

Exploring the Students Experiences with Speaking Anxiety at Tadulako University

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety is a common challenge that affects students' confidence, participation, and oral performance in English language learning. Although previous studies have identified the causes and levels of speaking anxiety, limited attention has been given to students lived experiences and how they cope with anxiety in authentic classroom contexts. Understanding these lived experiences is essential because it provides deeper insights into the emotional and contextual factors that influence students' willingness to communicate and enables educators to develop more responsive pedagogical practices. This study aimed to explore English Education students lived experiences of speaking anxiety at Tadulako University using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three fourth-semester students and analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method. Four major themes emerged: sources of speaking anxiety, emotional responses during speaking activities, coping strategies, and the role of classroom support. The findings revealed that speaking anxiety was influenced by fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, classroom atmosphere, classmates' reactions, and lecturer expectations. Students managed their anxiety through positive thinking, careful preparation, repeated practice, and AI voice chat applications, highlighting the interaction between psychological and instructional factors in shaping speaking experiences.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, Phenomenology, English Education Students, Coping Strategies, Classroom Experiences*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English because it allows students to communicate ideas, express opinions, and participate in classroom interaction. For university students, speaking is not only essential for classroom interaction but also for academic presentations, group discussions, and future professional communication. Therefore, the ability to speak confidently in English has become an important aspect of language learning. In English language classrooms, students are often expected to present ideas, answer questions, and engage in discussions using English. The ability to communicate effectively through speaking is essential because it reflects learners' language proficiency and enables them to use English meaningfully in both academic and real-life situations (Brown & Lee, 2025). However, speaking in front of others is not always a comfortable experience. Many students experience anxiety when they are required to speak, which can reduce their confidence and limit their willingness to participate in classroom activities. As a result, speaking anxiety has become an important issue in English language learning because it influences not only students' speaking performance but also their overall learning experience.

Despite the importance of speaking, many students experience feelings of nervousness and fear when they are required to communicate in English. These emotional responses are commonly referred to as speaking anxiety and often prevent learners from expressing their ideas confidently, even when they possess adequate language knowledge. According to

Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is closely related to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, all of which may affect students during speaking activities. Speaking anxiety has been widely recognized as one of the major affective factors influencing language learning. Similarly, MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) argue that anxiety interferes with learners' cognitive processing, making it more difficult for them to concentrate, retrieve vocabulary, and express ideas effectively. More recently, Demir & Kan (2025) also emphasized that speaking anxiety continues to affect learners' confidence and communication performance, indicating that it remains an important issue in language education.

Research on speaking anxiety has produced substantial evidence regarding the factors that contribute to students' anxiety during English-speaking activities. Internal factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited vocabulary have frequently been reported as major sources of anxiety, while classroom atmosphere, lecturer feedback, classmates' reactions, and speaking tasks also affect students' willingness to communicate (Young, 1991; Liu & Jackson, 2008). More recent studies likewise indicate that speaking anxiety remains a common challenge among university students and continues to influence their classroom participation and speaking performance (Abrar et al., 2022 ; Cheng et al., 2024). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by both individual and contextual factors.

Recent research has continued to demonstrate that speaking anxiety remains one of the most persistent barriers to successful oral communication among EFL learners. Studies have shown that students commonly experience anxiety due to fear of making grammatical and pronunciation errors, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and concerns about negative evaluation from teachers and peers, all of which reduce their willingness to communicate in English (Abrar et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2024). Furthermore, classroom-related factors, including teacher feedback, instructional practices, task difficulty, and the overall learning environment, have been found to significantly influence students' levels of speaking anxiety and classroom participation (Al-Sawalha & Chowdhury, 2024; Said & Weda, 2023). Recent studies have also highlighted the growing role of digital technologies, such as AI-assisted speaking applications and virtual communication platforms, in helping learners manage anxiety by providing opportunities for repeated practice in low-pressure environments (Kohnke et al., 2023). Despite these advances, most existing studies have relied on quantitative approaches that measure anxiety levels or examine causal relationships, while relatively few have explored students lived experiences and personal interpretations of speaking anxiety through qualitative phenomenological inquiry. This gap underscores the need to understand how students experience, interpret, and cope with speaking anxiety within authentic English classroom contexts.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into speaking anxiety, most of them have primarily focused on identifying its causes, measuring anxiety levels, or examining its relationship with language performance through quantitative approaches. As a result, relatively little attention has been given to understanding how students personally experience speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. Exploring these lived experiences is important because speaking anxiety is shaped not only by psychological factors but also by classroom interactions, emotions, and individual perceptions of learning situations. Therefore, a deeper exploration of students lived experiences is needed to better understand how speaking anxiety develops and how students cope with it in their everyday learning process.

