

EFL Students' Anxiety in Speaking English: Factors and Strategies

Masrurotul Ajiza¹, Arum Putri Rahayu², Setiawati³, Dini Deswarni⁴, Tri Rohani⁵

¹ Institut Teknologi Nasional, Malang, Indonesia

² STAI Ma'arif, Magetan, Indonesia

^{3,4} STAI Hubbulwathan Duri, Riau, Indonesia

⁵ STKIP Muhammadiyah Pagaram, Sumsel, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: masrurotul_ajiza@lecturer.itn.ac.id

Abstract: Anxiety has a big role in affecting students' performance in learning English, especially in speaking class. This study aimed to answer three questions: (1) the anxiety level the EFL students got in a speaking class, (2) some factors influence it, and (3) some strategies that can be used to minimize the level of students' anxiety. This research used a qualitative approach by adopting a questionnaire as an instrument. The participants of this study were 113 students; 68.1% female and 31.9% male students; from 4 different universities in Indonesia from different departments (an English and non-English departments). The results of this study showed that the student's level of anxiety was still high which was affected by internal and external factors. Those factors tended to decide the level of their anxiety. In addition, this study also showed some suggestions that can be used as strategies to minimize the level of the student's anxiety.

Keywords: *EFL, speaking anxiety, anxiety factors, anxiety strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

English is an important means of communication in the world. In Indonesia, English still holds a position as a foreign language (EFL) in which it is not used as the daily basic language. English is only used by students in an academic environment or any other specific circumstances as in the school or campus.

English has four major skills that must be comprehended. Among them, speaking skill takes a big role in creating effective communication through spoken language. Unfortunately, students still have some difficulties in learning speaking (Burns, 2016). Speaking skill still has minor time in the teaching process as most teachers are focusing more on reading and writing skills. This lack of speaking time can cause students to have speaking anxiety (Hamzaoglu & Koçoglu, 2016). This speaking anxiety can be seen as a big problem as it is hard to be recognized, and some teachers sometimes see and categorize it as a lack of motivation or low performance although in a fact the students were just facing speaking anxiety (Ansari, 2015). As EFL higher education students, the feeling of anxiety is undeniably felt when it comes to speaking activity. This condition can be a high barrier for them to explore their ability in speaking and communicate well in the teaching and learning process. Further, it can also limit them from having an active class. To conclude, speaking anxiety can avoid students to convey good communication.

Basically, language anxiety has broadly been learned. According to (MacIntyre, 2017), three approaches were made in order to classify the development and trends of language anxiety, namely the confounded approach, specialized approach, and contextually dynamic approach. In a specialized approach anxiety related to language was identified, defined, and studied. HORWITZ et al., (1986) defined language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning processes (25: p. 31). In this study, anxiety is a means of the students' anxious feelings during speaking/ conversation in the classroom.

Speaking anxiety for EFL students is a psychological condition. They tend to get nervous when they must deliver their idea or communicate their thought using a different language from their own. The anxious and nervous feeling makes them shy and afraid to make mistakes in speaking in the English language. According to M. Liu &

Hong (2021) when students feel anxious, they like to show a series of difficulties, such as sweating, being dumbfounded, and trembling, even do not know what to do. Speaking anxiety needs to be detected early because it can cause some negative impacts for the students. As M. Liu & Zhang, (2008) mentioned that anxiety can give a bad impact to the students' performance.

In this study, the researcher was purposefully using a presentation class in checking the student's level of anxiety in speaking for this way can force them to talk in the class. Then, the discussion part after the presentation can create communication among the students as well. (Hanifa, 2018) mentioned that some factors influencing anxiety can be related to cognitive, affective, and performance factors. In this recent study, the researcher wanted to know more about the most significant factor and the way to press it. There are three questions formulated in this study based on the problems faced: (1) How high is the anxiety level of EFL students in the English-Speaking class? (2) What factors influence the anxiety of EFL students in speaking English class? and (3) What strategies can reduce the anxiety of EFL students in speaking English class?

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to know the anxiety faced by the students in speaking. In accordance with the existing problem formulation, there are 3 purposes of this study addressed:

1. To find out how much the anxiety level of EFL students is in English Speaking.
2. To find out what factors influence the anxiety of EFL students in English Speaking.
3. To find out what strategies can reduce the anxiety of EFL students in English Speaking.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach and used a questionnaire spread online to the students to collect some data. 113 students were joining this research which was 68.1% female, and 31.9% male students. The gender was not being an issue in this study as Aida (1990) said in her study that there was no significant gender-anxiety interaction. The students in this study had different study backgrounds as they took English, Finance, and Engineering departments. They came from 4 different universities around Indonesia, located in Malang, Magetan, Riau, and Pagaralam.

