

**AN ANALYSIS OF EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY
(A CASE STUDY AT PABUARAN 1 JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN BANTEN)**

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Abstract

Studies show that speaking anxiety is a common challenge for many students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, this research was conducted to explore levels of speaking anxiety, factors contributing to students' anxiety, and coping strategies. Utilizing a qualitative approach with a case study design focuses on 36 eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Pabuaran. Instruments include a close-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and observational sheet, complemented by data-collecting techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation. The finding reveals that 3 participants (8%) indicated high anxiety, 16 participants (45%) indicated moderate anxiety, and 17 participants (47%) indicated low anxiety. Factors contributing to anxiety include personal and interpersonal anxieties, and classroom procedures. Students employ coping strategies such as preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking. It can be inferred that students are experiencing low levels of speaking anxiety, with two main factors including personal and interpersonal anxieties and classroom procedures. The strategies employed can serve as a reference for other students in managing their anxiety and improving their speaking skills.

Keywords: *EFL Students; Case Study; Student's Speaking Anxiety.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is fundamental to learning English as a foreign language (EFL) since it empowers students to articulate themselves, convey ideas, and interact with others. Speaking skills require more attention from students and teachers (Sidik et al., 2021). In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), many EFL students find speaking English fluently challenging. Speaking is the most challenging of the four primary English skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading (Arjulayana & Márquez Martínez, 2022). Therefore, one of the common challenges EFL students face in speaking English is anxiety, which can affect their ability to communicate effectively. The challenges students face in speaking English include a lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, concern about grammatical errors, anxiety, and low confidence (Nugrahaeni, 2022). These difficulties can cause EFL students to avoid speaking in English, negatively impacting their language learning progress.

Speaking anxiety is a common challenge for many students of English as a foreign language (EFL). Speaking anxiety is a challenge people worldwide face when communicating in English as a foreign language (Hussain et al., 2020). It raises the fear or nervousness of speaking English, particularly in front of an audience or a native speaker. Students often experience difficulty and anxiety when speaking English in front of their classmates or friends (Palupi, 2021). This anxiety can lead to avoidance behavior or negatively impact their performance in class, work, or social situations. Anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness are common among foreign language learners and can harm communication in the target language (Tanveer, 2007). In summary, the tension and unease linked to speaking anxiety in English as a foreign language learners can substantially disrupt communication and adversely impact academic and social interactions.

Furthermore, a previous study showed that anxiety significantly negatively affects EFL students' speaking English. Those studies can be put into several categories. The studies (Liu, 2007) and (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018) concentrated on precise situations that provoke anxiety, like speaking in front of the class or delivering presentations. The other studies by (Samad et al., 2021) and (Handayani & Rahmawati, 2017) aimed to identify the causes of anxiety among college students, gathering data from universities in Pakistan and Indonesia, respectively. Additionally, a study by (Hakim & Syam, 2019) and (Khouni et al., 2022) employed mixed-methods approaches to explore the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety. Besides, (Munchen et al., 2021) and (Hussain et al., 2020) employed quantitative research methods to assess speaking anxiety levels among EFL students.

A preliminary study was conducted in March 2023, observing a public Junior High School in Banten, SMP Negeri 1 Pabuaran. The study revealed that students' speaking skills were below average, which could contribute to their anxiety levels. Signs of anxiety were evident

throughout the teaching-learning process in English-speaking activities, such as avoiding speaking tasks, keeping silent when asked to communicate in English, feeling insecure, and displaying nervousness when asked to speak in class.

Based on the preliminary study results, some studies have only focused on anxiety related to speaking performance, while this research will focus on the teaching and learning process. Also, Previous studies have primarily focused on university students outside of Indonesia. In contrast, this study focuses on junior high school students in Banten, which can bridge a knowledge gap in the local context and offer specific insights into speaking anxiety at the secondary school level. Thus, there is limited research on speaking anxiety among students in a public junior high school in Banten using a qualitative approach with a case study design. Therefore, this study aims to classify the level of students speaking anxiety, the factors contributing to their speaking anxiety as perceived by the 8th-grade students of SMPN 1 Pabuaran for the academic year 2023/2024, and how students cope with their speaking anxiety.

