

Language Anxiety and English Speaking Performance Among EFL Learners at STIE Nasional Samarinda

Annisa Indah Vuspita¹, Muhammad Zainuddin²

¹STIE Nasional Samarinda

²Akademi Militer Magelang

E-mail: avuspita@gmail.com¹, zaypasca@gmail.com²

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of language anxiety on English speaking performance among EFL students at STIE Nasional Samarinda. Using a quantitative-descriptive design supported by interviews, data were collected from 30 management students through a modified FLCAS questionnaire. The findings show that 62% of students experienced moderate anxiety and 24% reported high anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation was the main contributing factor, followed by test anxiety and communication apprehension. Interviews revealed that limited vocabulary, low confidence, and peer or instructor judgment intensified anxiety. The study concludes that speaking anxiety reduces fluency, interaction quality, and students' willingness to participate. It highlights the importance of supportive classroom environments and communication-focused teaching strategies to improve students' oral proficiency.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak kecemasan bahasa terhadap performa berbicara bahasa Inggris pada mahasiswa EFL di STIE Nasional Samarinda. Dengan menggunakan desain kuantitatif-deskriptif yang didukung oleh wawancara, data dikumpulkan dari 30 mahasiswa manajemen melalui kuesioner FLCAS yang telah dimodifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 62% mahasiswa mengalami kecemasan pada tingkat sedang dan 24% melaporkan tingkat kecemasan yang tinggi. Ketakutan terhadap evaluasi negatif merupakan faktor utama yang berkontribusi, diikuti oleh kecemasan tes dan ketakutan dalam berkomunikasi. Wawancara mengungkapkan bahwa keterbatasan kosakata, rendahnya rasa percaya diri, serta penilaian dari teman sebaya atau dosen memperparah kecemasan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara mengurangi kefasihan, kualitas interaksi, dan kemauan mahasiswa untuk berpartisipasi. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya lingkungan kelas yang suportif serta strategi pembelajaran yang berfokus pada komunikasi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran berbicara mahasiswa.

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Corresponding Author:

Annisa Indah Vuspita
STIE Nasional Samarinda
Email: avuspita@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, English speaking skills are crucial for university students—not only for academic needs such as thesis defenses or presentations, but also as essential assets in entering the professional world. However, reality shows that many students still experience significant speaking anxiety when speaking in public, even inside the classroom.

A recent study by Fauzi & Asi (May 2023) on Indonesian university students revealed that female learners exhibited higher speaking anxiety than males, while students who studied English longer reported lower anxiety levels; furthermore, test anxiety emerged as the most dominant trigger.

Similarly, Saputro & Sahiruddin (2025) reported that speaking anxiety levels were generally low but notably higher among lower-proficiency learners, with key factors including fear of negative evaluation (39 %), personality traits (53 %), and pedagogical influence (67 %). They also found that outside-class practice (57 %) and positive lecturer feedback were effective coping strategies.

Moreover, Faidotur Rohmah & Kurdi Wijaya (2025) documented that internal factors (e.g., shyness, self-esteem issues) and external factors (e.g., fear of peer judgment) contribute to speaking anxiety among EFL students in Indonesia. Understanding language anxiety can help teachers design more effective teaching strategies. Teachers can incorporate low-stress speaking activities such as pair work, group discussions, and storytelling games to reduce anxiety levels. Moreover, integrating emotional support into teaching practices, such as offering consistent encouragement and establishing a non-judgmental classroom environment, can foster learners' willingness to speak.

Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. Speaking, as a productive skill, often triggers the highest anxiety levels due to its immediate and public nature.

Previous studies (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Liu, 2006) have demonstrated a negative correlation between language anxiety and speaking performance. High anxiety may lead to hesitation, avoidance of speaking tasks, and reduced communicative competence. Understanding this dynamic is essential to developing strategies that help students manage their anxiety.

