

A STUDY OF STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES AND FACTORS CAUSING IT

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Abstract

This research was mainly carried out to investigate the students' anxiety levels and internal and external factors leading to speaking anxiety. The third-semester students of English Language Education Study Program students, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture at a university in Yogyakarta who are taking Speaking in Professional Contexts subject are the population of this study. To provide the sample, a convenience sampling technique was employed by the researchers, resulting in 86 respondents. A Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire and a closed-form questionnaire were employed to collect data. A quantitative descriptive method was applied to analyze data. The research findings show that most students (37.2%) felt mildly anxious when speaking in front of the class. Internal and external factors affect students' performance in English-speaking classes. In terms of internal factors, lack of confidence (53.5%) is the most dominant internal factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety. Considering external factors, the most dominant external factor leading to students' speaking anxiety is the grammar factor (46.5%). It is expected that instructors create plans to lower students' anxiety levels and encourage their academic progress in speaking English fluently.

Keywords: anxiety, internal dan external factors, speaking anxiety, speaking skill

Introduction

Individuals' mental states are of great importance in the foreign language learning process since they have a big impact on their skills and accomplishments. Regretfully, students' feelings are typically more depressing than upbeat when it comes to learning a foreign language. Anxiety is one of the psychological conditions that makes learning a foreign language challenging. Anxiety is referred to as an uncontrolled emotion that could result in problems and pressure in learning a language (Şener, 2015). It is generally believed that students who feel anxious will experience apprehension, distraction, and turmoil in a particular circumstance where language is being undertaken. Every individual encounters anxiety in daily life, almost anywhere, and in all conditions (Palupi, 2021). Anxiety also occurs in English-speaking classes.

Since speaking is one of the language skills, it is often taken for granted. Unfortunately, classrooms are filled with students who are struggling to communicate their opinions and feelings orally. Students claim that speaking in English causes them a great deal of nervousness and that speaking assessments make them feel more restless than other tests. Mohamed and Wahid (in Melouah, 2013) state that speaking anxiety among EFL students has frequently hampered students' ability to adjust to their classroom atmosphere and meet their academic objectives. EFL students who struggle with speaking anxiety will feel insecure when they are driven to perform tasks in English. Instead of seeing speaking in front of the class as an opportunity to practice speaking more effectively, they would prefer to remain silent and perceive it as a danger.

Several comprehensive investigations have been conducted to examine university students' anxiety during English-speaking classroom activities. Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015) present their research findings as follows: 1) The degree of "error correction" anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language varies greatly depending on ability. Regarding speaking fear in a foreign language, there is a notable distinction between A1 and A2 competency levels. It is said that compared to A1 level students, A2 level students are less apprehensive while asking their teachers to correct their errors; 2) When it comes to readiness, female students feel more worried than male students if they do not prepare for the classes in advance; 3) Regarding exam anxiety, public speaking anxiety, and question-answer anxiety, female students experienced higher levels of anxiety than male students during question-answer sessions, tests, and public speaking; 4) Concerning assessing anxiety, there is an obvious distinction among the participants who began their English language education in elementary school, secondary school, and university. Findings revealed that students who initiated their English language learning in secondary school experienced greater levels of apprehension compared to those who began their studies at a university. However, in terms of other anxiety kinds including speaking, readiness, question-answering, conversation, public speaking, and error correction, the participants' degree of speaking anxiety was not significantly affected when they began learning the English language.

Comparably, Tien (2018), who gathered 658 students from eight southern Taiwanese colleges as participants, discovered that: 1) learners are highly concerned about their capability to communicate, their lack of vocabulary, how well they pronounce words, and the precision of their grammar usage; 2) More speaking anxiety is experienced by female students than by male students when it pertains to the gender-related issue; 3) Speaking phobia tends to happen to those who do not major in English; 4) Students who have studied English for a longer period are less anxious about speaking the language in class. Also, Damayanti and Listyani (2020), who recruited 52 second-year English Language Education Program (ELEP) students at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia as the participants of the study, revealed that: 1) The students' nervousness in English-speaking classes was mostly stimulated by three primary factors: communication apprehension, exam anxiety, and fear of an unsatisfactory evaluation; 2) Additionally, the students' restricted vocabulary, undervaluing of their abilities, lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, and fear of embarrassing themselves in front of their classmates were found to be significant contributors to their speaking anxiety.

