


Phenomena of Students Anxiety in English Speaking Activities

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Writing instructions, ELT learning, Communicative learning	Speaking is one of the most important skills in English learning because it allows students to communicate ideas directly. However, many learners face speaking anxiety which makes them nervous, less confident, and unable to perform well in class. Most previous studies discussed this problem with quantitative methods, but there is still a need for a deeper description by reviewing and comparing qualitative findings. Therefore, this mini research was conducted as a descriptive qualitative library study by analyzing five previous articles related to students' speaking anxiety. Referring to Horwitz (1986), speaking anxiety can be divided into communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The review shows that the dominant indicators are fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, and low self-confidence. These factors cause nervousness, forgetting words, avoiding participation, and only fair scores in speaking assessments. In conclusion, speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon in English classrooms, and teachers need to provide motivation, supportive learning environments, and more speaking practice to help students reduce their anxiety and improve their performance.
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INTRODUCTION

Language is very important for human communication because it helps people share ideas, information, and feelings. In learning English, students need to master four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is the most important because it allows learners to use the language directly in daily life and in the classroom. Good speaking ability is often seen as a sign of successful English learning.

Even though speaking is important, many students have problems when they try to speak English. They may feel nervous, shy, or afraid of making mistakes. This situation is called speaking anxiety. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety has three parts: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These problems explain why students often avoid speaking, feel less confident, or do not perform well in speaking tasks, other researchers also explain how anxiety affects language learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) say that anxiety can disturb three steps in learning: input (receiving language), processing (understanding it), and output (using it). Because of this, anxious students may forget vocabulary, lose focus, or fail to express their ideas. Spielberger (1983) divides anxiety into two types: trait anxiety, which is a personal tendency to feel anxious in many situations, and state anxiety, which happens only in certain

situations, such as when giving a presentation. These views give a clearer picture of how speaking anxiety appears in the classroom.

In Indonesia, speaking anxiety is also a common problem among school students. Many learners feel tense and worried when they are asked to speak English in front of their teachers or classmates. They often hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes, being laughed at, or receiving negative comments from others. Psychological, pedagogical, and social factors strongly influence this anxiety, such as fear of correction, lack of confidence, and limited vocabulary (Zakaria, 2025), besides psychological factors, cultural and classroom situations also contribute to speaking anxiety. Students may feel anxious when comparing their English ability with their peers or when they think English is a difficult subject. Such beliefs make them less willing to speak and reduce their participation during class activities (Subekti, 2018; Indrianty, 2016).

Many previous studies have researched speaking anxiety, but most of them used quantitative methods. These studies show how common the problem is, but they do not describe clearly what really happens in speaking activities. This creates a gap in the literature, while previous studies have identified the causes and levels of anxiety through surveys and questionnaires, few have explored how this anxiety appears in real classroom situations through qualitative approaches. Therefore, this study aims to describe the phenomena of students' anxiety in English speaking activities by reviewing related studies and highlighting how this issue appears in school learning contexts

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METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach because it aimed to explain and interpret the data in depth rather than quantify it. According to *Creswell (2009)*, qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning of a social phenomenon through descriptive analysis rather than numerical data. It focuses on describing experiences and contexts, which makes it suitable for examining students' speaking anxiety as discussed in previous research.

The descriptive design allowed the researcher to organize and present information from written materials in a clear and systematic manner. The research process began with preparing and selecting appropriate sources for analysis. The data were chosen based on three main considerations: relevance to the research topic, credibility of the source, and the publication period. To ensure the findings reflect current educational conditions, only journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 were included. These studies served as the secondary data used in this research.

The research procedure consisted of several stages. First, the chosen journal articles were carefully reviewed to find information about students' speaking anxiety and its effect on their speaking performance. Second, the information was sorted and classified into themes while unrelated details were excluded. Third, the data were categorized into major aspects such as causes of anxiety, observable indicators, and its influence on students' ability to speak English. Finally, the findings from the five selected studies were compared and synthesized. The data were collected through documentation analysis, meaning the researcher used information from existing written materials instead of conducting surveys, interviews, or tests. The data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This approach helped the researcher arrange the findings logically and describe the phenomenon of students' speaking anxiety comprehensively.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employed a library research design, in which data were obtained from written sources rather than direct classroom observation or interviews. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to review and analyze documents that discuss students' speaking anxiety. The research focused on two main variables. The first variable was students' speaking anxiety, which involved several aspects such as fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The second variable was students' speaking performance, which was identified through indicators including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, intonation, confidence, and overall achievement. Both variables were examined by analyzing the content of five selected journal articles.

