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Manifestation of Speaking Anxiety in Speaking Performance

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety is a psychological condition commonly experienced by students that significantly impedes fluency and overall performance. The study aims to investigate the manifestations of speaking anxiety among EFL learners, with a particular emphasis on verbal and nonverbal manifestations of speaking anxiety in EFL learning. This study employs a qualitative research design; data were gathered through structured observation and in-depth interviews with selected participants. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety manifests nonverbally, verbally, and in emotional reactions, as well as difficulty in constructing grammatical sentences spontaneously. The underlying causes encompass fear of negative evaluation from peers and instructors, diminished self-confidence, and limited vocabulary and grammatical competence. Of particular significance, certain participants demonstrated the capacity to reframe anxiety as a facilitative force, channeling it into increased motivation to enhance their linguistic performance. These findings underscore the necessity for educators to cultivate a supportive and low-evaluative classroom environment, repositioning anxiety not merely as an obstacle to be eliminated, but as a potentially constructive motivator in the EFL learning process.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety; Speaking Manifestation

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the important skills people need to have. To effectively express ideas and convey information through speaking, learners require adequate knowledge and confidence to communicate effectively. In today's globalized world, mastering only the national language is no longer sufficient. Individuals are also expected to develop proficiency in English, which serves as a lingua franca for international communication, education, and professional competition. Recognizing the importance of English, the Indonesian government has incorporated English into the national education curriculum, introducing it from elementary school through higher education to equip students with the language skills needed for global engagement. Although English in some places in Indonesia is not a second language, it is one of the international languages.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking ability becomes an essential component of language mastery since students are expected to use English actively in classroom interaction and communication. (Jack C. Richard and Willy A. Renandya, 2002) One of the primary goals of language learning is to develop learners' communicative competence. As one of the four core language skills, speaking plays a crucial role in helping learners achieve their goals.

Therefore, achieving communication competence through speaking requires more than grammatical and lexical knowledge. And It can influenced by the learning techniques and classroom context in which speaking takes place (Wulandewi et al., 2021). Learners must also be able to express their ideas confidently, accurately, and fluently in oral communication. However, speaking in English is often a challenging task for non-native speakers because they must manage various linguistic and psychological demands simultaneously. During the process of learning English, speaking often causes students' emotions to fluctuate, frequently leading to anxiety and nervousness (Maclntyre & Gardner, 1994b). Also, speaking anxiety can affect students' participation and performance in English speaking contexts and learners may deveop different strategies to cope with this anxiety (Idrus, 2023). A a result To reduce students' anxiety, they need appropriate learning strategy (Nurteteng, 2022)

In the context of foreign language production, the most common obstacle encountered in English-speaking classes is anxiety. The anxiety exhibited by students can manifest in both verbal and nonverbal ways when they are required to speak during an English-speaking performance, and this study examines the factors underlying the emergence of such anxiety. This phenomenon has long been discussed in the field of the psychology of language learning, particularly through the concept of foreign language anxiety introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope. They argue that this type of anxiety differs from general anxiety because it arises specifically as a result of language performance demands.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the forms of speaking anxiety that emerge during students' speaking performances and to analyze the underlying causal factors based on the participants' perspectives and experiences. This study is expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on foreign language speaking anxiety, particularly by providing empirical data on how speaking anxiety manifests verbally and nonverbally in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to help students increase their self-awareness of the anxiety they experience so they can manage it better, as well as serve as a basis for English instructors to design learning strategies and create a more supportive classroom environment to reduce students' levels of speaking anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Several previous studies have discussed speaking anxiety in English learning from different perspectives. (Hanifa, 2018) investigated factors generating anxiety in EFL speaking classrooms and found that anxiety negatively affects students' oral communication performance. (Rosana Putri et al. 2020) examined the causes of students' anxiety in speaking English and identified fear of mistakes and negative evaluation as major factors. (Zhu & Zhou, 2012)Discussed the influence of affective factors on junior high school students' English learning achievement. Meanwhile, Young (1991)focused on classroom anxiety and suggested that teaching methods and correction techniques may influence students' anxiety levels. Also found that anxiety negatively affects students' language performance and communication abilities. In addition, (Liu & Jackson, 2008) found that students with high levels of anxiety tend to avoid oral communication and demonstrate lower speaking participation in the classroom. They explained that anxious students are usually less confident and more afraid of making errors when speaking English publicly. Furthermore, (Tercan & Dikilitaş 2015) revealed that speaking anxiety not only affects students' oral performance but also decreases their classroom participation and interaction with peers and teachers. Although numerous studies have examined students' speaking anxiety and its contributing factors, most previous research has primarily focused on identifying the causes of anxiety and describing classroom conditions in general. Limited attention has been given to investigating how speaking anxiety is reflected in students' English speaking performance, particularly among students in the Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate students' speaking anxiety in English speaking performance and to explore the factors contributing to speaking anxiety during classroom speaking activities.

Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is one form of foreign language anxiety that learners specifically experience when confronted with speaking situations in the target language. (Horwitz et al., 1986) defined foreign language anxiety as feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with language learning situations. Similarly, (MacIntyre & Gardner 1994)explained that language anxiety specifically refers to feelings of stress and fear experienced during second language communication. These emotional conditions negatively influence students' willingness to communicate and participate in classroom interaction. As a result, anxious students often avoid speaking activities and become passive during English lessons.

Speaking anxiety is categorized as one of the affective factors influencing language learning achievement. (Brown, 2007) explained that affective factors in second language acquisition encompass a range of emotional and psychological elements,

including self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, and motivation, all of which interact with one another and significantly shape learners' success in acquiring and using the target language. In addition, Krashen (Krashen, 1985) proposed the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which explains that students with high anxiety and low confidence tend to have difficulties acquiring language successfully because emotional barriers interfere with the learning process. Anxiety can reduce students' concentration, confidence, and motivation during language learning activities. Therefore, anxiety is considered a serious issue in EFL classrooms because it may negatively influence students' speaking performance. Several scholars have also classified factors that contribute to students' speaking anxiety into distinct categories. (Hanifa, 2018) identified cognitive, affective, and performance factors as the major causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Cognitive factors include a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar mastery, and limited topical knowledge. Affective factors involve fear, nervousness, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Meanwhile, performance factors relate to classroom situations, speaking tasks, public performances, and fear of negative evaluation.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employs a qualitative case study design to identify manifestations of students' speaking anxiety in English-speaking performance and its contributing factors among second–semester students in the English Education Study Program at Widya Mandira catholic University, Kupang. A qualitative case study was appropriate because it helps the researcher to investigate speaking anxiety in depth within a specific classroom context using multiple sources of data, including classroom observation, field notes, and semi–structured interviews. In semi-structured interview allow researcher to explore students perspective (Aina Yuskandina et al., 2021). This study was conducted in an English–speaking class consisting of 20 students in the second semester. All students participated in the classroom observation. For the semi-structured interview, 10 participants were selected using purposive sampling. The participant choosed because they demonstrated manifestations of speaking anxiety during classroom activities.

Instrument and Procedure

This research was conducted using four instruments: observation, field notes, record, and semi- interview. Classroom observation was conducted during students' English speaking performances, such as presentations, discussions, and other speaking activities. The observation focused on identifying visible signs of speaking anxiety and was supported by field notes. During the observation, the researcher kept a record of participants. The recorded data needed to be translated by the researcher to identify verbal and non-verbal manifestations of speaking anxiety. The semi–structured interview guide consisted of 6 open–ended questions. It was designed to identify causes of speaking anxiety in English-speaking

activities, emotional reactions, and coping strategies students use to convern their anxiety in speaking. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enables the researcher to ask follow-up questions and explore emerging issues in greater detail.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and follow–up questions are analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The process begins with transcribing the recording, and the observation notes were organized systematically. The researcher then read the transcripts and observation notes repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Next, manual open coding was conducted by assigning codes to meaningful segments relate to the manifestation of speaking anxiety and the factors contributing to speaking anxiety. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into categories based on recurring patterns. These categories were further examined and refined through theme development. Finally, these categories were synthesized into broader themes that addressed the research objectives and formed the basis for interpreting the findings. This study adopted the criteria proposed by (Yvonna S. Lincoln, 1986). Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by combining classroom observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up questions. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was maintained by documenting the data collection and analysis procedures systematically. Whereas Confirmability was ensured by grounding the interpretations in the participants' responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Manifestation of speaking anxiety

Nonverbal manifestation

Facial expression

Based on the observations, it was evident that some students displayed facial expressions reflecting anxiety during their English speaking performances. The most noticeable manifestation was the students' tendency to avoid eye contact with their peers and instructors. In addition, serious and tense facial expressions were also evident in most participants throughout the performances. During the interview, one participans explained, "At least when I don't look at my classmates and the lecturer, I'm not afraid of being judged, because I feel that if I look at them, their expressions seem to imply that what I'm explaining is wrong." The interview results revealed that participants awareness sometimes unconsciously avoided eye contact. Some participants stated that they tended to avoid eye contact so as not to experience a "blank" or lose concentration while speaking. They preferred to focus on sentences they had memorized beforehand without fully understanding the context.