There are several causes why many EFL students undergo language anxiety. Individual differences in physical and psychological states as well as the demands of particular situations determine the degree of anxiety. Taking into account this, the researchers focused on the following two primary issues: the speaking anxiety levels of the third semester English Language Education Study Program (henceforth, ELESP) students at one of the universities in Yogyakarta in the Academic Year 2023/2024, and the different factors that contributed to the students' speaking anxiety. The researchers employed Oetting's scale of foreign language classroom anxiety (in Suparlan, 2021) to gauge the degree of students' speaking nervousness. Furthermore, they researched factors that led to the speaking anxiety that students encountered during speaking activities in the classroom by using classifications of external factors (language, grammar, pronunciation, and peer factors) and internal factors (stage fear, lack of confidence, and shyness) proposed by Rajitha and Amelu (2020).

Literature Review

Speaking

Speaking is regarded as the most vital phase in mastering any language. Moreover, a learner's speaking proficiency indicates how well he is initially picking up a language (Tambunan, Lumban Raja, & Sari, 2018). Teaching speaking competence in the English language is a challenging endeavor. English language instruction is provided in Indonesia as a foreign language. Its use is restricted to the classroom and does not extend beyond it. As a result, speaking proficiency becomes challenging for learners to absorb. Students report that they feel quite anxious when speaking in English and that speaking assessments bring about more anxiety than other subjects. Students admit that speaking in front of the class and doing immediate activities or exercises cause a great deal of nervousness (Young, 1991). It is in line with Occhipinti (in Damayanti & Listyani, 2020) saying that for the students examined in this study, speaking assignments in class can be somewhat stressful. This concern could be caused by a variety of factors, such as the instructor's strict correction techniques, fear of making mistakes that could damage the students' self-esteem, or anxiety about being "over-exposed" in front of others (communicative apprehension).

Several factors determine students' English communication skills, even with the advancement of English teaching through various innovative and creative practices in schools and colleges, and even though appropriate settings such as language labs, classroom speaking discussions, conferences, demonstrations, and training sessions are organized. These elements might be classified as psychological or physiological, and they have an impact on learners' speaking ability. Therefore, it is imperative to take decisive action to overcome speaking anxiety concerns because they impede both academic and professional advancement.

Anxiety

It is fundamental to perceive anxiety as an intricate feeling that merges feelings, emotional states, and personality characteristics (Scovel, 1978). Generally speaking, anxiety is a mental condition that is concerned with the possibility of an impending threat, tension, and specific physiological traits (Wooten in Pramusita, Situmorang, & Nugroho, 2022). Trait and state anxiety are the two main categories

of anxiety differences found in research studies. A fairly stable personality trait is the condition associated with trait anxiety. These learners experience anxiety in a range of contexts. State anxiety is the term for a transient state characterized by specific bodily symptoms that are felt at a certain period. Situation-specific anxiety is reflective of and recurrent in particular contexts. It is called situation-specific anxiety when it comes to language anxiety. Talking about situation-specific anxiety, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) say that it can be understood as a form of trait anxiety that is exclusive to a particular setting.

Foreign language anxiety

When referring to foreign language learning processes, anxiety is defined as apprehension and restlessness that might affect a person's performance, particularly their oral language production quality and fluency (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Despite their typically excellent abilities and knowledge, students' poor self-confidence sometimes contributes to their nervousness when learning a foreign language, causing them to remain silent or reluctant to participate in class. Fear is often thought to be the cause of speech anxiety. Communication anxiety, which has traditionally been linked to language impairments, can be a major cause of worry. After seeing this, students could become terrified of mispronouncing words or distorting the sense of what they are saying (Szyszka in Pramusita, Situmorang, & Nugroho, 2022). Exam-related factors, such as length, methods, setting, and instruction clarity, might also be triggers. Perfectionist students often experience discomfort from test anxiety, which also includes the fear of failing a foreign language course or receiving unsatisfactory marks. The ultimate trigger is an unpleasant examination, which makes students fearful of hearing unfavorable feedback from teachers or fellow students if they use a newly acquired foreign language (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018).