Tadulako University provides an appropriate context for investigating students lived experiences of speaking anxiety because its English Education Study Program emphasizes the development of communicative competence while students continue to encounter challenges in oral English performance. As prospective English teachers, students are expected to participate actively in presentations, discussions, and various classroom interactions that require frequent spoken communication, making speaking competence a central component of their academic training. Despite these expectations, many students still experience

psychological and linguistic barriers that hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. Common challenges include fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, low self-confidence, and anxiety when expressing ideas in front of others. These difficulties often reduce students' willingness to participate in classroom discussions and negatively affect their speaking performance, even after repeated exposure to speaking activities throughout their coursework. Such conditions indicate that speaking anxiety remains a persistent issue among English Education students and deserves further investigation. Therefore, exploring students lived experiences at Tadulako University through a phenomenological perspective provides valuable insights into how speaking anxiety is experienced, interpreted, and managed. These insights are expected to contribute to the development of more responsive pedagogical practices that foster students' confidence, reduce speaking anxiety, and enhance their oral communication skills.

Building on this research gap, the present study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of English Education students with speaking anxiety during English classroom activities at Tadulako University. Specifically, this study investigated the factors that influenced students' speaking anxiety, the effects they experienced during classroom speaking activities, and the strategies they used to cope with it. By focusing on students' own perspectives, the study provides a deeper understanding of how speaking anxiety develops and how students attempt to manage it in their daily learning experiences. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on speaking anxiety and offer practical insights for lecturers in creating supportive classroom environments that encourage students to participate more confidently in English-speaking activities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of English Education students who experienced speaking anxiety during English classroom activities at Tadulako University. A phenomenological approach was selected because it enables researchers to investigate how individuals perceive, interpret, and construct meaning from a shared phenomenon based on their personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). Rather than measuring the level of speaking anxiety, this approach seeks to uncover the essence of students' experiences, including the emotional, psychological, and contextual factors that shape their anxiety as well as the strategies they employ to cope with it. By focusing on participants' subjective perspectives, the study provides a deeper understanding of speaking anxiety as it is experienced in authentic classroom settings.

The participants consisted of three fourth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University who had experienced speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. They were selected through snowball sampling, beginning with one student who was identified by the lecturer as having frequently experienced anxiety during classroom speaking activities and who met the study's inclusion criteria. After completing the first interview, the participant was asked to recommend classmates with similar experiences. The researcher then contacted the recommended students and selected those who fulfilled the inclusion criteria: (1) being a fourth-semester English Education student, (2) having experienced speaking anxiety during English classroom activities, (3) being willing to participate voluntarily, and (4) being able to describe their experiences in depth. The recruitment process continued until three information-rich participants were obtained, and no substantially new insights emerged from subsequent recommendations. This number is consistent with phenomenological research, which prioritizes rich, detailed descriptions of lived experiences over large sample sizes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before data collection, all participants received a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations and provided written informed consent. To protect their privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was an interview guide designed for in-depth interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide consisted of six open-ended questions that focused on students' experiences with speaking anxiety, the factors contributing to their anxiety, the influence of the classroom environment, the effects of anxiety during speaking activities, and the strategies they used to cope with it. The questions were prepared to ensure that all participants discussed the same key topics while allowing them to describe their experiences in their own words. In addition, probing questions were used when necessary to obtain more detailed information and clarify the participants' responses.

