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# The anxiety in English for foreign language speaking class: the case of university students in Lampung context

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**ABSTRACT**

To date there have been a lot of currently emerging studies focusing on English speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian university students. Nevertheless, particularly the studies have not investigated university students in Lampung region as the new context. This study aims to describe the level, attitude and perception, and the causes of speaking anxiety in English among university students in the Lampung context. Descriptive research combining quantitative and qualitative approach was performed to conduct this study. 64 new state university students from the English Department were involved as participants in this study. A questionnaire and interview form related to speaking anxiety were used to collect the data whereby quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed via content analysis. Results of this study showed that students experienced low anxiety level when speaking English as a foreign language, but mostly they provided the perception that speaking ability was a trigger for anxiety. Even though students' positive attitude towards English used in the classroom was reflected, their speaking skill in English was negative. Additionally, some main sources such as the limited of vocabulary, self-confident, and speaking opportunity were the causes of speaking anxiety.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The most fundamental language skill to master is speaking [1], [2], but it is considered the most challenging of the four English language skills [3]–[5]. Students who live in an English for foreign language (EFL) setting suffer constraints in their use of the language they are studying, such as not knowing the language and being unable to pronounce it. As a result, students may experience stress and anxiety when asked to communicate in English in class [6], [7]. This can end without any feedback from the instructor. This situation arises as a result of psychological elements that play a significant part in the language acquisition process. A well-documented factor is anxiety. Language anxiety has transformed into "one of the significant concerns" in the discipline of teaching and studying foreign languages [8], [9]. In the process of acquiring a language, psychological elements play a significant role [10], whereby anxiety is an aspect of psychology that is linked to threats to self-efficacy and assessments of situations as dangerous [11]. Anxiety might be one of the well-documented psychological phenomena [12], [13] as it is pivotal for instructors to be aware of its existence, especially in terms of learners' speaking anxiety, and have adequate knowledge of it [14]. Governing learners' performance, anxiety is thought to play a significant role in

language learning results [15], [16]. Anxiety itself is a relative feeling of tension, nervousness, and apprehension related to "an autonomic nerve system arousal" [17], which is negative to learners as it potentially impedes language production and achievement [18]. It is basically "a state of alertness manifests itself through physical, emotional, and mental changes" caused by a stimulus [19]–[21].

Speaking anxiety is one type of anxiety which still grabs researchers' attention to date and there have been quite many very recent studies focusing on English speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian students. Few studies focus on the investigation of speaking anxiety among students in private English language institute [22], [23]. Moreover, a lot of studies focus on the anxiety experienced by university students when speaking English [24]–[29]. Additionally, numerous studies investigate speaking anxiety in English classroom among lower education such as junior high school [16], [30], [31], senior high school [32]–[35], and vocational school [36], [37]. This current study, however, focuses on the investigation of speaking anxiety among university students in Lampung region when speaking English in the classroom.

This recent study investigates the construct of classroom speaking anxiety in EFL university students in Lampung area. Moreover, this study aims to describe the level, attitude and perception, and the causes of the anxiety in speaking English among university students in the Lampung context. The following research questions are directed to explain the possible answers in achieving the aims of this study.

- What levels of speaking anxiety are the Lampungnese university students of the English-speaking class at?
- How do the Lampungnese university students perceive speaking in the English-speaking class and rate themselves with respect to their speaking skills?
- What are the causes of speaking anxiety among university students in Lampung context when speaking English?

This study is expected to help EFL university students in Lampung area in understanding the elements that can stymie their English language learning so that they can find the best strategy to deal with their anxiety. This is due to English will be utilized professionally when they graduate from university and begin working, it is critical that they have a strong command of the language. Moreover, the research on factors affecting successful verbal communication and adaptation to social and academic situations can aid English teachers who desire to shift their speaking in English classrooms from a tense and nervous environment to one that encourages student performance in speaking English.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research design

To conduct this study, descriptive research that combined between quantitative approach and qualitative approach was performed. According to Suparman *et al.* [38], the descriptive research could describe the observed phenomena of certainly scientific field. The involvement of quantitative approach in this descriptive study was to describe the level of speaking anxiety among university students in Lampung region in the English classroom. Meanwhile, the use of qualitative approach in this descriptive study was to describe students' attitude and perception to speak in English speaking class and explore the causes of the anxiety among university students in Lampung context when speaking English in the classroom.

### 2.2. Participant

This study involved 64 university students who studied English as foreign language in the second semester of speaking class. They consisted of 24 boys and 40 girls whereby their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old when they were in the first year of college. Moreover, they were selected purposively because they provided easy access such as time and place as participants to be investigated [39].

