

An Analysis of Students' Anxiety in Speaking English at UPT SMPN Satap 2 Batu in Leppangeng

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine whether students experience anxiety in learning English, particularly in speaking. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, involving 14 eighth grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu. The objectives of this research were to identify the forms of speaking anxiety experienced by eighth grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu and to analyze the internal and external factors that influence the students' speaking anxiety. The results show that the most dominant forms of anxiety are nervousness when speaking in front of the class (71%), fear of making mistakes (64%), and anxiety when speaking without preparation (64%). Other factors include feeling inferior to more proficient peers (50%) and fear of being laughed at (57%). The causes of anxiety were categorized into internal factors, such as low self-confidence, past experiences, and limited vocabulary, as well as external factors, including social pressure, peer attitudes, and teachers' feedback approaches.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety; English Learning; Internal and External Factors

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the issue of speaking anxiety among eighth-grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu in Leppangeng, with a particular focus on how students' emotional and psychological states impact their ability to speak English. The study recognizes that speaking in a foreign language, particularly English, is a fundamental skill for students in global communication. However, despite the importance of speaking proficiency, students often experience various levels of anxiety that hinder their ability to speak freely and confidently. This anxiety can stem from a variety of internal and external factors, creating a significant barrier to language learning and proficiency.

Speaking in English, for many students, is not just a matter of linguistic ability but also a challenge that involves overcoming psychological barriers. As outlined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), speaking anxiety is a feeling of tension and fear specifically associated with speaking a foreign language. This form of anxiety can have a profound impact on students' engagement in learning activities, preventing them from participating fully in class discussions, oral presentations, and other speaking tasks. In particular, for students living in remote areas like Leppangeng, where access to resources such as language clubs, online learning platforms, and native speakers is limited, the experience of speaking anxiety can be even more pronounced.

UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu is located in an area that lacks the educational infrastructure that might typically support English language learners. The school does not offer specialized English courses or access to advanced language learning resources, which further compounds students' difficulties in mastering English speaking skills. With limited opportunities to practice speaking, students at this school are particularly vulnerable to developing anxiety around speaking English. This anxiety is further exacerbated by factors such as the fear of making mistakes, lack of preparation, and comparison with peers who may be more proficient in English.

Understanding the factors that contribute to students' speaking anxiety is crucial for improving their learning experiences and outcomes. Previous studies, such as those by Ardiansyah and Suryani (2020), and Yuliana and Putri (2022), have highlighted the role of both internal factors, such as low self-confidence and past experiences, and external factors, such as peer pressure and teaching styles, in influencing students' anxiety. However, few studies have focused specifically on the experiences of students in rural areas, where the social and educational context may present unique challenges.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the forms of speaking anxiety experienced by students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu. The research will also analyze the internal and external factors that contribute to this anxiety. The findings will provide valuable insights into the nature of speaking anxiety in a rural educational setting, offering a deeper understanding of how students' emotional states affect their English-speaking abilities.

The significance of this research lies both in its theoretical contributions to the field of language learning and in its practical implications for teaching practices. On a theoretical level, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on language anxiety, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language in rural settings. On a practical level, the findings can help educators and school administrators develop targeted strategies to reduce speaking anxiety, create a more supportive classroom environment, and foster greater student confidence in using English.

The scope of this study is confined to eighth-grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu. Given the challenges faced by students in this particular context, the research does not seek to generalize its findings to other schools or grade levels. However, the insights gained from this study may prove relevant to educators working in similar educational settings, both in Indonesia and beyond. By focusing on a small but significant group of students, this research aims to offer a detailed and nuanced understanding of the factors that influence speaking anxiety and provide recommendations that can directly impact the students' learning experiences. This research seeks to explore the complex relationship between speaking anxiety and students' ability to communicate in English. By examining both the emotional and contextual factors that contribute to anxiety, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that can inform more effective teaching practices and help students overcome the barriers to successful language acquisition. The next section of the thesis will outline the research questions, objectives, and methodology used to investigate these issues in depth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Speaking Anxiety in Language Learning

Language anxiety is a complex emotional state that often manifests during oral communication in a foreign language. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define it as “a distinct feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, particularly speaking.” Students experiencing speaking anxiety frequently exhibit hesitation, nervousness, and avoidance behaviors, which hinder their communicative competence. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) conceptualize language anxiety as multidimensional, involving cognitive and emotional components that directly impact performance in language tasks. A central cause of speaking anxiety is the fear of making mistakes. Aida (1994) notes that students often worry about being negatively judged for errors in grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. This fear fosters self-doubt and contributes to communication breakdowns. Foss and Reitzel (2017) categorize language anxiety into three types: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension is the fear of expressing oneself ineffectively; fear of negative evaluation stems from concern about judgment by others; while test anxiety is related to the pressure of assessments.