Procedures

Data collection process began after the informants agreed to participate in the study and provided their informed consent. Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted using the interview guide as the primary instrument to explore the informants' experiences with speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was audio-recorded with the informants' permission to ensure the accuracy of the data. Following the interviews, all recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the informants' responses before proceeding to the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method (Morrow et al., 2015) was employed to analyze the data because it provides a systematic process for understanding the meaning of lived experiences. Analysis began with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the informants' experiences with speaking anxiety. Afterward, significant statements were identified, and meanings were formulated before being organized into categories and broader themes. These themes were then integrated into a comprehensive description that captured the essence of the phenomenon. To maintain the credibility of the analysis, the emerging themes were continuously compared with the original data to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the informants' accounts. Finally, the findings were refined to preserve the meaning of the informants' experiences while presenting a clear description of the factors influencing speaking anxiety, its effects, and the strategies used to cope with it.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore students' experiences of speaking anxiety during English classroom activities at Tadulako University. The findings were obtained through in-depth interviews with three participants from the English Education Study Program who had experienced speaking anxiety while participating in classroom speaking activities. During the interviews, the participants shared their feelings, thoughts, classroom experiences, and the strategies they used to deal with anxiety when speaking English in front of classmates and lecturers. Although each participant had different experiences, several similar patterns appeared throughout the interviews, especially related to fear of making mistakes, nervousness during speaking activities, lack of confidence, classroom pressure, and efforts to overcome anxiety.

The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method. The researcher read all interview transcripts repeatedly in order to understand the participants' experiences deeply and identify important statements related to speaking anxiety. After that, the researcher interpreted the meanings behind the participants' experiences and grouped similar meanings into themes. Through this analysis process, two major themes emerged from the participants' experiences, namely: (1) Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Anxiety and (2) Strategies Used to Cope with Speaking Anxiety.

Table 1 Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Anxiety

No.	Questions	Responses
1.	What internal factors make you feel anxious when speaking English in class?	The informants reported that speaking anxiety was mainly caused by fear of making grammatical mistakes, concern about being negatively judged by others, overthinking about speaking performance, and limited vocabulary that made it difficult to express ideas confidently.
2.	How does the classroom environment, such as lecturer feedback, classmates' reactions, or speaking tasks, influence your speaking anxiety?	The informants explained that supportive classroom environments helped them feel more comfortable speaking English, while negative reactions from classmates and high expectations from lecturers increased their anxiety and pressure during speaking activities.
3.	When speaking anxiety occurs, what emotional or physical reactions do you experience?	The informants experienced various emotional and physical reactions, including nervousness, trembling, stuttering, and difficulty concentrating when speaking English in front of others.
4.	What changes do you notice in your classroom behavior when you experience speaking anxiety?	The informants tended to become quieter, avoid eye contact, reduce participation in classroom discussions, and remain silent to avoid being asked to speak.

Theme Description

After reading the interview transcripts repeatedly, the researcher identified several significant statements related to students' experiences of speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. The informants commonly described speaking anxiety as a feeling of nervousness, pressure, fear, and self-doubt that appeared before and during speaking activities. Based on similarities in the informants' experiences, the meanings from the interview data were grouped into internal factors, external factors, and emotional, physical, and behavioral reactions. Through this analysis process, the researcher found that speaking anxiety was not caused by only one factor but developed from the interaction between personal insecurities and classroom situations experienced by the informants.

Table 2 Internal Factors

Category	Indicators	Description
Internal Factors	Fear of making mistakes	Concerns about making errors in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary during speaking activities.
Internal Factors	Fear of negative evaluation	Worries about being judged negatively by classmates and lecturers.
Internal Factors	Overthinking about speaking performance	Excessive concern about speaking accurately and avoiding mistakes.
Internal Factors	Lack of confidence	Doubts about personal speaking ability when using English.
Internal Factors	Limited vocabulary	Difficulty finding appropriate words to express ideas clearly.

The interview data indicated that speaking anxiety was influenced by several internal factors. Fear of making mistakes emerged as one of the strongest sources of anxiety during speaking activities. The informants explained that they often worried about grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary before speaking English in front of classmates and lecturers. Because of these concerns, speaking activities were frequently perceived as stressful situations.

One informant explained that overthinking about grammar and pronunciation made it difficult to speak naturally in class. Another informant reported feeling nervous because of concerns about making mistakes and receiving negative judgments from classmates. Rather than focusing on expressing their ideas, the informants tended to concentrate on avoiding errors. These concerns increased feelings of pressure and reduced their confidence during

speaking activities. As a result, they often experienced anxiety even before speaking activities began and became hesitant to participate in classroom discussions.

