

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS ANXIETY IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

(A Descriptive Study to the Eighth-Grade Students of SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak in the Academic Year of 2022/2023)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tingkat dan aspek kecemasan yang dialami siswa kelas delapan di SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak saat berbicara bahasa Inggris selama tahun ajaran 2022/2023 Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tingkat kecemasan siswa tanpa mengubah variabel apa pun. Data dikumpulkan dari 28 siswa menggunakan observasi dan kuesioner yang telah divalidasi. Kuesioner ini berfokus pada tiga hal utama Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa menunjukkan tingkat kecemasan yang tinggi saat berbicara bahasa Inggris. Ketakutan berkomunikasi muncul sebagai faktor paling dominan, diikuti oleh Rintangan psikologis ini secara signifikan memengaruhi kesediaan dan kemampuan siswa untuk terlibat dalam kegiatan bahasa Inggris lisan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara bahasa Inggris merupakan tantangan besar yang harus diatasi melalui strategi pengajaran yang dirancang untuk mengurangi kecemasan, meningkatkan kepercayaan diri siswa, dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar bahasa yang mendukung dan mendorong.

Kata kunci: Ketakutan akan evaluasi negative Siswa EFL, Kecemasan berbicara, Kecemasan ujian Ketakutan berkomunikasi

Abstract

This research explores the extent and aspects of anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak when speaking English during the 2022/2023 academic year. Employing a descriptive approach, the study aimed to describe students' anxiety levels without altering any variables. Data were gathered from 28 students using both observation and a validated questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on three key Findings indicated that the majority of students exhibited high levels anxiety when speaking English. Communication apprehension emerged as the most dominant factor, followed by then These psychological obstacles significantly affect students' willingness and capacity to engage in spoken English activities. The study concludes that English speaking anxiety presents a substantial challenge that should be addressed through teaching strategies designed to reduce anxiety, boost students' confidence, and create a supportive and encouraging language learning environment.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, Communication apprehension, Test anxiety, Fear of negative evaluation, EFL students

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the skill of conveying thoughts, ideas, and emotions through the use of sounds and words. Its primary function is communication, which involves the exchange of information between individuals to achieve mutual understanding. For effective communication, speakers must have a clear grasp of what they intend to express. Through speaking, students are able to share opinions, offer suggestions, or ask questions verbally. This skill is crucial in learning a second or foreign language.

Speaking also provides students with the opportunity to articulate their knowledge and emotions. To be understood by others, learners must express their ideas clearly, fluently, and accurately. Supporting this perspective, Noonan (2004) states that acquiring speaking skills is essential in of language acquisition heavily depends on one's communicative ability. Similarly, Ur (2000) emphasizes among because language learners are often judged based on their speaking ability.

In school settings, speaking is a fundamental especially in learning English. The core objective of English instruction is to help students communicate effectively and correctly (Davis & Pearce, 2000). However, many language learners lack the proficiency required to speak fluently and accurately. Since speaking is essential for language development, it is important to encourage students to practice it regularly particularly in classroom settings. Developing speaking proficiency strengthens overall communication skills and supports their broader English language competence.

Despite its importance, speaking is widely regarded as both difficult and intimidating. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most challenging for English language learners. As noted by Bueno, Madrid, and McLaren (2006) in Ahmadi (2017), numerous students, despite years of English instruction, still struggle to communicate effectively in spoken English. According to the 2013 curriculum, English language education aims to cultivate students' interpersonal, transactional, and functional communication abilities across both oral and written forms. Students are expected to discuss various topics—such as their personal lives, families, surroundings, and daily routines—in both literal and figurative contexts. However, many learners continue to face significant difficulties in speaking English, primarily due to limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, which lowers their self-confidence.

This form of anxiety, often referred to as debilitating anxiety, is characterized by feelings of fear, nervousness, or hesitation when speaking. Many students feel anxious when asked to share their thoughts, respond to questions, or speak in front of classmates. Even after extensive practice, they may struggle to produce accurate pronunciation, intonation, or meaning, often forgetting vocabulary due to anxiety. As Brown (2000) describes, anxiety encompasses feelings of worry, doubt, frustration, and nervous anticipation. In this study, anxiety is seen as a key factor that inhibits learners' speaking ability. Students' fear of making mistakes causes hesitation and negatively impacts their classroom communication.

A prior study by Mustahim (2013) found that speaking anxiety among students during classroom presentations—especially in informal or conversational contexts—significantly affected their performance. This research identified several contributing factors, including fear of speaking in public, being laughed at, low self-confidence, insufficient preparation, and unclear articulation. Alrabai (2015) also examined how anxiety within the language learning context can influence learners' overall academic outcomes. His research aimed to deepen the understanding of factors impacting language achievement. Likewise, Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2020) explored the complexities of English language anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Their study highlighted the unique challenges faced by EFL learners and contributed to a broader understanding of language-related anxiety across cultural and educational settings.

Although numerous scholars have investigated students' language anxiety and its impact on speaking performance, few have specifically focused on students' own perceptions regarding the causes of their anxiety. This study seeks to fill that gap. Furthermore, the research concentrates on students preparatory. In particular, study targets students in Pontianak, where anxiety during English speaking remains a common concern. Thus, this research aims to analyze the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak. The findings are expected to provide insight into the causes of debilitating anxiety in English speaking and contribute to efforts aimed at creating more effective language learning environments.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive method to evaluate students' levels of anxiety when speaking English, without manipulating any variables. As explained by Tavakoli (2012), Best and Kahn (2006), and Creswell (2018), descriptive research aims to explore what is occurring within a

phenomenon rather than why it happens. It is especially beneficial in educational settings to examine students' behaviors, attitudes, and traits. Data collection involved both observation and the use of an empirically validated anxiety measurement scale.

