

An Analysis of Students' Speaking Anxiety: A Case Study of 8th Grade Students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety is a common psychological barrier that hinders students from performing well in oral communication, particularly in foreign language learning contexts. This study aimed to analyze the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli and to identify the contributing factors as well as the dominant factor of their speaking anxiety. A mixed-method approach with a case study design was employed, involving 70 students from classes VIII B and VIII C as the subjects. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles et al. (2014). The findings revealed that the majority of students experienced speaking anxiety at mild to high levels, with 28 students (40%) in the Anxious category, 26 students (37.1%) in the Mildly Anxious category, and 15 students (21.4%) in the Very Anxious category. Only one student (1.4%) was classified as Relaxed, and none were Very Relaxed. The dominant factors contributing to speaking anxiety were Communication Apprehension (70%) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (69.7%). Internal factors identified included limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence, while external factors included being asked to speak without preparation, fear of being laughed at by friends, and pressure from teachers. This study confirms that speaking anxiety is a prevalent phenomenon among Indonesian junior high school students and aligns with the theory of foreign language anxiety proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, FLCAS, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Junior High School Students

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INTRODUCTION

English is recognized as an international language that plays a crucial role in the modern world, particularly in education, communication, and the advancement of science (Ananda, 2023). In Indonesia, English is a mandatory subject taught from elementary through secondary school, with the goal of enabling students to participate in global interactions. Through English learning, students are expected to master four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Amaniansih & Arsita, 2023). Among these four skills, speaking is often the most difficult to master because it requires mental readiness, fluency of thought, and accuracy in word choice. Consequently, students frequently feel nervous, afraid of making mistakes, or lack confidence when they have to speak in public. This condition makes speaking a skill that demands special attention in English language teaching at the junior high school level.

Speaking ability reflects the extent to which a person has actively mastered a language. To speak fluently, students must integrate their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and self-confidence to express themselves effectively. However, in practice, many students still struggle when asked to speak in English, whether in front of the class or in everyday conversations with teachers. They tend to feel unprepared, fear mispronouncing words, or worry about being laughed at by their peers. This indicates that, beyond linguistic factors, psychological factors significantly affect students' speaking performance. One such factor that frequently arises is speaking anxiety, which makes students feel tense and uncomfortable when communicating in a foreign language (Palupi et al., 2022). Interestingly, this anxiety is not only experienced by students with low proficiency but also by those who have good language skills. As a result, anxiety can reduce learning motivation and hinder the achievement of optimal learning outcomes.

Symptoms of speaking anxiety in English learning often manifest as passive classroom behavior. Some students choose to remain silent when the teacher asks questions or provides opportunities to speak, while others speak in very soft voices. It is also common for students to attempt to avoid speaking tasks for various reasons, such as forgetting their books or feeling unwell. These behaviors indicate fear, embarrassment, and a lack of confidence that hinder student engagement in learning. If this situation is allowed to continue, students will lose valuable opportunities to practice their speaking skills and will have difficulty developing their communication abilities. In the long term, they may perceive English as a difficult, stressful, and unenjoyable subject, and the primary goal of learning—to improve oral communication skills—will remain unachieved (Musriyono et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers need to pay attention to students' emotional factors to make the learning process more effective and conducive.

Every student has a different perception of the experience of speaking in English. Some students view speaking a foreign language as an interesting challenge that can improve their abilities, while others feel anxious and burdened, as if speaking has become a frightening ordeal (Rohayati, 2025). These differing perceptions influence the extent to which students are willing to participate in speaking activities in class. Students with positive perceptions tend to be more open to trying, even though they may still make mistakes. Conversely, students with negative perceptions prefer to remain silent or avoid speaking situations altogether. Thus, perception becomes a key factor that determines students' levels of speaking anxiety (Alfian et al., 2022). Understanding these perceptions can help teachers adjust their teaching approaches and strategies to boost students' self-confidence and encourage more active participation.