Voice

The results of the observation revealed vocal instability among some students during the performance. Several participants were heard speaking in soft, trembling voices, particularly when answering questions from the instructor or their peers. This vocal instability was quite evident and affected the clarity of their delivery. It was supported by the interview results, the participants revealed that their voices tended to tremble when they felt nervous while speaking in front of the class. This was in accordance with the answer from participant A "My voice gets quieter or trembles when my heart starts beating faster, and I feel nervous because I've forgotten some of the material. The response of participants indicates that the trembling voice was triggered by feelings og nervousness when the participant forgot the material.

Body Language

During the observation, it was noted that some students exhibited uncontrolled body movements in response to the anxiety they felt. Participant 1 was seen clenching and gripping both hands tightly several times while presenting the material. Those gestures were confirmed by participants , that he consciously clenched and gripped both hands tightly in an effort to reduce excessive anxiety while presenting in front of the class. Meanwhile, other participants acknowledged that their body movements occurred spontaneously and were difficult to control. In addition, several other participants also exhibited body movements that swayed from side to side, as well as an unbalanced posture throughout the presentation. Unocontrolled body movements were physical manifestation of speaking anxiety experienced by the participants. Interstingly, participant 1 intentionally clenched both hands as astrategy to reduce nervousness. The other participants reported that their body movements occurs spontaneously, indicating that their anxiety was reflected through automatic response. These finding imply that although similar bodiy behaviours wereobserved, they may serve different functions on the individual's awareness.

Emotional

The result of the observations, the students' expressions and behavior during the performance revealed emotional reactions related to public speaking anxiety. Some students appeared restless, uneasy, and uncomfortable, especially when in front of the instructor. These reactions emerged unconsciously as the performance unfolded. Interview results revealed that nearly all participants felt nervous when speaking in front of the class. This nervousness was triggered by a fear of making mistakes and concerns about negative evaluations from peers and instructors. It were supported by the answer of some participants stated, "I feel insecure about my English because I feel outmatched by my classmates." Another participant added, "When I speak in front of others, I lack confidence; I feel nervous because I'm afraid of being judged by both the professor and my classmates, and I'm afraid of making mistakes

in every sentence structure, word, and pronunciation I use." Some participants expressed feelings of *insecurity* regarding their English proficiency, which were exacerbated by feelings of competition when observing peers who were perceived as speaking more fluently. Participant E also noted that in anxious situations, they tended to forget vocabulary they had previously known. These findings suggest that emotional reactions were mainly influenced by low confidence and fear of negative evaluation. Comparing themselves with classmates who were perceived as more proficient increased their feelings of insecurity. Furthermore, anxiety appeared to interfere with cognitive processes.

Verbal Manifestation

Hesitation and fillers

During the observation of the speaking class activities, almost every student exhibited behavioural responses, such as producing hesitation sounds "emm" and "uh," as well as phrases with long pauses "I think…" and their voice became progressively quieter. These behaviors were particularly noticeable when students were faced with questions they had not anticipated beforehand. It was revealed during the interview, "Sister, actually, I often hesitate with my answer, and my voice suddenly goes low, because I am afraid my pronunciation and my vocabulary are wrong; meanwhile, if I make a long pause, actually, I have to recall the right vocabulary and shape the right sentences." These findings suggest that hesitation sounds, long pause, and decreased volume were manifestations of speaking anxiety triggered by cognitive pressure during spontaneous speaking. In this situation, sometimes students struggled to ensure their speaking.

Repetitions

In this part, the observations showed that students consistently repeated certain words or phrases during their speaking. Several participant repeated the same words or phrases six to nine times while presenting. This behaviour was also evident during the interviews. Although repetition did not occur in every part on sentences, the participants repeated words or phrases at some point during the speaking performance. The interview findings revealed that one participant intentionally repeated words or phrases to ensure mistakes pronounciations repair. Another participant confirmed that repetition occurred because they lost everything just because they made a mistake in the first phrase, and they tried to retrieve the right vocabulary to match the message they would like to convey. These findings suggest that repetition was not only used as a strategy to maintain communication but also represented one of the manifestations of speaking anxiety, frequently occurring during both classroom discussion and speaking performance.

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

Fear of Negative Evaluation

One of the major factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety was fear of negative evaluation. Most participants were concerned that their classmates would laugh, mock, or judge them negatively when they made mistakes during speaking activities. This was supported by the answers of two participants, who reported that they interpreted some of their classmates' facial expressions and reactions, looks like mocked or judged for their mistakes, whether related to vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. Regarding their lecturers, the participants expressed concerns that their lecturers might doubt their abilities, assign them low grades, or underestimate their potential. Overall, the participants' responses indicated that other people's evaluations had a significant influence on their learning progress. This suggests that a supportive learning environment, particularly positive peer interactions, plays a crucial role in helping students feel less afraid of making mistakes while speaking English.