Limited vocabulary was another factor that influenced the informants' confidence during speaking activities. One informant explained that having ideas to express did not always mean being able to communicate them effectively in English. Difficulties in finding appropriate words often created hesitation and nervousness during classroom interaction. This situation reduced the informants' confidence and made them feel less comfortable participating in discussions.

The analysis suggested that internal factors were closely connected to the informants' personal perceptions of their speaking ability. Many of them placed high expectations on themselves and focused more on their weaknesses than on communicating their ideas. These experiences indicate that speaking anxiety was influenced not only by language proficiency but also by self-perception and fear of negative evaluation.

These findings are closely related to the concept of fear of negative evaluation proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope. This concept explains that students may experience anxiety because they worry about making mistakes and being judged negatively during language learning activities. The findings are also supported by MacIntyre and Gardner, who explained that language anxiety can interfere with students' confidence, concentration, and speaking performance during classroom interaction.

Table 3 External Factors

Category	Indicators	Description
External Factors	Classmate' reactions	Positive responses increased confidence, while negative reactions increased anxiety.
External Factors	Lecturer expectations	Pressure to meet lecturers' expectations during speaking activities.
External Factors	Classroom atmosphere	Supportive classroom environments helped reduce anxiety.
External Factors	Speaking tasks	Spontaneous speaking tasks increased feelings of nervousness and pressure.

Classroom situations played an important role in shaping the informants' speaking experiences. Classmates' reactions, lecturer expectations, classroom atmosphere, and the nature of speaking tasks affected how comfortable they felt when speaking English. The informants commonly described that supportive classroom environments helped them feel more confident, while negative experiences increased feelings of nervousness and pressure. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety was shaped not only by personal factors but also by the social environment in the classroom.

Several informants explained that the reactions they received from classmates and lecturers influenced their confidence during speaking activities. Feeling supported made the informants less afraid of making mistakes and more willing to express ideas in English. In contrast, another informant reported that negative reactions, such as laughter from classmates, caused embarrassment and reduced the willingness to participate in classroom discussions. These experiences indicate that students are highly sensitive to the responses they receive from others during speaking activities.

Another factor that increased speaking anxiety was the pressure created by lecturer expectations and spontaneous speaking tasks. One informant explained that high expectations from lecturers increased the fear of making mistakes and created pressure to perform well. Several informants also reported that speaking tasks requiring spontaneous responses made them feel unprepared and more anxious. As a result, they often experienced greater difficulty expressing their ideas clearly during classroom interaction.

The informants' experiences indicate that classroom atmosphere can either reduce or intensify speaking anxiety. Positive responses and supportive interactions helped them feel more relaxed and confident, whereas negative reactions increased feelings of embarrassment

and anxiety. The informants' experiences demonstrate that supportive classroom situations can reduce the pressure associated with speaking English. Therefore, creating a positive and non-judgmental learning environment may encourage students to participate more actively in speaking activities.

These experiences are consistent with Young's theory, which highlights the influence of classroom conditions on language anxiety. According to this theory, supportive and non-judgmental learning environments help students feel more comfortable and confident when participating in speaking activities. The experiences shared by the informants reflect the important role of social interaction in shaping students' emotional responses during language learning. This indicates that classroom conditions can either reduce or intensify speaking anxiety.

Table 4 Emotional, Physical, and Behavioural Reactions

Category	Indicators	Description
Emotional Reactions	Nervousness	Feelings of worry and tension before and during speaking activities.
Emotional Reactions	Fear and embarrassment	Concerns about making mistakes and receiving negative responses from others.
Emotional Reactions	Self-doubt	Lack of confidence in speaking ability.
Physical Reactions	Trembling and shaking hands	Physical symptoms experienced during speaking activities.
Physical Reactions	Stuttering	Difficulty speaking fluently because of anxiety.
Physical Reactions	Difficulty concentrating	Losing focus or experiencing a blank mind while speaking.
Behavioral Reactions	Avoiding eye contact	Attempts to avoid being asked to speak.
Behavioral Reactions	Remaining silent	Choosing not to participate in classroom discussions.
Behavioral Reactions	Reducing participation	Becoming less active during speaking activities.

The analysis further indicated that speaking anxiety affected the informants emotionally, physically, and behaviorally during classroom speaking activities. Emotionally, the informants described feelings of nervousness, fear, embarrassment, panic, and self-doubt before and during speaking tasks. Several informants explained that anxiety often appeared even before they were asked to speak because they anticipated possible mistakes and negative reactions from others. These experiences show that speaking anxiety influenced the informants' emotional well-being throughout the learning process.