Peer feedback and self-assessment strategies can also empower students to reflect on their progress and overcome self-doubt. Teachers should avoid practices that might provoke anxiety, such as sudden oral tests or overly critical corrections in front of peers. Instead,

providing constructive feedback privately and encouraging students to set personal speaking goals can help build confidence.

Language anxiety has long been recognized as a significant affective factor influencing second language acquisition. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a unique and multifaceted phenomenon involving self-perceptions, beliefs, emotional responses, and behavioral tendencies specifically related to language learning in classroom settings. Among the four language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—speaking has consistently been identified as the skill most associated with anxiety due to its real-time demands and the public exposure it entails. Learners often fear negative evaluation, making them hesitant or even resistant to engage in spoken communication.

Research across decades has reinforced the negative impact of language anxiety on speaking performance. For instance, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that anxiety impairs cognitive processing and working memory, directly affecting speech fluency and accuracy. Similarly, Liu (2006) observed that EFL students experiencing higher levels of speaking anxiety tend to avoid oral tasks, participate less in classroom interactions, and demonstrate lower speaking proficiency.

More recent studies offer deeper insights into this phenomenon. For example, Zhang (2019) noted that students with heightened anxiety often exhibit physiological symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate, sweating), and their self-confidence significantly drops during speaking activities. Moreover, a study by Rafiee, Binamin, and Damavandi (2021) found that online speaking environments could either alleviate or exacerbate anxiety depending on the learner's digital literacy and comfort level.

A 2023 cross-sectional study by Fauzi and Asi, which surveyed Indonesian EFL university students, confirmed that test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation remain the most prevalent forms of anxiety during speaking tasks. Additionally, Saputro and Sahrudin (2025) revealed that students with lower English proficiency reported higher anxiety levels, while positive feedback and frequent speaking practice helped mitigate those anxieties.

Understanding this intricate dynamic between language anxiety and speaking ability is essential for educators, particularly in non-native contexts. Effective pedagogical strategies—such as scaffolded speaking activities, peer collaboration, and confidence-building exercises—are needed to foster a psychologically safe learning environment. As the research suggests, lowering speaking anxiety is not only beneficial for student performance but also vital in building long-term communicative competence.

Language anxiety is a well-documented affective factor that significantly influences second language acquisition, especially speaking performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a distinct form of anxiety specific to language learning contexts. They described it as a complex interplay of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors directly associated with the classroom environment. Among the four core language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—speaking has consistently been found to provoke the highest levels of anxiety due to its immediate and public nature (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Subsequent research reinforced the idea that speaking anxiety negatively impacts learners' cognitive processing, fluency, and communicative competence. MacIntyre and Gardner

(1994) demonstrated that FLA can impair working memory, making it more difficult for students to process language and respond spontaneously. Liu (2006) observed that students with high levels of speaking anxiety were less likely to engage in classroom interactions and more prone to avoiding speaking tasks altogether. These patterns suggest that anxiety not only hinders performance but may also lead to long-term disengagement.

Recent studies have provided further insights, especially in Asian and Indonesian EFL contexts. For instance, Fauzi and Asi (2023) conducted a study among Indonesian university students and found that test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were the most common causes of speaking anxiety. Their findings also highlighted gender differences, with female students experiencing higher anxiety levels. Similarly, Saputro and Sahiruddin (2025) found that speaking anxiety was more prevalent among lower-proficiency learners and was often triggered by pedagogical factors such as error correction styles, class participation formats, and lack of supportive feedback.

In terms of physiological and emotional responses, Zhang (2019) reported that anxious students often exhibited symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and trembling during speaking tasks. These symptoms were directly linked to poor oral performance and a decline in self-confidence. Furthermore, Dewaele and Al-Saraj (2015) emphasized the individual and cultural differences in how students experience and cope with anxiety, arguing that one-size-fits-all teaching methods may not effectively address learners' affective needs.

