

# **Researching factors and coping strategies of EFL students' speaking anxiety**

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## **ABSTRACT**

English students often face challenges with speaking anxiety when asked to speak in front of the class. Many students are unaware of the factors contributing to their anxiety and lack strategies to manage it effectively. This research aims to identify the causes of speaking anxiety and the strategies EFL students use to cope with it. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, employing semi-structured interviews to gather data. Convenience sampling was applied to select six English students who had completed a speaking class as participants. The findings revealed five key factors contributing to speaking anxiety: (1) lack of preparation, (2) fear of making mistakes, (3) limited English skills, (4) excessive worry about meeting academic targets, and (5) fear of others' reactions. Additionally, four strategies for managing speaking anxiety were identified: (1) changing mindset, (2) relaxation, (3) building confidence, and (4) improving speaking skills.

**Keywords:** *EFL; Speaking skills; Speaking anxiety*

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## **1. Introduction**

Speaking is a fundamental skill for effective communication, making it essential to develop speaking abilities, especially in English, which is widely used for global communication. As a lingua franca, English facilitates communication between people who speak different languages around the world (Al-Roud, 2016). According to Garg and Gautam (2015), one advantage of mastering English is the ability to communicate and interact with people from diverse backgrounds worldwide. Speaking English is highly important, especially in the context of globalization. However, many learners still struggle to become proficient in English speaking skills, facing various obstacles in mastering them. Fitri (2019) finds in her early research that many students have difficulty speaking in front of large groups, finding oral performance challenging. It is natural for students to feel anxious, nervous, shy, or lacking in confidence when speaking in front of others—characteristics that indicate anxiety in speaking English.

According to Heri et al. (2018), anxiety can affect individuals in everyday life, at any time, in any place, and under various conditions. Wu (2010) claims that anxiety is one of the major challenges for language learners, as they often feel anxious when learning a new language. Anxiety can significantly impact the learning process and outcomes, particularly students' speaking performance. Wu argued that anxiety has attracted the attention of language educators, as it is a major barrier to foreign language learning that students need to overcome.

In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language, and students are not accustomed to speaking it, as they rarely practiced speaking English from elementary through high school. Consequently, they may feel apprehensive about speaking English. Students who lack self-confidence and motivation to learn are often hesitant to demonstrate their speaking abilities in front of others. According to Wu (2010), anxiety is one of the most challenging issues for language learners, as they are likely to feel anxious while learning a new language. Anxiety can affect students' learning processes and outcomes, especially their speaking performance. Wu noted that anxiety has drawn significant interest in language education, as it presents a major obstacle to foreign language acquisition that students need to overcome.

Due to anxiety, students may feel afraid to speak English. Those with low self-confidence and motivation to learn are often reluctant to demonstrate their speaking skills in front of others. As Fitri (2019) suggests, students should identify the causes of their anxiety and conduct further research to understand it better. This implies that many students are unaware of the sources of their anxiety, which prevents them from finding effective solutions to manage it. This information suggests that students may be unaware of the factors contributing to their anxiety and lack strategies to manage it, preventing them from effectively addressing their anxiety. Based on the issues above, the researchers seek to answer the following questions: (1) What factors contribute to EFL students' anxiety in speaking English? (2) How do students cope with anxiety when speaking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Types of classrooms speaking performance*

According to Brown (1984), there are five types of classrooms speaking performance: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive.

#### *2.2.1. Imitative*

Imitative speaking refers to the ability to repeat phrases, words, or sentences spoken by another, typically a native speaker or a teacher (Lengkoan & Hampp, 2022). This type of speaking practice involves listening closely and accurately reproducing the sounds, rhythm, and intonation patterns of the language. In other words, this practice focuses on students' ability to match native speakers of the language in terms of pronunciation, stress, and pitch, aiming to develop a more authentic and natural-sounding speech. It serves as a foundational step in language learning, helping students build confidence in their pronunciation and improve their overall speaking fluency.

#### *2.1.2. Intensive*

Intensive speaking is generally more challenging than imitative speaking because it requires students to engage with language at a deeper level (Rahimpour et al., 2012). While imitative speaking primarily focuses on mimicking sounds, rhythm, and pronunciation, intensive speaking involves a more comprehensive approach. During intensive speaking practice, students are required to pay attention not only to phonological and grammatical features but also to the meaning and context of what they are saying. This type of speaking emphasizes the ability to construct sentences, use appropriate vocabulary, and apply correct syntax in real-life situations. Additionally, students practicing intensive speaking are prepared to not only produce words or sentences but also to respond appropriately to simple queries, engage in basic conversations, and demonstrate their understanding of the language in context (Linh, 2024). This level of speaking practice helps students develop greater fluency and accuracy in communication, as it challenges them to think critically and articulate their thoughts effectively in real-time interactions.