As noted by Creswell (2009), qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves preparing, organizing, and interpreting textual data to identify meaning and recurring patterns. Guided by this idea, the researcher systematically analyzed information from several written studies to understand how speaking anxiety affects students' performance in English speaking activities, the process of analysis followed several stages. First, the researcher carefully read and reviewed each selected journal article to identify relevant data. Second, the collected information was categorized into specific themes related to speaking anxiety and speaking performance. Third, the findings from the reviewed studies were compared to highlight similarities and differences across the sources. Finally, the interpreted results were summarized into a clear and comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. This step-by-step process ensured that the analysis remained systematic, objective, and aligned with Creswell's (2009) qualitative research framework

Instrument

The instrument of this study was documentation analysis, and the researcher acted as the main tool. Data were collected by choosing, reading, and analyzing five journal articles about students' speaking anxiety published between 2020 and 2025. A simple checklist was used to help group the data, such as the causes of anxiety and the aspects of speaking performance. No pilot study was done because all data came from secondary sources.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed through documentation analysis of five journal articles on students' anxiety in English speaking activities. The analysis followed the steps of Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, in the data reduction step, each article was read carefully, and only the parts that explained speaking anxiety and speaking performance were selected. For example, one study reported that students often lacked confidence and were afraid of making mistakes, another showed communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, while others revealed problems such as limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and avoidance of speaking tasks.

The data display step organized the findings into two main themes: (1) indicators of speaking anxiety and (2) impacts on speaking performance. The indicators found across the five articles included fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, low confidence, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The impacts

included nervousness, silence during speaking activities, avoiding participation, lack of fluency, and achieving only fair scores. When comparing all five articles, it was clear that fear of mistakes and limited vocabulary were the most common issues across different education levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Table 1. Indicators and Impacts of Students' Speaking Anxiety Across Five Articles

Article	Indicators of Speaking Anxiety	Impacts on Speaking Performance
Aisah et al. (2023) – Kudus	Fear of mistakes, low self-confidence, communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation.	Nervousness (trembling, loss of focus), hesitation, avoidance, less fluent delivery.
Kuswanto (2023) – Sidoarjo	Fear of mistakes, low self-confidence, low proficiency, incomprehensible input.	Silence/avoidance, reduced participation, only “fair” achievement.
Fahranah (2024) – Makassar	Communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation.	Grammar and pronunciation errors, forgetting simple structures, nervousness during oral tests.
Amiyanti (2022) – Lampung	Fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, peer/classmate factor, task type.	Lack of fluency (pauses, hesitation), avoidance of speaking, fair performance.
Hatiza (2025) – Kampung Inggris	Fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, lack of preparation.	Nervousness (shaking, blushing), broken fluency, mispronunciation, grammatical errors, avoidance during presentations.

The synthesis of five journal articles reveals that students' speaking anxiety is shaped by a combination of recurring psychological, linguistic, and social factors. One of the most dominant is fear of making mistakes. In various contexts, learners expressed strong concern that grammatical errors, mispronunciations, or incorrect word choices would lead to embarrassment in front of teachers and peers. *Aisah et al. (2023)* and *Kuswanto (2023)* both highlighted that this fear discouraged students from speaking freely, while *Amiyanti (2022)* observed hesitation in classroom discussions for the same reason. *Hatiza (2025)* reinforced this finding by showing how the mere possibility of making errors during presentations triggered visible nervousness, making students avoid participation or perform poorly.

This fear was often accompanied by low self-confidence, another indicator consistently reported across the studies. Many students doubted their ability to deliver speech fluently, even when they possessed a certain level of vocabulary knowledge. *Aisah et al. (2023)* and

Kuswantoro (2023) explained that lack of confidence reduced students' willingness to take risks in communication. Similarly, *Amiyanti (2022)* described how self-doubt led to frequent hesitation, while *Hatiza (2025)* noted that confidence problems were especially evident in high-pressure situations such as formal presentations, where students became overly cautious or passive, a third recurring factor is communication apprehension, defined as the nervousness or uneasiness students feel when speaking in front of others. This was particularly prominent in *Fahranah's (2024)* study at SMA Negeri 3 Makassar, where students were visibly tense and uncomfortable during speaking tasks. Comparable results were reported by *Aisah et al. (2023)* and *Hatiza (2025)*, who documented signs of trembling, avoidance, and even withdrawal from speaking when students were asked to perform in public.

Two other performance-related aspects also emerged: test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. *Fahranah (2024)* and *Aisah et al. (2023)* found that oral examinations and graded speaking tasks often heightened students' anxiety due to the pressure of being scored, the possibility of failure, and the perception of high expectations. This overlaps with *fear of negative evaluation*, as students worried about being judged by teachers or ridiculed by classmates. *Hatiza (2025)* confirmed that negative peer reactions and critical teacher feedback intensified anxiety and discouraged active participation.