In addition to emotional reactions, the informants experienced various physical symptoms while speaking English in front of the class. One informant reported experiencing trembling and shaking hands during speaking activities. Another informant explained that anxiety sometimes caused the mind to go blank despite having prepared answers in advance. An additional informant described feelings of hesitation and stuttering when trying to express ideas in English. These physical reactions often made it more difficult for the informants to communicate effectively during classroom interaction.

The interview data also revealed that speaking anxiety influenced the informants' classroom behavior. Several informants admitted becoming quieter during discussions because they were afraid of making mistakes. Some avoided eye contact with lecturers to reduce the possibility of being asked to speak, while others preferred to remain silent even when they understood the lesson material. These behavioral changes gradually reduced their participation and confidence during classroom interaction.

The analysis suggested that speaking anxiety influenced not only how the informants felt but also how they behaved and performed during speaking activities. Emotional pressure often led to physical discomfort and avoidance behaviors, which limited their opportunities

to practice speaking English. As a result, speaking anxiety became a challenge that affected both language development and classroom participation. These experiences demonstrate that the impact of speaking anxiety extends beyond communication difficulties and influences students' overall learning experiences.

These experiences are related to MacIntyre and Gardner's Language Anxiety Theory, which explains that language anxiety can interfere with students' concentration, speaking performance, and emotional condition during classroom interaction. The findings are also closely connected to the concept of communication apprehension proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, which describes feelings of fear, nervousness, and physical tension when communicating in a foreign language. The experiences shared by the informants support the idea that speaking anxiety affects multiple aspects of students' learning experiences. Therefore, addressing emotional and behavioral responses is important for helping students participate more confidently in speaking activities.

Essence of the Theme

Overall, the informants experienced speaking anxiety as a challenging part of learning English in the classroom. Speaking was not only about using English, but also about dealing with fear, pressure, and concerns about making mistakes in front of others. The informants often worried about how their classmates and lecturers would react to their performance. These concerns gradually affected their confidence and willingness to participate in speaking activities.

The informants' experiences also showed that speaking anxiety developed from the interaction between personal and classroom-related factors. Internal factors such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes combined with external factors such as classroom atmosphere and others' reactions. As a result, speaking anxiety influenced not only how informants spoke English but also how they felt and behaved during classroom interaction. Therefore, speaking anxiety was experienced as both a linguistic and emotional challenge throughout the learning process.

Table 5 Strategies Used to Cope with Speaking Anxiety

No.	Questions	Responses
1.	What actions or strategies do you usually use to cope with your speaking anxiety during speaking activities?	The informants used several strategies to cope with speaking anxiety. These included thinking positively before speaking, preparing vocabulary and practicing responses before class, and using AI voice chat applications to practice speaking in a more comfortable environment.
2.	Why do you think those strategies help you reduce speaking anxiety?	The informants believed that these strategies helped them feel calmer, more prepared, and more confident during speaking activities. Positive thinking reduced fear of making mistakes, preparation helped them know what to say, and AI-based practice allowed them to practice repeatedly without feeling judged by others.

Theme Description

After reading the interview transcripts repeatedly, the researcher identified several significant statements related to the strategies used by students to cope with speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. The informants commonly explained that they tried to find ways to reduce nervousness and become more comfortable while speaking English in front of classmates and lecturers. Based on similarities in the informants' experiences, the researcher found that positive thinking, preparation before speaking, and practicing through AI voice chat applications became the main strategies used by informants to manage speaking anxiety.

During the interviews, several informants explained that positive self-talk helped them feel calmer before speaking activities started. They tried to remind themselves that making mistakes was a normal part of learning English and encouraged themselves to focus on

communicating their ideas rather than avoiding errors. This mindset helped reduce excessive fear and overthinking before speaking in front of the class. By thinking more positively about their performance, they became more willing to participate in classroom discussions. As a result, speaking activities felt less stressful and more manageable for them.

