



Analysis of Student Anxiety in Communicating in English: A Study of Semester 4 HKBP Students at Nommensen University Medan

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Abstract

One of the main goals in learning English as an academic subject in Indonesia is to equip students with the ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing. However, many students experience anxiety when asked to speak in English. These psychological barriers significantly inhibit their confidence and willingness to engage in verbal communication. This study explores the various forms and levels of anxiety experienced by students of the class of 2024 of the English Education Study Program at HKBP Nommensen University Medan. Using a qualitative method through a closed questionnaire and supported by class observation, this study identified emotional and behavioral indicators that are signs of language anxiety. The results show that most college students show moderate to high levels of anxiety, which often manifest in the form of fear, embarrassment, and hesitation when speaking in English. These findings confirm the importance of attention to affective factors in the language learning process to improve students' speaking skills and overall academic performance.

Keywords: student anxiety, communicating

INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of learning English as of an academic discipline in Indonesia is to provide students with the skills they need to express themselves orally and in writing. Students learn to express their ideas verbally, which should help them become more self-assured in their interactions with others. However, students may feel anxious, especially when asked to speak in English, if they have trouble expressing their thoughts orally.

Anxiety by itself is a psychological condition that might undermine a student's confidence in using the foreign language they are learning. (Horwits & Muna, 2019) the theory that use As Horwitz and his colleagues (1986) put it, this worry includes the emotions of dread, nervousness, and anxiety that one may the experience when speaking, whether in a monologue or conversation. A scenario like this might impede the ability to comprehend and communicate messages effectively in English.

Because they are afraid of potential negative reactions from their audience or the person they are speaking to, students who are anxious often avoid speaking assignments. They struggle to analyze the information they hear and reorganize it into verbal responses. The effectiveness of one's speaking

abilities are significantly impacted by affective factors such as emotions and attitudes toward the learning process, in addition to cognitive competence.

Physical manifestation and specific conduct can indicate worry while learning a foreign language. For instance, a student who is anxious may appear restless, hesitant to speak, or display other common signs of mental stress in social situations. According to school observations, many students exhibit anxiety and uncertainty when asked to speak English. They see English as a challenging subject because of the complexity of the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and knowledge that must be acquired. As a result, they experience emotional stress, including feelings of insecurity, fear, shame, worry, and irritation, while participating in English-speaking activities.

(Horwits & Muna, 2019) Identify three categories of anxiety responses while speaking: anxiety caused by errors in language use, anxiety caused by inadequate preparation, and anxiety caused by difficulties performing the speaking task. Anxiety might be brought on by speaking tasks that demand mastery of both micro and macro skills if the student's skill set is insufficient. Prior to speaking, careful planning has been shown to reduce anxiety levels by increasing students' sense of preparedness and confidence. On the other hand, depending on how a mistake is handled, it can have different effects. Students' confidence levels are more likely to rise if they receive positive encouragement or feedback, while criticism or unfavorable evaluations can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and shame.

The psychological barriers to speaking include, but are not limited to, fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, a lack of self-assurance, and a lack of drive. One of the major impediments affecting students' ability to speak English fluently is anxiety. Students are more likely to be passive, reluctant to communicate, and hesitant to participate in classroom activities when they believe their English language skills are inadequate. In this situation, the overall progress of their learning process may be indirectly slowed.

The study focuses on anxiety as a significant psychological element that prevents students from speaking well. Students' lack of readiness to answer questions or participate in conversations in English is frequently caused by extreme anxiety. The anxiety is closely related to the students' reluctance to participate in verbal communication. A student who is anxious will likely struggle to comprehend and adhere to the teacher's spoken instructions, which will eventually lead to a decline in their self-assurance and motivation to learn a foreign language. Teachers see this happen frequently when they ask students to participate in conversations or answer questions in English. This research is specifically directed toward the 2024 cohort of students from the English Education Study Program. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the extent of anxiety experienced in English-speaking skills. This evaluation encompasses various aspects, ranging from physical signs such as restlessness or tension to behavioral responses like avoiding speaking, as well as affective factors related to emotions, self-confidence, and attitudes toward language learning.

The selection of the 2024 cohort as the research subjects is based on the fact that they are at the early stage of mastering English-speaking skills in an academic environment, a phase that often induces emotional pressure or certain levels of anxiety. At this stage, students frequently experience fear of making mistakes or receiving negative judgments from lecturers and peers.

Therefore, through data collection involving classroom observations, questionnaire distribution, and in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore how these psychological factors influence students' attitudes and willingness to speak English during daily learning activities. The results of this analysis are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the emotional barriers faced by students and to open opportunities for developing learning strategies that are better aligned with their psychological conditions.

METHOD

Qualitative research is an approach centered on gaining an in-depth understanding of social, cultural, or human behavior phenomena by exploring meaning from the perspective of participants. According to (Ummah, 2019) Qualitative research produces descriptive data consisting of the written or spoken words of individuals, along with observable behaviors, which are comprehensively analyzed in the context of their real-life situations. This approach integrates participants into their natural environment, seeing it as an integral component of the setting in which phenomena occur.