Finally, limited vocabulary was identified as a linguistic source of anxiety. *Amiyanti (2022)* reported that learners frequently paused and lost confidence when they could not find the right words. This linguistic gap not only disrupted fluency but also created a cycle of hesitation and silence. *Hatiza (2025)* likewise noted that inadequate vocabulary prevented students from expressing ideas fully, which reinforced their anxiety and reluctance to speak, these indicators directly influenced how students performed in speaking tasks. The most visible impact was nervousness and physical discomfort. *Aisah et al. (2023)* described students trembling, losing focus, and becoming restless during oral tests, while *Hatiza (2025)* observed that learners at Kampung Inggris often blushed, shook, or looked tense when presenting. Such symptoms disturbed the natural rhythm and clarity of speech.

Another consequence was silence and avoidance of participation. *Kuswantoro (2023)* found that students preferred to stay quiet rather than risk embarrassment, while *Amiyanti (2022)* noted that many withdrew from speaking activities because of vocabulary gaps and fear of errors. This shows how anxiety reduces learners' willingness to communicate, even when opportunities to speak are available, anxiety also led to fluency problems, as shown in *Amiyanti's (2022)* study, where students frequently paused or became stuck mid-sentence. *Hatiza (2025)* further illustrated that learners often lost their train of thought during presentations, resulting in disorganized delivery. In terms of accuracy and pronunciation, both *Fahranah (2024)* and *Hatiza (2025)* observed that students under pressure made more grammatical mistakes, mispronounced words, and sometimes even forgot simple language structures they had already learned. This indicates that anxiety not only affects confidence but also interferes with cognitive processes, limiting students' ability to retrieve and apply language knowledge effectively.

Ultimately, these issues combined to lower students' achievement in speaking performance. *Kuswantoro (2023)* and *Amiyanti (2022)* both reported that learners often

achieved only “fair” scores, not because of a lack of ability, but due to hesitation, avoidance, and frequent mistakes caused by anxiety. Even students with adequate skills struggled to demonstrate their true competence under pressure.

Discussion

The findings of this study strengthen the idea that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted and complex issue within English language learning. Based on the five analyzed articles, the most frequent indicators identified include fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and communication apprehension, as well as test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and limited vocabulary. These results align with Horwitz et al. (1986), who defined communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as the central components of foreign language classroom anxiety. Likewise, the connection between vocabulary limitation and confidence reflects Krashen’s *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which states that negative emotional conditions such as anxiety can block comprehensible input and obstruct language acquisition. Consequently, when learners struggle to find the right words, their confidence decreases and their affective filter rises, making speaking tasks more challenging.

Recent studies by Putra (2024) and Vanalestari and Setyarini (2025) broaden this perspective by highlighting that Indonesian EFL learners’ anxiety is strongly influenced by both psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. Putra (2024) found that factors such as self-esteem, past learning experiences, and the quality of teacher student interactions play a vital role in determining students’ anxiety levels. Similarly, Vanalestari and Setyarini (2025) discovered that elements like gender expectations, dialect variation, social identity, and classroom hierarchy shape learners’ confidence and readiness to speak. These socio-cultural factors create subtle pressures that amplify fear of negative judgment and communication apprehension, especially in collectivist learning environments where social harmony and error avoidance are highly valued.

The results also support Young’s (1991, 1994) framework, which identifies six potential sources of language anxiety arising from learners, teachers, and instructional methods. On the learners’ side, low confidence and fear of error were the most evident, while on the teachers’ side, harsh correction and evaluative feedback increased fear of being judged. Classroom routines such as oral tests and graded presentations further triggered test anxiety. Putra’s (2024) findings emphasize that students’ emotional stability during speaking tasks is strongly affected by how teachers design feedback and assessments. This implies that anxiety is shaped not only by internal learner traits but also by teaching methods and classroom atmosphere.

Eysenck’s (1979, 1988) *Cognitive Interference Theory* also helps clarify this phenomenon. The “worry” component of anxiety reduces learners’ working memory capacity, limiting their ability to recall words and grammar. Meanwhile, the “emotionality” component manifests through physical symptoms like trembling, sweating, and avoidance behaviors that were reported in Aisah et al. (2023) and Hatiza (2025). Likewise, Vanalestari and Setyarini (2025) observed that students who experience intense emotional tension tend to withdraw from speaking, particularly when they anticipate criticism from more proficient classmates.