More recently, Rafiee, Binamin, and Damavandi (2021) explored the impact of online learning environments on speaking anxiety. They found that while digital platforms could reduce anxiety for some learners due to the perceived safety of being behind a screen, others experienced heightened anxiety due to unfamiliarity with technology or lack of immediate feedback.

A study by Elaldi (2016) in Turkey supported similar conclusions, showing that students in English Language and Literature programs experienced significant speaking anxiety, particularly during oral examinations and impromptu speaking activities. The study stressed the importance of providing structured and low-stakes opportunities for oral communication to reduce performance pressure.

In the Indonesian context, Faidotur Rohmah and Kurdi Wijaya (2025) identified both internal (e.g., low self-esteem, shyness) and external (e.g., peer judgment, classroom dynamics) factors that contribute to speaking anxiety. Their study recommended integrating psychological support, peer interaction, and task-based speaking practice to foster a more supportive learning environment.

Overall, the existing literature confirms that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted issue with cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. It impacts not only learners' immediate speaking performance but also their willingness to communicate and long-term language development. Given these findings, it becomes essential for educators, particularly in non-native English contexts like Indonesia, to recognize and address anxiety in the classroom. Pedagogical strategies that emphasize emotional safety, scaffolded speaking tasks, and

positive reinforcement have been widely recommended to help students overcome their fears and build oral proficiency.

Based on this context, the following research questions arise:

1. To what extent do students in your study program experience speaking anxiety during presentations or class discussions?
2. What are the main triggers—whether related to evaluation fear, vocabulary limitations, psychological influences, or teaching methods?
3. How does anxiety affect speaking performance, particularly in fluency and interaction quality?

Therefore, this study aims to map out speaking anxiety levels, identify its causes and impacts on performance, and propose classroom-based interventions such as collaborative speaking practice, structured preparation, positive reinforcement, and supportive feedback.

METHODS

This study was conducted at STIE Nasional Samarinda and involved a group of undergraduate students from the Management program. The participants were not chosen randomly but were selected intentionally using a purposive sampling technique. This means that only students who met certain requirements were invited to take part. These requirements included being in at least their fourth semester, having learned English for a minimum of two years, and having some experience delivering academic presentations either in the classroom or in formal academic settings. Altogether, thirty students joined the study—ten of them were male and twenty were female. All of them participated willingly and provided written consent after being informed about the purpose of the research, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

The research followed a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. This approach was chosen to help describe and measure the levels of speaking anxiety among the students in a structured and statistical way. To collect the data, the researcher used a questionnaire based on the well-known Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), originally developed by Horwitz and colleagues. The questionnaire was adapted to suit the Indonesian university context and translated into Bahasa Indonesia so that the students could understand the questions clearly and respond with ease. Data collection took place over a two-month period. During this time, the questionnaires were distributed in two ways—some were handed out directly in class, while others were shared online to ensure flexibility and broader access.

In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with a few selected participants. These interviews were designed to gather deeper insights into the students' personal experiences with speaking anxiety. Through these conversations, students were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings more openly, which added a valuable layer of understanding to the study.

After all the data had been collected, the researcher used a computer program called SPSS version 21 to analyze the responses. First, descriptive statistics—such as averages and standard deviations—were used to find out how much anxiety students experienced overall and which areas caused the most difficulty. Then, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to see

whether there were any patterns or relationships between different variables, like how often students gave presentations and how anxious they felt when speaking English.

Meanwhile, the responses from the interviews were examined using thematic analysis. This process involved reading through the students' comments, identifying common topics or themes, and organizing them into categories that explained what causes speaking anxiety and how students respond to it. These qualitative insights were then compared and combined with the quantitative results to build a fuller picture of the challenges students face when speaking English in academic settings.

RESULTS

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed to determine the levels of speaking anxiety among EFL students at STIE Nasional Samarinda. The descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of participants (62%) experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety, while 24% reported high anxiety and 14% showed low anxiety levels.