#### *2.1.3. Responsive*

Responsive speaking refers to a person's ability to engage in spontaneous conversation, such as responding to questions, making brief comments, or reacting to statements made by others. Unlike prepared or scripted speaking, responsive speaking requires quick thinking and the ability to formulate coherent and relevant responses in real-time (Khardina et al., 2023). It involves not only understanding the question or comment but also constructing a reply that is appropriate to the context of the conversation. This type of speaking often occurs in everyday interactions, such as casual conversations, classroom discussions, or during informal meetings, where the speaker must be able to adapt to the flow of the conversation and provide thoughtful, on-the-spot

answers. In addition to responding verbally, it may also require non-verbal cues like body language or tone of voice to ensure clear communication and to demonstrate active listening and engagement. Mastering responsive speaking is crucial for building conversational fluency, as it enables individuals to interact confidently and naturally in a variety of social situations.

#### *2.1.4. Interactive*

In classroom learning activities, there are times when active communication is necessary, especially when multiple people are involved in the conversation (Mandal & Banerjee, 2022). This type of communication encourages students to participate, share ideas, and engage in dialogue with their peers, fostering a more dynamic learning environment. When many voices contribute to the discussion, it creates an opportunity for diverse perspectives to be heard, enhancing the depth of understanding and promoting critical thinking. Active communication not only makes the discussion livelier but also more interactive, as students are encouraged to ask questions, clarify points, and build on each other's ideas. This level of engagement helps to create a collaborative atmosphere where learning is not just about listening to a lecturer but about actively contributing to the collective knowledge of the group. It also strengthens students' communication skills, as they practice expressing their thoughts, listening attentively, and responding appropriately in real-time, all of which are essential for their personal and academic growth.

#### *2.1.5. Extensive*

Speaking extensively is a high-level speaking skill that encompasses a wide range of oral activities, including speeches, content delivery, storytelling, and narrative expression. This type of speaking goes beyond basic conversation and requires the speaker to articulate ideas in a more structured and coherent manner, often with the intention of informing, persuading, or entertaining an audience (Levasseur et al., 2004). It can involve preparing and presenting a formal speech or lecture, or it can take the form of an impromptu presentation where the speaker must think quickly and organize their thoughts on the spot. In both planned and unplanned scenarios, the speaker must demonstrate not only fluency in language but also the ability to engage and hold the audience's attention through effective communication strategies such as clear articulation, varied tone, and appropriate pacing. Speaking extensively challenges individuals to organize their thoughts logically, provide relevant examples, and ensure their message is both clear and impactful. It is a valuable skill in academic, professional, and social contexts, as it enables individuals to express complex ideas in an accessible way and fosters stronger connections with others through dynamic and engaging verbal communication.

## *2.2. Components of speaking*

According to Harris (1969), the mastery of speaking skills involves five key components that are integral to effective oral communication. The first component is comprehension, which refers to the ability to understand and process spoken language, allowing speakers to respond appropriately in conversations. Without comprehension, meaningful interaction would be difficult to achieve. The second component is vocabulary, encompassing the range of words a speaker knows and uses effectively. A broad vocabulary allows for greater precision and variety in expression, enabling speakers to convey their thoughts clearly and adapt to different contexts. The third component is grammar, which pertains to the correct use of language rules and structures. Grammar ensures that sentences are coherent and intelligible, facilitating the accurate transmission of meaning between speakers and listeners. The fourth component, fluency, is characterized by the ability to speak smoothly and with minimal hesitation. Fluency is not just about speed but also about maintaining a natural flow of speech, which makes communication more engaging and easier for listeners to follow. Finally, pronunciation is crucial for clarity and intelligibility. It involves the correct articulation of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns, all of which contribute to how well a speaker is understood. Effective pronunciation helps avoid misunderstandings and enhances overall communication. Together, these five components form the foundation of proficient speaking skills, each playing a vital role in ensuring that oral communication is effective and meaningful (Levis, 2018).

### *2.2.1. Comprehension*

Effective communication requires a shared understanding between the speaker and the listener. To avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation, it is crucial for the listener to fully grasp what the speaker is trying to convey. This ability to accurately interpret and process spoken messages is known as comprehension (Ahmad & Chowdhury, 2022). Without it, the intended meaning of the speaker's message might be lost, leading to confusion or errors in communication. For this reason, the speaker plays a significant role in ensuring clarity and precision in their delivery. They must organize their thoughts clearly, use appropriate language, and present their message in a way that is easy for the listener to follow. This includes tailoring their words and tone to the listener's level of understanding, avoiding overly complex or ambiguous expressions, and emphasizing key points. Additionally, the speaker should be mindful of non-verbal cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, which can enhance the message's clarity.