The impact of speaking anxiety is often visible through students' lack of participation in English learning, which serves as an important indicator for assessing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning

process (Sundari & Prasetya, 2024). Students who actively participate demonstrate courage and interest in using English in real situations. This participation is not limited to answering teachers' questions but also includes the ability to discuss, argue, and express opinions in class. Unfortunately, speaking anxiety often becomes a major obstacle to active participation. The fear of making mistakes or being mocked makes students reluctant to speak and choose to remain silent (Anjum & Campus, 2021). Consequently, the learning atmosphere becomes monotonous, and two-way communication between teachers and students becomes difficult to achieve. If this situation persists, English learning will not achieve its intended goal of training students' communication skills in real-life contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on speaking anxiety in Indonesian EFL contexts, most studies have concentrated on senior high school or university students, leaving junior high school students, particularly in regency-level schools such as SMP Negeri 1 Bangli, underexplored. Furthermore, while numerous studies have identified various contributing factors to speaking anxiety, few have systematically examined both the anxiety levels and the dominant factors using a mixed-method approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data. This study aims to fill this gap by comprehensively analyzing speaking anxiety among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli. The phenomenon is clearly observable at the school; a preliminary observation conducted on January 14, 2026, in classes VIII B and VIII C revealed that many students exhibited hesitation and reluctance to speak during English lessons. Only a few students dared to raise their hands and speak confidently, while others appeared restless, looked down, or spoke in very soft voices, with some admitting fear of being mocked for mispronunciation and others feeling they lacked sufficient vocabulary. Therefore, this research seeks to address the following objectives: (1) to identify the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli, and (2) to investigate the contributing factors and determine the dominant factor of their speaking anxiety.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

English is recognized as an international language that plays a crucial role in the modern world, particularly in education, communication, and the advancement of science (Ananda, 2023). In Indonesia, English is a mandatory subject taught from elementary through secondary school, with the goal of enabling students to participate in global interactions. Through English learning, students are expected to master four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Amaniansih & Arsita, 2023). Among these four skills, speaking is often the most difficult to master because it requires mental readiness, fluency of thought, and accuracy in word choice. Consequently, students frequently feel nervous, afraid of making mistakes, or lack confidence when they have to speak in public. This condition makes speaking a skill that demands special attention in English language teaching at the junior high school level.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The research findings are presented based on the analysis of data collected from 70 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli through the FLCAS questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 7 selected students. The findings are organized into two sections: (1) levels of speaking anxiety, and (2) contributing factors and the dominant factor of speaking anxiety.

Levels of Speaking Anxiety

The quantitative data from the FLCAS questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Based on the criteria established by Arikunto (2009), students were categorized into five anxiety levels. Table 1 presents the distribution of speaking anxiety levels among the 70 students.

Table 1 Distribution of Speaking Anxiety Level

No	Anxiety Level	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Very Anxious	124 - 165	15	21.4%
2	Anxious	108 - 123	28	40%
3	Mildly Anxious	87 - 107	26	37.1%
4	Relaxed	66 - 86	1	1.4%
5	Very Relaxed	33 - 65	0	0%
	TOTAL		70	100%

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students experienced speaking anxiety at mild to high levels. A total of 28 students (40%) fell into the Anxious category, 26 students (37.1%) into the Mildly Anxious category, and 15 students (21.4%) into the Very Anxious category. Only 1 student (1.4%) was classified as Relaxed, and none were Very Relaxed. This indicates that approximately 98.5% of students experienced some degree of speaking anxiety, with 77.1% falling into the Anxious or Very Anxious categories.

The FLCAS questionnaire consists of three components based on Horwitz et al. (1986), theory: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each component.

Table 2 Mean Scores for FLCAS Components (N=70)

Component	Number of Items	Mean	Percentage	Rank
Communication Apprehension	15	52.51	70%	1
Fear of Negative Evaluation	12	41.81	69.7%	2

Test Anxiety	6	20.5	68%	3
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Based on Table 2, Communication Apprehension obtained the highest percentage (70%), followed by Fear of Negative Evaluation (69.7%), and Test Anxiety (68%). This indicates that students experience the highest level of anxiety when they have to communicate in English, compared to anxiety related to tests or fear of being evaluated.