Lack of Confidence and Limited Vocabulary

Another factor identified from the interview was students' lack of confident. This was reflected in several manifestations observed during the speaking performance such as hesitation, progressively quieter voices, and their behave in front class. Several participants admitted that although they knew the answers, they were not confident to be actively involved because they were unable to construct grammatically correct sentences and had limited vocabulary. These findings suggest that lack of self-confidence can reduce willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, limited vocabulary and insufficient grammatical knowledge appeared to weaken their confidence, which ultimetly to contribuited to th e development of speaking anxiety.

The interesting aspect of this research is that the researcher found that Anxiety as a motivator for some participants. Although public speaking anxiety generally hurts students' performance, the interview results revealed a rather interesting other side to the issue. Some participants noted that the sense of competition they experienced was not entirely negative; rather, it also spurred them to grow and study more diligently. One participant stated, "That said, there is one thing: feeling competitive challenges me to study even harder." This finding suggests that speaking anxiety can also function as a motivator for some students. The pressure created by competition encouraged participants to study harder and improve their speaking performance. Thus, anxiety was not always a barrier but could also stimulate greater effort and motivation to learn.

These findings suggest that not all participants respond to anxiety in the same way. Some students were able to transform the pressure they felt into positive energy to

improve their English language skills. This indicates that speaking anxiety can function both as an obstacle and as a motivator, depending on how individuals respond to the situation.

The findings of this study revealed that speaking anxiety was reflected through a range of non-verbal manifestations, including avoidance of eye contact, tense facial expresstion, vocal instability, uncontrolled body movements, and emotional reactions. These observable behaviors indicate that speaking anxiety affects not only students' emotional states but also their physical responses during speaking performance. Such manifestations demonstrate that anxiety is expressed through visible psychological and behavioral reactions when students are required to communicate in English. These findings are consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who argue that foreign language anxiety is more than a subjective emotional experience; it also influences learners' performance during communicative activities. The non-verbal behaviors observed in this study support the view that anxiety can interfere with learners' ability to perform effectively by influencing both their emotional condition and physical behaviors while speaking.

One of the most prominent non-verbal manifestations identified in this study was the avoidance of eye contact. According to the interview findings, participants intentionally avoided looking at their lecturer or classmates because they felt nervous and found it easier to concentrate when they were not making direct eye contact. This finding supports Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that excessive anxiety creates psychological barriers that hinder language production. In this context, avoiding eye contact may be interpreted as a coping strategy that students employed to reduce psychological pressure and maintain concentration during speaking tasks. Similarly, facial expressions, trembling voice, and uncontrolled body movements are signs of emotional discomfort while speaking. These behaviors suggest that anxiety was not limited to students' internal feelings but was also expressed through involuntary physical reactions. Consequently, the findings indicate that non-verbal manifestations serve as important indicators of speaking anxiety, revealing how learners respond physiologically and behaviorally to the demands of speaking in a foreign language.

That speaking anxiety was also expressed through several verbal manifestations, including hesitation, fillers, repetition, prolonged pauses, and progressively quieter voices. These behaviors were particularly noticeable when students were required to respond the questions or when they had difficulty recalling vocabulary and organizing their ideas. Rather than occurring randomly, these verbal responses appeared when students experienced pressure to formulate an appropriate response while speaking in English. The findings accordance with Hanifa (2018), who identified limited vocabulary and difficulty in constructing grammatically appropriate utterances as cognitive factors associated with speaking anxiety. In the present study, students' hesitation and prolonged pauses reflected the additional

time they needed to retrieve vocabulary and formulate sentences despite feeling nervous and pressured.

Similarly, repetition occurred when participants attempted to make the right pronunciation or sentence patterns and search for more appropriate words or phrases to convey their message. These behaviors suggest that anxiety was closely connected with the cognitive demands of speaking in a foreign language. The progressively quieter voices observed during speaking performance also indicate that anxiety affected students' ability to maintain confident verbal delivery. Participants reported that their voices became quieter when they felt nervous, particularly when they were unsure of their vocabulary or worried about making mistakes. This finding supports Zhu and Zhou (2012), who demonstrated that negative affective states can interfere with learners' language performance. Therefore, the verbal manifestations identified in this study suggest that speaking anxiety affected not only the content of students' responses but also the fluency, continuity, and delivery of their oral communication.