At the same time, Bailey et al. (2013) emphasize that qualitative research is an academic tradition in the social sciences that is rooted in direct observation of individuals in their social context. The researcher engages directly with the research subject and utilizes the language and terminology that participants typically use, allowing for a more authentic and contextual understanding.

In the context of our research, we use a qualitative approach to explore individual understanding, opinions, and experiences in depth. While the qualitative method typically involves in-depth interviews or direct observation, we chose open-ended questionnaires as our data collection tool. The open-ended questionnaire conducted by this researcher contains exploratory questions that allow respondents to express their answers freely and narratively.

By utilizing open-ended questionnaires, we adhere to the basic principles of qualitative research, which focus on revealing respondents' subjective interpretations based on their own experiences, rather than limiting their answers to fixed choices as seen in quantitative methods. The collected data were then analyzed descriptively, paying attention to the context, patterns, and themes that emerged from the participants' responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in April 2025 at HKBP Nommensen University, Medan. Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire containing 8 statements related to students' anxiety in speaking English. The respondents amounted to 15 students in the fourth semester of the English Language Education Study Program who were selected by purposive sampling based on active involvement in English lessons.

Based on data obtained from a questionnaire of 15 students, with an analysis conducted by the researcher, it was found that the level of anxiety of students in speaking English was quite high. This can be seen from the dominance of answers in the categories of Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA), which shows an indication of anxiety when speaking English.

Table1. Description: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neutral, A = agree, SA = strongly agree

No	Question	Answer					Percentage					Entire
		SD	D	N	A	SA	SD	D	N	A	SA	
1	I feel embarrassed when others	1	3	9	1	1	6,7 %	20 %	60 %	6,7 %	6,7 %	100%

	listen to me speak English											
2	I sweat or my heart races when I have to speak English.	1	1	9	2	2	6,7 %	6,7 %	60 %	13,3 %	13,3 %	100%
3	I often forget what I want to say when speaking English.	-	1	8	4	2	-	6,7 %	53,3 %	26,7 %	13,3 %	100%
4	I feel more comfortable writing in English than speaking.	1	1	6	5	2	6,7 %	6,7 %	40 %	33,3 %	13,3 %	100%
5	I'm worried about being ridiculed if my pronunciation or grammar is wrong.	2	2	6	4	1	13,3 %	13,3 %	40 %	26,7 %	6,7 %	100%

6	I avoid the opportunity to speak English in public,	1	1	9	3	1	6,7 %	6,7 %	60 %	20 %	6,7 %	100%
7	I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class	-	2	9	4	-	-	13,3 %	60 %	26,7%	-	100%
8	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.	1	3	6	5	-	6,7 %	20 %	40 %	33,3%	-	100%

The results showed that the majority of students chose a Neutral answer on almost all statements, which could be interpreted as an indication of latent anxiety. This suggests that the student may not be fully aware of or unwilling to admit his or her feelings of anxiety, but still exhibit common anxiety symptoms such as forgetting to speak (Statement 3), increased heart rate (Statement 2), and nervousness (Statement 7).

In theory, these results support the proposed concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) (Horwits & Muna, 2019) which is a form of anxiety that arises when a person has to use a foreign language in a communication situation. This anxiety can hinder the language production process and lead to difficulties in decision-making and reduce student confidence.

This research is also in line with the findings of the (Liu, 2006) WHO states that factors such as fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and negative experiences in learning a foreign language are the main triggers for anxiety when speaking in class. This study reinforces the evidence that anxiety speaking in a foreign language is a significant psychological factor in English language learning. It emphasizes the importance of integrating affective approaches in language learning.

English teachers can adopt more supportive and participatory learning strategies, such as small group discussions, role-playing, and positive reinforcement techniques, to

reduce the pressure of public speaking. Creating a classroom environment that is free of ridicule and supports mistakes as part of the learning process is also important.

KESIMPULAN

Most students in the fourth semester of the English Language Education Program have a rather high level of anxiety when speaking in English. Student anxiety is manifested in bodily symptoms (such as pounding heartbeat, sweating), behavioral symptoms (avoiding opportunities to speak), and emotional symptoms (feeling embarrassed, afraid of making mistakes, and nervousness). Most respondents chose the Neutral option in the survey, indicating latent anxiety — they were not aware of or unwilling to admit their concerns, but still showed obvious symptoms.

The Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) theory, which suggests that anxiety about foreign language use can interfere with language production and reduce confidence, is supported by the results of this study. The main causes of anxiety are fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and previous bad experiences speaking a foreign language. In the journey of learning to speak English, anxiety has been shown to be a major barrier, affecting students' motivation and engagement. Language acquisition requires an affective approach, such as fostering a supportive atmosphere, not mocking, and using methods such as role-playing, small group discussions, and positive reinforcement..

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