

Speaking Anxiety among the Fourth Semester Students of English Department at University

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2609>

* Yunita Sinaga, Dedi Sukma Wijaya^{ab} 

¹²Universitas Kutai Kartanegara, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author: yunita@unikarta.ac.id

A B S T R A C T

Speaking anxiety is considered one of the most significant psychological factors affecting students' speaking performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. High anxiety may reduce students' confidence, participation, and oral communication ability in speaking classes. This study aimed to identify the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University and determine the dominant aspect of anxiety experienced during Speaking Class. This research applied a descriptive quantitative design using a survey method. The participants of this study were 22 students selected through total population sampling. The instrument used was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), consisting of 33 questionnaire items. The findings revealed that most students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety, with a mean score of 94.76. Furthermore, test anxiety was identified as the dominant aspect of speaking anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. The study concluded that students' speaking anxiety was primarily caused by evaluative classroom situations and performance pressure during Speaking Class.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, FLCAS, English Speaking, EFL Students, Test Anxiety*

Article History:

Received 19th May 2026

Accepted 29th June 2026

Published 02nd July 2026



INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential productive skills in language learning because it allows learners to express ideas, opinions, and emotions through oral communication. According to Bygate (1987), speaking refers to the ability to use oral language effectively to communicate meaning. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, speaking ability becomes an important indicator of students' language mastery because learners are expected to communicate actively using the target language.

In the globalization era, English functions as an international language that connects people from different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, mastering English speaking skills is considered important for academic achievement, social communication, and future career opportunities. Garg & Gautam (2015) explained that English proficiency enables people to interact globally and access wider educational and professional opportunities. However, many students still experience difficulties when speaking English in classroom situations.

Speaking is considered a complex language skill because learners must simultaneously pay attention to pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain stated that speaking is one of the most difficult skills to master because it requires linguistic competence and sociocultural understanding. Consequently, many EFL learners experience nervousness, fear, and lack of confidence during speaking activities.

Foreign language anxiety is a psychological condition that commonly occurs during language learning activities, especially in speaking performance. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as feelings of tension, nervousness, worry, and apprehension

specifically associated with second or foreign language learning contexts. In speaking classes, students often feel afraid of making mistakes, being laughed at by classmates, or receiving negative evaluations from lecturers.

In EFL learning contexts, speaking anxiety is considered one of the major barriers to successful language acquisition because English is rarely used in students' daily communication outside the classroom. Therefore, students often lack exposure and confidence when required to speak English during classroom interactions. Consequently, understanding students' speaking anxiety becomes important for lecturers in designing supportive learning environments and reducing students' psychological pressure during speaking activities.

Several previous studies have investigated speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Ula (2016) found that most university students experienced moderate speaking anxiety during speaking classes. Similarly, Fitri (2019) reported that students' anxiety negatively influenced their speaking performance in English classrooms. Kurniawati (2017) also discovered that students' anxiety significantly affected classroom participation and oral communication. Recent studies have continued to highlight the significant impact of speaking anxiety on EFL learners' speaking performance. Taqwa et al. (2022) found that many university students experienced anxiety during speaking activities, which affected their classroom participation and communication confidence. Similarly, Emara (2022) reported that foreign language anxiety remained a major factor influencing students' speaking performance in both face-to-face and online learning environments. Tsang (2022) also revealed that anxiety in oral presentations was closely related to learners' speaking proficiency and self-perceived pronunciation competence. Furthermore, Kurniasari (2023) found that EFL students generally experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety, particularly during speaking assessments and classroom presentations. These studies indicate that speaking anxiety remains a prevalent issue in EFL classrooms and continues to affect students' oral communication performance.

Therefore, investigating students' speaking anxiety is important because understanding the sources and levels of anxiety may help lecturers design more supportive learning environments and develop effective strategies to improve students' speaking confidence and participation.

In this study, the researchers analysed the levels of speaking anxiety among the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University and identified the dominant aspect of anxiety experienced by the students.

The research questions of this study were formulated as follows: (1) What are the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University? (2) What is the dominant aspect of speaking anxiety experienced by the students?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design using a survey method. According to Sugiyono (2009), descriptive quantitative research aims to describe phenomena systematically through numerical data analysis. The survey method was selected because the researcher intended to collect information regarding students' speaking anxiety through questionnaires.

Respondents

The participants of this study were the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University in the academic year 2026/2027. The research was conducted during the Speaking Class in April 2026 at Kutai Kartanegara University, Tenggarong, East Kalimantan. The total population consisted of 25 students. This study employed total population sampling, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. Total population sampling was chosen because the population size was relatively small and manageable. According to Arikunto (2010), when the population consists of fewer than 100 participants, it is recommended to include all members of the population to obtain

more accurate and representative data. By involving all students, the researchers minimized sampling bias and ensured that the findings reflected the actual level of speaking anxiety among the fourth semester students of the English Department. Therefore, all 25 students were selected as the sample of this study.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaire consisted of 33 items measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaires were distributed directly in the classroom after the speaking lesson activities had finished.

The FLCAS questionnaire measured three major aspects of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, positive and negative statements were scored differently to maintain scoring consistency. The total scores ranged from 33 to 165, where higher scores indicated higher levels of speaking anxiety.