On the other hand, listeners also have a responsibility in the communication process. They must pay attention, ask clarifying questions if need, and actively engage with the speaker. This reciprocal effort between speaking clearly and listening attentively ensures that the message is effectively transmitted and received. Comprehension is a cornerstone of successful communication. Both speakers and listeners must work together to minimize the potential for misunderstanding, with speakers ensuring their message is

clear and listeners actively striving to understand (Addimando, 2024). When both parties fulfill their roles, communication becomes more effective, fostering mutual understanding and stronger relationships.

### *2.2.2. Vocabulary*

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of communication, encompassing the words or diction used to convey thoughts, ideas, and information (Alqhtani, 2015). Without a solid vocabulary, it would be impossible to transmit any meaningful message, as words are the building blocks of language. They allow us to express our emotions, share knowledge, and engage with others effectively. Mastering vocabulary is critical because it directly influences our ability to communicate. The more extensive our vocabulary, the more nuanced and precise our speech becomes. A rich vocabulary enables us to articulate complex ideas, describe experiences in detail, and adapt our language to suit various contexts and audiences. For instance, having a broad vocabulary allows us to transition seamlessly between informal conversations with friends and formal presentations in professional settings.

Enriching vocabulary is an ongoing process that significantly enhances our communication skills (Joffe & Lowe, 2023). By expanding our vocabulary, we gain access to a wider range of words, making it easier to select the most appropriate diction for a given situation. This skill is essential for creating clear and effective sentences that convey their intended functions and meanings. For example, a speaker with a rich vocabulary can choose words that align with the emotional tone of their message, whether it's persuasive, informative, or empathetic.

Moreover, a well-developed vocabulary fosters confidence in speaking and writing. When individuals are equipped with a diverse set of words, they are less likely to hesitate or struggle to express themselves. This confidence not only improves the quality of their communication but also strengthens their ability to connect with others and leave a positive impression.

### *2.2.3. Grammar*

According to Azlina et al. (2015), grammar is defined as the ability to construct proper sentence structures and ensure the appropriateness of grammatical forms in communication. It serves as the foundation for organizing language in a way that is both meaningful and effective. Grammar is an essential component of speaking, as it enables speakers to make appropriate word choices and arrange them in a coherent sequence, facilitating clear and effective communication. Correct grammar is particularly important in oral communication because it ensures that the speaker's message is not only accurate but also easily understood by the listener. When grammar is used correctly, the speaker can articulate their thoughts precisely and with clarity, avoiding any confusion or misinterpretation. For example, proper use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure allows the speaker to convey the intended meaning without ambiguity.

This precision is especially crucial in formal or professional contexts, where misunderstandings can have significant consequences.

In addition to enhancing clarity, correct grammar contributes to the speaker's credibility and confidence (Handayani, 2018). When a speaker uses grammatically correct language, they are more likely to be perceived as knowledgeable and competent, which strengthens their ability to connect with their audience. On the other hand, frequent grammatical errors can distract the listener and undermine the speaker's message. Furthermore, proper grammar plays a role in ensuring that the conversation flows smoothly. Clear and grammatically accurate speech reduces the need for repeated clarifications, allowing for more efficient and productive interactions. This is particularly important in situations that require collaboration or problem-solving, where mutual understanding is key to achieving goals.

#### *2.2.4. Fluency*

Fluency refers to the ability to speak English accurately, effortlessly, and without hesitation (Wang et al., 2024). It is a critical aspect of effective communication, as it enables speakers to express their thoughts and ideas in a smooth and coherent manner. When someone speaks English clearly, confidently, and with ease, they are considered fluent, as their speech is not interrupted by frequent pauses or struggles to find the right words. Being fluent in English goes beyond simply speaking; it involves delivering messages in a way that the audience can easily understand. This includes proper pronunciation, which ensures that words are articulated correctly and intelligibly. Accurate pronunciation helps listeners focus on the message rather than the mechanics of the speaker's language use. For example, correctly pronouncing vowels and consonants, as well as paying attention to stress and intonation patterns, can make a significant difference in how effectively a message is received.

In addition to pronunciation, fluency also requires the use of correct syntax, or sentence structure. Proper grammar ensures that sentences are logically organized and clear in meaning, which is essential for conveying complex ideas. A fluent speaker knows how to construct sentences that flow naturally, making their speech more engaging and easier to follow.

Another important aspect of fluency is the ability to select appropriate word diction. This means choosing words that are precise and contextually relevant, enabling the speaker to express their ideas more accurately and persuasively (Kecskes & Cuenca, 2005). Effective word choice allows speakers to adapt their language to suit their audience and the situation, whether they are engaging in casual conversation, giving a formal presentation, or participating in a debate. Fluency also involves the ability to think on one's feet and respond quickly in conversations. This skill requires not only a strong command of the language but also confidence in using it. A fluent speaker is able to maintain the flow of dialogue, contributing actively and effectively without long pauses or hesitation.

