

An Analysis of English-Speaking Anxiety Awareness among Vocational High School Students

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Abstract

Anxiety related to speaking in English is one of the major problems encountered by vocational high school learners, which might affect their communicative skills and self-reassurance in the classroom. The research focuses on identifying students' awareness of speaking anxiety and the factors leading to it. A mixed method approach was utilized through the survey, where 145 students filled out the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and the interviews with 16 students were conducted. Quantitative data shows that most of the students suffer from moderate and high anxiety. Thematic analysis revealed seven main categories, namely nervousness when speaking in front of people, fear of mistakes, lack of self-confidence, anxiety from peer evaluation, small vocabulary, sudden calling upon, and students' coping technique. These findings emphasize the importance of metacognitive and emotional awareness, also suggest the implication of pedagogical for teachers in building a more supportive classroom environment.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, vocational high school, FLCAS, language learning

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the study that includes in the curriculum in vocational schools. English is not just an additional skill but a necessity. However, the English learning process still cannot achieve the expected results (Nasution et al., 2021). This is due to various factors, such as low student interest, limited vocabulary, lack of speaking practice, and teaching methods that are not yet fully effective. In addition, anxiety in speaking English is also a major obstacle that reduces students' confidence in using the language actively (Saputra & Wathoni, 2024). As a result, even though English is taught as a compulsory subject, students' communication skills are still relatively low.

Students must have English language skills, one of which is speaking (Muhammad & Quthbi, 2023). Speaking is one of the skills that every student must have to communicate. According to Al Hakim and Syam (2019), speaking focuses on helping students use English to communicate effectively. By speaking English, students can easily understand the meaning of the other person. According to Bogodad et al. (2021) Speaking is an important communication means of communication. This ability not only functions as a means of conveying ideas but also as an instrument for understanding and analysing various situations that occur around us.

In the teaching and learning process, speaking skills is the main key to master so that the communication process can take place properly (Canestra & Putra, 2023). Therefore, speaking skills are very important for students. Speaking is a process that takes place continuously, where there is a dynamic interaction in the form of an exchange of messages, symbols, and meanings between the speaker and the listener. Although all components of English skills and elements are important in learning, speaking skill is the most crucial aspect for every English learner to optimize. Speaking is a skill that can be developed to meet students' everyday communication needs (Saragih et al., 2023). In addition, speaking can also be used by students to practice using English vocabulary in the classroom.

Speaking skills are basic abilities that need to be developed to establish effective oral communication. Through speaking activities, a person can understand and interpret the context of the ongoing situation. Individuals who master speaking skills well have an advantage in the process of transmitting and receiving information or messages in interactions with others. In essence, speaking is a one of complex process that includes the construction and exchange of meaning, which is manifested not only through the use of verbal symbols but also through nonverbal elements in various situations and communication contexts. As if they were told to communicate in front of others using English. They have

their own fears when facing learning English speaking skills.

Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety about speaking English is an obstacle faced by students. When asked to speak English in front of their classmates, they feel intimidated and uneasy. (D. Sari, 2017). There are several anxieties when speaking English, namely excessive fear, nervousness, restlessness, and lack of confidence experienced by students in class which requires communicating using English with friends or teachers (Simanungkalit & Likuyang, 2023). This situation can occur due to various conditions from the surrounding environment and their interactions with English. Anxiety in speaking English in public is caused by the students themselves. With limited expertise, experience, and skills, students will easily experience anxiety in speaking in public.

Vocational High School

Among vocational high school students in Indonesia, many experience speaking anxiety, not due to a lack of ability but because of a complex set of issues influenced by various factors, including the curriculum, teaching quality, learning environment, perceptions of English, access to learning resources, and industry needs. Although many students have basic English proficiency analyze, they often feel anxious when it comes to speaking.

While earlier studies have examined a number of factors that contribute to anxiety in English speakers, such as peer pressure, lack of fluency, and fear of making mistakes, the majority of these studies have either identified anxiety factors or offered general teaching solutions. For instance, Damayanti & Listyani (2020) and Canestra & Putra (2023) primarily focused on the analysis of external causes including the classroom climate or feedback from teachers. However, it is worth noting that there is not enough research on the topic of students' internal perception of their anxiety which is of vital importance.

Also, there have been a few studies about anxiety in English-speaking learners in the vocational high school setting. Most prior research has been conducted in general high school or university settings. Yet, vocational students face different learning goals and job-market expectations, which may affect their anxiety differently. This creates a clear research gap, where it is required to analyze not only the sources of anxiety but also how vocational students recognize and respond to their emotional experience of speaking English. This study addresses that gap by focusing on anxiety awareness, an individual's ability to recognize and understand their own speaking anxiety and how it manifests among vocational high school students, both cognitively and emotionally.