Procedures

The researchers distributed printed questionnaires directly to the students during classroom activities. Before filling out the questionnaire, the students were informed about the purpose of the research and were instructed to answer honestly based on their actual feelings and experiences during English-speaking activities. After collecting the questionnaires, the researchers checked the completeness of the responses and calculated the total scores for each participant.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed descriptively using percentages and mean scores. The researchers categorized the students' speaking anxiety into three levels based on Horwitz et al. (1986)

Table 1. Levels of Students' Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety Score Range	Level of Anxiety
33-75	Low
76-119	Moderate
120-165	High

The researchers also calculated the percentage of each anxiety aspect to determine the dominant aspect experienced by the students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Levels of Speaking Anxiety

The findings revealed that the majority of the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Speaking Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	4	16%
Moderate	20	80%
High	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Based on Table 2, 20 students (80%) experienced a moderate level of anxiety, 4 students (16%) experienced a low level of anxiety, and only 1 student (4%) experienced a high level of anxiety.

The mean score of students' speaking anxiety was 94.76, which indicates that the students generally experienced a moderate level of anxiety during English-speaking activities. These findings indicate that although the students were able to participate in classroom speaking activities, they still experienced nervousness and lack of confidence while speaking English. Students with moderate anxiety usually feel worried about making mistakes, pronunciation errors, and grammatical inaccuracies. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Ula (2016) and Kurniawati (2017), which reported that most EFL learners experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety.

Dominant Aspect of Speaking Anxiety

The researchers categorized the FLCAS questionnaire into three aspects of speaking anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Table 3. Percentage of Speaking Anxiety Aspects

Anxiety Aspect	Total Score	Percentage
Communication Apprehension	845	35.67%
Test Anxiety	1083	45.72%
Fear of Negative Evaluation	441	18.61%

The findings showed that test anxiety was the dominant aspect of speaking anxiety experienced by the students, with a percentage of 45.72%. The findings revealed that test anxiety was the most dominant aspect of speaking anxiety among the participants. This result suggests that students experienced greater psychological pressure when they were assessed or evaluated during speaking activities. Unlike regular classroom interactions, speaking tests and graded performances often placed students in situations where they felt that their language competence was being closely judged. Consequently, students became more concerned about making mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary use, and fluency, which increased their anxiety levels.

Several classroom situations were identified as potential triggers of speaking anxiety. Oral presentations, individual speaking tests, answering questions in front of the class, and impromptu speaking tasks were among the activities that caused students to feel nervous. These situations required students to speak spontaneously while being observed by both the lecturer and their classmates. The possibility of making errors and receiving negative evaluations often reduced students' confidence and increased their fear of failure (Rahayu, 2016; Rochmawati & Martanti, 2022; Sukma, 2022).

The dominance of test anxiety may also be influenced by students' concern about academic achievement. Many students perceived speaking assessments as high-stakes activities that could affect their final grades (Fitriani, 2022; Nasrullah, 2025; Tuan, 2012). As a result, they tended to focus more on avoiding mistakes than on communicating their ideas effectively. This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who argued that test anxiety emerges when learners associate language learning tasks with evaluation and possible academic failure.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that speaking anxiety is not solely related to students' linguistic competence but is also influenced by psychological and social factors. Fear of receiving low scores, concern about negative judgments from peers, and lack of self-confidence may contribute to students' anxiety during speaking performances. Therefore, lecturers should create a supportive classroom atmosphere, provide constructive feedback, and offer more opportunities for low-pressure speaking practice to help reduce students' anxiety and improve their speaking confidence (Emara, 2022; Kurniasari, 2023; Kurniawati, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed to reduce students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. First, lecturers are encouraged to implement

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collaborative speaking activities such as pair work, group discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. These activities allow students to practice speaking in a less threatening environment and reduce the pressure associated with individual performance. Second, lecturers should provide supportive and constructive feedback rather than focusing primarily on students' errors. Positive feedback can help students build confidence and encourage them to participate more actively in speaking activities. Instead of immediately correcting mistakes, lecturers may emphasize communication effectiveness and provide guidance for improvement. Third, low-pressure speaking tasks should be incorporated regularly into classroom instruction. Activities such as informal conversations, small-group discussions, storytelling, and peer interviews can help students develop speaking confidence gradually without the fear of formal evaluation. These activities may create a more comfortable learning atmosphere and encourage students to use English more frequently. Therefore, by combining collaborative speaking activities, supportive feedback, and low-pressure speaking tasks, lecturers can help reduce students' speaking anxiety and promote greater confidence and participation in English-speaking classrooms. In addition, lecturers are encouraged to apply interactive speaking methods such as group discussions, pair work, role-play, and collaborative speaking activities to help students feel more relaxed and confident while speaking English. Providing constructive feedback instead of focusing excessively on grammatical errors may also help students improve their speaking confidence and participation in EFL classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to Almighty God for His blessings and guidance throughout the completion of this study. The researcher also would like to thank the fourth semester students of English Department at Kutai Kartanegara University for their cooperation and participation during the research process. Special appreciation is addressed to the research advisor, lecturers, family, and friends who continuously provided support, motivation, and valuable suggestions during the completion of this study.

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