### 2.3. Instrument

The modified foreign language classroom anxiety (MFLCAS) was used to collect the data regarding the level of speaking anxiety among university students in English classroom. The MFLCAS evolved from the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), which was developed as a learner questionnaire by a group of pioneering academics in this field [40]. The foreign anxiety inventory was developed by selecting 18 items out of 33 items on the Likert response scale, in which respondents expressed their attitude towards English-speaking anxiety, responding to one (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree. Moreover, total scores ranged from 18 to 90 because the questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale. As a consequence, the level of EFL speaking anxiety for this study was categorized as 18 – 53 (low), 54 – 72 (moderate), and 73 – 90 (high) [41], [42].

Meanwhile, the student interview form (SIF) was used to collect the data related to the causes of the anxiety among university students in English speaking class, and also university students' attitude and

perception in English speaking class. It was designed as a written answer form. All of the questions illustrate three types of performance anxiety: social anxiety, test anxiety, and negative assessment anxiety [40]. The SIF consists of three open questions that were expected to contribute important data to this research in the sense that students would be able to freely express their feelings. Both MFLCAS and SIF have been translated into Indonesian for construct validity, and the Indonesian version was reviewed by three applied linguistics experts. As a result, both research instruments items obtained more than 0.50 points in objective test index for item compliance, which corresponds to the validity of expert evaluations.

### 2.4. Data collection

The MFLCAS was administrated to participants to get quantitative data in which they were guided to fill all statements in the questionnaire correctly. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data and provide an overview of their anxiety potential when speaking in English. Moreover, a semi-structured interview and certain guidelines were designed and provided in developing their ideas.

### 2.5. Data analysis

The quantitative data got from the deployment of the questionnaire was evaluated by using descriptive statistics like the percentage unit. This data was used to measure university students' level of speaking anxiety in English classroom. Additionally, the qualitative data gathered from a semi-structured interview was analyzed by using content analysis after the researcher had transcribed the interviews. To establish inter-rater reliability, the researchers examined and coded the items. This data revealed common and important things, themes, and patterns related to university students' attitude and perception to speak in English speaking class and also the causes of the anxiety among university students in English speaking class.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. The level of English for foreign language speaking anxiety

The study's first research question was speaking anxiety level that students experienced when speaking English. The amount of speaking anxiety was measured using an 18-item questionnaire. The mean scores were derived using descriptive statistics to measure the university students' level of EFL speaking anxiety as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. EFL university students' speaking anxiety level

| Parameter | EFL speaking anxiety level |
|---|---|
| Mean | 51.19 |

The statistical finding in Table 1 shows that overall, students at the university had low level of speaking anxiety. Few studies also revealed that university students in Java area such as East Java and West Java have low level of speaking anxiety in English public speaking [28], [29]. Some studies, however, showed that EFL university students in Sumatera area such as Aceh and North Sumatera have high level of speaking anxiety [26], [27]. These reports show that the phenomena related to speaking anxiety experienced by university students are relatively various in the different region. This indicates that indirectly the area difference has an important role on the various levels of speaking anxiety among EFL university students. In detail, the level of speaking anxiety among EFL university students in Lampung region can be classified to three categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentages and frequencies of EFL university students' speaking anxiety

| Level of speaking anxiety | Percentages (%) | Frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| Low | 59.38 | 38 |
| Moderate | 29.69 | 19 |
| High | 10.93 | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 64 |

Table 2 revels that the number of university students who had low speaking anxiety level were higher than the number of university students who had high level of speaking anxiety. This interprets that

most of them feel relax when speaking English in the classroom and only few students who feel anxious when speaking English. Few reports revealed that some university students who focus on studying in the English department still experience anxious when speaking English [43], [44]. Hartono *et al.* [45] argued that EFL speaking anxiety among students are related to their self-efficacy ability. Moreover, Hartono *et al.* [46] explained that students who have high self-efficacy will feel relax when speaking English while they who have low self-efficacy tend to feel anxious when speaking English in the classroom. The ability to speak English is a clear benefit for their future career as English teachers, which explains their low level of speaking anxiety. As a result, they will be able to increase their abilities. to speak patiently in speaking classes and therefore experience lower levels of anxiety.