The Effects of Language Anxiety

Language anxiety affects students cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. Cognitive disruptions include difficulties with memory and concentration, which impair the ability to comprehend and produce language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2016). Emotionally, students may feel fear, embarrassment, or frustration, which often leads to avoidance of speaking activities (Young, 2018). Behaviorally, students may withdraw from participation, avoid eye contact, or speak in a low

voice signs that anxiety interferes not only with language learning but also with classroom engagement.

Contributing Factors to Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety arises from both internal and external influences. Internal (psychological) factors include low self-confidence, limited proficiency, and prior negative experiences. Park and Lee (2015) report that students with low self-esteem are more prone to anxiety in speaking tasks, particularly when they doubt their ability to communicate clearly. Likewise, learners who perceive their vocabulary or pronunciation as inadequate tend to experience heightened anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2016). Negative past experiences—such as ridicule for making mistakes—can create long-term psychological barriers (Foss & Reitzel, 2017). External factors include social and educational dynamics. Social pressure from peers or teachers often heightens anxiety, especially when students fear being judged (Wang & Ro, 2019). Teaching style is another key influence. Heng and Abdullah (2017) emphasize that overly critical error correction can increase anxiety, whereas supportive and constructive feedback encourages risk-taking. The classroom atmosphere also matters; competitive or high-pressure environments can exacerbate anxiety, while safe and inclusive settings foster greater confidence (Young, 2018).

Strategies to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

A wide range of pedagogical strategies have been recommended to help students overcome speaking anxiety. A positive classroom environment is fundamental. Encouraging a growth mindset and emphasizing effort over perfection can reduce fear and promote confidence (Young, 2018). Teachers play a vital role in shaping this environment through their feedback and classroom interactions. Gradual exposure to speaking activities is another effective strategy. Thornbury (2017) suggests starting with low-risk tasks like pair work or informal group discussions before moving to higher-stakes presentations. This progression allows students to develop speaking skills incrementally while building confidence. Constructive feedback is essential for both improvement and motivation. Rather than focusing solely on errors, teachers should highlight students' strengths and provide actionable guidance for development (Heng & Abdullah, 2017). Positive reinforcement can increase students' willingness to engage in speaking tasks. Peer support is also beneficial. Zhang (2020) found that students feel less anxious when working with supportive peers. Collaborative activities such as role-plays or group projects create safer, less intimidating environments where learners can practice speaking with mutual encouragement.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study aimed to explore the speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu, located in Leppangeng. A qualitative research design was chosen to allow for an in-depth examination of the students' lived experiences and the internal and external factors influencing their anxiety in speaking English. This design was selected to capture the complexity of language anxiety, which may not be fully understood through quantitative methods. The participants in this study were 14 eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. This sampling method ensured that participants were relevant to the research objectives, as eighth grade represents a crucial stage in language development. Students at this level are generally expected to engage more actively in speaking tasks. The participants came from diverse backgrounds and had varying levels of English proficiency, providing a rich source of data for examining speaking anxiety.

Instruments and Procedures

Three primary instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The questionnaire consisted of eight Likert-scale statements designed to measure the students' speaking anxiety, with response options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." It aimed to identify specific anxiety triggers such as fear of making mistakes, nervousness during public speaking, and anxiety when speaking without preparation. The questionnaire was administered during an English class, and students were given 15 minutes to complete it. To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three selected students. These interviews allowed the researcher to explore students' personal experiences and emotions related to speaking anxiety. The interview questions focused on their confidence in speaking English, past experiences with criticism or ridicule, and self-perceptions of language ability. Conducted in a private setting outside class hours, the interviews were recorded with the students' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

