



## Investigating EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety: A Case Study at English Department of UINSU

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**Abstract.** Anxiety about speaking English has received a lot of attention in recent years. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the factors that caused students' language anxiety and their strategies for reducing anxiety in speaking English at class. Participants in this study were 5 students' English department in the second semester. The methods used in this study were descriptive and qualitative. Data were obtained from interviews and observations. As a result, it shows that EFL students in English Department of UIN Sumatera Utara, they feel anxiety in speaking English. Fear of speaking English is due to a number of factors, both internal and external. The first factor was the type of the task, fear of making mistakes, the role of the language teacher, self-perception and the last is the limited exposure to English. Moreover, the finding of this study also revealed that there were some strategies they used to reduce anxiety. There is preparation before speaking English, positive thinking, and strategy they used was peer seeking.

**Keywords:** *Speaking, Anxiety, Foreign Language, Spoken English.*

### Introduction

English as a foreign language is very essential in global communication. Not only technology but also student motivation impacts the teaching and learning process (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022). In Indonesia, English is extensively used in the educational system, particularly from primary school to university. English, which is essential in global communication, is one of the topics that most Indonesian education systems should include, from primary to higher education. Many foreign language learners are concerned, as English becomes the language of preference. Over the last 30 years, language anxiety has been a major issue in foreign language teaching and learning.

Speaking is one of the tools we use to communicate with one another in everyday life. Speaking is highly important in human existence since it allows us to exchange our opinions, information, news, and ideas. Speaking English in an English class can be difficult because students need to speak confidently in their new language. Fluency indicates your ability to master a foreign language. Students are often nervous, unconfident, and anxious. It's called foreign language anxiety. (Fauzi et al., 2021). Many foreign language learners are concerned, as English becomes the language of preference. Over the last 30 years, language anxiety has been a major issue in foreign language teaching and learning.

Most EFL students are likely to face anxiety when speaking and conversing in a foreign language in public (Hanifa, 2018). Many students may encounter difficulties while acquiring their EFL language at higher levels. Anxiety study began with native speakers when psychologists saw anxiety in various settings such as driving, testing, and stage performance (Liu, 2018).

Speaking is one of the most productive abilities, and English students must be courageous and self-assured to deliver their message to their listeners. Everyone must learn to communicate effectively with one another. English is a foreign language in Indonesia that

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all students should acquire from middle school to university level. Because the primary aim of learning a target language is to improve one's speaking skills. As a result, foreign language learners often regard speaking as a success measure for learning a language. Fear, on the other hand, becomes an issue for foreign language learners, whom themselves help convey messages and create communication in their environment (Çağatay, 2015)

Anxiety is a negative manner of expressing human emotions. We feel apprehensive, frightened, and fearful when we are anxious. We battle, quiver, sweat, and our hearts race. Anxiety is a multifaceted phrase that is based not only on one's feelings of self-efficacy but also on assessments of the potential and perceived hazards inherent in various situations (Ansari, 2015).

In this study, researchers analyzed problems found in the situational field. Researchers collected data by observing students' anxiety when speaking. Why do anxiety situations occur when speaking English? It has far-reaching effects on performance. Therefore, there is a need to study and investigate the effects of fear on language learning so that students can acquire the language with minimal difficulty. As part of this study, Indonesian learners studying English at the Islamic State University of North Sumatra (UINSU) must pass an English challenge. However, observations show that learners face difficulties in English classes. They demonstrate a lack of motivation and participation in classroom activities. Reasons cited by most Indonesian learners include a lack of self-confidence and the difficulty of the English language itself.

Several researches has been undertaken to investigate her EFL students' levels of anxiety around speaking performance. The researchers discovered that there is an urgent need to explore anxiety difficulties among EFL learners during speaking performance. This is because it can lead to underdeveloped speaking skills and decrease students' performance in speaking and foreign language learning (Darmawan et al., 2021). A substantial relationship was established between students' speaking scores and their fear of speaking in a foreign language. (Tridinanti, 2018). Her worried EFL students have fewer continuous utterances, longer pauses in the middle of phrases, and more erroneous starts.

Mohd Fadhli Shah Khaidzir (2015) researched foreign language anxiety in Thai students in an EFL classroom. As a result, Bahasa revealed that, despite studying Melayu as a second language, the majority of pupils experience language anxiety. The data point to a normal response. In other words, each time these kids learned a new foreign language, they experienced some degree of language anxiety(Pahargyan, 2021).