1.1 Speaking

Speaking is a tool for individuals to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and opinions to others using a shared language. Several experts have presented varying viewpoints on the character and significance of speaking to provide further insights. As stated by (Brown, 2004), Speaking is a productive skill that can be directly observed and measured empirically. This definition suggests that speaking is a way for individuals to communicate verbally, and it can be directly observed when they are engaged in speaking. Then (Hamzaoglu & Koçoğlu, 2016) affirmed that speaking is a linguistic skill that enables individuals to employ English to articulate their thoughts and convey their ideas to others. Speaking skills allow individuals to utilize English for their opinions and effectively give their concepts to others, facilitating meaningful communication.

1.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a common experience that has been studied widely by researchers. Anxiety is a sense of uneasiness or nervousness caused by increased activity in the autonomic nervous system, accompanied by tension, worry, and fear (Horwitz et al., 1986). Then (Liu, 2007) stated anxiety is a significant phenomenon that has a major effect on language learning and is generally considered a negative factor. Also, (Bashori et al., 2022) stated that anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language is a multifaceted psychological phenomenon experienced by many language learners while acquiring a new language. Based on the definition provided earlier, it can be inferred that Anxiety is a feeling of weakness, nervousness, unease, and concern that arises in response to a specific situation or potential future event.

1.3 Levels of Anxiety

In analyzing speaking anxiety levels, Horwitz et al. (1986) categorize anxiety into three levels: high, moderate, and low. Individuals with high anxiety experience extreme worry and physical symptoms like sweating or trembling and may avoid speaking situations altogether. Those with moderate anxiety feel nervous but can manage their anxiety and speak reasonably well, experiencing only mild symptoms such as an increased heart rate. Meanwhile, individuals with low anxiety feel calm, relaxed, and confident, experiencing little to no physical symptoms and communicating effectively. Understanding these levels helps individuals and educators develop strategies to manage anxiety and improve speaking performance, leading to more effective and confident communication in English.

1.4 Factors Associated with Foreign Language Anxiety

Several factors can contribute to speaking anxiety in foreign language classes, particularly through specific speaking activities. According to Young (1991), language anxiety may arise from personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. Personal and interpersonal anxieties often stem from low self-esteem and fear of negative peer evaluations. Learner beliefs, such as unrealistic expectations about pronunciation or fluency timelines, can also lead to anxiety. Instructors' beliefs about their role, such as focusing heavily on correcting errors, can heighten student anxiety. The nature of interactions between instructors and learners plays a significant role; positive communication can reduce anxiety, while misunderstandings can increase it. Classroom procedures, like handling mistakes during performances, can contribute to anxiety, as can the pressures of language testing, which may lead to fear of making errors and losing self-confidence. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing strategies to manage and mitigate language learning anxiety.

1.5 Students' Strategies to Reduce Anxiety

In learning foreign languages, managing speaking anxiety is crucial. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) suggest several strategies: preparation involves practicing beforehand to boost confidence; relaxation techniques like deep breathing and positive thinking can calm nerves; focusing on positive thoughts reduces anxiety and builds confidence; peer seeking provides support by sharing experiences with classmates; and avoiding resignation, which means not giving up but instead using these effective strategies to manage anxiety and improve performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative case study design. The qualitative approach allows for an

in-depth exploration of students' subjective experiences (Yin, 2016; Yin, 2018). This study's research site was conducted at SMPN 1 Pabuaran in Serang Regency, Indonesia. The school was chosen due to its relevance to the study topic of language anxiety and its accessibility. As (Creswell, 2014) said, researchers should select research sites relevant to collecting necessary data while considering factors such as time availability, resources, and accessibility. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from the VIII A class, which exhibited anxiety indicators such as reluctance to speak English and lack of interest in the learning process.