In addition to the questionnaire and interviews, supporting documentation such as school records and lesson plans was collected. This documentation helped provide a contextual understanding of the school environment, the instructional strategies used by teachers, and the resources available to support English language learning. The data collection process followed a structured sequence—beginning with the distribution of the questionnaire, followed by interviews, and concluding with the review of documentation. Throughout the research, ethical procedures were strictly followed by obtaining informed consent from both students and their parents, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study followed the framework developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher coded and categorized the responses from both the questionnaires and interviews to identify emerging themes related to speaking anxiety. This step involved summarizing the data and focusing on information that was most relevant to the research objectives. Next, in the data display stage, the categorized themes were presented in both visual and narrative formats, such as tables and descriptive summaries. This organization made it easier to observe recurring patterns and differences in the students' experiences. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher cross-referenced data from the questionnaires, interviews, and supporting documentation. This triangulation process helped validate the findings and provided a deeper understanding of the internal and external factors contributing to the students' speaking anxiety. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were carefully observed to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. The findings of this study are intended to inform educators about the complexities of speaking anxiety and provide practical recommendations for improving English language instruction, especially in similar educational contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal the dominant forms of speaking anxiety among the students and provide insights into the factors that influence their experiences with speaking English. The questionnaire responses indicated that the majority of students experience high levels of anxiety when speaking English in front of the class. Of the 14 students surveyed, 71% reported feeling nervous when speaking English in front of their classmates. This fear of speaking publicly was identified as the most common form of anxiety. Additionally, 64% of students admitted to being afraid of making mistakes while speaking English, while another 64% expressed anxiety when asked to speak without preparation. These findings highlight that fear of judgment, fear of making errors, and lack of preparation are major contributors to students' speaking anxiety.

Another significant finding from the questionnaire was that 50% of students reported feeling inferior when comparing their speaking skills to those of their peers, indicating that social comparison plays a substantial role in their anxiety. Approximately 57% of students expressed fear of being laughed at when speaking English, suggesting that the fear of ridicule from classmates is another contributing factor to speaking anxiety. On the other hand, 43% of students indicated that they felt comfortable speaking English with their teachers or peers, suggesting that some students find informal or supportive settings less anxiety-provoking.

The interview data further supported the findings from the questionnaire, providing deeper insights into the factors contributing to speaking anxiety. When asked about

their experiences speaking in English, most students reported a lack of self-confidence as a significant factor affecting their willingness to speak. Many students shared that they felt nervous and uncertain about their abilities to communicate effectively in English, which made them reluctant to participate in speaking activities. One student mentioned that they felt shy and embarrassed, while another noted that they lacked confidence because they were unsure of their vocabulary and grammar.

Past experiences also emerged as a key factor influencing students' anxiety. Several students reported being mocked or criticized by their peers or teachers in the past for making mistakes when speaking English. For instance, one student mentioned being laughed at for mispronouncing words, while another described feeling embarrassed after receiving negative feedback from a teacher. These experiences created lasting emotional barriers, causing students to feel anxious about speaking in future situations. However, a few students shared that these negative experiences motivated them to improve their language skills, demonstrating a more resilient attitude toward criticism.

Limited vocabulary was another prominent factor identified by the students as contributing to their anxiety. Many students reported feeling anxious when speaking English because they lacked the necessary vocabulary to express themselves clearly. One student mentioned that they felt embarrassed because their limited vocabulary made it difficult for them to complete sentences and convey their ideas effectively. This fear of being unable to find the right words added to their overall sense of anxiety and hesitation when speaking.

Despite the challenges identified in the results, some students demonstrated greater confidence and a positive attitude toward speaking English. These students were less concerned with making mistakes and more focused on improving their language skills. Some students expressed that they felt comfortable speaking with their teacher or close peers, as they felt less judged and more supported in these settings. Overall, while many students experienced high levels of speaking anxiety, a smaller group of students was able to manage their anxiety and participate in speaking activities with greater confidence.

The results of this study indicate that speaking anxiety among eighth-grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu is influenced by a range of internal and external factors. The most prominent forms of anxiety were fear of speaking in front of the class, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about speaking without preparation. Social comparison, fear of ridicule, and limited vocabulary were identified as key contributors to these anxieties. Past experiences of criticism or mockery also played a significant role in shaping students' emotional responses to speaking English. These findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students in rural educational settings and highlight the need for strategies to address speaking anxiety and support students in developing their language skills.

The results revealed that students frequently experience anxiety when speaking English, particularly in public contexts, and that this anxiety is shaped by a complex interplay of emotional, social, and linguistic factors. These findings are consistent with, and further contribute to, the body of literature on foreign language anxiety. One of the most prominent findings was that public speaking is a major source of anxiety, with 71% of students reporting nervousness when required to speak English in front of the class. This confirms the earlier findings by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who categorized public speaking as one of the most anxiety-inducing tasks in language learning. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argued that communication apprehension is a key component of language anxiety, particularly when learners feel exposed or judged by an audience. In the current study, the classroom setting, especially when students were required to perform without preparation, intensified their fear of being evaluated by peers and teachers. This fear often led to reluctance in participating in speaking activities.