Preparation before speaking activities emerged as an important strategy for reducing anxiety. One informant explained that preparing vocabulary and practicing possible responses before class helped them feel more ready during speaking activities. Several informants also described that preparation gave them a clearer idea of what they wanted to say and how they could express their ideas effectively. This reduced uncertainty and helped them feel more confident during classroom interaction. As a result, preparation became an effective way to support their participation in speaking activities.

Besides mental preparation, the findings showed that informants also used technology-based practice to improve confidence while speaking English. Informant 3 explained that practicing English using AI voice chat applications helped create a more comfortable and non-judgmental learning environment. The participant admitted feeling more relaxed when practicing with AI because there was no fear of being laughed at or judged for making mistakes. During the interviews, the participant described that repeated speaking practice through AI applications gradually reduced embarrassment and helped improve speaking confidence before participating in classroom activities.

Technology also became a useful tool for some informants in improving their speaking ability. Practicing with AI voice chat applications allowed them to use English in a more relaxed environment without worrying about being judged by other people. This experience gave them more opportunities to practice speaking and experiment with new vocabulary or expressions. Because the practice could be repeated as often as needed, they felt more comfortable developing their speaking skills. Over time, regular practice helped them become more familiar with using English in conversations. As a result, they felt more confident when participating in classroom speaking activities.

Several informants also explained that these coping strategies helped them become emotionally more comfortable during English speaking activities. Although nervousness still appeared in certain situations, the informants felt more prepared and more willing to participate during classroom discussions after regularly using these strategies. Some participants admitted that they slowly became braver to speak because they realized that mistakes were part of the learning process. These experiences showed that reducing anxiety was not an instant process, but developed gradually through repeated practice, positive thinking, and supportive learning experiences.

Essence of the Theme

Overall, the experiences shared by the informants showed that coping with speaking anxiety required active effort and personal commitment. Although feelings of nervousness did not disappear completely, the informants did not allow these feelings to prevent them from participating in speaking activities. Instead, they looked for practical ways to become more comfortable when using English. Through their own efforts, they gradually learned how to handle situations that previously made them feel anxious. These experiences demonstrate that managing speaking anxiety is a process that develops over time rather than an immediate result.

The experiences of the informants also suggest that confidence grows through repeated practice and positive learning experiences. As they became more familiar with speaking situations, they felt more capable of expressing their ideas in English. Their efforts helped them focus less on mistakes and more on communicating effectively with others. In addition, supportive practice opportunities encouraged them to continue improving their speaking ability. Therefore, coping with speaking anxiety can be understood as a gradual journey of developing confidence, gaining experience, and becoming more comfortable with using English in different situations.

Discussion

Speaking anxiety emerged as a multidimensional experience shaped by the interaction of personal beliefs, classroom conditions, emotional responses, and the strategies students used to cope with challenging speaking situations. Rather than resulting from a single source, participants described anxiety as a combination of experiences that influenced how they viewed their speaking ability and participated in classroom activities. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety should not be understood solely as a linguistic difficulty but as a personal experience constructed through continuous interaction with the learning environment. Similar perspectives have been reported in recent studies, which describe speaking anxiety as a dynamic phenomenon influenced by both individual and contextual factors (Cheng et al., 2024; Fauzi & Asi, 2023; Norahmi et al., 2025). This overall understanding provides a basis for explaining how different aspects of students' classroom experiences contributed to the development of speaking anxiety.

Rather than reflecting limited English proficiency, speaking anxiety in the present study appeared to be closely associated with how participants interpreted their own communicative ability. Feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt often emerged before they had the opportunity to speak, suggesting that anxiety developed from negative self-evaluation rather than from the speaking task itself. Negative self-evaluation appeared to shape participants' anxiety long before they began speaking, an observation that aligns with Teimouri et al. (2019), who linked learners' self-perceptions to language anxiety. Confidence also seemed to influence how participants approached speaking tasks, echoing the view of Akkuş (2021) that confidence affects students' willingness to communicate. While these studies explain the relationship between self-evaluation and speaking anxiety, the present findings further show that such perceptions were continuously reconstructed through classroom experiences, allowing anxiety to develop as part of students lived experiences rather than as a fixed psychological characteristic.

