

Students' Speaking Anxiety of Learning English Speaking Skills at Grade X of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran

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Abstract

This study investigates students' speaking anxiety in English speaking skill learning at Grade X of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran. Speaking anxiety is a common psychological barrier that inhibits students' oral performance in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This qualitative descriptive study aimed to identify the dominant causes of speaking anxiety, describe coping strategies employed by students, and analyze the correlation between anxiety levels and speaking fluency during individual presentations. Data were collected through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation of 15 selected Grade X students. The findings reveal that 40% of participants demonstrated severe anxiety levels (scoring 8-10 on the anxiety scale). The dominant internal factor was fear of making mistakes, affecting 10 out of 15 students. External factors such as peer pressure, audience gaze, and fear of negative evaluation significantly amplified students' anxiety. These results align with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS framework encompassing communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The study recommends that English teachers adopt low-stakes interactive methods, reduce immediate corrective feedback, and cultivate a supportive classroom culture to lower the affective filter and enhance students' speaking confidence.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, EFL, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Individual Presentation, Speaking Skills

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kecemasan berbicara (speaking anxiety) siswa dalam pembelajaran keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris di kelas X SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran. Kecemasan berbicara merupakan hambatan psikologis umum yang menghambat performa lisan siswa dalam konteks bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi penyebab dominan kecemasan berbicara, mendeskripsikan strategi koping yang digunakan siswa, serta menganalisis korelasi antara tingkat kecemasan dan kelancaran berbicara selama presentasi individu. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan observasi kelas terhadap 15 siswa kelas X yang dipilih secara privat/purposif. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa 40% partisipan menunjukkan tingkat kecemasan tinggi (skor 8-10 pada skala kecemasan). Faktor internal dominan adalah takut membuat kesalahan, yang mempengaruhi 10 dari 15 siswa. Faktor eksternal seperti tekanan teman sebaya, tatapan penonton, dan ketakutan akan evaluasi negatif secara signifikan meningkatkan kecemasan siswa. Hasil ini selaras dengan kerangka FLCAS Horwitz et al. (1986) yang mencakup kecemasan komunikasi, kecemasan tes, dan ketakutan akan evaluasi negatif. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar guru bahasa Inggris mengadopsi metode interaktif berisiko rendah, mengurangi umpan balik korektif langsung, dan menumbuhkan budaya kelas yang mendukung.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Berbicara, EFL, Kecemasan Kelas Bahasa Asing, Presentasi Individu, Keterampilan Berbicara

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INTRODUCTION

English has become the primary global lingua franca that serves as a vital tool for international

communication, academic advancement, and professional success. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most essential yet the most challenging to master because it requires real-time processing and social interaction. However, many students in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context face significant barriers to achieving oral proficiency. The primary barrier is not always a lack of linguistic knowledge, but rather a psychological phenomenon known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). According to Horwitz et al. (2021), speaking is the aspect of foreign language learning that triggers anxiety the most.

Students often experience a "mental block" when asked to speak in class, which leads to stuttering, forgetting vocabulary, or total silence. This discomfort is often rooted in the fear of being judged by peers or evaluated negatively by the teacher (Aydin, 2016). In the Indonesian context, speaking anxiety is highly common due to the pressure of high academic expectations and a cultural fear of making mistakes in public. Rahni (2024) notes that many students have adequate grammar and writing skills, but fail to communicate effectively because their anxiety levels inhibit performance. When students feel anxious, their "Affective Filter" is high, thereby preventing the brain from processing and producing language efficiently (Krashen, 1982).

Although this problem is widely recognized, further exploration is still needed regarding how students cope with such anxiety and how this psychological barrier directly correlates with their actual speaking fluency. Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors, strategies, and impact of speaking anxiety on student performance, specifically in Grade X of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2021), qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. This design is deemed appropriate because it allows researchers to explore the factors influencing students' speaking anxiety in depth, as experienced and perceived by the students themselves.

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted at SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran, located in Kisaran, North Sumatra. This school was chosen based on preliminary observations showing that the majority of Grade X students exhibited signs of speaking anxiety during individual presentation activities in English class. The study was conducted in the 2026/2027 academic year, specifically during the first semester, for approximately four to six weeks.