Sanei (2016) states that anxiety mainly exists in three types: minor, moderate, and major. At minor levels, people may have trouble concentrating, tremble physically, and abruptly elevate their voices when exposed to low amounts. Regardless of its efficacy, learning and problem-solving are still feasible at moderate levels. Palpitations, an accelerated heartbeat, chills, and moderate physical symptoms are among the physiological reactions that take place at this stage. At major levels, learners would struggle to successfully follow the process of learning. They could encounter severe dread, overbreathing, and somatic symptoms.

Internal and external factors causing speaking anxiety

Speaking anxiety-causing variables can be divided into psychological and physiological aspects. In their research findings, Rajitha and Amelu (2020) elaborated on two types of elements contributing to speaking anxiety: external and internal factors. Language, grammar, pronunciation, and peer pressure are examples of external influences, whereas stage fear, lack of confidence, and shyness are examples of internal ones.

Internal Factors

The research results of Rajitha and Amelu (2020) have found three internal components. They are explained in further detail below:

1. Stage Fear

In reality, stage fright is the most frequent source of anxiety in public speaking situations. Performance anxiety or worry is the primary cause of stage fright or fear. An individual experiences it when they are required to speak or perform in front of a class or group of people.

2. Lack of Confidence

To be able to communicate in a foreign language without nervousness or fear, one needs confidence. Rajitha and Amelu (2020) state that anxiety arises when a student feels pressured to create an impression on the audience yet lacks confidence in their strengths. Low performance is the consequence of a lack of confidence.

3. Shame Factor

Another significant problem that hurts learners whenever they are obligated to use the target language is shame. They occasionally experience shyness when speaking in front of the class or the public or when interacting with others.

External Factors

There are three external factors identified in the research findings of Rajitha and Amelu (2020). They are elaborated as follows:

1. Language Aspect

Language aspect is one of the crucial contributors to speaking anxiety. Sometimes, students are not capable of expressing their thoughts in the English language properly. Having insufficient English vocabulary also inhibits them from speaking in the English language confidently.

2. Grammar Aspect

Grammar has been identified by the students as one of the key external variables that contribute to speaking fear. It was discovered that a few students expressed fear of making grammatical errors. They felt concerned about the accuracy of their sentence construction. It appears that Rajitha and Amelu's research findings (2020) show that grammar is the foremost external aspect that generates students' speaking anxiety.

3. Pronunciation

Pronouncing the target language precisely is imperative. A few students confessed that they were petrified of pronouncing the target language incorrectly.

4. Peer Factor

Students would always feel anxious about their peers' or classmates' opinions or judgments, especially when they had to speak in front of the class.

The FLCAS, or foreign language classroom anxiety scale

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (henceforth, FLCAS) was created in the middle of the 1980s by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Since then, it has been a vital aid to examine individual variations that may affect the results of second and foreign language learning (Lee & Ye, 2023). According to

theory, the creation of the FLCAS signaled the start of a field-specific comprehension and conceptualization of anxiety as something that originates from and is positioned within a language learning environment (MacIntyre, 2017; Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019). In practical terms, numerous investigations have demonstrated the negative link that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has with other affective factors, like readiness to speak (Liu & Jackson, 2008), self-assessed language competence (Kitano, 2002; Sila, 2010), resolving self-efficacy (Fallah, 2017), particular language abilities, such those needed for spoken classroom tasks (Phillips in Lee & Ye, 2023), and activities involving listening (Kim in Lee & Ye, 2023).

Method

In this study, a quantitative descriptive method was used, and the findings were presented both numerically and descriptively. Quantitative research, according to Apuke (2017), focuses on measuring and analyzing variables to provide findings. It entails applying particular statistical techniques to the use and analysis of numerical data to provide answers. The descriptive method was used to develop and analyze the findings in great depth.

