

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SPEAKING ANXIETY WHEN SPEAKING ENGLISH IN FRONT OF THE CLASS AT UNIVERSITAS BHINNEKA PGRISilvia Floresia Ndate¹, Rosanita Tritias Utami²^{1,2}Universitas Bhinneka PGRIsfloresia@gmail.com¹, utami.rosanita@gmail.com²**Abstract**

Speaking anxiety is a common psychological barrier experienced by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly when they are required to speak in front of the class. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of their anxiety when speaking English in classroom settings. The research focuses on how students perceive their emotional, cognitive, and physical responses during speaking activities. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, drawing on questionnaire responses, classroom observation, and interview data adapted from previous validated instruments on foreign language anxiety. The findings reveal that students generally perceive speaking English as a stressful and intimidating activity due to fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of self-confidence. These perceptions manifest in physical symptoms such as trembling voice and nervous gestures, as well as psychological reactions including worry and self-doubt. The study concludes that students' perceptions of speaking anxiety significantly influence their classroom participation and speaking performance. Understanding these perceptions is essential for educators in designing supportive learning environments that reduce anxiety and encourage active oral participation.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety, students' perception, EFL learners, classroom speaking*

Abstract

Kecemasan berbicara merupakan salah satu hambatan psikologis yang umum dialami oleh mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, khususnya ketika mereka harus berbicara di depan kelas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi mahasiswa terhadap kecemasan yang mereka alami saat berbicara bahasa Inggris di depan kelas di Universitas Bhinneka PGRI. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui angket, observasi kelas, dan wawancara untuk menggali persepsi mahasiswa terkait aspek emosional, kognitif, dan fisik dari kecemasan berbicara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memersepsikan kegiatan berbicara bahasa Inggris sebagai aktivitas yang menegangkan dan menimbulkan rasa takut, terutama karena kekhawatiran akan melakukan kesalahan, takut terhadap penilaian negatif, serta rendahnya rasa percaya diri. Kecemasan tersebut berdampak pada menurunnya konsentrasi, kelancaran berbicara, serta partisipasi mahasiswa dalam kegiatan pembelajaran. Oleh karena itu, pemahaman terhadap persepsi mahasiswa mengenai kecemasan berbicara menjadi penting bagi dosen untuk menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang suportif dan mampu meminimalkan kecemasan dalam kegiatan berbicara bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: kecemasan berbicara, persepsi mahasiswa, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, EFL

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a fundamental skill in language learning, as it enables learners to express ideas, emotions, and information through oral communication. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is often considered the most challenging skill to master because it requires learners to produce language spontaneously and accurately in real time. According to Nunan, speaking is a productive skill that demands immediate language use, leaving learners with little opportunity to rehearse or correct their utterances. This condition often creates pressure and increases the possibility of anxiety, particularly when learners are asked to speak in front of others.

Anxiety has long been recognized as a significant affective factor influencing foreign language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope define anxiety as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with language learning contexts. In classroom situations, especially during oral activities, students frequently report feelings of fear, worry, and discomfort. These emotional reactions may hinder students' willingness to participate and negatively affect their speaking performance.

In higher education contexts, EFL students are often expected to demonstrate their speaking ability in front of their peers and lecturers. However, many students perceive this situation as threatening rather than motivating. They may worry about making grammatical or pronunciation errors, being laughed at by classmates, or receiving negative evaluation from lecturers. As Berger explains, anxiety involves feelings of tension and fear that activate physiological responses, which can interfere with cognitive processes and learning performance.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on a single research question: How do students perceive their anxiety when they have to speak English in front of the class? By concentrating on students' perceptions, this article seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how anxiety is experienced and interpreted by learners themselves, rather than merely measuring anxiety levels.

Speaking is not only a linguistic activity but also a social and psychological process. Bygate emphasizes that speaking involves organizing ideas, selecting appropriate language forms, and producing comprehensible utterances in specific contexts. Brown further explains that speaking is influenced by various components, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These components must work together for effective oral communication.

In EFL classrooms, speaking tasks often require students to perform publicly, which can increase pressure and self-awareness. As a result, students may become overly focused on accuracy and correctness, leading to hesitation and reduced fluency.