Research Subjects (Participants)

The research participants were Grade X students of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran who were actively learning English. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on the following criteria: (1) students enrolled in Grade X, (2) students who had participated in at least one

individual presentation activity in English class, and (3) students who exhibited signs of speaking anxiety. Based on these criteria, around 10 to 15 students were selected as the primary research participants.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument used was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This instrument consists of 33 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to analyze three types of anxiety: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide and a behavioral observation sheet were utilized.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques:

1. Non-participant observation during individual presentation activities to record verbal and non-verbal behaviors indicating speaking anxiety;
2. Semi-structured interviews conducted individually outside of class hours, with a duration of 20-40 minutes per session;
3. The FLCAS questionnaire, which was adapted and distributed to all participants in a written format.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which involves three interconnected stages: data condensation (selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data), data display (organizing data into a structured format), and conclusion drawing and verification (interpreting identified patterns and themes).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This study focuses on the profile of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran and explains the data to answer the research problem. Data were collected from Grade X science stream (IPA) students along with their English teacher at SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran.

Students' Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to explore students' psychological and emotional responses regarding their experiences in individual speaking presentations. The following is the list of questions presented to the respondents:

Table 1. Question

No	Question
1.	How do you feel after completing a speaking assignment in front of the class?
2.	What description of anxiety mostly dominates your mind 10 minutes before making a presentation?

3.	Based on a scale of 1 (very calm) to 10 (very anxious), what number is your nervousness level at before performing in front of the class?
4.	Among the following factors, which one is the main reason for your obstacles when speaking in public? 1. Fear of making mistakes 2. Fear of peers' reaction/evaluation 3. Vocabulary limitations/difficulty in constructing sentences
5.	In the context of speaking anxiety, which aspect triggers your anxiety more: the performance of the material presented or the perception/gaze of the audience?

Based on students' responses to Question 1, most felt a sense of relief ("plong" or "relief") after completing their performance. However, responses to Questions 2 and 5 showed a strong pattern where the fear of negative evaluation from peers and the intense gaze of the audience heavily triggered emotional pressure before performing.

Results of Students' Speaking Anxiety Levels

To quantitatively measure the subjective psychological distress reported in Question 3 of the questionnaire, a screening scale from 1 (very calm) to 10 (very anxious) was used. The following table displays individual scores along with key qualitative descriptors:

Table 2. Respondent

No	Respondent	Anxiety Score	Anxiety Level / Dominant Factor
1.	Adinda Novian Fadillah	10	Fear of mistakes
2.	Mhd Azka	3	Lack of vocabulary
3.	Jeremy Ars Havin Situmorang	10	Low confidence
4.	Gadis Bunga Silvia	7	Fear of mistakes
5.	Faiz Abdillah	3	Lack of vocabulary
6.	Ragel	6	Fear of mistakes
7.	Rendi Valentino Pjt	10	Low confidence
8.	Aldi Zakaria	1	Fear of mistakes
9.	Alfisyahri Pradita	1	Fear of mistakes
10.	Eki Aditya Prandana	8	Fear of mistakes
11.	Vania Gloria Br Gultom	9	Fear of mistakes
12.	Mhd Alfin	5	Fear of mistakes
13.	Goklas	6	Low confidence
14.	Amanda Lestari	8	Fear of mistakes
15.	Kayla	10	Fear of mistakes

The numerical distribution revealed that 40% of the selected sample (6 out of 15 students) scored between 8 and 10, indicating severe and debilitating anxiety during individual oral presentations. The remaining respondents showed low to moderate levels of performance stress, which was mostly dynamic depending on their level of preparation at the time.

Dominant Factors and Excerpts of Student Interviews

To deepen the contextual accuracy of the findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The qualitative text below captures the psychological roots behind those numbers, classified according to the core themes proposed in the framework of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope:

