

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPEAKING ANXIETY AND STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN EFL LEARNING

Hanifah Muthmainnah Kurniawan^{1*}, Andi Asmawati¹

¹English Education Department, Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia

*Email: hanifahmuthmainnahkurniawan@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' speaking performance in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. Speaking is considered one of the most important skills in learning English, yet many students still experience anxiety when they are required to speak in front of others. This anxiety may affect students' confidence, participation, and speaking performance in the classroom. Therefore, this research focuses on identifying the level of students' speaking anxiety, analysing students' speaking performance, and examining the relationship between the two variables. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, students, and future researchers regarding the influence of speaking anxiety in EFL learning. Furthermore, this study may help teachers develop more supportive classroom environments and effective teaching strategies to reduce students' anxiety and improve their speaking skills.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety; Students' Confidence; Speaking Performance; EFL Learning*

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important international languages used for communication and global interaction. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), and students are expected to develop language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is considered one of the most important because it allows students to communicate ideas, opinions, and feelings effectively. Recent studies have highlighted that speaking competence plays a central role in EFL learning because it reflects learners' ability to use language meaningfully in real communication contexts. For instance, Thanh (2024) found that speaking is a crucial indicator of successful language learning, as it enables students to actively engage in communication and social interaction. One aspect of speaking that is essential in EFL learning is interactional speaking skill, which refers to the ability to maintain conversations, respond appropriately, ask questions, and interact socially using English. This skill is important because effective communication requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to manage turn-taking and social interaction. In line with this, recent studies on communicative language teaching emphasize that interaction-based speaking activities significantly improve students' communicative competence and classroom participation.

However, despite the emphasis on communicative competence, many EFL students still experience difficulties in speaking English due to speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety is a feeling of nervousness, fear, or worry that occurs when learners are required to

communicate orally in English. Students may feel anxious because of fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, or concern about being negatively evaluated by others. Ajiza et al. (2024) reported that a high level of speaking anxiety remains common among Indonesian EFL students, influenced by both internal and external factors. Similarly, Tiana et al. (2024) found that anxiety significantly affects students' speaking performance, especially in large EFL classrooms where students often fear making errors in front of peers. Another study by Suryadi et al. (2024) revealed that fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence are among the strongest predictors of poor speaking performance in EFL contexts. Furthermore, Damayanti and Cahyono (2026) emphasized that cognitive, linguistic, and social factors collectively contribute to speaking anxiety among EFL learners. This anxiety can hinder students' willingness to participate in classroom interactions and negatively affect their speaking performance. Consequently, speaking anxiety has become an important factor to consider when examining students' interactional speaking skills in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design. The purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding speaking anxiety and its influence on their speaking performance in EFL learning. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The participants were asked to describe their feelings, experiences, challenges, and strategies related to speaking anxiety during English-speaking activities. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in students' responses.

The subjects of this study were undergraduate students from various English major and non-English major faculties who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They were selected based on their experience in participating in English-speaking activities. The participants were expected to provide information about their experiences of speaking anxiety and its influence on their speaking performance in EFL learning.

The instrument used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions designed to explore students' experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding speaking anxiety and its influence on their speaking performance in EFL learning. The open-ended format allowed participants to provide detailed responses based on their personal experiences. The questions focused on sources of speaking anxiety, its effects on speaking performance, and strategies used by students to cope with anxiety during English-speaking activities.

The data collected from the open-ended questionnaire were analysed using thematic analysis. First, the researchers read all participants' responses to gain a general understanding of the data. Next, the responses were coded by identifying important words, phrases, and ideas related to speaking anxiety and speaking performance. The codes were then grouped into broader themes and categories. Finally, the themes were interpreted to describe students' experiences, perceptions, and the influence of speaking anxiety on their speaking performance in EFL learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were obtained from questionnaires distributed to 23 students from various academic backgrounds. Based on the analysis of open-ended responses, the findings are categorized into six themes related to speaking anxiety and its influence on students' speaking performance in EFL learning.