Dominant Factors and Contributing Factors

The quantitative findings identified Communication Apprehension as the dominant factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety, with a mean score of 70%. This was followed closely by Fear of Negative Evaluation (69.7%). The highest-scoring items in the Communication Apprehension component were related to speaking without preparation (item 9, 82%), comparing oneself to peers (item 23, 83%), and fear of being laughed at (item 31, 80%). These results suggest that students' anxiety is primarily triggered by situations requiring spontaneous speaking, social comparison with peers, and fear of negative reactions from others.

To gain a deeper understanding, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 students selected from different anxiety levels. Table 3 presents the interview participants.

Table 3 Interview Participations

Code	Subject	FLCAS Score	Anxiety Level
P1	Subject 20	145	Very Anxious
P2	Subject 35	145	Very Anxious
P3	Subject 7	121	Anxious
P4	Subject 34	123	Anxious
P5	Subject 1	90	Mildly Anxious
P6	Subject 45	87	Mildly Anxious
P7	Subject 36	86	Relaxed

The qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis revealed several themes related to the factors causing speaking anxiety.

Regarding triggering situations, all seven participants (100%) reported that being asked to speak without preparation was the main trigger of their speaking anxiety. P1 stated, "Saya bingung sekali ditanya oleh guru dan pertanyaan yang keluar sangat sulit." Six participants (86%) also identified being called to the front of the class as a triggering situation. P4 expressed, "Rasa cemas muncul pada saat mau maju ke depan kelas."

Regarding internal factors, all seven participants (100%) identified limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes as the main causes of their speaking anxiety. P4 emphasized, "Paling utama karena kosakata terbatas." P3 added, "Lebih ke takut melakukan kesalahan dalam tata bahasa." Six participants (86%) also mentioned lack of self-confidence as a contributing factor. P4 stated, "Kurang percaya diri dan kurang menguasai bahasa Inggris."

Regarding external factors, six out of seven participants (86%) reported fear of being laughed at by friends and pressure from teachers. P2 mentioned, "Saya takut ditertawakan jika salah." P3 expressed, "Dikoreksi di depan umum membuat saya lebih takut dan malu."

Regarding the impact of anxiety, all seven participants (100%) reported experiencing memory loss or blank mind when anxious. P1 stated, "Saya merasa lupa jawaban karena saya merasa gugup." Six participants (86%) reported choosing to remain silent rather than speaking. P4 explained, "Lebih baik diam daripada takut salah." Six participants (86%) also reported speaking incoherently or stuttering. P4 added, "Suara tidak jelas, kebanyakan terbata-bata."

To overcome their speaking anxiety, all seven participants (100%) reported preparing before speaking as their main coping strategy. P4 stated, "Mengulang materi, duduk dengan tenang." Six participants (86%) also reported thinking first before answering. P3 stated, "Saya suka berpikir terlebih dahulu."

Finally, all seven participants (100%) expressed expectations for supportive teachers and friends. P3 stated, "Memberi pemahaman lebih dalam." P4 expressed, "Saya ingin didukung, tidak ditertawakan."

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that speaking anxiety is a prevalent phenomenon among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli. The majority of students (77.1%) experienced anxiety at Anxious or Very Anxious levels, with only 1.4% classified as Relaxed and none as Very Relaxed. This finding aligns with the theory of foreign language anxiety proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), who identified foreign language classroom anxiety as a distinct, situation-specific anxiety experienced by many language learners. Horwitz (2010), further explained that language anxiety is not simply a general anxiety but a unique form of anxiety that arises specifically in response to learning and using a second or foreign language.

