

Exploring Speaking Anxiety Among Eleventh-Grade EFL Students at Sma Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety and the types of anxiety experienced by Grade 11 students at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong in the 2025/2026 academic year. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires from six students. The findings reveal four main factors causing speaking anxiety: limited vocabulary, difficulties in pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation. The study also identifies three types of anxiety: state anxiety, trait anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. These findings highlight that speaking anxiety significantly hinders students' confidence and performance in English learning. The results suggest that teachers should create supportive classroom environments and provide strategies to reduce anxiety, thereby encouraging students to participate more actively in speaking activities.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, EFL Learners, Grade 11 Students*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it allows learners to express ideas, share opinions, and interact in meaningful communication. Unlike other language skills, speaking requires the integration of several components such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension, along with confidence and motivation to speak (Sadiku, 2015). Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is considered the most complex to master since it demands both linguistic competence and psychological readiness. In this sense, students must not only know how to form correct sentences but also be able to deliver them spontaneously in real communicative situations.

English itself has become an international language and is used for academic, professional, and cross-cultural communication worldwide. As Leong and Ahmadi (2017) point out, learning English is crucial because it provides access to global opportunities, and mastery of its four skills can help learners succeed in both education and future careers. In schools, speaking skill plays a central role since it is the most direct indicator of communicative competence. According to Derakhshan et al. (2016), teaching speaking emphasizes improving learners' oral production, while Hwang et al. (2016) highlight that speaking is the second most common language activity after listening, making it a vital part of everyday interaction. Therefore, for Indonesian learners, especially senior high school students, the ability to speak English fluently is not only an academic requirement but also a necessary skill for global participation.

However, speaking in a foreign language often presents serious challenges for learners. Many students lack vocabulary, struggle with pronunciation, and fear making grammatical

mistakes, which hinder their ability to speak effectively (Al Nakhalah, 2016). These problems are compounded by psychological barriers such as shyness, low self-confidence, and the fear of negative evaluation from peers or teachers. Russell (2020) notes that EFL students often experience high levels of anxiety when required to speak in English, whether in front of large groups or even in smaller classroom interactions. Nervousness, as well as the fear of being judged or laughed at, can significantly reduce students' willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Anxiety, as explained by Powell and Enright (2015), is an emotional state characterized by worry, tension, or fear, which may arise even without a specific cause. In the context of language learning, Huang (2018) distinguishes between general anxiety and situation-specific anxiety, both of which affect learners' ability to communicate. Ahmed (2016) further argues that speaking anxiety often stems from fear of failure and peer judgment, which prevents students from using English actively in the classroom. Kampmann et al. (2016) also emphasize that speaking anxiety can disrupt both oral communication and the physiological state of learners, leading to stress, avoidance, and poor performance.

Several studies confirm that anxiety is one of the most significant affective factors that hinder speaking proficiency. Alrabai (2014) describes language anxiety as a combination of self-consciousness, perfectionism, and fear of making mistakes, while Melouah (2013) considers it a major obstacle to developing oral skills since anxious learners tend to make more errors and lose confidence. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety not only reduces students' motivation but also creates a cycle where fear of mistakes leads to silence, which in turn limits opportunities for practice and improvement.

In the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in senior high schools, many students avoid speaking in English due to a combination of limited language competence and affective barriers. Based on classroom observations, students often remain silent during English lessons, hesitate to answer questions, and avoid voluntary participation. Such conditions were also observed in SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong, where Grade 11 students reported difficulties related to vocabulary, pronunciation, and fear of making mistakes. These problems indicate that speaking anxiety plays a significant role in shaping students' performance and attitudes toward learning English.

Considering the importance of speaking skills and the challenges posed by anxiety, this study aims to explore the factors that contribute to students' speaking anxiety and identify the types of anxiety experienced by Grade 11 students at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong. By examining these issues, the study seeks to provide insights into how anxiety affects learners' oral performance and to offer recommendations for teachers to create more supportive classroom environments that encourage active participation in speaking activities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze students' speaking anxiety. As noted by Ormston et al. (2014), qualitative descriptive research is based on the philosophy of positivism and is typically used to examine real-life phenomena in their natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. This method was chosen because it emphasizes words rather than numbers, provides depth rather than breadth, and allows the exploration of participants' opinions, thoughts, and feelings.

The research was conducted with Grade 11 students at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong, Suralaga District, during the 2025 academic year (May–August). Out of 15 students, 10 were purposively selected as research participants. The selection considered their availability and willingness to provide detailed information related to speaking anxiety in English learning.