As a result, the goal of this study was to investigate the classification of anxiety levels, the factors that contribute to students' nervousness when speaking English, and the solutions students require to alleviate their anxiety.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Speaking Anxiety**

Speaking is a productive language ability that entails activities that involve two or more persons using verbal and nonverbal communication to send and receive messages. Furthermore, the speaker should utilize proper vocabulary and language to express meaning clearly and concisely, as well as structure the dialogue in a way that the audience can understand. Speaking has a detrimental impact on language anxiety learners, making them anxious about speaking the target language. According to Basic (2011, p. 4), fear of speaking leads to 11 lower levels of self-confidence, and pupils are more likely to succeed in any situation, even if they have the skills to articulate themselves and the knowledge to be heard. This means that pupils who are afraid of speaking will fail and would prefer to remain mute than risk failing again. It is commonly stated that youngsters who are not initially encouraged to speak contribute to their limited opportunity to practice their speech abilities.

Furthermore, Basic (2011, p. 10) claims that these pupils typically drop out early and remain silent during the school year. Students that find it difficult to speak are typically silent and passive. They believe that they should only speak correct English and compare their abilities to native speakers of the target language. They are concerned that their

pronunciation is inadequate. Even if a child is not as bright as the other pupils in the class, a lack of opportunity to participate in classroom activities might stymie learning. Because of their lack of information, taciturn students are perceived as less intelligent.

### **Assessment of Speaking Anxiety**

The goal of measuring student language anxiety is to help language teachers understand the nature of foreign language fear, particularly when it comes to speaking, and to help develop solutions to lessen student language anxiety. As a result, learners frequently estimate their language learning progress and the efficiency of English courses depending on how much they believe their speaking skills will improve.

When students have a fear of speaking, they have some trouble speaking. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127), students who suffer from language anxiety experience uneasiness, anxiety, and discomfort when speaking in class. They believe that they should only speak correct English and compare their abilities to native speakers of the target language. They are concerned that their pronunciation is inadequate.

In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) state that three main factors produce language anxiety. Three of them are Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety. Communication anxiety disorder as a type of shyness marked by fear and anxiety when communicating with people. This problem revealed itself during speaking events in which pupils were required to speak in front of their peers. They were shy and didn't give their best effort. This answer is crucial in foreign language teaching. It refers to the level of worry or anxiety linked with an expected conversation with other individuals.

Furthermore, in Communication Anxiety, Chan and Wu (2004, p. 292) indicate that people are frequently fearful of the verbal communication they speak and listen to. According to Daly (1991), anxious pupils may find it difficult to grasp what others are saying or to get others to understand what they are attempting to communicate. They are supposed to be hesitant to speak in front of classmates and to wait until the teacher has completed asking a question before raising their hand, assuming that someone else would do so. As a result of this condition, students do not answer or participate when speaking in class. They also entice uninterested pupils to enroll in foreign language classes.

Fear of negative evaluation is the avoidance of evaluative situations and the assumption that others would evaluate them adversely. Learners can be sensitive to peer evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation is defined by Chan and Wu (2004, p. 292) as worry about other people's evaluations, anguish over their unfavorable evaluations, and expectations that others will regularly judge oneself. (Sho, 2020) This circumstance causes pupils to avoid beginning talks with their peers or teachers. Furthermore, (Machmud & Abdulah, 2018) contend that in their study, many students stated that they would be more inclined to speak if they were not fearful of making a mistake and being judged harshly in front of their teacher and peers.

Test anxiety is a type of stage fright disguised by the fear of failing an exam. This frequently occurs after a student has fared poorly on previous tests. They form negative prejudices about testing and have erroneous impressions about assessment circumstances (Mulyono & Saskia, 2021). Furthermore, Chan and Wu (2004, p. 293-294) said that these pupils may have had painful exams in language classes or other disciplines and inadvertently transferred pictures of their dissatisfaction to modern English lessons. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128), pupils who are worried about tests have an erroneous attitude about language learning. (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020) These kids generally set unreasonable goals for themselves and believe that anything less than a perfect exam score is a failure. Also, Mayer (2008, p. 77) ensures that all students understand that taking a test implies they will be reviewed, evaluated, and compared with their classmates; states that he understands that it invites He also claims that children with test anxiety can experience a variety of physical, mental, and emotional symptoms. These 18 symptoms assist pupils in focusing on exam topics. It is tough to perform well when you lose or forget exam questions that you have previously learned.