Frequency of English Use in Classroom Interaction

The first finding revealed that the majority of participants rarely used English actively during classroom interactions. Most reported using English only sometimes or rarely, while very few indicated that they used it often or always. This limited and inconsistent exposure directly contributed to lower confidence levels and heightened anxiety when students were required to speak English.

Several participants explained that they lacked confidence to speak English regularly, such as:

- a. *"I rarely use English in class because I am not confident enough. I usually just listen and stay quiet rather than trying to speak."* (Participant 7, Semester 4)
- b. *"In my faculty, English is not always used in discussions. So, when I suddenly have to speak English, I feel unprepared and nervous."* (Participant 12, Semester 6)

These findings align with Wahyuni et al. (2023), who found that the lack of authentic speaking practice opportunities in EFL classrooms significantly contributes to reduced fluency and increased anxiety among university students. Similarly, Al-Saraj (2024) found that students who rarely use the target language in daily interactions tend to experience higher anxiety levels compared to those who actively use it. Purnama and Aisyah (2023) further emphasized that minimal speaking practice frequency in the classroom is one of the primary factors underlying low oral competence among EFL students in Indonesia.

Emotional Responses Toward Speaking English

The second theme revealed a range of negative emotional responses experienced by participants when required to speak English. The most frequently reported feelings included nervousness, fear, embarrassment, and lack of confidence. Many participants expressed concern about making grammatical errors, mispronouncing words, and using incorrect vocabulary, all of which triggered strong emotional reactions.

Participants described their experiences as follows:

- a. *"Every time I speak English in front of my classmates, my heart beats fast and my mind goes blank. I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes."* (Participant 3, Semester 4)
- b. *"I feel embarrassed when I mispronounce words. Sometimes I prefer to stay silent rather than risk saying something wrong."* (Participant 19, Semester 6)
- c. *"Speaking English makes me feel less confident. I always think that my English is not good enough compared to others."* (Participant 5, Semester 2)

These findings are consistent with the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986) and confirmed by more recent studies. Fitria and Lestari (2024) found that feelings of embarrassment and fear of negative evaluation are the most dominant emotional responses among Indonesian EFL university students. Zhang and Rahimi (2023) further established that speaking anxiety is closely linked to low self-esteem, which ultimately inhibits students' active engagement in oral communication activities. Aeni

et al. (2022) similarly identified fear of making mistakes in front of classmates as the most frequently reported emotional factor among EFL students in Indonesian university contexts.

These responses indicate that speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among EFL learners and often becomes a barrier to effective communication. This finding supports Thanh (2024), who reported that nervousness and fear are among the most common emotional responses among EFL learners. Likewise, Tiana et al. (2024) found that anxiety frequently causes hesitation and low self-confidence during speaking tasks. Suryadi et al. (2024) also emphasized that emotional discomfort negatively affects oral performance.

Anxiety Triggering Situations

The third theme identified specific situations that most frequently triggered speaking anxiety among participants. The most commonly mentioned situations included speaking in front of the class, delivering presentations, answering lecturers' questions, and interacting directly with fluent English speakers. These situations share a common characteristic: they require students to perform publicly and expose them to potential evaluation by others.

Participants described these situations as follows:

- a. *"I feel the most anxious when I have to do a presentation in English. I practice a lot, but when I stand in front of the class, I forget everything I have prepared."* (Participant 9, Semester 4)
- b. *"When the lecturer suddenly asks me a question in English, I panic. I know the answer, but I cannot express it well because I am nervous."* (Participant 16, Semester 6)
- c. *"Speaking with a native or very fluent English speaker makes me feel inferior. I am afraid they will judge my accent and grammar."* (Participant 22, Semester 4)

These findings support the concept of fear of negative evaluation (FNE), which explains why public performance situations trigger greater anxiety than private interactions. Syafradin et al. (2023) found that classroom presentations and oral question-and-answer sessions are the two situations most frequently triggering speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2023) similarly showed that anxiety levels increase significantly when students feel observed or evaluated by an audience. Ibrahim et al. (2024) further confirmed that interaction with speakers perceived as more competent creates additional pressure that amplifies speaking anxiety in EFL contexts.

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

The participants identified several factors contributing to their speaking anxiety, including fear of making grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation difficulties, lack of speaking practice, and fear of being judged.