Based on the assumptions of the students that have studied English for considerable amount of time, students still face challenges in using the language, especially in the aspect of speaking, which requires the ability to express thoughts verbally along with other supporting skills (Abrar, 2018). This resulted a decrease in some student motivation to learn English, which is exacerbated by various obstacles such as language complexity, limited quality learning materials, and minimal time and opportunities to practice their language skills. In addition, teaching English speaking currently has a lot of differences from one teacher to another. Many English teachers in Indonesia have low levels of language proficiency and lack confidence in using English as a medium of communication. This is exacerbated by the lack of ongoing professional training (Jon et al., 2021). The teaching methods used are often too focused on grammar and reading texts, while speaking and listening skills tend to be neglected. In the end, students are less exposed to the use of English for everyday communication (Jon et al., 2021).

Based on the discussion that has been explained above, this study will contribute to English language learning. However, most of the previous studies focused at most on identifying the problems or levels of speaking anxiety, without exploring how students perceive or become aware of their own anxiety. Moreover, few studies have integrated both methods of quantitative and qualitative approach to analyze both the extent and nature of anxiety. These limitations indicate a research gap that this study seeks to address, particularly by investigating students' self-awareness of speaking anxiety and the factors contributing to it. This study aims to analyze anxiety factors of students when they are in a situation where speaking anxiety occurs. In addition to analyzing speaking anxiety when speaking English, the results will help determine whether speaking anxiety affects speaking performance. Thus, this study is necessary to examine pupils who still experience anxiety when speaking English. Accordingly, it also addressed these following research questions: (1) What is the level of English-speaking anxiety among vocational high school students? (2) What factors contribute to English-speaking anxiety among vocational high school students?

METHODS

This study is based in Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) theory of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986), which conceptualizes language anxiety through test anxiety, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The dimensions provide the basis for analysis of students' speaking anxiety in English. In

addition, the theory of the Affective-Filter Hypothesis (Krashen,1982) shows how anxiety can become a hindrance in language proficiency.

For this study, the researcher used a mixed combination of approaches which is called the mixed methods research design with an explanatory sequential method. The process involved quantitative data collection and analyzes the numerical data using questionnaire and then conducting qualitative interviews to further explain the results obtained. This kind of approach was chosen to gather both numerical information on anxiety levels and rich descriptions of students' personal experience, in the end granting a more comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety and students' awareness.

Rather than using advanced statistical models such as factorial design or regression analysis, which are often applied in confirmatory studies to determine causal relationship, this study focuses on pattern identification, anxiety level categorization, and describing factors and student awareness qualitatively. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the objective of gaining practical conclusion from it instead of making inferences about the phenomena, descriptive statistics and thematic analysis is more relevant to use. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence increase credibility of the result. The anxiety levels have been measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), while the perspective of students on the issue and their emotions were discovered using additional interviews.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions meant to get students' internal process associated with speaking in English. The questions covered the feelings, thoughts, bodily reactions, and coping mechanism of the students while engaged in speaking activities. The interviews were carried out using Bahasa Indonesia, it was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was done in line with the six steps thematic analysis put forth by Braun and Clarke. It included familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme search, theme review, definition and naming of themes, and production report. Consistency was ensured by conducting double coding. Triangulation of data was done through findings of questionnaire and interviews.

Multiple measures of speaking anxiety were uses in the study to facilitate not only data collection but also analysis. First, on the psychological level, anxiety was often associated with fear of committing mistakes in grammar or pronunciation, which made learners hesitate or doesn't speak at all. Psychological effects of anxiety included trembling, sweating, and rosing heartbeat when student had to address their class fellows with oral communication. on cognitive level, anxiety could be

viewed through difficulty starting the conversation and finding the right words under stress. Emotionally, anxiety could be caused by low self-confidence and fear f negative judgment of instructors and classmates. Behaviorally, students tended to stay passive, talk whisper, or give a minimum answer. Moreover, some of the participants reported feeling more comfortable while performing writing task, as those provided more time for thinking, while speaking imposed an obligation to act quickly. Finally, many students felt relieved after having to speak, which suggest that speaking itself was one of major sources of anxiety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A mixed-methods approach is used this study to investigate (1) The extent of English-speaking anxiety awareness among vocational high school students, and (2) the contributing factors to this anxiety.

