

Investigating Speaking Anxiety in Indonesian Young Learner Classrooms: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

¹**Aditya Galih Agustin, ^{1*}Teguh Sulistyо, ¹Agus Sholeh**

¹English Education Study Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang.
Jl. S. Supriadi No. 48 Kota Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: sulistyoteguh@unikama.ac.id

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Abstract

Language anxiety among learners, especially young learners, can be alarming, and it is estimated that up to one-half of all language students experience debilitating levels of speaking anxiety. Students' anxiety can influence both the fluency and the accuracy of speaking because anxiety acts as a distraction. Therefore, being aware of students' speaking anxiety is important. This study aimed to analyze the students' speaking anxiety in a young learner classroom. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design. This study was conducted with a sample of 35 students. Two instruments were used in this study, which included: observation, a questionnaire, and an interview. The process of data analysis included data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data gathered were then verified by an expert validator. The result of this study indicated that the majority of students had a high level of anxiety in the anxious category. This result certainly deserved attention in the implementation of the speaking learning process because it was possible for anxiety to contribute to students' speaking failure. Furthermore, there were a number of factors that contributed to the speaking anxiety faced by students with high and low anxiety. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors. In terms of internal factors, the students were worried about their language skills, afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, and had low confidence. In terms of external factors, the students were afraid of getting bad grades, afraid of being laughed at by their friends, afraid of getting negative feedback from the teacher, and afraid that their English would not be understood. In addition, both students with high and low anxiety had a number of strategies to reduce speaking anxiety. Those strategies were included: preparing, practicing, relaxing, smiling, taking a deep breath, making jokes, and looking away in various directions during the speaking performance. The implications and suggestions of the research are also discussed.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety; Young learner; Speaking performance

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the productive skills that demands English language learners to have considerable courage and confidence in conveying messages to listeners (Suleimenova, 2013). It is crucial for learners to build good communication skills among themselves, as mastering speaking skills is often viewed as a key determinant of whether learners have successfully mastered a language or not. Therefore, foreign language learners tend to perceive speaking ability as a success criterion in language acquisition (Palupi, 2021).

However, anxiety has become a significant problem for foreign language learners, hindering their ability to convey messages effectively and build communication within their environment (Elmenfi, 2016). Language anxiety, especially among young learners, is alarming, with estimates suggesting that up to half of all language students experience

debilitating levels of speaking anxiety (Tobergte & Curtis, 2013; Liu & Jackson, 2021). Students' anxiety can influence both fluency and accuracy in speaking. Since anxiety acts as a distraction, students may not be able to learn new words, phrases, or grammar structures when they are worried. This worry may manifest as fear of future communication or simply fear of misunderstanding something.

Teaching speaking to young learners differs in many ways from teaching adolescents or adults (Nilsson, 2019). Primary school students are, in a sense, a captive audience; instruction is compulsory, and they are not fully able to deal with anxiety. Becker and Roos (2016) mention that young learners are at an age where their rapid cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development affects their attitudes and metacognitive abilities. Therefore, oral communication is the focus of early language instruction, and teachers need to create an atmosphere where children develop confidence to communicate in English despite their limited language proficiency as beginners (Copland et al., 2012; Zhang & Tsung, 2021).

Anxiety is regarded as a psychological construct commonly described as a state of apprehension or worry, indirectly associated with an object (Copland et al., 2012). Tobergte and Curtis (2013) assert that anxiety is a feeling and emotional reaction that arises while learning or using a second language, negatively impacting the learning process. This implies that anxiety causes worry or fear that can negatively influence both the process and achievement of learning a foreign language. Horwitz (2010) further proves that foreign language learning anxiety has a negative impact on learners' performance and academic achievement.

Speaking anxiety is one of the most important affective variables influencing foreign language learning and often has a detrimental effect on students' oral performance in English (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). Speaking anxiety can range from slight nervousness to intense fear, with common symptoms including hand shaking (Abrar, 2017), shivering, sweating, fear, forgetfulness, blankness, butterflies in the stomach, dry mouth and throat (Karatas et al., 2016), fast heart rate, and squeaky voice (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). The level of anxiety varies from person to person according to their physical and psychological condition as well as specific situational demands.