### *2.2.5. Pronunciation*

Pronunciation is a fundamental aspect of speaking, as it directly affects how well listeners can understand what is being said. Proper and accurate pronunciation is essential for ensuring that the message is conveyed clearly and effectively (Duan & He, 2024). In English, where many words sound similar or have subtle variations in sound, even small pronunciation errors can change the meaning of a word or sentence. This can lead to confusion or miscommunication, making it more challenging for listeners to grasp the speaker's intended message. For example, words like “bear” and “bare” or “peace” and “piece” sound nearly identical but have completely different meanings. Mispronouncing such words can create ambiguity and result in misunderstandings. Therefore, it is critical for speakers to pay attention to how words are pronounced, ensuring that each sound is articulated correctly to maintain clarity in their speech.

Beyond individual words, pronunciation also encompasses other important elements, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm, all of which contribute to the overall meaning and tone of a sentence. Intonation refers to the rise and fall of the voice when speaking, which can convey emotions or indicate whether a sentence is a statement, question, or command. For example, the sentence “You are coming?” can sound like a question or a statement depending on the intonation used. Similarly, stress—the emphasis placed on certain syllables or words—can change the meaning of a sentence entirely. For instance, in the phrase “I did not” say he stole the money,” stressing different words changes the implied meaning.

Proper pronunciation also plays a significant role in avoiding ambiguity, which is key to effective communication. When speakers pronounce words correctly and use appropriate intonation and stress, their message becomes more precise and easier for listeners to interpret (Paudel, 2024). This is particularly important in professional or academic settings, where unclear pronunciation could lead to significant misunderstandings or errors in communication.

### *2.3. Anxiety*

Anxiety is a common emotional response characterized by feelings of nervousness or unease when an individual is confronted with situations they perceive as frightening. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125), anxiety arises from subjective experiences such as uneasiness, concern, tension, and apprehension. It is a complex mix of negative emotions, including fear, worry, and distress. These emotions are triggered by unpleasant or unwelcome situations that are perceived as intimidating or threatening.

Anxiety can significantly impact various aspects of a person's life, including their ability to learn a new language. One of the most challenging aspects of learning a foreign language is overcoming language anxiety. Saidghi and Dastpak (2017) explain that foreign language anxiety is associated with feelings of fear, uncertainty, confusion, and concern about the conditions in which the language is learned, such as in an English as a foreign language class.



Many students experience anxiety when required to use the foreign language they are learning. According to Sadiq (2017), anxiety is a type of emotional condition that can sometimes enhance EFL learners' academic performance under certain circumstances. However, Thompson and Lee (2013) argue that language anxiety often causes students to feel uneasy and reluctant, particularly during spoken English classes. Rassaei (2015) further highlights that language anxiety negatively impacts students' ability to improve both their English fluency and accuracy. In other words, language anxiety poses a significant challenge to students, hindering their overall language achievement.

Based on the explanation above, language anxiety can be identified as a negative emotion, such as uneasiness or fear, that students often experience when learning a foreign language, particularly English. This feeling commonly arises in situations where students feel discouraged, such as when they are required to speak in the foreign language. Language anxiety can significantly hinder students' language learning progress, negatively affecting their overall development and confidence in using the language.

#### *2.4. Types of anxiety*

Horwitz et al. (1986) identify three distinct types of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety.

##### *2.4.1. Trait anxiety*

According to Spielberger (1983), trait anxiety is a fundamental predisposition to feel worried or anxious in a wide range of situations. It can manifest at any time and across various contexts, regardless of external circumstances. Similarly, Riasati (2011) describes trait anxiety as the tendency of an individual to feel nervous or anxious irrespective of the situation they are in. People with trait anxiety are more likely to experience panic attacks or persistent nervousness, even in relatively benign environments. Omrod (2011) further asserts that trait anxiety can arise even in non-threatening situations, highlighting its pervasive nature. This type of anxiety often becomes ingrained in a person's personality, leading them to perceive it as an inherent part of who they are.

##### *2.4.2. State anxiety*

Brown (1984) defines state and situation-specific anxiety as forms of anxiety that arise in response to particular situations or conditions. Indrianty (2016) elaborates that state anxiety refers to the apprehension experienced at a specific moment in time as a reaction to a distinct situation. This type of anxiety is transient, occurring only under certain circumstances that the individual perceives as threatening or challenging.