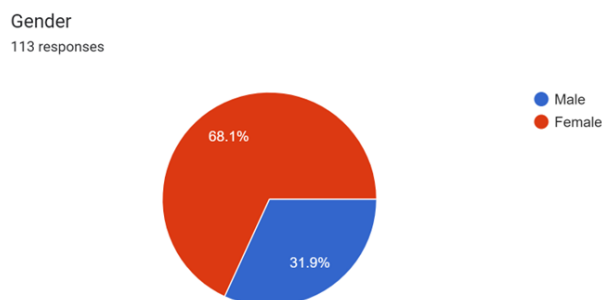


Figure 1. The Subject of the Study

Several questions were in the questionnaire delivered to the study subjects. The answer was formed in linear scales from 1 as the lowest level to 5 as the highest level. Then, as the need to get deeper information about the students' anxiety levels and the reasons behind it, the questionnaire was also presented in an open-ended form. Then, the data collected from the questionnaire instrument was analyzed descriptively to get a clear perception from the students' side.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the Study

The researchers first asked how much the students liked the presentation class because they wanted to know their internal motivation for the presentation class that required them to talk in the class.



Figure 2. The Attitudes of Students Towards Presentation Class

Level 1 was the lowest level, while level 5 was the highest one. The result showed that only 7% of students were less interested in presentation class. About 11% of students was having a better interest in level 2. 23% of students were in level 3 (moderate). The highest number of students who had good interest in presentation class was taking 30%, and 27% were in their highest interest in having a presentation class that required them to talk during the time being of the class. Therefore, more than 60% of students liked to have a presentation class as they were at level 3 (moderate) and higher levels, and it was just less than 15% that was not too like it. It means that those EFL English learners had a high motivation to practice their spoken English.

The students in this study had many reasons for liking the presentation class that required them to speak a lot which are stated as follows:

Table 1. The reason of being motivated in a presentation class

Number	Reasons to Like Presentation
1	When we present we actively talk and share information and make us critical thinking
2	more train to speak in English
3	The purpose of the presentation is generally so that students understand the material better because given assignments they will definitely read. Other goals are for students to learn to work in groups, be able to present aaterial, hone their speaking skills and answer questions in public, and many other goals.
4	Because I want to be able to make opponents afraid of presentations
5	Well, I kind of used to Presentation class, it can help me express and do discussions in the class.
6	students can think more creatively
7	because with the presentation students will practice public speaking or understand speaking in front of many people
8	With presentations, you can hone your speaking skills and understand the material. Showing the presentation must have read 1. aims to hone the ability to speak and interact with the audience
9	Presentation class makes me more courageous to speak in public
10	Because he gets used to speaking in public, especially being a teacher
11	When we (do) presentation, we active to talk and share information and make us (have) critical thinking
12	Because I want to be able to make opponents afraid of presentations
13	Because a lot of material is difficult to understand, students must explain and explain it to other students

14	The purpose of the presentation is generally so that students understand the material better
15	Other goals are for students to learn to work in groups, be able to present material, hone their speaking skills, and answer questions in public, and many other goals.
16	it can help me express and do discussions in class.
17	because with the presentation students will practice public speaking or understand speaking in front of many people
18	Presentation class makes me more courageous to speak in public
19	To get used to speaking in public, especially for being a teacher in the future
20	The presentation helps to build confidence
21	it can train public speaking, then how to have good and correct discussions, and lastly it makes it easier to understand the material.

From all the reasons given, almost all of them felt challenging to have presentation class in order to improve their speaking ability. It shows how much they are willing to have a better proficiency in their speaking skill.

Next, the second question was about whether they had language anxiety or not during speaking in the presentation and how much did they get it. The result can be seen in the figure below.

Do you get anxiety when you speaking in presentation? Apakah mengalami kecemasan selama berbicara dalam presentasi?