Participants identified these factors as follows:

- a. *"My biggest problem is vocabulary. When I speak, I sometimes forget the English word I want to use and I have to stop in the middle of my sentence. It makes me feel bad about myself."* (Participant 2, Semester 2)
- b. *"I am scared of being laughed at by my friends if I make a mistake in pronunciation. So, I choose not to speak unless I am really sure."* (Participant 11, Semester 4)
- c. *"I think my speaking anxiety comes from lack of practice. I do not have many chances to speak English outside of class, so I never feel ready."* (Participant 18, Semester 6)

These findings reinforce the argument that psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors collectively shape speaking anxiety in EFL students. Rokbi et al.

(2023) classified the sources of speaking anxiety into three main categories: internal factors (confidence and motivation), linguistic factors (vocabulary and grammar mastery), and external factors (social responses from peers and instructors). Bashir et al. (2024) further established that limited vocabulary is the strongest predictor of speaking anxiety among non-English major EFL students. Apriani et al. (2022) also demonstrated that fear of negative evaluation from both lecturers and peers significantly reduces students' active participation in EFL speaking activities.

Impact of Anxiety on Speaking Anxiety and Speaking Performance

The findings examined the impact of speaking anxiety on participants' actual speaking performance. Nearly all participants reported that anxiety negatively affected their ability to communicate effectively. The most frequently reported effects included pausing mid-sentence, difficulty organizing thoughts, forgetting previously learned vocabulary, and reduced fluency. Several participants noted that their speaking performance did not accurately reflect their actual English language ability, as anxiety prevented them from demonstrating their full potential.

Participants expressed this clearly:

- a. *"When I am anxious, I forget the words I already know. My mind goes blank and I cannot continue my sentence. It feels like all my preparation disappears."* (Participant 6, Semester 4)
- b. *"Anxiety makes me speak very slowly and I often pause for a long time. I know what I want to say but I cannot say it fluently because I keep thinking about making mistakes."* (Participant 14, Semester 6)
- c. *"My speaking performance is much worse when I am nervous. My real ability is better than what I show in class, but anxiety stops me from showing it."* (Participant 20, Semester 4)

These findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety does not only affect the affective dimension but also directly disrupts students' cognitive processes during speech production. Alrabai (2023) found that speaking anxiety significantly reduces both the accuracy and fluency of EFL students' oral performance, particularly in academic presentation contexts. Lestari and Wahab (2024) further showed that students with high anxiety levels tend to produce speaking performances that underrepresent their actual competence, due to the cognitive interference caused by anxiety. Tanveer et al. (2023) additionally highlighted that students experiencing speaking anxiety often become trapped in a negative cycle, where poor performance caused by anxiety reinforces further anxiety in subsequent speaking situations.

Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety

Participants used to manage their speaking anxiety. The most commonly reported strategies included practicing English regularly, expanding vocabulary, preparing thoroughly before presentations, communicating with friends in English, and consuming English-language media such as films, podcasts, and videos. Beyond personal strategies, participants also emphasized the critical role of teachers in creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment.

Participants shared their strategies as follows:

- a. *"I try to watch English movies and listen to podcasts every day to get used to the language. It helps me feel more confident when speaking."* (Participant 1, Semester 2)
- b. *"Before a presentation, I practice speaking in front of a mirror or record myself. It makes me feel more prepared and less nervous in front of the class."* (Participant 13, Semester 4)
- c. *"I think teachers play a big role. When my lecturer creates a relaxed and supportive atmosphere, I feel more comfortable to speak and to make mistakes without feeling ashamed."* (Participant 21, Semester 6)

These findings align with Abdulkareem and Mohsin (2024), who found that regular exposure to English-language media significantly reduces speaking anxiety and builds confidence among EFL students. Saeed et al. (2023) confirmed that consistent speaking practice, including role-play activities, group discussions, and self-recording, is effective in reducing anxiety levels. Hamid et al. (2024) further emphasized that teacher strategies in building a supportive classroom climate — including providing constructive feedback and encouraging participation without fear of judgment — represent the most influential external factor in helping EFL students overcome speaking anxiety.