Data Collection

To obtain comprehensive data, three instruments were employed: observation, interview, and questionnaire.

Observation



Classroom observation was conducted to examine students' speaking performance and anxiety-related behaviors. An observation sheet was prepared containing indicators such as hesitation, nervousness, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of confidence. The researcher also recorded the learning activities (audio and video) to support accuracy and allow detailed analysis.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain in-depth insights into students' feelings and perceptions regarding speaking anxiety. Individual interviews were conducted with selected participants based on the initial observations. The researcher explained the purpose of the interview, asked guiding questions, took notes, and recorded the conversations to ensure data completeness and reliability.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was distributed to collect students' self-reported experiences of speaking anxiety. The questionnaire consisted of checklist items related to possible causes of anxiety (e.g., vocabulary limitations, pronunciation problems, fear of mistakes, fear of negative evaluation). Before distribution, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures to ensure clarity and accurate responses.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the model proposed by Alhojailan (2012), which includes three stages:

Data Reduction

Raw data obtained from observation, interviews, and questionnaires were transcribed, coded, and simplified to focus on relevant findings. Irrelevant or redundant information was excluded.

Data Display

The reduced data were organized and presented in tables and descriptive formats to highlight patterns and themes. As stated by Biggs and Collis (2024), effective data display provides a structured overview that supports drawing valid conclusions.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The researcher drew conclusions based on the patterns emerging from the data. These conclusions were continuously verified against the collected evidence to ensure validity. The process involved constant comparison between initial findings and subsequent data until a final, coherent interpretation was achieved.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The observations in Grade 11 English classes at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong showed clear signs of speaking anxiety among students. For instance, S1 and S3 frequently paused and looked confused while searching for vocabulary in dictionaries, while S7 and S8 often repeated words or switched into Indonesian and the Sasak language. These behaviors indicate a lack of vocabulary, which became a recurring obstacle. Students such as S4 and S6 spoke in unclear tones or very low voices, suggesting pronunciation difficulties, while S2, S5, and S10 displayed nervousness, trembling voices, and fear when called upon, which reflected fear of mistakes and negative evaluation.

These results confirm that linguistic barriers (vocabulary and pronunciation) and psychological barriers (fear of mistakes and peer judgment) interact to create anxiety. This is consistent with Eda Taysi (2015), who identified vocabulary and pronunciation as central issues in speaking anxiety, and Amengual-Pizzaro (2018), who emphasized fear of negative evaluation as a dominant factor in foreign language learning.

Results of Interview

The interviews revealed three main types of anxiety experienced by students, consistent with Huang (2018): state anxiety, trait anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety.

State Anxiety

Several students described panic when speaking English in class. For example, AH shared:

"Saya tidak merasa gugup ketika harus berdiri depan kelas atau ketika guru saya memberikan kesempatan kepada saya untuk melakukan sesuatu seperti praktik berbicara, berdialog atau memperkenalkan diri menggunakan Bahasa Inggris. Saya tahu itu masalah saya dan saya biasanya merasa gugup dan berkeringat di tubuh saya merasa malu dan panik. Karena saya tidak bisa menerjemahkan ke dalam Bahasa Inggris dan kekurangan kosa kata, dan saya kehilangan semua yang ada di pikiran saya dan tidak bisa fokus."

"I sometimes felt nervous when I had to stand in front of the class or when my teacher gave me the opportunity to do something like practice speaking, having a dialogue or introducing myself in English. I knew it's my problem and usually felt nervous and sweat on my body feeling embarrassed and panicked. Because I couldn't translate into English and lacked vocabulary. And I lost everything in my mind and I couldn't stay focused."

This illustrates how spontaneous speaking tasks triggered panic, physical discomfort, and loss of focus—typical of state anxiety. HS also added:

"Saya kalau cemas itu saat disuruh kedepan dan menyampaikan materi, yang sedang dipelajari. Kadang saya juga cemas kalau ada latihan berbicara Bahasa Inggris ke depan kelas, jadi saya kurang percaya diri."

"I'm worried when I'm told to come forward and convey the material being studied. Sometimes I also worried about speaking English in front of the class, so I didn't feel confident."

Trait Anxiety

Other students reported consistent anxiety regardless of the situation. NK explained:

"Saat guru mengajar di kelas terkadang guru menjelaskan terlalu cepat. Jadi, saya harap dia tidak mengajar secepat itu saya juga terkadang malu jika bertanya kepada guru. Dengan teman-teman saya terkadang tertawa ketika saya praktik berbicara bahasa Inggris dan membuat saya jadi merasa malu..."