## Material and Method

The qualitative research method was applied in this study, employing a case study methodology. The qualitative method was chosen since the goal of this study is to provide insight into situations of language anxiety among English language students, specifically worry over speaking English. A case study, according to Fraenkel and Wallen, is a qualitative research method that studies a single person, group, or noteworthy example to produce an interpretation of a specific situation or to generate relevant generalizations. Because of the study case technique, the authors were able to examine specific students to better understand cases of language anxiety. The subject of this study was Students of the English Department in UINSU, Medan. This amounts to 5 students who are considered to be anxious about Speaking English. Data were analysed in several steps. First, the author randomly selected five of her students as respondents to this survey. Second, the authors observe in the respondent's classroom and collect on the same day. Third, we interviewed students with observation sheet scores, relaxed, anxious, and somewhat anxious scores, and students with scores for behavior when speaking English in class. After collecting the data, the authors synthesized the results and related them to the research background, primarily the research question, the theory, and the methodology used to classify the data into manageable units.

This study focuses on EFL students' fear of speaking in the classroom. Use a qualitative descriptive method. Data sources from observations and interviews with students. Observations were made through researchers observing the psychology of students in the class when speaking in front of the class. There are some unnatural psychology and psychological condition that need to observe such as flushed face, trembling, voice intonation/articulation, gesture, and nervousness. In the social sciences, observation is used to collect information about people, processes, and societies. Observation, particularly participatory observation, is a common methodological technique in ethnography and is used in many studies in anthropology and sociology. It is also a tool that teacher researchers in classrooms, social workers in community settings, and psychologists use to record and gather data on human behavior. The systematic explanation of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social world is known as observation.

An interview is a type of data collection method in which respondents are chosen at random. Furthermore, this is a face-to-face conversation in which one or more respondents are asked to provide a reliable and validated measure in the form of verbal answers. In-depth interviewing, according to Bungin, is the process of gathering information for investigative purposes through face-to-face conversations between an interviewer and an informant or respondent, with or without the assistance of an interviewer's guide. The authors explained the importance of this research and that all interviews would be conducted in the student's native language, Bahasa, to obtain answers without limiting or inhibiting the students. Those who indicated willingness to participate were invited for an interview. Afterward, five participants were interviewed. Of the remaining 5 participants, 2 were male and 3 were female. All the participants are second-semester students of the English department in UINSU. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes and was recorded with the participant's permission. Interview guides are price-adjusted and focused on foreign language anxiety.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

Researchers conducted the survey and obtained data from all research tools including observations and interviews. Data were analyzed to conclude the purpose of the study. In this section, researchers described the process of observing and interviewing outcome data.

**Table 1**  
Data observation result

Participant	Unnatural Psychology and Physiology Condition						Level of Anxiety
	Flu- shed Face	Trembl- ing	Voice Intonatio- n/ Articulati- on	Gest- ure	Eye Conta- ct	Nervo- us	
Student 1	✓		✓		✓	✓	Anxio- us
Student 2		✓	✓	✓			Anxio- us
Student 3	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Anxio- us
Student 4		✓				✓	Mildly Anxio- us
Student 5		✓				✓	Mildly Anxio- us

Based on observations, there are five student samples. The first student exhibits psychological and physiological unnaturalness, including vocal intonation and pronunciation, gestures, eye contact, and nervousness. The second student, included in the Fear Level, exhibits unnatural psycho-physiological features such as tremors, gestures, and eye contact with her. A third student included in the anxiety level displays unnatural psychological and physiological symptoms such as tremors, gestures, and nervousness included in the anxiety level. The fourth student and fifth students show unnatural psychological and physiological phenomena, such as being easily tremors and nervous.

The researchers concluded that all students in the sample felt anxious. This is because when speaking English in public, they not only spoke, but also engaged in other unnatural activities such as unnatural eye contact, shaking, and unnatural gestures. That's the only hallmark of anxiety levels.