Further analysis showed that the highest anxiety was related to the fear of negative evaluation, with a mean score of 3.87 (on a 5-point Likert scale). This was followed by test anxiety ($M = 3.45$) and communication apprehension ($M = 3.21$). These findings suggest that students are particularly anxious when they anticipate being judged by peers or instructors during speaking tasks.

In terms of gender, female students demonstrated slightly higher average anxiety scores ($M = 3.56$) compared to male students ($M = 3.42$), although the difference was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, students with more frequent speaking practice outside the classroom reported lower levels of anxiety, indicating a possible link between exposure to real-world speaking tasks and anxiety reduction.

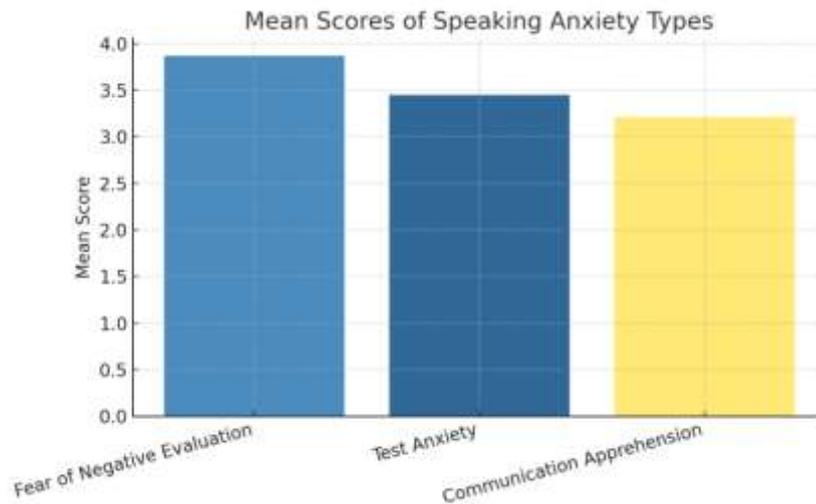
The qualitative responses from the semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative results. Many students expressed feelings of nervousness, self-doubt, and fear of making mistakes in front of others. Some also mentioned that unfamiliar topics and lack of vocabulary further increased their anxiety.

Overall, the results highlight a clear relationship between speaking anxiety and various psychological and contextual factors, reinforcing the need for targeted pedagogical strategies to support EFL learners in developing their speaking confidence.

Table 1. Result of Anxiety

No	Anxiety Type	Mean Score
1	Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.87
2	Test Anxiety	3.45
3	Communication Apprehension	3.21

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the mean scores of different anxiety types.



DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the presence, triggers, and consequences of speaking anxiety among students at STIE Nasional Samarinda. Through both quantitative and qualitative data, it is evident that speaking anxiety is a pervasive issue that significantly affects students' performance and engagement in English-speaking tasks, particularly during presentations and discussions in classroom settings.

1. Extent of Speaking Anxiety

The finding that a large majority of students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety (86% combined) reflects not only an individual affective challenge but also a systemic issue within the learning environment. This high prevalence may be influenced by the linguistic and socio-cultural context in which English is learned primarily as a foreign language. Students are often under pressure to perform accurately in a non-native language, which may amplify anxiety in public speaking scenarios.

This aligns with previous findings (Horwitz et al., 1986; Fauzi & Asi, 2023) that suggest language anxiety is not limited to proficiency but also tied to students' perceived readiness and psychological preparedness. At STIE Nasional Samarinda, where English-speaking opportunities outside the classroom may be limited, students are likely to feel less confident, especially when required to speak in front of peers and lecturers during formal tasks.

2. Main Triggers of Anxiety

The analysis revealed that the fear of negative evaluation was the most prominent anxiety trigger. This confirms earlier theories (Horwitz et al., 1986) that highlight how students fear being judged by others, particularly in high-stakes academic environments. The classroom culture, where linguistic accuracy is often emphasized over communicative competence, may unintentionally create pressure that inhibits spontaneous expression.