Students' Awareness of their English-Speaking Anxiety

The percentage of English-speaking anxiety awareness is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Students' Awareness of their English-Speaking Anxiety

Score Range of Anxiety	Level	%	Frequency
33 – 82	Very low anxiety	11.72%	17
83 – 89	Moderately low anxiety	13.10%	19
90 – 98	Moderate anxiety	31.72%	46
99 – 108	Moderately high anxiety	31.03%	45
109 – 165	High anxiety	12.41%	18
Total			145

Based on the results, this study includes 145 participants from the same teacher in a Vocational High School. The researcher used a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) which had been adapted to suit the research focus, which was to measure the students' speaking anxiety level.

One of the most regularly mentioned themes in the interviews was fear of committing errors when speaking English, reported by 27 students. These mistakes include pronunciation errors, grammatical inaccuracies, and inappropriate word choice. Many students expressed their fear of speaking incorrectly and being laughed at or judged by others. For instance, one student stated, “I’m afraid of mispronouncing a word or using a word that’s not appropriate in that context.” (Student 14). This finding reinforces the theory with Horwitz et al.’s (1986) theory of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), especially in communication apprehension and fear of receiving a poor evaluation.

A total of 22 students participants revealed that low self-confidence significantly contributes to their anxiety when speaking English. Students often feel that they do not have enough fluency and are unsure about their own capabilities and whether the things they say are correct. One example, student shared, “*I’m not that fluent... I don’t really think about whether what I say is right or wrong.*” (Student 14). This lack of confidence often accompanied by an inability to communicate and take part in classroom discussion. This topic addresses the affective aspect of language anxiety in relation to how students feel, such as insecurity and fear of failing. The topic also deals with the psychological block that prevents students from exercising their speaking skills despite having the proper linguistic skills.

This theme was expressed by 16 participants, who experience anxiety emanated from a fear of being socially evaluated by their classmates. Anxiety stems does not only come from speaking errors but also, precisely from social implication of those errors, such as ridicule, criticism, or perceived as less capable. Student responses like “*I’m afraid of being laughed at when I make a mistake...*” (Student 15) and “*I’m scared of being judged... of being seen as bad as it...*” (Student 17) illustrate the pressure and challenges faced in social context. This aligns with the theory of social evaluation anxiety, where students feel as though they are under social evaluation from other people. This is especially true for adolescents, who value peer approval greatly.

Although this theme was found by only four students’ participants, the issue of lack of vocabulary is still another factor that can contribute to speaking anxiety. Student participants reported problems with word selection as well as lack of vocabulary that leads to hesitance in speaking. One student explained, “*I’m afraid of making mistakes because I haven’t mastered the vocabulary yet.*” (Student 14). Lack of lexicon limits the ability in conveying thoughts clearly and fluently. Although this is not an overwhelming theme, it is crucial in comprehending the

anxiety associated with linguistic competence that can lead to communication problems and raise self-doubt even more. This also highlights the necessity for vocabulary training as well as controlled speech practice.

Fifty-two students reported being anxious while addressing in front of crowds, making this problem one of the most prevalent themes. Students frequently reported bodily symptoms such as shaking hands, cold sweats, and racing heartbeat. These responses are classic signs of performance anxiety, which occurs when individuals feel they are the center of attention. One student stated, “*I feel nervous... my heart beats fast, my hands are cold...*” (Student 1). Such anxiety may hinder the process of concentration on the speech delivery and prevent individuals from giving good oral speeches despite their preparation. The problem reveals the psychological reaction to the environment of the public speaking which can be intimidating for many students and results in avoidance speaking test.

A total of thirty students indicated that they have been developed individual strategies for dealing with speaking anxiety. Strategies include various relaxation methods like deep breathing, prayer, drinking water before talking and practicing in front of mirror. For example, “*I take a deep breath, say a prayer, then try to concentrate...*” (Student 12). This theme illustrates the students’ self-awareness and their attempts at emotional regulation, which are vital traits in achieving success in foreign language learning. Even though these techniques do not entirely prevent anxiety, they prove the students’ willingness to overcome challenges in order to improve their speaking skills.

Eighteen total students indicated they felt anxious when unexpectedly asked to speak in English without any preparation. This kind of situational pressure makes students feel nervous and unprepared. One participant stated, “*If I’m suddenly asked to speak in English... it really makes me nervous.*” (Student 14). This emphasizes the importance of planning the preparation and mental readiness in reducing speaking anxiety. The theme fits best under situational language anxiety where the context or timing of speaking task caused extra stress. Teachers may need to reevaluate how speaking opportunities are organized to building a safe environment, by providing adequate preparation time and using a gradual method from small to large tasks.