Classroom experiences did not automatically create speaking anxiety. Instead, they intensified feelings that had already developed within the participants, particularly when speaking situations were interpreted as opportunities for negative evaluation. This suggests that the influence of the classroom depended less on the situation itself than on how students made sense of that situation during interaction. Such an interpretation is compatible with studies that recognized classroom interaction as an important source of speaking anxiety (Maher & King, 2022; Abin & Syam, 2019). However, while earlier research mainly explains classroom environment as an external factor, the present study indicates that its influence emerged only after participants attached personal meaning to those experiences. This finding broadens current understanding by showing that classroom conditions and personal interpretation cannot be separated when explaining speaking anxiety from a phenomenological perspective.

Another important insight from the present study is that the influence of speaking anxiety did not end when a speaking activity was completed. Instead, informants continued to carry the emotional impact of earlier experiences into subsequent classroom interactions, which gradually affected their confidence and willingness to participate. This suggests that speaking anxiety became part of an ongoing learning experience rather than a temporary classroom reaction. As these experiences accumulated, participants increasingly approached new speaking opportunities with hesitation because they anticipated outcomes similar to those they had experienced before. Such a continuing influence on classroom participation has also been identified among Indonesian EFL learners (Mamang et al., 2023). Unlike previous studies that primarily describe emotional reactions as consequences of speaking anxiety, the present findings indicate that these emotions continued to shape how students interpreted later classroom experiences, revealing speaking anxiety as a dynamic process that evolved over time.

One of the central experiences emerging from this study was that the informants perceived internal factors as the main source of their speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. Rather than being determined solely by their actual language

competence, their anxiety was largely shaped by the way they evaluated and interpreted their own ability to communicate in English. This interpretation reflects Teimouri et al. (2019) explained that negative self-evaluation plays a significant role in the development of foreign language anxiety. Similarly, Akkuş (2021) suggested that students' confidence in their own language ability strongly influences their willingness to participate in speaking activities. In the present study, these experiences indicate that speaking anxiety became closely connected to the informants' personal perceptions, making self-judgment an important part of their lived classroom experiences.

Consistent with previous research, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and negative self-perceptions were identified as important internal factors contributing to speaking anxiety among EFL learners (Abrar et al., 2022; Karatas et al., 2016; Nirmala, 2024). Similar patterns were observed in the present study, where informants perceived these internal factors as the primary source of anxiety during classroom speaking activities. However, rather than simply identifying these factors as causes of speaking anxiety, this study demonstrates how students continuously interpreted and experienced them throughout classroom interactions. Such experiences suggest that speaking anxiety developed through the personal meanings students attached to their own speaking ability instead of being influenced solely by the presence of internal factors. This perspective extends previous research by offering a deeper understanding of how internal factors shape students lived experiences in English classroom communication.

Despite these challenges, the informants actively developed strategies to manage their speaking anxiety. Positive thinking, preparation before speaking, and practicing through AI voice chat applications helped them become more confident and better prepared for speaking activities (Abrar et al., 2022). These strategies reduced uncertainty and allowed the informants to practice English in a more comfortable environment. The findings suggest that managing speaking anxiety requires continuous effort and regular practice rather than relying solely on language proficiency.

The use of AI voice chat applications provided additional opportunities for independent speaking practice without fear of negative judgment. This finding supports previous studies on technology-assisted language learning, which highlight the benefits of technology in promoting learners' confidence and autonomy. The findings of this study indicate that supportive learning environments and accessible practice opportunities can help students participate more actively in speaking activities (Young, 1991; Liu & Jackson, 2008). Therefore, reducing speaking anxiety requires collaboration between students, lecturers, and the learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored students lived experiences of speaking anxiety during English classroom activities at Tadulako University. The findings revealed that speaking anxiety was influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and limited vocabulary, whereas external factors involved classmates' reactions, lecturer expectations, and the overall classroom atmosphere. These interconnected factors shaped students' emotional experiences and reduced their willingness to participate actively in speaking activities. To manage their anxiety, participants adopted several coping strategies, including positive thinking, careful preparation before speaking, repeated practice, and the use of AI voice chat applications. Over time, these strategies enhanced their confidence and encouraged more active classroom participation. The findings suggest that speaking anxiety is a dynamic yet manageable phenomenon that can be reduced through supportive learning environments and continuous speaking practice. Therefore, English lecturers should create low-anxiety classrooms by providing constructive feedback, encouraging collaborative speaking activities, and treating mistakes as natural parts of learning. Because this study involved a small sample from a single university, future.

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