113 responses

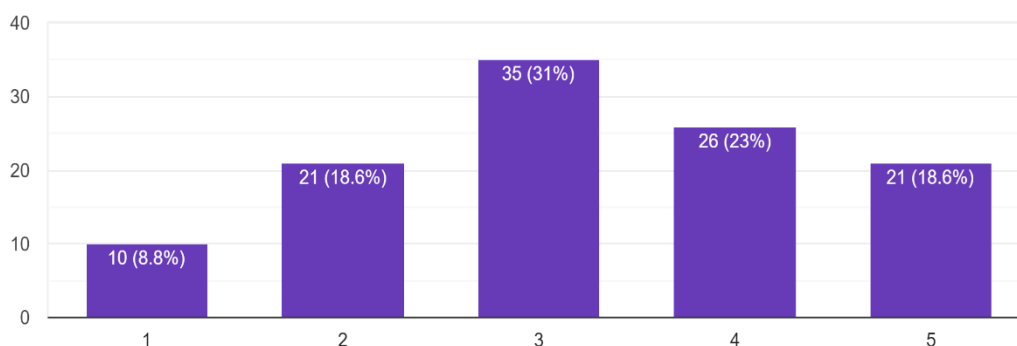


Figure 3. The level of students' anxiety during speaking

The data obtained showed that the students' level of language anxiety was quite high. Again, figure 3 showed that level 1 was the lowest, and level 5 was the highest. From 1 to 5, it was only 8.8% of students got low levels of anxiety. Followed by 18.6% of students in level 2. The highest number of students was in level 3 with 31%, and a little lower than it was in level 4 with 23%. Then, the peak level of anxiety was experienced by 18.6% of students. This data clearly declared that the level of anxiety about speaking English was still high for EFL students where more than 70% of students were having problems with it.

Then in the next question, the students were asked the reasons why they get their anxiety. This point was given not only to know the reason for their language anxiety but also in order to be able to set some strategies after knowing the trouble they faced. The answers were varied, and the researcher has concatenated the same answers as follows:

Table 2. The reason for being anxious during speaking

Number	Reasons to Like Presentation
1	Watched by many people
2	I experience anxiety because I lack confidence, I feel that when presenting the language, I use to be convoluted, and I also worry when an audience asks questions, I can't answer them.
3	I cannot reply to what people say in English
4	Lack of confidence (19)
5	Not mastering tenses
6	Because I do not believe in myself and am too worried that the way of conveying the language is wrong / fear to make mistakes (12)
7	a little nervous when people pay attention (3)
8	My pronunciation is still lacking (2)
9	Because thinking about other people's reactions when talking
10	when I do not understand the material (2)
11	It is very difficult for me to process words and convey what is on my mind so what I convey to the audience is sometimes difficult to understand
12	because of the lack of public speaking that I mastered for presentations
13	yes, maybe I do not really understand the material that I will convey, so that's why I experience anxiety
14	Due to the limited knowledge that I have and I feel inappropriate to convey something of my own
15	flustered when the teacher stared at me.
16	Feeling shy, afraid to speak less fluently, (3)
17	there is still a lack of understanding (4)
18	Insecure
19	it is often difficult to say a difficult word in English
20	do not have good public speaking
21	My personality, I am introverted and maybe a little lazy to explain continuously
22	Less vocabulary (4)

The table above showed that language anxiety can be triggered by many factors that came from a lack of confidence which are classified into:

1. Lack of confidence
2. Lack of English proficiency including vocabulary, pronunciation and tenses, lack of public speaking,
3. fear of people's judgments,
4. shyness,
5. insecurities, and
6. introverted personality.

After stating some problems, the students shared some acts to do that can be strategies to minimize speaking language anxiety.

Table 2. Some Strategies to Press Language's Anxiety

Number	The Strategies
1.	Improving self-confidence (19)
2.	Practice English every day (14)
3.	Enriching and memorizing vocabulary (13)
4.	Take a deep breath in the middle of anxiety (10)
5.	Relax/ stay calm (7)
6.	Motivation from lecturer and friends (4)
7.	try to talk with friends in the English language (4)
8.	Learning more pronunciation (3)

9. Finding good partners as lecturers for improving English speaking ability (3)
10. Not to worry about people (2)
11. Pray (2)
12. Not afraid to make mistakes (2)
13. Improving public speaking
14. Starting to speak with a small number of people (2)
15. Sit down and drink water
16. Talk more often
17. Getting some encouraging words
18. Being optimistic
19. Listening more to English conversation
20. Pause time to talk again.
21. Trying to enjoy the conversation
22. Silent
23. Distract our focus
24. Get used to talking to many people
25. Thinking about the funny thing
26. Think positively
27. Talking to ourselves first to practice
28. Create a comfortable and conducive situation.