Another crucial affective factor related to speaking anxiety is self-efficacy. Research by Marleiny Radjuni et al. (2024) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between

students' self-efficacy and their oral performance. Learners who believe in their ability to speak English are generally more confident, persistent, and fluent, whereas those with low self-efficacy often hesitate and experience higher anxiety. This suggests that self-efficacy acts as a psychological shield that reduces fear of mistakes and enhances resilience in communication. Conversely, when learners perceive themselves as incapable, anxiety rises, motivation declines, and speaking performance suffers.

Further evidence from *Ibrahim and Kuswardani (2023)* adds another dimension by linking motivation with speaking performance. Their study showed that Indonesian EFL students were motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, but intrinsic motives such as self-improvement, enjoyment, and a sense of achievement were more dominant. This finding indicates that internal satisfaction and autonomy play an important role in reducing anxiety and maintaining engagement. Extrinsic motivation, such as pursuing academic success or career goals, can also encourage participation, though it is less sustainable without intrinsic reinforcement. The study also reported no significant gender differences in motivation, meaning that male and female learners generally share similar affective orientations toward speaking English. However, a lack of external support, particularly during online learning, reduced students' willingness to practice, underscoring the importance of teacher creativity, social interaction, and learner autonomy in maintaining motivation and preventing anxiety.

Motivation and self efficacy, as observed by *Putra (2024)*, are closely intertwined affective components influencing students' willingness to speak. Highly motivated learners are more likely to participate despite their nervousness, while unmotivated ones tend to remain silent. Thus, speaking anxiety can be viewed not only as an emotional issue but also as a motivational challenge that demands psychological support and pedagogical intervention, from a socio-cultural viewpoint, *Vanalestari and Setyarini (2025)* identified gender, dialect, and identity as additional variables influencing students' confidence. Female learners, in particular, often experience higher anxiety because cultural norms discourage assertiveness in mixed-gender interactions. Moreover, as *Putra (2024)* pointed out, English proficiency is often associated with intelligence or social class in Indonesian society, which increases pressure to perform well and reinforces anxiety. These observations reveal that speaking anxiety in Indonesia is deeply intertwined with cultural and social expectations beyond the classroom context.

Pedagogically, these findings highlight the need for a holistic approach to reducing speaking anxiety. Establishing a positive and emotionally supportive learning environment is crucial. Teaching strategies such as collaborative learning, role-playing, constructive feedback, and digital media integration can significantly lower students' fear while boosting their confidence. *Roziqoh (2024)* demonstrated that incorporating YouTube-based speaking activities provided students with enjoyable and low-pressure practice opportunities. When learners participated in fun, interactive speaking tasks, their fear of mistakes diminished, and their confidence increased. This aligns with *Dewaele and Alfawzan's (2018)* perspective that *foreign language enjoyment* can mitigate anxiety and enhance learners' willingness to communicate.

In addition, speaking instruction should prioritize enjoyment and meaningful engagement, as enjoyment plays a vital role in stabilizing emotions and fostering confidence.

When students find speaking activities enjoyable and relevant to their interests, anxiety levels tend to decrease. Enjoyment helps lower the affective filter, enabling learners to communicate more naturally and creatively. Therefore, designing communicative tasks that are interactive, culturally inclusive, and fun is essential to sustain motivation and prevent excessive anxiety.

Teachers play a central role in cultivating both emotional safety and learning enjoyment. Supportive feedback, humor, encouragement, and flexible evaluation help students feel valued and confident. Conversely, overly strict correction or public criticism can intensify fear and inhibit participation. As several studies (*Putra, 2024; Vanalestari & Setyarini, 2025; Radjuni et al., 2024*) suggest, anxiety reduction should be viewed not as a separate pedagogical goal but as part of broader efforts to enhance emotional well-being, motivation, and communicative competence in language classrooms.

Overall, the synthesis of all reviewed literature indicates that speaking anxiety results from the interconnection of psychological, linguistic, motivational, and socio-cultural factors. The combination of fear of errors, low self-efficacy, limited vocabulary, and cultural pressure perpetuates avoidance and reduces oral performance. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated pedagogical approach that values not only linguistic accuracy but also affective and social growth. Future studies should focus on classroom-based interventions or longitudinal research to explore how enjoyment, motivation, and socio-cultural sensitivity can be optimized to minimize speaking anxiety in Indonesian EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

Students' speaking anxiety primarily stems from psychological and linguistic factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and communication apprehension. These factors were found to significantly hinder learners' fluency, accuracy, and willingness to communicate in English. Moreover, students with higher levels of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation were generally more confident and less anxious, showing better speaking performance. On the other hand, external influences like peer judgment, classroom structure, and cultural norms that discourage errors were shown to heighten anxiety and reduce participation. Overall, the study concludes that speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners arises from the interplay of emotional, linguistic, and social elements, emphasizing that successful language learning depends not only on linguistic competence but also on emotional support and motivational reinforcement.

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