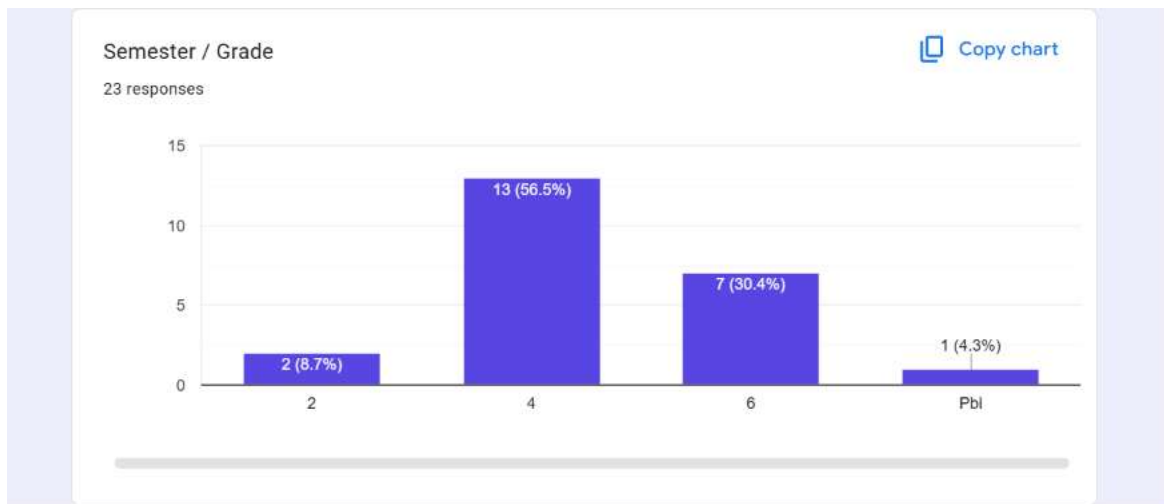


Figure 1. Information of Students' Semester

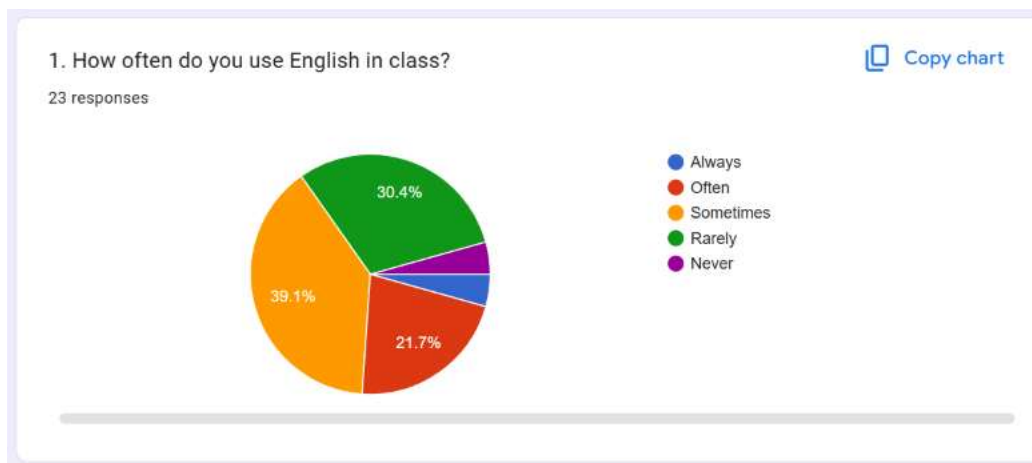


Figure 2. Intensity of the English uses

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that speaking anxiety is a common challenge experienced by EFL students from various academic backgrounds. The results showed that many students feel nervous, afraid, embarrassed, and less confident when speaking English, particularly in situations such as classroom presentations, answering questions, and speaking in front of others. The main factors contributing to speaking anxiety include fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, lack of speaking practice, and fear of negative evaluation from peers and teachers.