The data collection technique for this study involved multiple methods to address the different research questions. To determine students' levels of speaking anxiety, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), consisting of 33 questions using a five-point scale, was used and translated into Bahasa Indonesia. Semi-structured interviews allowed in-depth exploration of factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety. A semi-structured interview is a predetermined set of questions to guide the conversation, but the interviewer can also ask additional questions and dig deeper into the discussion as needed (Creswell, 2014). Observations, recorded on an observational sheet, provided insights into students' coping strategies in real classroom settings, with a non-participant role focusing on low-level anxiety behaviors (Yin, 2016). Documentation further supported and enriched the data, offering additional context and corroborating qualitative findings (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis involves inspecting, cleaning, altering, and interpreting data to reveal insights. In this study, two types of data were collected. The first type was quantitative, obtained through a close-ended questionnaire analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency distribution. As (Miles et al., 2014) argue that numerical data can be used to summarize, organize, and describe qualitative findings. The second data type was qualitative, gathered through interviews and observations of student groups from each category. Data analysis techniques proposed by (Miles et al., 2014) are employed to achieve this research. For analyzing speaking anxiety levels, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used, categorizing anxiety into low, moderate, and high based on scores (Horwitz et al., 1986). Interviews identified factors contributing to speaking anxiety, analyzed using Young's (1991) framework, while observations identified coping strategies, categorized based on Kondo & Ying-Ling's (2004) theory. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation, using multiple data sources to validate findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

FINDINGS

The research reveals varying anxiety levels among students—high, moderate, and low—and identifies influencing factors such as personal and interpersonal anxiety and classroom

procedures. Students with low anxiety employed coping strategies like preparation, positive thinking, and relaxation, showcasing their nuanced experiences in managing anxiety.

1.1 Students Speaking Anxiety Levels

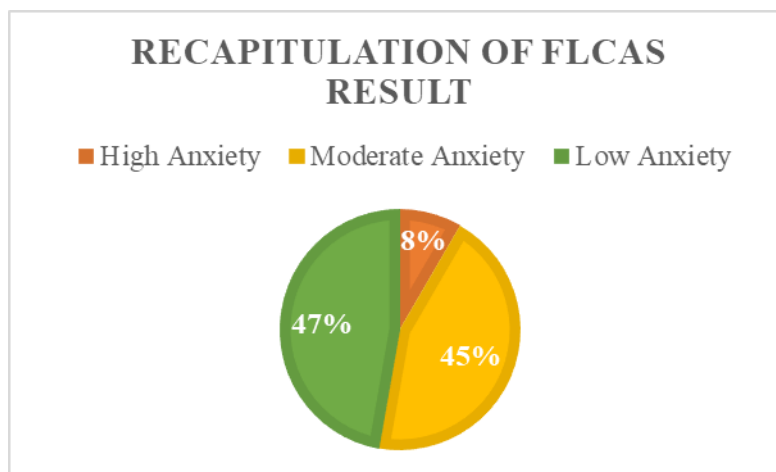
The questionnaire measured students' speaking anxiety levels through responses to 33 FLCAS items, with possible total scores ranging from 33 to 165. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the total sample

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Total	36	69	115	86.4	13.7

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for students' speaking anxiety based on a sample of 36 students, revealing a range from a minimum score of 69 to a maximum of 115. The average anxiety level, indicated by the mean score of 86.4, suggests a moderate level of anxiety overall, with a standard deviation of 13.7, highlighting significant variability in anxiety levels among the students surveyed. These statistics provide a clear overview of the distribution of speaking anxiety within the sample, showing both the central tendency and the extent of dispersion in anxiety scores. Then, the result showed that 3 participants (8%) indicated high anxiety, 16 participants (45%) indicated moderate anxiety, and 17 participants (47%) indicated low anxiety. The distribution showed that over half of the participants reported low speaking anxiety, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Recapitulation of FLCAS Result



Additionally, the results of the frequency distribution calculations are also discussed. This analysis is key to uncovering patterns and characteristics within the data, providing deep insights into the distribution of recorded values. Here is the frequency distribution displayed in Table 2 for students' speaking anxiety levels:

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of score for students' speaking anxiety levels

Interval Class	F	f%
69-76	9	25.00%
77-84	11	30.56%
85-92	7	19.44%
93-100	3	8.33%
101-108	0	0.00%
109-116	6	16.67%
Total	36	100.00%

The frequency distribution of scores for students' speaking anxiety levels, shown in Table 2, highlights the highest frequency in the 77-84 score range, with 11 students (30.56%) and no occurrences in the 101-108 range. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the anxiety level distribution among the 36 students. The FLCAS results indicate notable anxiety levels during speaking classes, aligning with prior research showing low anxiety levels among students in specific contexts (Savilla et al., 2024; Handayani & Rachmawati, 2017; Hussain et al., 2020). This suggests a generally favorable mental health status among the participants.

