Speaking Anxiety Among English Major Students at UMNU kebumen: Causes and Impacts in University Setting

Nur Anifa[1], Hastri Firharmawan[2]

[a]Universitas Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama, Kebumen

(anifanur03@gmail.com)

Abstract

This study examines the issue of English speaking anxiety among students in UMNU Kebumen's English Education Program. Although speaking is considered an essential skill for future educators, many students still experience fear, anxiety, and lack of confidence when using English in public situations such as classroom presentations and spontaneous interactions. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study collected data through semi-structured interviews with selected students who reported experiencing speaking-related anxiety. The findings showed that the main sources of anxiety included vocabulary deficiency, fear of grammatical errors or incorrect pronunciation, low self-confidence, and fear of others' judgment. Spontaneous speaking triggered more anxiety compared to prepared presentations. In addition, the classroom atmosphere and the way the lecturer interacted with the students had a big influence on their comfort level. Despite these challenges, the participants used various strategies to cope with anxiety, such as relaxation techniques, self-affirmation, support from peers, and repeated practice. This study suggests that creating a more supportive and less pressurized learning environment can help reduce speaking anxiety as well as increase students' desire to communicate in English.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety, foreign language learners, classroom interaction, student confidence, English language education*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a fundamental element of language acquisition and plays an important role in both academic and professional environments. For students in the English Education program, especially those preparing to become future educators, the ability to speak English clearly and confidently is crucial. However, despite years of language learning, many students still feel high levels of anxiety when asked to speak in English, especially in public situations such as classroom presentations, spontaneous discussions, or academic seminars.

Language learning is not just a cognitive process - it is also influenced by emotional and psychological factors. One of the most commonly reported emotional barriers in language learning is speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety refers to a sense of anxiety or fear that arises when individuals are asked to express themselves orally in a second language. It can be triggered by internal factors such as lack of vocabulary, low self-esteem, or fear of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes. External factors, including pressure to perform in front of others, fear of negative judgment, or a rigid classroom environment, can also contribute significantly to this anxiety. At UMNU Kebumen, many English education students face this challenge despite their familiarity with the language. Instructors often expect students to perform well in speaking activities, but the psychological pressure associated with speaking in a foreign language often hinders their performance. This condition not only affects students' academic results but also their self-confidence and desire to actively participate in class.

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of speaking anxiety among English Language Education students at UMNU Kebumen by exploring the underlying causes, the visible impact on language performance, and the coping strategies adopted by students. By identifying these aspects, this study is expected to provide meaningful insights for the field of language education and offer practical suggestions for creating a more supportive classroom environment.

This investigation utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach, which highlights students' experiences and views. Through in-depth interviews, this research captures learners' emotional realities and emphasizes the importance of addressing affective factors in English language teaching.

METHOD

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method to examine the experiences of students who face speaking anxiety. The study was conducted at Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama University (UMNU) Kebumen, with a specific focus on students enrolled in the English Education Study Program.

Participants were purposively selected based on their acknowledgment of speaking-related anxiety experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed students to share their thoughts and experiences openly, while keeping the conversation on key themes. In addition, observational insights were taken during classroom activities, but the main focus remained on the interview data.

The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore students' personal feelings, classroom experiences, and strategies used to overcome speaking anxiety. This allowed for flexibility while still focusing on consistent thematic areas.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which included three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the researcher identified and categorized the themes that emerged across the various interviews. These themes were then presented descriptively, followed by interpretation and verification to ensure consistency and validity.

To increase the reliability of the findings, the study applied triangulation by referring to multiple sources and conducting member checks, where participants were asked to confirm the veracity of their statements as interpreted by the researcher. Ethical principles, including informed consent and participant confidentiality, were maintained throughout the research process. This methodological framework ensured that the data collected reflected the authentic voices of the participants and enabled an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show some important patterns related to how students experience speaking anxiety, its causes, its effects, and how they deal with it. Based on interviews with six participants from the English Education Program at UMNU Kebumen, a number of interrelated themes emerged. Most participants expressed feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and even physical discomfort such as shortness of breath or loss of focus when speaking in English in public.

These emotional reactions were felt more strongly when facing unplanned speaking tasks, such as spontaneous questions in class, compared to structured presentations. One participant said, “When I speak English in front of people, I often feel dizzy and my heartbeat is very fast” (Interviewee 2)

The main factors causing speaking anxiety were identified as lack of vocabulary, fear of grammatical or pronunciation errors, low self-confidence, and fear of judgment from others. Spontaneous speaking tasks were perceived as more daunting than prepared speaking activities due to the lack of control and preparation. As one student admitted, “I often worry that my grammar is wrong, and it makes me overthink before speaking” (Interviewee 4).

In addition, this study found that the classroom atmosphere plays an important role in shaping students' anxiety levels. A relaxed and supportive environment, especially when the lecturer shows patience and encouragement, helps to reduce anxiety. In contrast, a strict or critical teaching style often increases students' tension and reluctance to speak up. One participant stated, “If the lecturer is friendly, I feel calmer, but if they look serious or strict, I easily feel nervous” (Interviewee 3).

Anxiety also has a clear impact on student participation and performance. Some students avoided opportunities to speak even skipped class when they expected to be asked to speak. This avoidance behavior limits their opportunities to improve their language fluency and negatively impacts their engagement in the learning process. “Once I skipped a speaking class just because I was too scared to speak,” said one respondent (Interviewee 5).

Despite these challenges, participants reported using several strategies to cope with anxiety. These included deep breathing, practicing in front of a mirror, affirmations, preparing vocabulary and grammar in advance, and seeking emotional support from friends. One student explained, “Before speaking, I take deep breaths, pray, and ask friends to remind me that I can do it” (Interviewee 6). The students also provided suggestions for improving the classroom experience. They emphasized the importance of creating a more relaxed learning atmosphere through group discussions, regular informal speaking practice, and activities such as “English Friday” that encourage natural language use without pressure. Overall, speaking anxiety among English education students is influenced by both internal and external factors. However, with a supportive classroom environment, knowledgeable lecturers, and consistent speaking practice, students can gradually build their confidence and improve their ability to communicate effectively in English.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that speaking anxiety is a common and significant challenge faced by English Education students at UMNU Kebumen. The anxiety experienced by students is caused by a combination of internal and external factors, including lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and fear of negative judgment. These factors are exacerbated by a classroom environment that is perceived as strict or stressful.

The Findings show that this anxiety not only affects students' emotions, but also hinders their academic engagement and participation. Some students avoided speaking tasks altogether, thus reducing their chances of improving fluency. However, this study also found that students were proactive in managing their anxiety through strategies such as preparation, support from peers, and relaxation techniques.

Therefore, it is important for educators to create a supportive and non-stressful environment that encourages speaking practice in both formal and informal situations. By providing consistent communication opportunities, offering positive reinforcement, and building trust in the classroom, lecturers can help students gradually reduce their anxiety and increase confidence in using English.

REFERENCES

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.2307/327317

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Tóth, Z. (2011). *Foreign language anxiety and the advanced language learner: A study of Hungarian students of English as a foreign language*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(1), 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136