The study also found that speaking anxiety negatively affects students' speaking performance. Students reported experiencing hesitation, reduced fluency, difficulty organizing ideas, and forgetting vocabulary when speaking English. These effects indicate that anxiety can interfere with students' ability to communicate effectively and prevent them from demonstrating their actual language proficiency.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that regular speaking practice, vocabulary development, and supportive classroom environments can help reduce speaking anxiety. Teachers play an important role in encouraging students, providing constructive feedback, and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere where students feel confident to express themselves in English.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that there is a relationship between speaking anxiety and students' speaking performance in EFL learning. Higher levels of speaking anxiety tend to hinder students' confidence and speaking performance, while reduced anxiety can contribute to more effective communication and improved speaking skills. Therefore, efforts to minimize speaking anxiety should be considered an important aspect of English language teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful.

First and foremost, the researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His endless blessings, mercy, guidance, and strength, which have enabled the researcher to complete this study entitled "The Relationship Between Speaking Anxiety and Students' Speaking Performance in EFL Learning."

The researcher would like to express deepest appreciation to the lecturer/supervisor for their invaluable guidance, advice, constructive feedback, patience, and encouragement throughout the process of conducting this research. Their support has greatly contributed to the completion of this study.

The researcher is also sincerely grateful to all participants who willingly participated in this research by completing the questionnaire and sharing their experiences. Their contributions provided valuable data and insights that made this study possible.

Special appreciation is extended to the researcher's beloved parents and family for their endless love, prayers, understanding, encouragement, and unwavering support throughout the academic journey. Their sacrifices and belief in the researcher have been a constant source of motivation and strength.

The researcher would also like to thank friends and classmates for their assistance, support, and encouragement during the completion of this research. Their companionship and positive spirit have made the research process more enjoyable and meaningful.

Furthermore, the researcher would like to express heartfelt gratitude to CUPAKSUS, TOEFL Group Matte, and New Generation Club for providing a supportive environment, meaningful experiences, valuable learning opportunities, friendship, and continuous motivation. Being part of these communities has not only enriched the researcher's academic and personal development but also provided encouragement throughout the completion of this study.

Finally, the researcher realizes that this study is not free from limitations. Therefore, constructive suggestions and criticisms are highly appreciated for future improvement. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to the field of English language education and provide useful insights for students, teachers, and future researchers interested in speaking anxiety and speaking performance in EFL learning.

REFERENCES

- Al-Saraj, T. M., & Alghamdi, A. A. (2023). Speaking anxiety among EFL learners: Causes and coping strategies in higher education. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 11(2), 45–61.
- Ariyanti, A., & Fitriana, R. (2023). Students' speaking anxiety in English oral presentations: A qualitative study in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 7(3), 310–325.
- Brown, H. Douglas. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. Douglas. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Creswell, John W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Damayanti, R., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2026). Factors contributing to speaking anxiety among EFL learners: Cognitive, linguistic, and social perspectives. *Indonesian Journal of Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 11(1), 45–60.
- Fadilah, N., & Mulyani, S. (2025). Teacher support and classroom atmosphere in reducing speaking anxiety among EFL students. *Journal of Language and Education Research*, 9(1), 72–89.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Horwitz, Elaine K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- Krashen, Stephen D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- MacIntyre, Peter D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283–305.

- Rahman, A., Yusuf, M., & Hasanah, N. (2025). The role of speaking practice in reducing EFL learners' anxiety and improving oral fluency. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 6(2), 88–103.
- Rahmawati, D., Sari, P., & Hidayat, M. (2025). Fear of negative evaluation and willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 11(2), 133–148.
- Richards, Jack C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, David. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Suryadi, M., Putri, A. N., & Kurniawan, D. (2024). Fear of negative evaluation and self-confidence as predictors of speaking performance in EFL contexts. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Pedagogy*, 6(1), 78–91.
- Thanh, N. T. (2024). An investigation into college students' anxiety in EFL speaking classes. *International Journal of Language Education*, 8(3), 155–170.
- Thornbury, Scott. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Longman.
- Tiana, R., Pratama, F., & Yuliana, S. (2024). The influence of students' anxiety on speaking performance in EFL large class: A survey study. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13(1), 33–47.
- Wahyuni, S., & Prasetyo, A. (2026). Vocabulary mastery and speaking confidence in EFL learning. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 14(1), 21–36.
- Young, Dolly J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426–439.