study which was in the same topic. This study examined the anxious feeling towards speaking activities that was experienced by students and tried to pinpoint its main factors. The instruments employed in this study to collect data were questionnaires. Participants in this study were 300 fourth-year English majors from three Libyan universities. According to the findings of this study, speaking anxiety among students was found to range from moderate to high. Speaking anxiety was most frequently caused by low self-esteem, worry of receiving a poor grade, and communication apprehension.

Furthermore, Bashori et al. (2022) discovered that most students experienced moderate speaking anxiety. Handayani et al. (2020) also indicated that most second-year university students at a university had high levels of speaking anxiety. (Christy et al., 2021) investigated how speaking anxiety affected

students' speaking abilities and found that those with higher levels of anxiety performed worse when speaking.

From aforementioned studies, it can be seen that speaking anxiety is still crucial to be investigated since it is one of aspects which inhibit students' achievement while learning speaking. Thus, the goal of this study was to examine speaking anxiety while taking into account its level, the gender of the students, and the factors led to this issue. This study proposed three research questions: (1) How anxious are students when they speak in an EFL class? (2) Do male and female students in the foreign language classroom exhibit significantly different levels of speaking anxiety? (3) What factors lead to anxious feeling while speaking? Additionally, the sample instrument, data analysis methods, data description approach, and setting were also different. This study is important because the findings can help lecturers and teachers recognize the problem of speaking anxiety that many students face and find ways to help them lessen it.

2. METHODS

This study was quantitative in nature. A descriptive research design and survey method were employed in this study in order to look into the degree of speaking anxiety felt by students, assess whether there was a difference in speaking anxiety experienced by the students with different genders, and find the factors that lead to this anxious feeling. According to Creswell (2014), a quantitative approach is appropriate for the study, as it indicates the result in numerical or statistical data and uses close-ended questions as the instrument of the study. Additionally, a survey is recommended as a method that yields a numerical description of the features, attitudes, trends, or characteristics of a population through sample analysis.

Furthermore, the population of this study was the students who were in third semester of the English Department at a state university. This study employed a class of thirty-five students as its sample. There were 27 females and 8 Males. FLSAS questionnaire was utilized as a tool to gather the data. It consisted of 18 items adopted from Öztürk et al. (2014). Those 18 items of 33 items of FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al., (1986) were chosen because they were specifically connected to speaking anxiety. Since the sample for this study was made up of Indonesian students, the instrument was written in both English and Indonesian to obtain accurate data. The items of the instrument were categorized into communication apprehension, self-confidence, and fear of evaluation. Using a 5-point Likert scale, with strongly disagree to strongly agree as the possibilities, the students scored the items of the questionnaire. Google Forms was used to distribute the questionnaire virtually.

Additionally, the quantitative data was obtained using the FLSAS, which consists of 18 items. Descriptive analysis and SPSS were utilized to evaluate the data. An independent sample t-test was used to see if the mean speaking anxiety scores of male and female students differed significantly from one another.

Table 1. The Categorization of Speaking Anxiety Level

Range	Level
$t > 72$	High
54-72	Moderate
< 54	Low

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Levels of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Table 2. Students' level of speaking anxiety

	Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety
Mean	60,3

Table 2 indicated the speaking anxiety level that was analyzed from the responses obtained in the FLSAS. Based on this table, Most students reported having moderate speaking anxiety.

Table 3. Percentages and frequencies of participants of foreign language speaking anxiety

Level of Speaking Anxiety	Frequencies	Percentage
Low	7	20%
Moderate	23	65,71%
High	5	14,29%
Total	35	100%

Moreover, the statistical results from table 3 showed that 65,71% of the participants scored 54-72 . It indicated that the students felt anxious at a moderate level. The students who experienced a high anxious feeling were the second highest with a percentage 20%, meanwhile, 14,29% of students who scored lower than 54 had high speaking anxiety.

Similar findings were obtained from studies conducted by Akkakoson (2016), Azizifar & Fariadian (2015), and Toubot et al. (2018), Asysyifa et al. (2019), Çağatay (2015) and Zulfikar (2022). According to Toubot et al. (2018), teaching methods and classroom atmosphere could be the reasons contributing to this finding. However, this finding was in opposition to what Handayani et al (2020) and Öztürk et al. (2014) discovered in their investigations. Handayani et al. (2020) indicated that most of participants experienced speaking anxiety at a high level, and classroom atmosphere was also the factor highly contributed to this case. Meanwhile, Öztürk et al. (2014) revealed that speaking anxiety was generally low among participants since most of students were aware that the ability to speak English was beneficial for them, and they were motivated to learn and practice speaking English. These disparate results suggest that a variety of reasons may cause anxiousness in speaking, however the majority of students reported that the classroom environment was a factor that made them anxious when learning a language.