3.2 Factors Contribute to Students' Speaking Anxiety

Based on interviews, factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety were identified. The primary sources revealed in interviews are nervousness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. To support this finding, a study by (Shen & Chiu, 2019) showed that (a) psychological problems (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence) were the primary reason for English speaking difficulties. Then, a study (Liu, 2007) found that the students identified many variables such as low English proficiency, lack of practice, difficulty with the task, and fear of making mistakes. Speaking anxiety is often linked to personal and interpersonal factors, with studies demonstrating a correlation between anxiety and various social and psychological elements, notably low self-esteem (Young, 1991). These kinds of factors were categorized as personal and interpersonal anxieties.

Classroom procedures establish another factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety, including worry about strict punishments. A specific example underscores the impact of strict regulations, as one student expressed anxiety in the English class, fearing the consequences of not bringing a dictionary. Supported by the previous study (Jafar Batiha et al., 2016) found that the existence of Fear of negative evaluation is a vital source of speaking anxiety among Jordanian EFL learners. Then (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018) stated that many students reported being more willing to speak if they were not too afraid of making a mistake and being evaluated negatively by their teacher and peers. This underscores the impact of strict regulations on students' emotional well-being and highlights the need for a more flexible and supportive

approach in the English learning environment.

3.3 Coping Strategies for Students' Speaking Anxiety

In dealing with anxiety, the students implemented various strategies to reduce their speaking anxiety. During the observation and interview sessions, students displayed and clarified specific methods they used to cope with their anxiety. Three strategies related to (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004) theory were discovered: preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking. Reflecting results came from (Hakim & Syam, 2019), who found that students overcome anxiety in speaking English using five strategies: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation.

The first strategy was preparation; one student tried to overcome their anxiety by reading books before learning a preparation and then rereading them afterward to understand better. It was verified based on the interview by students who said, *"I usually reread books before the learning activities, like preparing beforehand. And afterward, I read again to understand it better"*. Then, the second strategy involved relaxation, highlighting the importance of easing the body, such as taking deep breaths and staying calm. This was proved by students who highlighted, *"Calm me down until completely relaxed, take a deep breath, and always refer to the notes"*. The last strategy was positive thinking; this strategy was proposed to distract attention from worrying conditions and provide positive and enjoyable cues to relieve anxious students. Thinking that everything would be fine if they were felt positively. It is shown by students who said, *"I just think positive because mistakes are inevitable, right? But still, believe in yourself that we can do it, even if it's just a little bit."* To sum up, the student's active engagement in activities such as pre-and post-reading, employing relaxation techniques, and fostering a positive outlook highlighted their effective coping strategies for managing speaking anxiety.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the comprehensive data findings and discussions regarding speaking anxiety in the eighth-grade English class at SMPN 1 Pabuaran, students displayed varying levels of anxiety, including low, moderate, and high, with a notable majority experiencing low anxiety. The study identified two primary contributors to speaking anxiety: personal and interpersonal anxieties, along with classroom procedures, where personal and interpersonal issues were particularly prominent. This highlights the necessity for targeted interventions that address these specific concerns to alleviate anxiety and enhance the overall language learning experience at SMPN 1 Pabuaran. Additionally, students who reported low anxiety levels effectively utilized strategies such as preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking, which can serve as models for others in managing anxiety and improving speaking skills. In conclusion, the study underscores

the critical importance of employing comprehensive approaches to mitigate speaking anxiety among EFL students. This requires a thorough understanding of the factors influencing anxiety, encompassing personal, interpersonal, and instructional dynamics within the classroom. By integrating this understanding, educators can implement tailored strategies aimed at reducing anxiety and fostering a supportive learning environment, thereby enhancing students' overall English language learning experience and facilitating their development of linguistic competence and confidence in communication skills essential for academic and professional success.

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