State anxiety is situational and temporary, meaning it is felt only at a particular point in time when triggered by specific events or conditions. For instance, a person may feel heightened anxiety before giving a public speech, sitting for an exam, or facing an

intimidating social interaction. Unlike more pervasive forms of anxiety, state anxiety diminishes once the perceived threat or challenging situation has passed.

This type of anxiety is often a reaction to a potentially dangerous or high-stakes event, whether the danger is real or perceived. While it can be unsettling, state anxiety also serves as an instinctive response that helps individuals prepare for and cope with immediate challenges (Saviola et al., 2020). However, if unmanaged, it may hinder performance and decision-making in high-pressure situations.

#### *2.4.3. Situation-specific anxiety*

According to Luo (2014), situation-specific anxiety shares similarities with state anxiety but is distinct in its inconsistency across different circumstances. It arises only in particular situations, such as during exams, public speaking, or other high-pressure scenarios. Indrianty (2016) further explains that situation-specific anxiety is persistent and multifaceted, encompassing various forms of anxiety triggered by specific events or contexts. For example, it may manifest during activities like public speaking, taking exams, or participating in class discussions. Unlike more generalized anxiety, this type is closely tied to certain events, making it easier to predict and address.

### *2.5. Elements of foreign language anxiety*

According to Horwitz (1986), foreign language anxiety manifests in three distinct forms: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

#### *2.5.1. Communication apprehension*

Communication apprehension refers to the anxiety students experience when engaging in communication. This anxiety often stems from a lack of confidence in their understanding of the material being discussed or a fear of being unable to express information accurately during interactions (Katyal et al., 2023). Students with communication apprehension frequently feel a sense of unease, characterized by self-doubt and worry about how others will perceive their ability to communicate effectively. These feelings can lead to guilt and hesitation when interacting with others, further hindering their ability to participate fully in conversations or discussions.

#### *2.5.2. Test anxiety*

This type of anxiety is closely associated with academic examinations and is rooted in the fear of failure. Students who experience this form of anxiety often have a history of negative experiences with exams, which can lead to feelings of insecurity and heightened apprehension about failing future tests (Ustabaşı, 2024). These past experiences create a cycle of fear and self-doubt, making it challenging for students to approach exams with confidence.

### 2.5.3. Fear of negative evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is closely tied to anxiety about others' opinions and perspectives (Pigart et al., 2024). When speaking, individuals may feel anxious about receiving criticism, negative impressions, or evaluations from those around them. This type of anxiety is pervasive, as it can manifest in many social situations involving evaluation, such as speaking in front of a class.

### 2.6. Strategies in reducing EFL speaking anxiety

Speaking anxiety is a common issue among high school students, especially in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. This challenge affects not only students with lower English proficiency but also those with higher levels. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) propose five strategies to help alleviate foreign language anxiety. The first strategy, *preparation*, involves taking steps to reduce the perceived threat by enhancing study and research skills (e.g., studying diligently and summarizing key points from lectures). Through preparation, students work to gain a sense of self-control by refining their study and learning techniques. By applying these strategies, students can improve their understanding of the subject matter, which in turn helps to reduce their anxiety in language courses.

The second strategy is *relaxation*, which involves techniques designed to reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety. Common approaches include deep breathing exercises and self-reminders to stay calm. These methods help alleviate symptoms of speaking anxiety by relaxing both the body and the mind.

The third strategy is positive thinking, which helps reduce anxiety by counteracting problematic psychological processes that contribute to students' fears (e.g., visualizing successful performance, embracing the challenge). Anxiety decreases when students adopt a positive outlook and trust that things will go well (Arenas, 2024). These techniques enable students to manage their anxiety by focusing on encouraging and optimistic aspects of the situation.

The fourth strategy is peer-seeking, where students actively look for classmates who may also be struggling with understanding the subject or managing their anxiety. A willingness to connect with peers facing similar challenges is central to this approach (Altermatt, 2016). For anxious students, realizing that others share similar difficulties can provide emotional relief and help them regulate their feelings through social comparison. The fifth strategy is *resignation*, marked by a student's reluctance to take action to reduce their language anxiety (e.g., giving up or disengaging in class). Reports of resignation among students often reflect an attempt to lessen the impact of their anxiety by avoiding the problem rather than addressing it.

## 3. Method

This qualitative research carried out in 2024 involved 6 English Education Department students at a state Islamic university in Aceh, Indonesia. It is believed that

qualitative research is well-suited to studying social interactions, cultural norms, and group dynamics. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is an appropriate research approach to explore information about a particular phenomenon occurring in a community. The Foreign Language Classroom Scale (FLCS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used as an instrument to measure students' anxiety levels and identify anxious students. 15 of the 33 FLCS items directly related to students' feelings of anxiety were selected. The questionnaire was distributed to 86 English Education Department undertaking English speaking courses in the third semester in 2024. Based on the FLCS scores, 6 participants were selected to be interviewed, 3 participants with high levels of speaking anxiety and 3 participants with low levels of speaking anxiety. The face to face interviews lasted for approximately 20 to 40 minutes for each participant carried out both in English and Indonesian, depending very much upon the convenience of participants.