The most salient theme is nervousness in front of an audience, experienced by 52 students, which suggests that many students become anxious when asked to speak in public. Fear of Making Mistakes is the concern of 27 students who worry about pronunciation or grammar errors. 22 students’ also have the problem of Low Self-

Confidence, due to being unprepared and doubting their speaking abilities. Meanwhile, 16 students experience anxiety about peer judgment, meaning they are anxious about how their classmates will respond. 30 total students' use Anxiety Coping Techniques to self-soothe before speaking, such as deep breathing and focusing on speaking goals. In addition, 18 students when suddenly called to speak without preparation. Generally, these findings suggest that the major factors influencing the English communication skill of the students are anxiety and less self-confidence.

Discussion on Students' Awareness of their English-Speaking Anxiety

The findings of FLCAS instrument given to 145 vocational high school students offer important information about their levels of awareness about speaking anxiety in English. The data show that students were distributed across all levels of anxiety with the majority of the students (around 62.75%) fall in moderate and moderate to high level of anxiety category, and 12.41% have high level of anxiety. It shows that speaking anxiety is a common and significant problem for these students. Furthermore, the result also indicates that most of the students had not only experienced anxiety but were aware of its existence and its disruptive effects on their participation in the classroom. Such a level of awareness is a critical starting point for pedagogical intervention.

The concept of metacognitive awareness, that is the awareness of one's emotional and cognitive states while using the target language, able to explain students' metacognitive awareness of their anxiety. Horwitz (1986) states that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) stems from communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The findings is that many students in this study are the moderate to high anxiety categories suggest that they are consciously managing these fears.

This finding is supported by recent research, such as Khajavy et al. (2021), concluded students with elevated metacognitive awareness of their anxiety demonstrated more proficiency in reflecting on their constraints and adapting their learning tactics accordingly. This is in line with the student responses in this study, which disclose apprehensions over errors, language retention, and adverse evaluation by peers.

The ability to recognize and articulate these physiological responses indicates that the students were not only experiencing anxiety but were also cognitively aware of how it affects their bodies and minds. This level of awareness is supported by Liu & Wang (2023), who emphasize that learners who can identify and reflect on their emotional states are more capable of developing

effective coping mechanisms and are less likely to be overwhelmed by fear during communication.

Interestingly, this study also found that some students have started to implement their own self-initiated coping strategies, such as deep breathing, silent prayer, practicing in front of a mirror, and drinking water before speaking. These actions reflect what Oxford (2017) terms affective strategy use, referring to deliberate efforts by learners to lower emotional barriers to language use. The presence of these strategies indicates a relatively high level of emotional intelligence (EI), as defined by Salovey and Mayer, namely, the ability to monitor one's own emotions, distinguish among them, and use this information to guide thought and behavior.

The result of this study correlates with research conducted by Duong & Trang (2023), which indicates that when teachers acknowledge language anxiety as a valid and common experience, students feel more comfortable discussing it and seeking support.

In summary, the findings obtained through FLCAS questionnaire, along with qualitative information and current academic literature, indicate that while there are some students who are self-assured, the greater number of them suffers from anxiety when using English as a means of communication, students are not only conscious about their anxiety when using English, but they are also working on dealing with it actively. In this way, teachers will be able to turn anxiety into a helpful element of language acquisition by using students' existing knowledge.

Discussion on Factors of English-Speaking Anxiety among Vocational High School Students

This study's finding indicates that English-speaking anxiety in vocational high school students is influenced by several interconnected psychological, linguistic, and environmental elements. It includes nervousness in front of an audience, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, anxiety for peer judgment, suddenly called, coping strategies and limited vocabulary. Each factors shows a different dimension of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) proposed the theory from Horwitz (1986), called communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, while recent literature helped relevance continuation on these dimensions in contemporary language classroom.

Nervousness in Front of an Audience, the most dominant theme reported by 52 students, illustrates how public speaking can trigger physiological symptoms such as trembling, sweating, and increased heart rate. This is common occurrence in performance anxiety (Cheng,

2017), especially in classroom settings with high-stakes evaluative classroom. Students who evaluate themselves as the main focus of attention often experienced increase in anxiety, regardless of their competence in foreign language. Liu & Jackson (2019) findings confirms that learner with a limited exposure on English-speaking environment are more susceptible to audience anxiety in the Asian classroom culture, where losing face is one critical issue.