Moreover, vocabulary limitations were repeatedly mentioned in interviews, showing that students struggle to find the right words in real-time, which results in

hesitations, grammatical errors, and reduced fluency. This resonates with the findings of Zhang (2019), who argued that linguistic insecurity often fuels anxiety, especially among learners who equate language mastery with perfect grammar and pronunciation. Another key theme is the role of psychological influences, such as low self-confidence and previous negative speaking experiences, which act as barriers to oral participation. Many students internalize these experiences, creating a cycle of avoidance and anxiety that worsens over time. Instructors' feedback styles and classroom dynamics also play a role; if feedback is perceived as harsh or overly corrective, it may further discourage students from engaging.

3. Impact on Speaking Performance

Anxiety was found to impact both the fluency and interactional quality of students' speech. Students experiencing high anxiety often paused excessively, lost their train of thought, and provided shorter, less elaborate responses. They were less likely to initiate discussion or respond spontaneously. This is consistent with MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) theory that anxiety reduces working memory efficiency, thereby impairing the real-time processing necessary for effective communication.

Interactional breakdowns—such as one-word answers, avoidance of eye contact, or reliance on memorized speech—suggest that anxiety not only affects linguistic production but also the relational aspects of communication. Given that presentations and discussions are key academic activities in higher education, such limitations can hinder students' overall academic development and professional preparedness.

4. Pedagogical Implications

The implications of these findings are substantial. First, there is a need to restructure classroom speaking activities to reduce performance pressure. Low-risk, collaborative tasks (e.g., group discussions, peer presentations, role plays) can provide safer spaces for students to build fluency without fear of judgment. Instructors should aim to balance corrective feedback with encouragement, recognizing that psychological safety is a prerequisite for linguistic risk-taking.

Second, explicit instruction in speaking strategies, such as paraphrasing, turn-taking cues, and hesitation fillers, can empower students to handle speaking tasks with more confidence. Third, integrating reflective exercises on anxiety—such as self-assessment and journaling—may help students identify and manage their triggers over time.

Finally, it is essential to build a culture that values communication over perfection, promoting the idea that making mistakes is a natural part of learning. This cultural shift can begin with faculty modeling tolerance for linguistic variation and encouraging students to focus on message clarity rather than linguistic accuracy alone.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the extent, causes, and effects of speaking anxiety among EFL students at STIE Nasional Samarinda, focusing specifically on oral presentations and class discussions. The findings confirmed that speaking anxiety is a common and significant challenge faced by learners in this context. A large proportion of students reported experiencing



moderate to high levels of anxiety, with fear of negative evaluation emerging as the most prominent factor influencing their reluctance to speak in English.

The study identified several key triggers of anxiety, including linguistic limitations, psychological self-doubt, and classroom dynamics that often emphasize accuracy over fluency. These factors contribute to communication apprehension and performance pressure, which hinder students' ability to speak confidently and fluently. Anxiety was found to negatively impact not only the fluency of students' speech but also the overall quality of classroom interaction, confirming the detrimental effects of affective factors on second language acquisition.

Importantly, the results suggest that speaking anxiety is not merely an individual issue but a pedagogical and institutional one. Addressing it requires a comprehensive response, including creating low-stakes speaking opportunities, promoting a supportive classroom environment, and incorporating anxiety-reduction strategies into the curriculum. Teachers play a critical role in fostering positive student perceptions of speaking tasks through constructive feedback and a tolerance for linguistic errors.

Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how anxiety shapes the speaking behavior of EFL students and provides evidence-based recommendations for improving speaking instruction. Future research is encouraged to explore intervention strategies, such as speaking clubs or digital language tools, that may help students gradually overcome their anxiety and develop greater oral confidence.

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