The interviews were fully transcribed in order to capture relevant information, and then grouped into themes (Monette et al., 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Monette et al., 2011; Richards, 2009). The data were analyzed using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) by identifying common themes that emerged from the interviews. All major themes and information were outlined and simplified into groups of categories. To protect participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality, initial P1-P6 (participant 1 - participant 6) is used in reporting the data.

#### **4. Findings**

The findings of this study are reported under each research question proposed in the last part of the introduction section; (1) What factors contribute to EFL students' anxiety in speaking English? And (2) How do students cope with anxiety when speaking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

##### *4.1. The driving factors of students' speaking anxiety*

Based on interviews with students experiencing varying levels of anxiety, the researchers identified several factors contributing to speaking anxiety: lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, limited English skills, excessive worry about meeting academic goals, and fear of others' reactions.

##### *4.1.1. Lack of preparation*

The first factor contributing to students' anxiety, especially when speaking in front of an audience, was a lack of preparation. Participant 1, when asked about the sources of their anxiety, responded, "The primary cause of my anxiety was being asked to speak in English spontaneously, without any preparation." (P1). Another participant said that "When speaking, especially when aware of their limited language abilities, students should thoroughly prepare their material and organize their thoughts clearly. Without adequate preparation, students may feel confused and unsure of what to say or

do, making it difficult for them to handle unexpected situations. This lack of preparation can weaken both their mastery of the material and their confidence, increasing nervousness and anxiety.

#### *4.1.2. Fear of making mistakes*

The second factor was the fear of making mistakes, which made students anxious about leaving a negative impression on the audience. As Participant 1 explained, she felt terrified to speak due to the belief that the audience would closely observe her and notice every error she made. She expressed, “I tend to overthink that people are too focused on me and will notice every mistake I make when I'm asked to speak English in front of a large audience.” (P1).

#### *4.1.3. Lack of English skills*

The third factor was the lack of English language proficiency. This deficiency makes it difficult for students to find the right words and often leads to errors in vocabulary or pronunciation. As Participant 4 stated, “The first thing I am afraid of is mispronunciation in my use of English” (P4). The student's fear of mispronouncing words highlights an ongoing struggle with English language skills.

#### *4.1.4. Excessive worry about achieving the target study*

The fourth factor was excessive worry about achieving academic targets. Students become stressed and anxious when they cannot meet the high standards, they set for themselves. As Participant 2 shared, “From my personal experience, the first thing is stress—it is like there is a target I want to achieve, but I fail to meet it, and that leads to anxiety.” (P2).

#### *4.1.5. Fear of people's response*

The final factor was the fear of others' reactions. Students felt anxious about receiving feedback from teachers or reactions from classmates regarding their speaking performance, whether in or outside of class. Participant 4 explained, “The first thing I was afraid of was mispronunciation in my use of English, and then I was nervous about my interlocutor's reaction.” This participant experienced anxiety over potential mistakes or mispronunciations. Similarly, Participant 6 shared, “What usually makes me anxious is the fear of people's responses—like if what I'm saying is wrong, they might talk about me, which can disrupt my concentration.” (P6).

### *4.2. Students' strategies in dealing with speaking anxiety*

Based on the results from the interview, the researchers identified 4 main strategies that students use to manage their speaking anxiety: Change the mindset, relax, be confident, and improve speaking skills.

#### *4.2.1. Change the mindset*

The first strategy is to change one's mindset. Many students who experience speaking anxiety often do so due to negative thoughts, such as the fear of making mistakes or the worry about negative reactions from others, like the assumption that people will laugh or judge them. Therefore, it is essential to manage one's thoughts and cultivate a positive mindset to prevent these negative feelings, which can lead to anxiety, embarrassment, and nervousness that ultimately impact speaking performance. For example, Participant 1 emphasized the importance of positive thinking, stating, "I try to convince myself that people will not be as focused on the small mistakes I might make when I speak English in public." This mindset helped me gain the confidence to speak in front of larger audiences." (P1). In the same vein, Participant 2 said that:

In order to be able to speak in front of the class when the instructor asks me to perform, I always try to convince myself that I can and will perform in front of the class to convey my best ideas. When my confidence is high, I feel that I have the power to perform in public. P2