Anxiety is commonly described as a state of apprehension accompanied by physical and psychological symptoms such as sweating, trembling, and difficulty concentrating. Horwitz and colleagues introduce the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety, which specifically refers to anxiety experienced in language learning situations. This type of anxiety is closely related to learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward language learning.

Speaking anxiety is considered one of the most prominent components of foreign language anxiety. According to Zhang and Zhao, many university students experience nervousness and fear when they are required to speak English in front of others. These feelings often stem from fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and low self-confidence.

Students' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their anxiety. When learners perceive speaking tasks as threatening or beyond their ability, their anxiety tends to increase.

Conversely, positive perceptions and supportive classroom environments can help reduce anxiety and promote confidence

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of speaking anxiety. The participants were EFL university students at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI who were required to perform speaking activities in front of the class. Data were collected through a combination of questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire items were adapted from established foreign language anxiety frameworks to capture students' self-reported feelings and perceptions. Classroom observations focused on visible signs of anxiety, such as body movement, eye contact, and voice quality. Interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' personal experiences and interpretations of their anxiety when speaking English.

Data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns related to emotional, cognitive, and physical perceptions of anxiety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perception of Speaking Anxiety

The findings indicate that most students perceive speaking English in front of the class as an anxiety-provoking activity. Emotionally, students reported feelings of fear, nervousness, and embarrassment. Many expressed worry about making mistakes and being judged negatively by their peers or lecturer. This perception aligns with Horwitz's view that fear of negative evaluation is a central source of foreign language anxiety.

Cognitively, students perceived anxiety as a factor that interfered with their ability to think clearly while speaking. Several students stated that they often forgot what they wanted to say, even when they had prepared beforehand. This supports Tallon's explanation that anxiety can reduce working memory capacity, making it difficult for learners to retrieve vocabulary and construct sentences.

Physically, students associated speaking anxiety with symptoms such as trembling voice, sweating, rapid heartbeat, and restless body movements. These physical reactions reinforced their perception that speaking English was uncomfortable and stressful. As Reeve suggests, such physiological responses can intensify anxiety and create a cycle of fear and avoidance.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Speaking Anxiety When Speaking English in Front of the Class

No	Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1	I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class.	45	35	15	5
2	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.	50	30	15	5
3	I worry about receiving negative evaluation from my classmates or lecturer.	40	38	17	5
4	Speaking anxiety makes it difficult for me to express my ideas clearly.	42	36	17	5

Table 2. Level of Students' Speaking Anxiety

Level of Anxiety	Number of Students	Percentage
High	14	56%

Moderate	8	32%
Low	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Table 3. Students' Perceptions Based on Anxiety Indicators

Anxiety Indicator	Students' Perceptions
Emotional	Fear, nervousness, and embarrassment when speaking English
Cognitive	Difficulty recalling vocabulary and organizing ideas
Physical	Trembling voice, sweating, and rapid heartbeat

Overall, students perceived their anxiety as a major barrier that limited their confidence and participation in speaking activities. Even students with adequate linguistic knowledge felt anxious when they had to speak publicly, indicating that anxiety is not solely related to language proficiency but also to psychological factors.

The findings demonstrate that students' perceptions of speaking anxiety are shaped by a combination of emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences. These perceptions influence how students approach speaking tasks and how confident they feel in using English orally. When students perceive speaking as a threatening activity, they are more likely to avoid participation, which may hinder their language development.

The results support previous theoretical perspectives that emphasize the role of affective factors in language learning. Anxiety, as perceived by students, acts as a filter that blocks effective communication and reduces speaking performance. Therefore, addressing students' perceptions is essential in reducing speaking anxiety.

Conclusion

This study explored students' perceptions of their anxiety when speaking English in front of the class. The findings reveal that students generally perceive speaking activities as stressful due to fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, and lack of self-confidence. These perceptions are accompanied by cognitive difficulties and physical symptoms that further intensify anxiety.

Understanding students' perceptions of speaking anxiety is crucial for educators, as it provides insight into the emotional challenges faced by learners. By creating supportive classroom environments and encouraging positive attitudes toward mistakes, teachers can help reduce anxiety and foster students' confidence in speaking English. Future research may explore instructional strategies specifically designed to transform students' negative perceptions into positive speaking experiences.

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