### 3.2. Students' attitudes and perceived ability to speak in speaking class

The second research question of the study investigated learners' attitudes towards spoken English and assessed their English proficiency. The first and second open-ended questions in the SIF probed how university students in Lampung region rated their own performance and how they felt about speaking English in class. Students' attitude and perception to speak in English speaking class are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. University students' attitudes and perceived ability

| # | Questions | Number of students (n = 64) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Positive | Negative | No idea |
| 1. | Students' attitudes towards speaking English | 46 (71.87%) | 15 (23.44%) | 3 (4.69%) |
| 2. | Average speaking ratings | 30 (46.87%) | 34 (53.13%) | - |

According to quantitative findings, the students have low levels of anxiety while speaking English in class as a foreign language, 71.87% of respondents expressed a positive opinion about speaking English. Some of university students reported that:

*"Although at first I was embarrassed, I had fun."*
*"It is fun because this is the way of practicing and developing my English."*
*"It's fun to try and learn from my mistakes through trial and error."*
*"I have more confidence to speak."*

The passage above shows three main points to be discussed. First, what students say may be an example of a negative correlation between their perceived concerns about speaking and the attitudes they express towards spoken English. Their statements show that students are enthusiastic about using English in the classroom: affective responses to language learning contexts, such as attitudes toward teachers, classrooms, textbooks, as well as language labs [22]. Secondly, the appearance of this positive attitude could be related to the fact that as the course progress, students' speaking anxiety level may diminish. Once they get to know their fellow students and instructors, the learning and teaching environment will be welcoming. This can cause students to gradually develop the courage to take risks by speaking English in class. This is line to Hanafiah *et al.* [23] argued that the positive attitude toward English course can reduce the anxious feeling in speaking class. Third, when students say, *"Fun, although I was embarrassed at first."* and others say, *"It's fun to learn from my mistakes through trial and error. I have more confidence to speak."* They can be the result of concerns raised by the facilitator/benefactors that have a positive impact on and motivate the students. Perhaps students can achieve better than they expect because of the beneficial parts of fear, as it allows them to become balanced, cautious, and alert. To summarize, these students may be aware that two affective variables have a negative connection: fear of speaking and attitudes towards spoken English. Their situational concerns will diminish over time and their moderator/benefit concerns will play a role.

On the other hand, 15 university students reported dissatisfaction with their English class. Several students say:

*"I become nervous when I'm afraid I won't be able to respond immediately away since I'm at a loss for words."*
*"When I speak English, I'm humiliated and embarrassed because I can't think of the correct words."*

*"It takes me a long time to develop sentences."*

Although the above view is only shared by around a third of respondents, this could be an example of speaking being seen as an important variable in language learning process.

These results are consistent with previous studies show that speaking is a concern for learners from many ethnic groups in various learning situations [4], [22], [23], [40], [43], [44], [47]. Speaking anxiety appears to be relatively typical in L2 or foreign language learners, according to preliminary studies on foreign language anxiety by Horwitz *et al.* [40]. Anxious learners, according to Horwitz *et al.* [40], are hesitant to speak in a foreign language. They are afraid to express themselves in English in front of others. They are terrified of not understanding every voice input because mastering the target language necessitates knowing every word spoken. In class, learners are allowed to sit in the back row so that they do not feel shy or embarrassed when asked to speak. At best, they can learn too much, but at worst, they can skip classes. Anxious students who are speaking in English do not want to make mistakes because they feel chastised and that every correction implies failure.

Anxiety in learning a foreign language is situational, unique and different from other types of anxiety. This is because anxious students recognize that the task of learning a language is unsolvable [40]. Similarly, concerns about speaking English as a foreign language, apart from general worries regarding foreign language proficiency, this could be a distinct phenomenon that should be investigated in different circumstances [4]. Despite the fact that 71.87% of university students in Lampung context indicated a good attitude toward speaking English in class, 53.15% did not recognize their English skills. This implies that, despite their awareness of the need of using the target language in speaking classes, these students are less confident in speaking English in class. Allowing students to use a portion of their native language (L1) in class could be a solution to this issue, Mak [47] conducted a study in which he enabled his pupils to utilize Mandarin in English as a second language (ESL) sessions to lessen language anxiety. Moreover, the findings revealed that the application of L1 increases students' confidence and in turn stimulates speech and the amount of L1 to be used should not be too large to prevent students' contact with the target language.