Population and sample

The population of this study consists of 341 third-semester students enrolled in the Speaking in Professional Contexts subject at the ELESP, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Cultures at a university in Yogyakarta in the Academic Year 2023/2024. The convenience sampling technique was utilized to determine 86 respondents for the sample, taking into account the respondents' availability and readiness (Solimun & Fernandes, 2018).

Instruments of collecting data

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) FLCAS was utilized to collect the data for this study. There are thirty-three statements provided in the questionnaire; eleven of them deal with communication anxiety, fifteen with test anxiety, and seven with negative assessment. A five-point grading system that ranges from highly disagree to highly agree, was incorporated with each statement. To discover the causes (internal and external factors) triggering students to experience discomfort or apprehension when speaking English in speaking classes, the researchers distributed a closed-form questionnaire which was adopted from Rajitha and Amelu's (2020) research findings.

Data analysis

The researchers utilized the following FLCA Scale (Oetting in Suparlan, 2021) to gauge the students' speaking anxiety, as indicated in the following table:

Table 1. FLCA Scale (Oetting in Suparlan, 2021)

Range	Category
33-63	Very relaxed
65-85	Relaxed

Range	Category
86-106	Mildly apprehensive
107-123	Apprehensive
124-165	Very apprehensive

The more speaking apprehension students experience, the more they exhibit symptoms in oral performance. Thus, there is a direct relationship between the score and the anxiety levels of the students.

Findings and Discussion

The study's findings are comprehensively discussed, highlighting the degree of anxiety perceived by students when they are speaking English in class as well as the internal and external variables that contribute to this fear. The discoveries on students' anxiety levels when taking part in spoken performance in Speaking in Professional Contexts classes are expounded as follows:

Table 2. The levels of participants' anxiety

Range	Level	Frequency	Percentage
33 – 63	Very relaxed	9	10.5
65 – 85	Relaxed	19	22.1
86-106	Mildly anxious	32	37.2
107 – 123	Anxious	14	16.3
124 – 165	Very anxious	12	13.9
TOTAL		86	100

Table 2 above shows that from 86 students who performed in English-speaking classes, 12 students felt very anxious (13.9%), 14 students (16.3%) felt anxious, 32 students felt mildly anxious, 19 students felt relaxed, and nine students felt very relaxed.

The following are the findings of internal and external factors leading to students' speaking anxiety.

Table 3. The frequency and percentage of internal factors affecting students' speaking anxiety

Internal Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Confidence	46	53.5
Stage Fear	24	27.9
Shyness Factor	16	18.6
TOTAL	86	100

Table 3 presents that lack of confidence is the primary internal trigger leading to participants' speaking nervousness (53.5%). Stage fear ranks second (27.9%), while shyness factor comes in last (18.8%).

Table 4. The frequency and percentage of external factors influencing students' speaking anxiety

External Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar Factor	40	46.5
Pronunciation Factor	25	29.1
Language Factor	16	18.6
Peer Factor	5	5.8
TOTAL	86	100

Table 4 shows that the grammar factor is the highest percentage leading to students' speaking anxiety (46.5%), the second position is occupied by the pronunciation factor (29.1%), the language factor occupies the third position, and the lowest percentage contributing to students' speaking anxiety is peer factor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research objectives are to ascertain the levels of apprehension faced by the third-semester students of ELESP, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture at a university in Yogyakarta and to investigate internal and external variables impacting students' speaking anxieties. The research findings imply that most students (37.2%) felt mildly restless when performing spoken English. About internal components, lack of confidence (53.5%) is the most dominant internal factor, stage fear (27.9%) positions second, and shyness factor (18.6%) is the least dominant factor. In terms of external factors, the highest percentage leading to students' speaking anxiety is the grammar factor (46.5%), 29.1% was influenced by the pronunciation factor, and the lowest one is the peer factor (5.8%).

English learners should frequently practice speaking in English so that they have more confidence. English teachers are suggested to implement various teaching methods and give relevant tasks to their students to enhance their speaking skills in English.

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