**Interview Result**

Finding from the data taken from the interview are shown in the following table:

**Table 2.** Data Observation Result

No.	Question	Result
1.	Please tell me something about how you have felt during Speaking English in class?	<p>S1: <i>"I feel scared to be in front of people include to be including front of my classmate, I often feel nervous and it makes me forget what to say"</i></p> <p>S2: <i>"When I speak English, I often feel afraid that maybe I speak the wrong way, I feel not confident"</i></p>



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		<i>S3: "It's hard to focus because looking at my friends' face make me laugh and forget what to say"</i>
		<i>S4: "I feel a little bit nervous but I don't take it as pressure so I can control myself to just focus on the material"</i>
		<i>S5: "I don't put pressure at all if I Speak English in class with my friend because in senior high school, I used to take part in speech contests"</i>
2.	What is the problem with Speaking English? Why? Tell me more!	<i>S1: "The thing that bothers me the most is that I forgot what to say, its because I don't know much about vocabulary"</i>
		<i>S2: "For me, it's a lack of speaking practice, I don't have friends to talk with so its rare for me to practice speaking"</i>
		<i>S3: "I fear making mistake so it makes not confident in speaking English"</i>
		<i>S4: "I'm nervous so it makes me not want to speak English with my friend"</i>
		<i>S5: "If I master the material, I have nothing that is a barrier in speaking English"</i>
3.	What do you think of the role of your lecturer to guide you in the teaching learning process?	<i>S1: "The role of lecturer has been good but sometimes I feel uncomfortable when the situation is nerve-wracking, it makes me afraid and trembling if I get a negative comments about my speaking"</i>
		<i>S2: "There is a lecturer who makes me fine when making mistakes in speaking, but also there is a lot of lecturers who makes me nervous to speak English in front of them"</i>
		<i>S3: "The role of the lecturer is fine and we have a good relationship with all our lecturers"</i>

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		S4: <i>"So far our lecturer is quite effective to transfer the lesson material"</i>
		S5: <i>"All is good, the lecturer a learning resource, as a student when I ask something, the lecturer can swiftly and responsively reply to student questions by using language that is easy to understand"</i>
4.	How do you think people in your classroom will react if you make a mistake in speaking English?	S1: <i>"My classmates don't intimidate me when I speak the wrong English"</i>
		S2: <i>"Some of my friends are laughing at me, sometimes I feel embarrassed"</i>
		S3: <i>"They laughed at me because of my mistakes in speaking English"</i>
		S4: <i>"I think people in my classroom don't like me so they act like they're the best at everything"</i>
		S5: <i>"Their reaction when I make mistake in speaking English is not friendly, they didn't hesitate to reprimand me if I speak wrong English"</i>
5.	Do you think English is a difficult language to learn? Why? Tell me more!	S1: <i>"I think yes because its so hard for me to remember vocabulary in English"</i>
		S2: <i>"Of course, speaking is challenging for me, I'm afraid of making mistake"</i>
		S3: <i>"I think yea, there are complicated concepts to learn English regarding how to spell the word and pronunciation itself."</i>
		S4: <i>"I think so, there are a lot of rules, a lot of grammar that I have to master it makes me confuse sometimes"</i>
		S5: <i>"I think it's easy when you already know about the vocabulary and you keep practicing it with your friend"</i>

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6.	Do you have any ideas of how English Speaking skills might be less stressful? What did you do to reduce anxiety? Please give me an example!	<p>S1: <i>"I think having friend to speak English with makes me less stressful"</i></p> <p>S2: <i>"Doing a lot of practice is one thing that can overcome anxiety in speaking English"</i></p> <p>S3: <i>"What I do to reduce my anxiety in speaking English is that I usually visualize my success, imagine that I can speak fluent English and people give me applause"</i></p> <p>S4: <i>"To overcome my anxiety I usually just focused on my material of speaking not focused on my friend/audience"</i></p> <p>S5: <i>"English speaking can be less stressful if you have friends that support you in English. Not intimidate you when you make a mistake"</i></p>
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Based on observations and interviews, researchers received responses that most English department students in the English Department of UIN Sumatera Utara are afraid during class due to several factors. There were several factors caused by both internal and external politics. The first factor was the nature of the task. When students were asked to present an activity in front of the class, the task became anxiety-inducing. All of the students felt the same way about the anxiety they felt when they made a mistake. The third is the role of the language teacher. This relates to how teachers create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the teaching and learning process. The fourth factor is self-awareness, and self-awareness in this context is a perception that negatively impacts students. A final factor was my limited exposure to English. Limited exposure to English around them hinders their development of communication skills.

Furthermore, researchers revealed ways students used to minimize anxiety after each interview. The findings revealed that they adopted effective anxiety-reduction measures. The first step was to prepare before studying English. Students had a stronger sense of having materials to use in their studies as a result of this. The second method is to think positively. To manage language anxiety and reduce worry in the classroom, positive thinking as a psychological aspect was required. The final approach they employed was peer searching. This was something that students used to do. Students enjoyed asking their peers about something they didn't understand, whether it was a sentence, the meaning of a word, or imprecise pronunciation. It proved to be a wonderful option for students.