### 3.3. Speaking anxiety sources

The objective of the final research question is to figure out what the causes of speaking anxiety among university students in Lampung context in English classroom. The student interviewees (n = 64) provided a total of 116 responses. Various reasons were suggested as to why students were afraid to speak in class. There are a total of six anxiety trigger factors that have been discovered as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Speaking anxiety sources

| Anxiety sources | Responses | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of vocabulary | 40 | 34.48 |
| Self-confident | 21 | 18.10 |
| English speaking opportunity | 19 | 16.37 |
| Grammar | 16 | 14.54 |
| Attitude towards English | 15 | 12.93 |
| English proficiency | 5 | 4.31 |
| Total | 116 | 100.00 |

Table 4 shows that there were six speaking anxiety sources among EFL university students in Lampung context such as lack of vocabulary, self-confident, speaking opportunity, inaccurate use of grammar, negative attitudes towards English, and poor English proficiency in English. Moreover, lack of vocabulary was considered as the major factor while poor English proficiency was a minor cause for concern. This is the primary cause of speaking anxiety, which can be divided into three categories: environmental, individual, and educational [11], [48], [57]–[59], [49]–[56]. Individual characteristics, such as vocabulary, self-confidence, grammar, and attitude toward English, are the first sets of elements that comprise the greatest number of causes. These elements can be considered important in the creation of English speech, but these factors are not inherent in individual learner, which causes them anxiety when speaking in English. Verbal communication in English is uncommon since students reside in Indonesia, a monolingual country in which all common activities can be successfully carried out in their original tongue. As a result, individuals become apprehensive when speaking English. One element is included in the last category: a lack of English competence. These students' English abilities are insufficient, despite the fact that they have been learning English in public schools for at least nine years. This is due to the fact that the Indonesian English curriculum emphasizes syntax over writing, reading, and memorization, with less focus on communicating and listening [10], [60]. Clearly this raises the anxiety in terms of student listening and speaking in English.

Interestingly, this group of university students believes that vocabulary is the most important factor in speaking English. These results are consistent with the findings that participants emphasized that the anxiety stemmed primarily from a lack of vocabulary in English lessons [51], [61], [62]. One possible

explanation is that without a sufficient vocabulary, children are unable to understand others or convey their own thoughts. Some studies reported that the communication in English is difficult to be done without grammar and vocabulary [62]–[64]. It means that we may envision ourselves conversing in a different language; we can converse even if we do not know any grammar and only have a few useful phrases and expressions. Additionally, few studies revealed that vocabulary is the main element of every language [48], [50]. It is critical for students to acquire more precious vocabulary information and build their own vocabulary acquisition strategies, especially as their English fluency and expressiveness improve. Students are generally aware of the importance of vocabulary because of the inherent nature of language learning. In this approach, studying vocabulary aids students in mastering English for their own objectives, as well as understanding and communicating in English with others.

Furthermore, the sources of anxiety mentioned earlier were consistent and distinct from previous studies. Goñi-Osácar and Lafuente-Millán [48] stated that students who experience anxious when speaking English are affected by some factors such as inaccurate use of grammar, lack of confidence, and views toward English language. In addition, Ozdemir and Papi [64] studied that self-confidence is one of the main sources of EFL speaking anxiety whereby students who have high self-confidence will not feel nervous, whereas they who have low self-confidence will feel anxious. According to Liu [3], no confidence or poor self-perception of being able to speak the target language has also been linked as an implicit source of anxiety when speaking a foreign language. Öztürk and Gürbüz [4] also found that when studying a foreign language, fear of making a mistake, perfectionist attitudes, and reactions from other students are all sources of anxiety. Few studies also showed that the lack of opportunity for students to speak English in the public place more makes them anxious than they who have much opportunity to train their speaking skills in English [49], [50]. Moreover, Arnaiz and Pérez-Luzardo [49] revealed that attitudes toward English as foreign language is also the cause of speaking anxiety among students in which students who have negative attitude toward English language tend to experience anxious when speaking English while they who have positive attitude toward English language relatively feel relax when speaking English. These reports prove that several sources of speaking anxiety have to be noticed by students to reduce their anxious feeling when speaking English.

## 4. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, AND SUGGESTION

This study focuses on conceptualizing communicative anxiety in English from the perspective of university students in Lampung region in a typical language learning context. The findings revealed that Indonesian students were fearful of speaking English. Despite the fact that this study indicated a low level of speaking anxiety in English and reported unsatisfactory speaking abilities in English, students had a positive view toward English spoken in the classroom. If we talk about parameter-based anxiety levels, then test anxiety and negative evaluation fear are more frequent anxiety about performance than communicative fear. In addition, students considered limited vocabulary as the primary source of speaking anxiety. Therefore, this study implies that teachers/instructors and students have to notice some main source of EFL speaking anxiety to decrease the anxious experience when speaking English.

For future research, this study suggests using qualitative tools such as journaling, open-minded protocols, as well as classroom compliances, or teacher thinking to consolidate understanding of speaking anxiety in the class. It is worthwhile to examine the effectiveness of the partial use of L1 in a student speech lesson. The relationship between speaking anxiety and other emotional characteristics including self-esteem, motivation, risk acceptance, and extraversion is an intriguing research issue.

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