Closely related to this is the fear of making mistakes, another dominant form of anxiety among the participants. Approximately 64% of the students expressed concern about making errors while speaking English. This fear aligns with the concept of "fear of negative evaluation," as described by Aida (1994), which is a central construct in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Students frequently associated mistakes with failure and embarrassment, which limited their willingness to take linguistic risks. As also noted by Park and Lee (2015), low self-confidence exacerbates these fears, as students begin to internalize negative outcomes, making them more hesitant to participate in oral communication tasks.

Social comparison was another significant factor, with half of the students indicating that they felt inferior when compared to more proficient peers. This result supports the work of Wang and Ro (2019), who noted that learners often gauge their own competence by comparing themselves to others, which can contribute to increased anxiety and lowered self-esteem. In competitive or performance-driven classrooms, students who perceive themselves as less capable may withdraw from speaking tasks to avoid potential embarrassment. In such cases, rather than fostering healthy motivation, peer comparison becomes a barrier to engagement and growth. This underscores the importance of promoting cooperative learning and reducing competitiveness in the classroom.

The impact of past negative experiences was also evident in the findings. Some students reported having been mocked by peers or criticized harshly by teachers for their mistakes. These experiences left lasting impressions and heightened students' reluctance to speak in class. Foss and Reitzel (2017) similarly observed that ridicule and public correction can instill long-term fear and emotional distress in language learners. When students associate speaking English with humiliation, even constructive feedback may be perceived as threatening. Thus, teacher sensitivity and the creation of a psychologically safe classroom environment are essential for reducing anxiety.

Additionally, limited vocabulary emerged as a strong internal factor contributing to students' anxiety. As noted during interviews, students often feared they would be unable to express their ideas clearly or would use incorrect words. This is in line with Young (2018), who identified insufficient vocabulary as a major obstacle to oral proficiency, especially in spontaneous speaking tasks. When learners do not feel linguistically equipped, their focus shifts from communication to avoidance. Therefore, targeted vocabulary instruction and frequent speaking practice can help students gain the confidence needed to express themselves more fluently.

Despite the challenges, the study also revealed a small group of students who managed to speak with greater confidence. These learners appeared less affected by the fear of making mistakes and were more open to learning through trial and error. Zhang (2020) highlighted that students who adopt a growth mindset—viewing mistakes as part of the learning process are better able to cope with language anxiety and improve over time. In this study, such students reported feeling more comfortable in supportive environments, particularly when teachers and peers provided encouragement rather than criticism. Their experiences suggest that fostering a positive, low-stress classroom climate can significantly mitigate anxiety and promote active participation.

In summary, the findings of this study are consistent with the existing literature and emphasize the multifaceted nature of speaking anxiety in language learning. Key forms of anxiety identified include fear of public speaking, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety triggered by social comparison and previous negative experiences. Both internal factors, such as low self-confidence and limited vocabulary, and external factors, such as peer pressure and teacher feedback, play critical roles in shaping students' speaking anxiety. These insights highlight the need for educators to adopt more empathetic and inclusive teaching approaches. By cultivating a safe and supportive environment, minimizing judgment, and encouraging collaboration over competition, teachers can help students overcome anxiety and become more confident English speakers.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at UPT SMPN SATAP 2 Batu and identified the internal and external factors that contribute to it. The results showed that many students feel anxious when speaking English, especially in front of the class, when they fear making mistakes, or when they are unprepared. These anxieties are linked to low self-confidence, limited vocabulary, fear of being judged by peers or teachers, and past negative experiences like being mocked or criticized. Despite these challenges, some students were able to manage their anxiety, especially in supportive and informal settings. This shows that a positive classroom environment can help students feel more confident in speaking English. Teachers play a key role in reducing anxiety by giving encouraging feedback, avoiding harsh criticism, and creating opportunities for

practice without pressure. In conclusion, helping students overcome speaking anxiety requires understanding both their emotional and learning needs. Teachers should focus on building confidence, encouraging mistakes as learning opportunities, and promoting peer support. By doing so, they can help students feel more comfortable speaking English and support their language development more effectively.

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