This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies. Nurjayanti (2024). found that most junior high school students experienced speaking anxiety at anxious levels. Similarly, Rahayu (2022) reported that most students were at the anxious and very anxious levels, and Meyriza et al. (2024) confirmed that most junior high school students in Indonesia experience speaking anxiety at moderate to high levels. These consistent findings across different schools and regions suggest that speaking anxiety is a widespread phenomenon among Indonesian junior high school students.

The interview findings revealed that internal factors were the main causes of students' speaking anxiety. All seven participants identified limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes as the primary internal factors. This finding is supported by Marliana (2023), who stated that limited vocabulary hinders students' ability to convey ideas effectively. Khreisat (2022), also found that limited vocabulary is a major cause of speaking anxiety, and Taufik (2025) identified it as one of the contributing factors. Regarding fear of making mistakes, Idrissi & Tofail (2022), stated that speaking anxiety is caused by poor grammatical understanding and limited vocabulary. Afdal & Iswanto (2022), added that good grammar makes communication more effective, while Rois & Gumelar (2025) found that fear of making mistakes was the dominant factor of speaking anxiety. Six out of seven students also mentioned lack of confidence as a contributing factor, which is supported by Anjum & Campus (2021), who stated that students who feel less confident will have low expectations, resulting in low achievement.

The interview findings also revealed that external factors contribute to students' speaking anxiety. Six out of seven students reported fear of being laughed at by friends and pressure from teachers. This

finding is supported by Asnaini et al. (2025), who stated that peer factors, such as being laughed at when making mistakes, discourage students from speaking. Marliana (2023) also found similar results regarding fear of being laughed at by classmates. Regarding pressure from teachers, Damayanti & Listyani (2020) stated that fear of teacher evaluation and negative expectations contribute to speaking anxiety.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings showed that Communication Apprehension and Fear of Negative Evaluation were the dominant factors causing speaking anxiety at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli. Communication Apprehension had the highest percentage (70%), followed by Fear of Negative Evaluation (69.7%). From the interviews, all seven participants reported experiencing anxiety when asked to speak without preparation, and six out of seven expressed fear of being laughed at. This finding is consistent with Damayanti and Listyani (2020), who found that Communication Apprehension was the most dominant type of anxiety among junior high school students. However, Rahayu (2022) found that Fear of Negative Evaluation was slightly higher. The small differences between these studies suggest that all three factors—Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety—are important, and which one is slightly higher may depend on the specific school environment and student characteristics. These findings are also supported by the theory of social conformity (Myers, 1968), which states that social factors such as peer or social pressure to perform perfectly can trigger anxiety.

This research has several limitations. First, due to time constraints, the research was conducted within a limited period. Second, the number of participants was limited to 70 students from only one school, and only 7 students were selected for the interviews. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all junior high school students in Indonesia. Third, the data collection methods relied on self-report instruments, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research with a longer time frame, larger and more diverse participants, and multiple data collection methods is needed to obtain more comprehensive and valid results.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bangli and to identify the contributing factors as well as the dominant factor of their speaking anxiety. Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, it can be concluded that the majority of students (98.6%) experienced speaking anxiety at mild to high levels, with only one student classified as relaxed and none as very relaxed. This indicates that speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among eighth-grade students at this school.

Regarding the contributing factors, both internal and external factors were identified. Internal factors included limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence, while external factors included being asked to speak without preparation, fear of being laughed at by friends, and pressure from teachers. The dominant factors were Communication Apprehension and Fear of Negative Evaluation. These findings align with Horwitz et al. (1986), theory of foreign language anxiety and Myers' (1968) social conformity theory, confirming that speaking anxiety is a significant issue among Indonesian junior high school students.

SUGGESTIONS

For teachers, it is recommended to give students more time to prepare before speaking, avoid correcting mistakes in front of the class, and create a supportive classroom environment. For students, they are encouraged to prepare before speaking, practice more at home, build their vocabulary, and understand that making mistakes is a normal part of learning. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct studies with longer time frames, larger and more diverse participants from various regions, and multiple data collection methods such as observations and speaking tests to obtain more comprehensive findings.

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