#### *4.2.2. Relaxation*

The second strategy is relaxation. Relaxation in speaking English makes the student feel more confident than without it and helps them convince themselves that they can do it, making it easier for them to speak English. As a result, it is critical that we first take a moment to calm down before we begin speaking English. To feel more at ease while speaking English, they needed to take a deep breath and calm down, so they had to do it. As stated by Participant 1, "I try to convince myself that people will not be that focused on the small mistakes I might make when I speak English in public and I try to calm down by taking deep breaths and also speaking slowly." (P1). Participant 2 also said, "I will take a deep breath and then exhale and focus on the activities that I am doing at that moment" (P2). Relaxation was also claimed by participant 3 to be an effective way in dealing with speaking anxiety as depicted in the following excerpt:

When the lecturer called my name to speak, my heart was beating very fast. It was like my heart was going to burst. But I always try to be calm so that I can control the atmosphere. When my mind is calm, I can easily perform and speak in class. P3

#### *4.2.3. Be confident*

The third strategy is confidence. Students' negative thoughts may arise because students have never tried to speak English in front of many people. It makes students have a negative view of speaking as they think badly before they talk, which makes them scared, nervous, shy, and anxious, and they do not want to speak in front of many people. Whereas, the students better try it first to find out how it feels and to know the extent of their abilities and if they make mistakes, it is okay because they are still learning it. As

stated by Participant 6 in the interview, she said “Personally, I do not want to do anything, but I am more confident and believe that I can do it, even if there are mistakes, it is like just learning” (P6). This was also agreed by participant 5 implying “What I have to do is just to be brave and to have confidence in myself so that I can perform in front of the class” (P5). If students allow their fears to take over and avoid speaking out, they will never develop; if they do not try to get used to it, they will always be fearful, and anxious, and avoid speaking in English. When students attempt to speak in front of many people, they become aware of their weaknesses and evaluate their speaking abilities. It should be the perfect strategy for the students’ speaking improvement.

#### *4.2.4. Improve speaking skills*

The last strategy that the students have to do is to improve their speaking skills. All participants acknowledged that improving language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar mastery, fluency, intonation, and intensity of practice, are efforts that must be made by all students as the most effective strategy to eliminate excessive fear of speaking English. As one participant noted, “Building a strong foundation in language skills, such as expanding vocabulary, mastering grammar, and practicing regularly, is crucial for boosting confidence (P1)”. P2 emphasized, “Fluency and proper intonation come with consistent effort and repetition, which are key to overcoming the fear of speaking.” “The more we practice speaking English, the more natural it feels, helping to eliminate anxiety and hesitation, added participant 6”. These insights highlight that deliberate and consistent efforts in language development form the most effective approach to conquering the fear of speaking English. Besides, P 3,4, and 5 respectively added that “Listening to native speakers and mimicking their pronunciation and tone has been incredibly helpful for me”, “Engaging in conversations with friends or joining English-speaking clubs is an excellent way to gain real-world experience”, “Recording myself while speaking allows me to identify and correct mistakes, which boosts my confidence over time.” These insights underscore that deliberate, diverse, and consistent efforts in language development are the most effective strategies to conquer the fear of speaking English.

## **5. Discussion**

In this section, the researchers present the overall findings of the study, which address the research questions: the factors contributing to students’ speaking anxiety and the strategies students use to manage it.

The first issue discussed is the factors contributing to students’ speaking anxiety. The findings reveal five main factors that cause students to feel anxious when speaking English: insufficient preparation, fear of making mistakes, limited English language proficiency, excessive concern about meeting academic targets, and fear of others’ reactions. These were identified as the primary causes of speaking anxiety for most students.

The first factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety is a lack of preparation, which is a common reason for their discomfort when speaking English. Without preparation, students often feel nervous and uncomfortable speaking in front of the class, as they lack notes or have not reviewed the material. This factor was also identified by Vera Abdillah (2018), who found that some students admitted they struggled with speaking tasks when they were not well-prepared. Similarly, Marwan (2007) concluded that insufficient preparation was a primary cause of students' anxiety. Additionally, Iizuka (2010) found that participating in class without adequate preparation often leads to heightened anxiety.

Beside lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes is also identified as the factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety. This fear arises from students' concerns that the audience may laugh at them or give negative evaluations if they make errors, leading to a lack of confidence, embarrassment, and anxiety about speaking. As Horwitz (1986) explained, the fear of negative evaluation is a significant factor in speaking anxiety. Many students feel anxious when speaking English because they worry about saying something incorrect. This aligns with Suryadi (2021), who found that students often fear appearing foolish in the language classroom, which causes them to worry. As a result, students who are afraid of making mistakes and feel embarrassed often choose to remain silent until they are specifically asked to speak in English.