The observational component focused on students' real-time behaviors during English-speaking activities in class, such as fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, or stammering. In addition, a structured questionnaire with 30 statements was used to assess levels of speaking anxiety. These statements were categorized into three key dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Responses were recorded using capture information on students' attitudes, perceptions, and characteristics, with closed-ended items selected to facilitate quantitative analysis. and its reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, in accordance with the standards proposed by George and Mallery (2003).

The research process began by obtaining formal approval from the school. The questionnaire was then distributed to students in the classroom, accompanied by instructions for completion and assurance of anonymity. Once all responses were collected, the data were analyzed and presented visually, along with interpretations that compared anxiety levels across demographic subgroups, explored underlying causes of anxiety, and offered recommendations for minimizing students' English-speaking anxiety.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings revealed that communication apprehension was the most significant factor. A majority of students experienced heightened nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and self-consciousness when speaking English, especially in formal contexts such as oral tests and classroom presentations. Analysis showed that 67.86% of students fell into the high anxiety category for communication apprehension, while only a few students were categorized as having low or very high levels.

Test anxiety also appeared as a considerable factor impacting students' emotional and cognitive responses during English-speaking evaluations. Most students reported feelings of nervousness, stress, and mental blocks when required to participate in oral examinations. Data analysis indicated that 60.71% of students experienced high test anxiety. A smaller proportion demonstrated moderate or low levels, and none were found to exhibit very high levels, suggesting that although common, test anxiety was not extreme among the participants.

Fear of negative evaluation was the third dominant factor. Many students expressed concern about being judged or criticized by their classmates or teachers, which led to hesitation, reduced engagement, and avoidance of speaking tasks. The analysis showed that 57.14% of, with only a small number classified as having low or very high levels of this type of anxiety.

English-speaking anxiety, largely stemming from psychological and emotional influences. These outcomes underscore the need for a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere that fosters student confidence, reduces fear, and enhances their speaking abilities in the English language.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research revealed critical insights into the underlying anxiety factors affecting eighth-grade students' English-speaking performance. These factors were categorized into three core dimensions: communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE), each contributing in different ways to students' hesitation and challenges in oral communication. The results are interpreted in relation to existing theories and previous studies.

To begin with, the analysis of communication apprehension showed that a significant portion of students (71.4%) experienced high levels of anxiety when speaking English. This aligns with the theory proposed by, who identified CA as a common and influential barrier in second language acquisition. Students frequently reported feelings of nervousness, confusion, and lack of self-confidence when required others, particularly in a foreign language setting. This finding suggests that psychological discomfort in speaking English may stem from limited vocabulary, fear of making errors, and insufficient speaking practice.

Secondly, the data related to test anxiety also indicated a concerning trend. Approximately 53.6% of students were classified as having high test anxiety, with an additional 28.6% falling in the moderate range. According to Sarason (1984), test anxiety is often the result of self-doubt and the pressure to succeed under evaluative conditions. In this study, it was evident that speaking tasks involving assessment increased stress levels, particularly among students who felt underprepared or overly focused on their grades. Such anxiety is likely to interfere with cognitive functions such as concentration and memory, thus impairing fluency and accuracy during oral evaluations.

This observation aligns with Wine's cognitive interference theory (1980), which suggests that anxious individuals are more preoccupied with the fear of failure than the task itself. In the case of

these students, the anxiety surrounding English-speaking assessments appears to cause excessive self-monitoring and overthinking, leading to decreased performance.

Third, the findings regarding fear of negative evaluation revealed that 57.14% of students reported a high level of fear, while 35.71% were categorized as moderate. These results support Watson and Friend's (1969) concept of FNE, which refers to an individual's discomfort about being judged negatively by others, particularly in performance-related situations. In the classroom, students may refrain from speaking if they anticipate criticism or ridicule, especially from peers or teachers.

The prevalence of "Agree" responses across all three anxiety dimensions—CA, TA, and FNE highlights that public speaking or evaluative contexts continue to serve as major sources of psychological stress for the participants. These findings are consistent with recent research by Tsegaye (2022) and Gkonou (2019), which affirm that speaking anxiety remains a strong predictor of low performance in foreign language learning environments.

In conclusion, the discussion underscores that English-speaking anxiety among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak is both substantial and multifaceted. Therefore, there is a clear need for instructional approaches that foster low-anxiety environments, promote positive reinforcement, and encourage the gradual development of communicative competence in a supportive and non-threatening manner.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Pontianak during the 2022/2023 academic year, this study concluded that students experience a high level of anxiety when speaking English. This anxiety is evident in three primary dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Firstly, a majority of students demonstrated high levels of communication apprehension, indicating discomfort and nervousness when required insufficient practice in real-life English-speaking contexts.

Secondly, test anxiety also emerged as a significant factor. Many students reported feeling stressed and pressured during speaking evaluations, likely due to academic performance expectations and concerns about receiving low grades.

These results align with foundational theories in language anxiety research (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sarason, 1984; Watson & Friend, 1969) and are supported by recent empirical evidence. The prevalence of psychological barriers in the language learning environment highlights the urgent need for instructional strategies that create supportive, low-anxiety classrooms to foster students' confidence and speaking competence.

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