Table 3. Interview Quote

No	Student Name	Dominant Factor	Interview Quote
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1.	Adinda Novian Fadillah	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of being shouted at because if it's crowded, I'm afraid of becoming a joke"
2.	Mhd Azka	Lack of vocabulary	"Don't know the vocabulary in English, so I'm afraid of being shouted at by friends"
3.	Jeremy Ars Havin Situmorang	Low confidence	"A bit embarrassed because I'm not very good at speaking English"
4.	Gadis Bunga Silvia	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid the meaning is wrong in English words"
5.	Faiz Abdillah	Lack of vocabulary	"Don't know the vocabulary in English, so I'm afraid of being shouted at by friends"
6.	Ragel	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of being shouted at because of wrong pronunciation of words"
7.	Rendi Valentino Pjt	Low confidence	"Not confident because I'm afraid of wrong English pronunciation"
8.	Aldi Zakaria	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of making mistakes in English pronunciation"
9.	Alfisyahri Pradita	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of saying the wrong thing"
10.	Eki Aditya Prandana	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of saying the wrong thing"
11.	Vania Gloria Br Gultom	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of making mistakes in speaking or answering in English"
12.	Mhd Alfin	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of not being able to answer questions in English"
13.	Goklas	Low confidence	"Anxious when people look, and become nervous"
14.	Amanda Lestari	Fear of mistakes	"Because I'm watched by friends, so I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing"
15.	Kayla	Fear of mistakes	"Afraid of feeling anxious, afraid of saying the wrong thing"

Discussion

The qualitative data collected at SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran provides critical insight into the internal and external mechanisms of speaking anxiety within the foreign language classroom context. By linking empirical findings to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) framework pioneered by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), a deeper theoretical narrative emerges.

Analysis of Dominant Causes: Internal vs. External Dimensions

Out of the 15 primary participants interviewed and observed, a large majority (10 students) identified *Fear of Mistakes* as their primary inhibitor. When broken down into its psychological constructs, this fear is closely related to two core components of FLCA: *Fear of Negative Evaluation* and *Communication Apprehension*. Socio-cultural factors within the Indonesian classroom ecosystem strongly amplify this phenomenon. As noted in the transcripts of Adinda Novian Fadillah and Faiz Abdillah, anxiety is not merely an abstract linguistic deficit, but rather a social anxiety regarding peer reactions ("afraid of being shouted at", "afraid of becoming a joke"). This aligns with Sugandi (2016), who argues that the modern language classroom heavily functions as a stage for evaluation, where defensive mechanisms trigger avoidance behavior when students feel their social status among classmates is threatened.

Furthermore, *Lack of Vocabulary* (as reported by Mhd Azka and Faiz Abdillah) directly underlies *Communication Apprehension*. When students lack semantic processing speed or do not store sufficient English equivalents in their memory, "cognitive overload" occurs. This manifests physically as

hesitations, long pauses, or a total breakdown of conversation during presentations.

The Impact of Visual Embarrassment and Audience Gaze

Interview responses from Goklas ("Anxious when people look, and become nervous") and Amanda Lestari ("Because I'm watched by friends...") highlight the massive influence of external factors, particularly *Audience Reaction* and *Classroom Environment*. In an individual presentation format, students lose the protection of their peers. Becoming the single focal point of the room triggers an evolutionary stress response. This physical self-consciousness disrupts speaking fluency, forcing students to abandon structural accuracy or switch to rushed speech simply to end the psychological pressure as quickly as possible.

Synthesis and Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings demonstrate a critical imbalance in Grade X: although students may understand basic grammar rules when evaluated through written tests, their productive capacity freezes due to psychological inhibitors. To address this, teaching methods must transform to lower the classroom's affective filter. Instructors at SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran should shift away from immediate corrective feedback while students are speaking—which directly induces *Test Anxiety*—and should instead cultivate a collaborative environment where mistakes are treated as normal markers of progressive foreign language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the qualitative research findings and deep data analysis conducted in Grade X of SMA Swasta Daerah Kisaran, the researchers draw several critical conclusions:

1. Dominant Level of Speaking Anxiety:

Most Grade X students exhibit high levels of foreign language classroom anxiety during individual speaking presentations. Out of the 15 primary participants examined, 40% (6 students) showed severe psychological distress, scoring between 8 and 10 on the subjective anxiety matrix.

2. Primary Internal Causes:

Empirical data confirms that *Fear of Mistakes* is the most dominant internal psychological inhibitor, affecting 10 out of 15 students. Additionally, *Lack of Vocabulary* significantly exacerbates their communication apprehension.

3. Primary External and Social Triggers:

Speaking anxiety is heavily amplified by negative external variables in the classroom environment. Social pressure from classmates, particularly *Fear of Negative Evaluation* such as fear of being laughed at or becoming a subject of public mockery, severely suppresses students' willingness to speak.

This study recommends that English teachers reduce immediate corrective feedback during students' speech, adopt low-stakes interactive activities, and actively foster a supportive classroom culture by setting firm boundaries against peer mockery. For students, it is suggested to change their

mindset toward foreign language learning and employ practical anxiety relaxation mechanisms before presentations.

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