To this end, the strategies that can be used to press the students' language anxiety might come from the students themselves, their friends, and their teachers/ lecturers.

Discussion

This study tried to answer 3 questions addressed, they are the level of students' speaking anxiety, the factors affecting students' speaking anxiety, and the strategies that can be carried out to minimize students' speaking anxiety.

The first result figured out that the level of students' anxiety in speaking English as a foreign language is still high in which there was more than 60% including to moderate to high level of anxiety. This result was linear with Erdiana et al., (2020) that conducted a checking of language anxiety to her 29 junior high school students and found out that more than 60% of them were having moderate to high level of anxiety in speaking. Not too different, (Çağatay, 2015) also had similar result that his students got moderate level in Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA).

Some factors were found to influence the students' anxiety in speaking English that come from personal factors such as lack of confidence that got the loudest choice. Lack confidence could relate to students' self-efficacy. When their self-efficacy is high, they would have more enjoyment and less bad emotions as anxiety (Wang et al., 2021). This statement was supplemented by Su (2021) that said the students who had a low speaking confidence tend to think themselves to have low proficiency in English. This condition led them to have an anxiety in every speaking class. Next factor was a lack of English proficiency. Their self-evaluation of proficiency deficiency was including in vocabulary, pronunciation, tenses, and public speaking. M. Liu & Zhang, (2008) in their previous study also said the same that students' self-evaluation of proficiency deficiency may cause them to have anxiety in learning a language. Pramonos (2015) also claimed in his study that students with low English proficiency could experience more anxiety while speaking. Next factor to cause anxiety was fear of people. The students tend to mind and make assumption about what the interlocutor think about their words. That thought lead them into having language anxiety. Then, shyness could also be the next factor. The last, insecurities and introverted personality were being other factors respectively.

Working with language anxiety in speaking, some strategies can be carried out by the students to decrease their language anxiety levels that were classified into: (1) Improving self-confidence. This strategy was gaining the highest number of students. Being confident and optimistic will be very good in minimizing language anxiety, one of them is not thinking about others' opinions too much, and not being afraid to make mistakes during the process. (2) Improving

English proficiency. It can be done by fixing pronunciation and enriching vocabulary, listening more to English conversations, and practicing speaking English more frequently. Practicing speaking English can be started by talking to oneself in front of the mirror to get used to it, then finding a good speaking partner for the next step. (3) Enjoy the talk/ conversation. Enjoying the talks can lift the mood in the conversation which can cause the speakers more relaxed and feel the enjoyment that minimizes their language anxiety. This is similar with the study conducted by Dewaele & Alfawzan, (2018) and Rezazadeh & Zarrinabadi, (2023) that there is a positive correlation between students' enjoyment of a foreign language and their achievement, and a negative relationship between the said variables. In other words, the students' enjoyment can create less anxiety. M. Liu & Hong, (2021) also said that the enjoyment and anxiety are independent variables. When the students are joyful in the classroom, they tend to be more active and far from the anxious reactions.

The result of this study also revealed that some physical acts can be done to reduce anxiety when the talk is going on by taking a deep breath when the anxiety attacks, drinking some water, doing small body movements, and staying calm.

Minimizing language anxiety in speaking can also come from the help of the lectures by giving reassuring words to the students, giving motivation, providing a comfortable and conducive situation in the class, and being a good partner in speaking with them. Providing a comfortable situation can be done by giving a familiar topic to discuss. According to Daly et al., (1989), choosing a familiar topic can make the students feel more at ease in speaking. The result about how the lecturer has a big role in the students' anxiety level is corroborated by the previous study from Subaşı, (2010) that said teachers' manners can be the factor how much students can get anxiety. A negative feedback given could increase the level of students' anxiety (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014). Yet, this result is in contrary with Liu (2012) said that there was no big interconnection between motivation and students' level of anxiety.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted showed that EFL students are still having a high level of anxiety in speaking. There are some factors affecting language anxiety, such as: lack of confidence, lack of English proficiency, fear of people's judgment, shyness, insecurities, and introverted personality. The students, however, can minimize those problems by using some strategies such as improving their self-confidence, improving their English proficiency, and trying to engage and enjoy the conversation,. Not only the students themselves, but their friends and lecturers support can affect their anxiety by showing. Showing their support in the talk can be a big help for the students. For the lecturers, they can also show their support by providing a comfortable and conducive environment for the students in speaking class to ease them in pressing their anxiety level. They can also help the students by giving motivation by being a good and constructive speaking partner and by always give reassuring words during the talks.

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