3.2. Speaking Anxiety and Gender

Table 4. Descriptive statistic for foreign language speaking anxiety and gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety	Male	8	63.63	14.510	5.130
	Female	27	59.30	10.325	1.987

Numerous research revealed that students who were female spoke with greater anxiety than those who were male (Fauziyah A et al., 2021; Karatas et al., 2016; Mohtasham & Farnia, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013). Surprisingly, table 4 above demonstrated that when speaking, male students showed

anxiety more compared to female students. It was evident from the result of the mean score indicating that 63.6 (male) and 59.30 (Female). This finding was in accordance with Abrar M (2017) and Mahmoodzadeh (2012) who discovered that female students had less anxiety than male students. Female students were less anxious since they believed that they were more motivated in learning a second language (Abrar M, 2017). Meanwhile, concerning interlanguage grammar, male students had more anxious feelings (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012).

Table 5. T-test results for foreign language speaking anxiety and gender

	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference
FLSA	.740	.396	.948	33	.350	4.329

Furthermore, table 5 presents the independent simple t-test results. Using the test, the team group's mean score was compared to determine whether the anxiety experienced by male and female significantly differed. Before evaluating t-test results, Laverne's Tes was utilized to check the variance of the two groups for Equality of Variance. Based on the table, it indicated that sig. value (.396), and it is more than 0.05. Therefore, it could be implied that the data group is representative of a variance-homogeneous population. Additionally, the table showed that the t-score (0.948) with the 2-tailed significance value (0.350). It implied that gender did not significantly affect the anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language because the sig value was more than 0.05.

This finding was consistent with a study by Fauziyah et al. (2021) which found that male and female students did not significantly differ in their levels of speaking anxiety. Furthermore, Mahmoodzadeh (2012) also supported the idea that male and female students' speaking anxiety levels did not significantly differ from one another, and this finding might be explained by the unequal distribution of the data that they provided for the study. It was aligned with Alsowat (2016) who revealed that gender had no discernible effect on foreign language anxiety. Mohtasham & Farnia (2017) had the opposite finding in their study. It was discovered that the gender of the students had a major impact on how anxious they felt when speaking. It was reported that compared to male students, female students expressed greater anxiety during speaking class. These findings are consistent with a study by (Hwa & Jaya, 2014) which discovered that speaking anxiety differed statistically significantly between male and female students. These diverse results arised since personality acted as a major mediating factor in the association between gender and anxiety related to learning a foreign language. Individuals who are extremely emotional or conscientious have higher levels of anxiety. Moreover, women have a stronger association with this case; therefore gender was also a moderator in the personality-foreign language anxiety relation (Gargalianou et al., 2015). In other words, gender and personality influence one another in terms of anxiety.

3.3. Factors of Speaking Anxiety

3.3.1. Communication Apprehension

Table 6 revealed that communication apprehension was the highest factor leading to anxious feelings in speaking. It could be seen from the average score that was 19,5. Furthermore, 29 students thought that their classmates speak more fluently, and it made them unwilling to communicate. It might happen because they were concerned about how their classmates who had better proficiency in English would respond to their performance and they also lack of confidence when speaking in English with their classmates (Hidayat et al., 2022). 24 students who responded to item 7 confirmed this finding. They acknowledged that when they converse in English with native speakers, they get nervous. Native speakers are considered to have good English proficiency since English is their first language, and this might make them afraid to speak. This statement was supported by Asma Melouah (2013), who asserted that students think they were less competent than native English speakers when comparing

their speaking skills with the persons who are fluent in the language, and it caused them to feel more anxious.

Table 6. Frequencies of CA Factor Items

No	Item	A	SA	A+SA
12.	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	21	8	29
7.	I feel nervous while speaking English with native speakers.	20	4	24
14.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English classes	19	2	21
8.	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	18	2	20
11.	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English classes.	13	6	19
15.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word my English teacher says.	14	3	17
4.	I get frightened when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	13	-	13
16.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.	6	5	11
Avarage of A+SA		19,5		

For students who answered items 7 and 15, they supported their answers to no 8 “I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting”. It means that teachers' teaching style is important to reduce anxiety. It was in line with Sharif & Ferdous (2012) who stated that a key factor in reducing speaking anxiety is the role played by teachers and the way they teach. According to Toubot et al. (2018), to ensure that students can comprehend the materials, teachers should speak slowly and use simple words. They also suggested that teachers should facilitate students to feel at ease, ask questions freely, and speak English without any tension.

Moreover, there were 19 students who responded to Item no 11 “I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English classes”, and item no 16 supported this statement. The number of rules in English made students afraid to participate in English classes. According to Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel (2013), the students' linguistic problems including word power, grammar, and pronunciation challenges could increase their level of language anxiety. Since the students had to concern with various rules such as grammar, they were difficult to speak fluently. They were worried of making grammatical errors. Therefore, teachers should begin by explaining to students that learning involves making mistakes. The teachers ought to prioritize fluency above accuracy (Toubot et al., 2018). Teachers who place a greater focus on fluency provide an opportunity for their students to express themselves comfortably with a language.