Another factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety is a lack of English language skills. Limited English proficiency poses a significant challenge for students, particularly those learning English as a foreign language. Many students worry that they may be unable to sustain communication due to limited vocabulary, and they feel anxious about their pronunciation, fearing they might mispronounce words and be ridiculed. Consequently, students with lower English skills often find it difficult to participate in classroom speaking activities. Mulyani (2011) highlighted this issue in her research, identifying a negative correlation between English proficiency and speaking anxiety: students with lower English skills tended to experience higher levels of anxiety.

The finding also elucidates that excessive fear also contributes to students' fear of speaking English. Students often fear they will not reach the high goals they set at the beginning, and the pressure to achieve perfection can lead to unrealistic self-expectations. Viewing an assignment or test result as a failure if it is less than perfect reinforcing feelings of inadequacy, increasing their anxiety and self-doubt. This cycle of worry can hinder students' ability to complete assignments effectively and may cause them to be passive in class to avoid evaluative situations. Ultimately, this leads to a heightened fear of negative evaluation. Indrianty (2016) noted that the anticipation of correction and evaluation contributes significantly to students' anxiety.

The final factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety is the fear of others' responses. An unsupportive environment, including ridicule from peers or even teachers, significantly heightens students' anxiety. Many students worry that their classmates will laugh at them if they make a mistake, causing them to feel self-conscious and afraid of



embarrassing themselves in public. This aligns with findings by Price (1991), who identified the fear of being laughed at as a major source of anxiety. Similarly, Oxford (1999) emphasized that ridicule is one of the key issues related to speaking anxiety.

The second aspect discussed in this study was the strategies students use to cope with speaking anxiety. Four primary strategies were identified. The first strategy is to shift their mindset. Students are encouraged to adopt a positive outlook to foster confidence and anticipate positive responses. Atas (2015) suggested that students should remind themselves that they are not alone in their challenges and view teachers as supporters who help them improve rather than criticize them. Recognizing that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process can also help build their courage. Kondo and Ying (2004) emphasized positive thinking as an effective strategy for reducing student anxiety, as it helps redirect students' focus away from stress and anxious feelings.

The next strategy is relaxation. Practicing relaxation techniques helps students feel more confident and assures them that they can succeed in speaking English, making the experience less daunting. Before speaking, students are encouraged to take a moment to calm themselves, often by taking deep breaths to ease their nerves. This technique helps them feel more comfortable and composed. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) found that taking deep breaths and focusing on calming down is an effective method for reducing symptoms of speaking anxiety, as it helps relax both the body and mind.

Another strategy is building confidence. This involves encouraging students to be brave and speak in front of others, which allows them to identify and work on their weaknesses until they improve. Students should adopt a positive mindset, believing they can succeed and not fearing mistakes, as errors are part of the learning process. Recognizing and correcting these mistakes helps them become more fluent over time. Hauck and Stella (2005) suggested that students should take risks in language learning by being courageous and not overly concerned with making mistakes.

The final strategy is to improve students' English skills, particularly their speaking abilities. Many students experience anxiety when speaking English due to their awareness of their limitations, especially in Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language. They may feel self-conscious about their pronunciation, worry about mispronouncing words, and fear being ridiculed by their peers. To alleviate this anxiety, it is essential for students to focus on enhancing their speaking skills. Teachers can facilitate this process by incorporating regular speaking and communication practice in every lesson, which helps students become more familiar and comfortable with the language. With consistent practice, students will gradually build their confidence in speaking English.

The strategies proposed in this study align with those identified by Kondo and Ying (2004), who suggested various approaches to reduce student anxiety, including preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer support, and resignation. However, this research identified only two overlapping strategies with Kondo and Ying's findings: relaxation and positive thinking.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the data presented in the previous chapter, the researchers have drawn several conclusions regarding the factors that contribute to students' anxiety in EFL speaking. First, students often experience anxiety due to a lack of study, practice, and preparation. Second, they fear making mistakes or misinterpreting communication with their audience. Additionally, many students feel they lack proficiency in English, particularly in speaking skills. They also experience anxiety related to the fear of failing tests or not meeting their academic targets. Lastly, students often fear the reactions of others, feeling nervous about being laughed at or criticized during their speaking performances.

Based on these results, the researchers concluded that many factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety are linked to their negative perceptions. Additionally, the interviews revealed several strategies that students can use to reduce their anxiety. First, students should work on changing their mindset by eliminating negative thoughts before or during speaking. They need to stop fearing mistakes and instead adopt a positive attitude to boost their self-confidence. Second, relaxation techniques can be helpful. Students might consider avoiding eye contact with the audience initially, taking a moment to breathe before speaking, and then attempting to engage again. Next, building confidence in speaking is crucial. Students should embrace the idea that they cannot fully assess their speaking abilities without trying, which can help diminish fear of making mistakes. Finally, improving English skills, particularly speaking abilities, through consistent practice is essential.

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