"When the teacher taught in the classroom, sometimes the teacher explained too quickly. So, I hoped he didn't teach that fast. I was also sometimes embarrassed to ask the teacher. And also my friends sometimes laughed when I practiced speaking English and it made me feel embarrassed..."

This reflects trait anxiety, as NK felt anxious not only in specific activities but generally throughout English learning. The laughter from peers intensified her anxiety, supporting Alrabai's (2014) claim that self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation play a major role.

Situation-Specific Anxiety

Some students felt anxious only in particular contexts, especially during exams or oral presentations. OM admitted:

"Saya cemas itu saat waktu-waktu tertentu. Saat ujian dan saat harus mengerjakan secara mandiri tentang menjelaskan suatu hal atau pun orang lain. Sehingga saya tidak begitu percaya diri untuk menjawab semua arahan dari guru..."

"I worried about it at certain times. During exams and when I had to work independently about explaining something or someone else. So I was not so confident to answer all the directions from the teacher..."

This indicates situation-specific anxiety, where students became nervous primarily during testing situations or performance tasks.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Grade 11 students at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong experienced four main causes of speaking anxiety: lack of vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation. These factors manifested across the three types of anxiety (state, trait, and situation-specific), as explained by Huang (2018).

The students' experiences resonate with prior studies. For example, Melouah (2013) noted that anxiety prevents students from fully representing themselves in a foreign language, while Al Nakhalah (2016) highlighted fear of peer judgment as a trigger for anxiety. The present findings extend these observations by showing how students in this context not only feared mistakes but also actively avoided participation, as expressed by DR:

"Saya takut kalau disuruh ke depan kelas... takut nanti salah dan ditertawakan teman, saya bisa malu nanti. Jadi saya lebih memilih diam saja di kelas..."

"I was afraid if I was asked to come to the front of the class... afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by my classmates, so I preferred to stay silent in class..."

This illustrates how fear of negative evaluation directly leads to silence and avoidance, confirming Horwitz's (2010) idea that anxiety can paralyze participation in EFL classrooms.

Overall, the most dominant anxiety observed was state anxiety, where students panicked during speaking tasks. However, evidence of trait anxiety and situation-specific anxiety indicates that the problem is multi-layered. The persistence of anxiety suggests the need for pedagogical strategies that address both linguistic competence (e.g., vocabulary enrichment and pronunciation practice) and affective factors (e.g., building confidence, creating supportive classroom environments).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that students in Grade 11 at SMA Tahfiz Al-Batthawi NWDI Kerongkong continue to experience significant anxiety in speaking English. Four primary factors were identified: (1) limited vocabulary, which restricts students from forming sentences fluently; (2) difficulties in pronunciation, which hinder clear expression of ideas; (3) fear of making mistakes, which discourages students from speaking in class; and (4) fear of negative evaluation, particularly when speaking in front of teachers or peers. These results are consistent with prior research (e.g., Al Nakhalah, 2016; Amengual-Pizarro, 2018) and confirm that both linguistic limitations and psychological pressures contribute to speaking anxiety.

In line with Huang's (2018) framework, three types of anxiety were evident: state anxiety, where students panicked or felt stressed during speaking tasks; trait anxiety, where nervousness persisted even beyond specific classroom events; and situation-specific anxiety, which was most pronounced during speaking tests or oral presentations. The presence of all three types suggests that speaking anxiety among students is complex and multi-dimensional, not simply a temporary classroom issue.

These findings carry important implications for English language teaching. First, they highlight the need for greater emphasis on vocabulary development and pronunciation practice, which can build linguistic competence and reduce hesitation. Second, teachers should adopt supportive classroom strategies such as pair work, small group speaking tasks, and positive reinforcement to reduce fear of mistakes and negative evaluation. Third, providing gradual exposure to public speaking tasks and giving students adequate preparation time may help lower situation-specific anxiety during assessments.

Finally, the study recommends that teachers pay closer attention to the emotional aspects of language learning. Addressing speaking anxiety is not only about improving language ability but also about creating a low-anxiety classroom environment where students feel safe to practice. This requires integrating both cognitive and affective approaches to teaching speaking, ensuring that students develop confidence alongside competence. Future research could explore intervention strategies, such as anxiety-reduction techniques or peer mentoring, to further support students in overcoming their speaking anxiety.

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