3.3.2. Fear of Negative Evaluation

Table 7 shows that the second type of speaking anxiety that students commonly face was fear of negative evaluation. Most students agreed that they felt anxious when lecturers asked them some questions they hadn't thought to prepare for. This happened because of their inability to speak spontaneously. It is in line with Asysyifa et al. (2019), who stated the biggest cause of students' anxiety is a lack of preparation for English class since they are scared that the teacher would ask them about

the material. This was because they were still second-year students and their English skill was still lacking.

Table 7. Frequencies of FNE Factor Items

No	Item	A	SA	A+SA
18.	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	21	5	26
2.	I am afraid of making mistakes in English classes.	17	6	23
3.	I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in English classes	13	7	20
17..	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	12	6	18
6.	I get embarrassed to volunteer answers in English classes.	13	2	15
10.	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	9	63	12
Avarage of A+SA			19	

In this instance, the researcher recommended that rather than letting students talk in Indonesian, lecturers should provide opportunities for students to practise communicating in English throughout class. Because of this practice, the students would feel more confident and worry less about what others would think of them (Toubot et al., 2018). It was in accordance with Antoro et al. (2015) who stated that the absence of English as the primary language in the learners' environment caused the pupils to feel anxious. In addition, Abdullah Coskun (2016) and Akkakoson (2016) also stated that the limited speaking opportunities in the classroom might also cause students to experience speaking anxiety.

Furthermore, as shown by item 2, 23 students said they experienced anxiety when they made mistakes in English class. According to Saharani (2023), anxiety was derived from fear of failure. 20 students shook as the teacher called their names because they were terrified of making mistakes. There were more than 10 students responding to items 6, 10, 17. It was indicated that students' anxiety was caused by their fear of being assessed by their lectures or classmates.

Moreover, item 12 in the communication apprehension factor might be the cause of this. Students tended to have a negative view of their own speaking abilities, which caused them to fear criticism from others. These issues also contributed to their low enthusiasm for participating in class activities (Mahmud, 2018). This finding also supported item 2, the students were hesitant to talk in English because they knew that other students would correct them if they made mistakes (Antoro et al., 2015). It also aligned with the findings of Hidayat et al. (2022), who reported that students felt more anxious when they thought about others making fun of them when they were completing English assignments. This led students to prefer to be quiet rather than speak in order to practise their English.

3.3.3. Low Self-Confidence

Table 8 . Frequencies of LSC Factor Item

No	Item	A	SA	A+SA
13.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students	17	4	21
5.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English classes	14	7	21
1.	I am never quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English.	13	2	15
9.	I don't feel confident when I speak English in classes	11	3	14
Average of A+SA			17,75	

Low self-confidence was the factor that obtained the lowest average score. Based on table 8, 21 students responded to item 13 "I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students". According to Toubot et al. (2018, this happened due to the style of instruction used in the classrooms by the teachers, which didn't give students opportunities to communicate in English more. This was in accordance with Zia & Sulan (2015) who suggested that the primary determinants for reducing students' speaking fear were teachers' teaching strategies and the classroom environment. In other words, students' self-confidence would be increased and anxiety would be subsequently reduced in a supportive environment within the classroom between them and their lecturers, and it led to improvement in learning and performance.

Furthermore, this finding also demonstrated that students' confidence was lacking when they have to speak English in the class and their spontaneous speaking caused them to feel worried and experience speaking anxiety, which could be seen from the students who answered items 1, 5, and 9. For instance, there were 21 students who answered item 5, which represented their experience related to speaking anxiety because of no prior preparation when they wanted to speak. Lack of communication between lecturers and students might be the reason for this. It was better for the lecturers to inform the topic or material in advance. This would help students prepare themselves, and their anxiety would be reduced. It was in line with Hidayat et al (2022) who proposed that lack of preparation contributed to their language anxiety. In other words, preparing for speaking situation in advance is needed since it is helpful for students. The students feel more confident and focused since they have the opportunity to prepare thoughtful responses and anticipate potential challenges or questions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined EFL speaking anxiety among students enrolled in a state university's English Department. The statistics showed that speaking anxiety affected most of the students in the classroom at a moderate degree. This study revealed that students who were male experienced higher levels of anxiety compared to those who were female. On the other hand, this study also investigated the factor contributing to anxious feelings. Speaking anxiety was found to be mostly caused by communication apprehension, low self-confidence, and fear of being evaluated negatively. This study still has some drawbacks. Sometimes the data that the participants offered on questionnaires did not accurately reflect their true opinions. This occurred because respondents can have distinct ideas, presumptions, and understandings, in addition to other factors such the participants' honesty when providing their

opinions in the questionnaire. Hence, it is suggested that further research be carried out to assess any changes in the participants' behavior over time. Moreover, although the results of this study cannot be applied generally, it can be utilized as consideration for educators in order to increase their awareness of speaking anxiety and identify effective strategies to overcome this issue.

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