The findings revealed that students' speaking anxiety was influenced by several interrelated factors, particularly fear of negative evaluation, lack of self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences. Among these factors, fear of negative evaluation appeared to be particularly prominent, as participants expressed concerns about being judged by both their classmates and instructors when making mistakes in vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. These findings is consistent with Young (1991) and Liu & Jackson (2008), who identified fear of negative evaluation as a major source of foreign language speaking anxiety. In the present study, students' concerns about how others perceived their performance appeared to increase their psychological pressure during speaking activities. Some participants also interpreted classmates' facial expressions as if they were making judgments, while others were concerned that instructors might underestimate their abilities. This refers to how students' perceptions of their social environment played an important role in shaping their willingness to speak and their emotional responses during oral performance. Several participants reported that they sometimes knew the answer but were reluctant to respond because they were not brave and uncertain with their ability. Their insecurity was further intensified when they compared themselves with classmates whom they perceived as more fluent. This social comparison appeared to reinforce their perception of having lower English proficiency, thereby reducing their willingness to communicate.

In addition, limited vocabulary and insufficient grammatical knowledge were closely associated with students' lack of confidence (Nugroho et al., 2021). Participants reported difficulty selecting appropriate vocabulary and constructing accurate sentences, even when they knew what they wanted to say. These linguistic difficulties increased their hesitation and fear of making mistakes during speaking. Taken together, the findings indicate that speaking anxiety emerged from the interaction between psychological and linguistic factors, in which fear of negative

evaluation and low self-confidence were reinforced by students' perceived limitations in vocabulary and grammar.

Although most previous studies have identified speaking anxiety as a factor that hinders language learning, one notable finding of this study is that anxiety may also function as a motivating force for improving English-speaking proficiency. Several Participants reported that their feelings of anxiety encouraged them to prepare more through, practice more frequently, and make greater efforts to improve their speaking performance. Rather than avoiding speaking situations, these participants used the pressure they experienced as a reason to work harder on their English. The findings align with Luo and Xiong's (2025) concept of facilitating anxiety, which refers to a form of anxiety that motivates learners to invest greater effort in achieving their learning goals. Furthermore, Luo and Xiong found that both facilitating and debilitating anxiety may contribute to increased intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among EFL learners. This suggests that anxiety does not affect all learners in the same way. While some students may experience anxiety as an obstacle that interferes with their speaking performance, others may transform it into productive learning efforts and motivation for self-improvement.

Thus, the findings of this study suggest that the effect of speaking anxiety depends partly on how learners perceive and respond to anxious situations. In this context, anxiety can function as either a debilitating or facilitating force, depending on whether learners are overwhelmed by the pressure or use it to motivate themselves to prepare, practice, and improve their speaking ability. Overall, the findings indicate that speaking anxiety is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon involving cognitive, affective, social, and physiological aspects. Another important finding is that several participants recognized the importance of continuous speaking practice to improve their fluency and confidence. They reported engaging in self-directed practice, such as rehearsing in front of a mirror and practicing with friends before speaking performances. This finding is supported by (Maulidia Handayani & Rizkiani, 2019), who found that practicing in front of a mirror and with peers can improve learners' speaking fluency, confidence, and overall speaking performance. These findings suggest that although speaking anxiety cannot be eliminated, learners can adopt effective coping strategies that help them manage anxiety and improve their speaking abilities.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that speaking anxiety among EFL students manifests in physical, emotional, and behavioral forms. Physical manifestations are evident through nonverbal behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, tense facial expressions, an unstable voice, and uncontrolled body movements. Emotional manifestations were reflected in fear of negative evaluation, nervousness, and low self-confidence, while behavioral manifestations appear in the form of hesitation and prolonged pauses while speaking. These findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a

multidimensional phenomenon that affects both the psychological state and speaking performance of students.

One of the key contributions of this study is the finding that speaking anxiety does not always act as a barrier to English language learning. Although some students experience anxiety as an obstacle to speaking, others perceive anxiety as a motivating factor that encourage them to prepare more thoroughly and engage in more intensive speaking practice. This finding suggests that the impact of anxiety is greatly influenced by how individuals interpret and respond to the pressure they experience. Furthermore, this study found that speaking practice, whether done independently or with peers, such as practicing in front of a mirror or rehearsing before a presentation can help students manage their anxiety and improve their fluency. Therefore, English instructors and teachers need not only to strive to reduce students' anxiety but also to help them develop strategies that allow them to transform that anxiety into a positive driving force for improving their speaking skills. Speaking anxiety is not merely an obstacle; under certain conditions, it can become a source of motivation and growth for EFL learners.

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