Fear of Making Mistakes were mentioned by 27 students rose due to perfectionism and cognitive overload, where students not only worry on pronunciation, but also on grammar and lexical accuracy. Such fear is well justified due to classroom culture and as the result of it fear emerges, when being correct is more prioritize over communication (Tóth, 2020).

22 students reported that they experience Low Self-Confidence, one of it was the most important emotional barriers. Student who shows themselves as “not fluent” or doubting their correctness on answers tend to not participate in speaking activities. This finding is consistent with the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) and has been reaffirmed in recent studies, such as those by Mahmud and Yusra (2022), who found that students with higher self-efficacy reported lower levels of speaking anxiety. Confidence in speaking is often shaped by prior classroom experiences, feedback from teachers, and the presence of supportive peers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). In the absence of these elements, students may internalize failure and disengage from oral participation.

Anxiety about Peer Judgment, which emerged in 16 student accounts, points to the social- evaluative nature of language anxiety. Peer evaluation becomes a significant stressor during adolescence, a period where social belonging and peer approval are particularly salient (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). As observed by Effiong (2016), fear of being judged or laughed at by classmates is a major deterrent to participation in oral tasks, especially in collectivist cultures where social harmony and group acceptance are highly valued.

Although Limited Vocabulary was mentioned by only 4 students, it remains an important factor in triggering anxiety. The inability to recall or use appropriate vocabulary can lead to communication breakdowns and reinforce students’ reluctance to speak. Research by Yalçın and İnceçay (2019) shows that students with a limited lexicon often report higher levels of speaking apprehension due to the pressure of finding the right words under time constraints.

Another important situational trigger is Being Called Suddenly, as reported by 18 students. Sudden speaking demands can heighten anxiety, particularly when students

are unprepared. Spontaneous speaking tasks, while often used to test fluency, may not be effective for all learners. In a study by Alrabai (2020), unplanned speaking tasks without adequate preparation time significantly increased anxiety levels among EFL learners. This suggests the importance of balancing spontaneity with scaffolding to create a less threatening speaking environment.

Interestingly, 30 students shared that they had developed Anxiety Coping Strategies, such as deep breathing, drinking water, or practicing in front of a mirror. These strategies indicate a degree of metacognitive awareness and emotional regulation. The ability to manage anxiety proactively reflects learner resilience and should be nurtured in classroom practices. According to Dewaele et al. (2018), learners who employ positive self-regulation techniques experience lower FLA and perform better in speaking assessments. Integrating these techniques into classroom instruction, such as through mindfulness or visualization exercises, may support anxious learners more effectively.

English-speaking anxiety among vocational high school students is multifaceted, involving cognitive, affective, linguistic, and social components. While nervousness in front of others remains the most prevalent issue, underlying causes such as fear of errors, lack of confidence, peer pressure, and insufficient vocabulary also contribute to students’ discomfort. However, the emergence of coping strategies provides hope that with the right pedagogical interventions such as structured speaking tasks, positive feedback, peer collaboration, and anxiety-reducing techniques students can gradually overcome their fears and participate more confidently in English communication.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion provides a summary of the description of this research aimed to measure English-speaking anxiety levels among the population of students enrolled at vocational high schools and determine their level of awareness about the problem. It can be concluded from the results of this study that a significant number of students demonstrated quite high levels of speaking anxiety, which means that anxiety remains one of the major problems in students’ that anxiety when speaking in public, as well as fear of being asked to say something. However, according to the results, the most dominant source of speaking anxiety is fear of mistakes whether in pronunciation, grammar, and word choice errors. Thus, English teachers are advised to not only improve the linguistic skills of their students but also create a positive and safe learning atmosphere that encourage confidence and engagement, reducing any fear of criticism or failure. Using methods

that include effective speaking practice, appropriate feedback, and techniques for managing anxiety might help the learners overcome with fear in speaking. Overall, this paper emphasizes that both the psychological and linguistic aspects of language acquisition should be considered in order to help students become more confident speakers of language.

In addition, there was found to be variability in the level of awareness of their speaking anxiety among students. Some of the learners were able to recognize and analyze the reasons for their anxiety while other learners showed a tendency to have trouble understanding the factors that triggered their emotional reactions. This mean that the learners' emotional and metacognitive awareness is still developing and needs further improvement. Therefore, apart from developing the language skills of the learners, teachers need to provide an environment which boost the learners' self-confidence and awareness of their emotions.

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