### **Discussion**

#### **The Factors of Students' Fear of Speaking English**

Based on the interview result above, some factors makes Students in the English department feel anxiety about speaking English, there is the task type, fear of making mistakes, the role of language teaching, self-awareness, and limited exposure to English.



### **Task Type**

When students were requested to present an activity in front of the entire class, the assignment became stressful. For example, tasks included speaking, storytelling, dialogue, role-playing, and presentation. When they had to practice speaking in front of their peers, their confidence helped them perform better (Idaryani, 2020).

### **Fear of Making Mistakes**

According to interviews, most students felt the same about feeling anxious when they made a mistake (Rajitha, 2020). The above data show that students were afraid of making mistakes when performing in front of the class. The type of fear of peer acceptance or reaction can affect English-speaking performance and for some students. If you make a mistake, you may fear negative judgment from your instructor. Their way of thinking influenced the development of their language skills. Because of my poor grades and fear of being evaluated by others, I was unable to speak freely while speaking English.

### **Self Awareness**

The student's self-concept is one factor that adds to student anxiety about speaking performance (Sho, 2020). Negative thoughts and underestimating one's skills can lead to anxiety as one's self-esteem declines. The data presented above indicate that this condition is associated with low self-awareness. This condition was a psychological barrier to learning to talk well. Students with this condition are concerned about what others perceive of them.

### **The role of the language teacher**

The role of the language teacher also played a part in the existence of anxiousness. In this scenario, as a language teacher, the tutor must be able to select appropriate teaching methods and approaches to ensure a successful learning process. According to the data presented above, the lecturer's environment should be appropriate for the student's condition, as it affected the student's anxiousness when speaking English. Teachers must consider how to respond to each student's errors. Limited exposure to English To achieve their objective of speaking English fluently, students must practice speaking English daily. However, little exposure to English might stifle the development of communication abilities. According to the statistics, the English-speaking environment was unwelcoming to the students, and it was difficult for them to find English-speaking practice partners. On the other hand, the frequency of continuous practice was critical for lowering anxiety. (Liu, 2018).

### **The Strategies of Students to reduce anxiety**

Data from interviews and observations showed that there are three strategies that students use to reduce anxiety. The strategies were pre-learning English preparation, positive thinking, and peer search.

First, the majority of students stated that one strategy they can use is to prepare themselves before studying English. Use the app to browse discussion topics and learn new pronunciations. Then rehearse with a friend or in front of a mirror. Zeidner was discovered to be a task-related preparation, used equally by students with high and moderate anxiety. exercise. As a result, with appropriate preparation, students can improve their skills. Improving competence can aid in the reduction of student anxiety. (Grieve et al., 2021)

Positive thinking is a second technique that many students employ. The researchers discovered what they were looking for in the interview once again. Students responded that they should strive to believe they can talk English fluently, even if they don't know how, because confidence is crucial. It may alleviate their nervousness. Furthermore, positive thinking is a psychological component in dealing with language anxiety and overcoming performance anxiety in class. Language anxiety shares some common mental traits, such as fear of being laughed at in class, being shy to interact or talk with others, and being concerned about underperforming in comparison to other languages.

Third, Seeking a companion was a simple student anxiety-reduction technique. When presented with unfamiliar words or less clear pronunciations, students sometimes chose to ask their peers if they had any problems. You can talk with suitable learning partners or create small groups. This can be an effective solution, particularly if students can share their experiences and strategies with their learning partners (Ansari, 2015).

## Conclusion

The study concludes that EFL students at UINSU's English Department are anxious and avoid speaking English. In the classroom, students face the issue of foreign language speaking anxiety. This study discovered characteristics that cause students to feel apprehensive when speaking English or when required to speak English in the classroom, as well as the ways they are employed to lessen their anxiety. Research shows five variables contribute to student anxiety in foreign language classes. The first was the task's nature, the second was the fear of making mistakes, the third was the language teacher's function, the fourth was self-awareness, and the last was the limited usage of English. Students prefer to be quiet all the time during learning procedures such as discussions and speaking activities, which can be more than just shame. This was not only an issue for pupils but also required additional attention to understand this common case. I also learned about the method used for Pre-learning English preparation, positive thinking, and peer seeking were the tactics used. Students must deal with anxiety difficulties. If the students knew what was causing their anxiety, they might have been able to overcome it, allowing them to enjoy anxiety-free learning. The study also suggests that there should be more studies on speaking anxiety in the EFL Students' context.

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