Ellis (2015) classifies anxiety into three types: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety refers to a stable tendency to feel nervous in many circumstances, forming part of an individual's personality and thus difficult to change. State anxiety, on the other hand, relates to an unstable feeling of anxiousness arising in specific circumstances as a response to external stimuli (Akkakoson, 2016; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). This type of anxiety fades when the threat disappears (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015). Finally, situation-specific anxiety is a type of trait anxiety limited to particular contexts, such as taking a test, public speaking, or speaking in a foreign language (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

In foreign language learning, Ellis (2015) mentions three main sources of anxiety: communicative apprehension (e.g., difficulty in understanding teachers' instructions or peers' talk), fear of negative evaluation (e.g., fear of being corrected), and test anxiety (e.g., fear of failing). These are well-known sources of anxiety in the discourse of foreign language education (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Liu, 2020).

In Indonesia, English in primary schools is a local-content subject intended to develop abilities to understand simple oral and written expressions. English is not a compulsory subject, giving teachers and schools flexibility regarding approaches, materials, and content. Classrooms are usually informal and supportive, learners are not grouped according to proficiency levels, competitive elements are minimized, and the curriculum emphasizes equality, solidarity, and acceptance of diversity (Pratama & Setyaningsih, 2022). However, such conditions may contribute to the formation of

students' speaking anxiety, as teachers may not pay sufficient attention to individual competencies. Consequently, classes are often dominated by active students, while others remain silent.

Previous studies on speaking anxiety have predominantly focused on junior high school and university students, with limited data on young learners (Liu & Jackson, 2021; Zhang & Tsung, 2021). Moreover, since English is not compulsory at the primary level, there is limited understanding of how speaking anxiety develops among young learners in Indonesia. This highlights a significant research gap.

Further research is needed on students' speaking anxiety in young learner classrooms, as speaking anxiety is often attributed to age factors (Elmenfi, 2016) and may have negative long-term effects (Jusoh et al., 2016). Therefore, this study aims to explore students' speaking anxiety, the factors influencing it, and the strategies they use to reduce their anxiety in the primary classroom context. Based on the above background, the research questions of this study are as follows: What is the level of speaking anxiety among students in young learner classrooms? What factors influence students' speaking anxiety in young learner classrooms? What strategies do students use to reduce their speaking anxiety in young learner classrooms? The results of this study will provide new insights into students' speaking anxiety and can serve as valuable input for overcoming speaking anxiety in young learner classroom contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze students' speaking anxiety, the factors influencing it, and the strategies used to reduce anxiety in young learner classrooms. Descriptive qualitative research aims to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena and describe them systematically (Ary, 2010). This design allowed the researchers to deeply explore students' feelings, perceptions, and experiences related to speaking anxiety within their natural classroom context (Moleong, 2009).

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 3 Panggungrejo, Malang, involving all sixth-grade students as participants, with a total of 35 students (18 females, 17 males) aged 11–12 years old. The students had been learning English since grade four, primarily at beginner levels, such as introducing themselves and family members. English was taught once per week for 35 minutes as a local-content subject. Their prior exposure to English was limited to classroom instruction, as most students did not attend private English courses. Information on socio-economic background was gathered informally, and the majority came from lower-middle income families in the area.

Instruments

The study employed three primary instruments for data collection, each designed to capture different aspects of students' speaking anxiety and coping strategies. The first instrument was an observation checklist combined with field notes. Observations were carried out over the course of three meetings to identify visible signs of speaking anxiety as well as the strategies students used to manage it. The observation checklist was developed based on commonly recognized anxiety indicators as described by Karatas et al. (2016), ensuring that it reflected relevant behaviors. Field notes were also taken during these sessions to document contextual details that might not be captured in the checklist, thereby enriching the data. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the checklist was reviewed and validated by an English education lecturer before it was applied in the study.

The second instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. A modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), adapted from Nilsson

(2019), was implemented to measure students' levels of speaking anxiety, the factors influencing them, and the strategies they employed to cope. The questionnaire consisted of 20 close-ended items organized on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to its administration, the instrument was piloted with 10 students from another nearby primary school to confirm the clarity of its items. Reliability testing revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .84, indicating good internal consistency and suitability for data collection.

The third instrument was an interview protocol designed to gain deeper insights into students' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants, comprising four students categorized as "Very Anxious" and four categorized as "Very Relaxed." The interview questions were developed in alignment with the research objectives and reviewed by two English education lecturers to establish content validity. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Indonesian to ensure participants' comfort and natural expression, and all sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed in full, providing detailed qualitative data for subsequent analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was first obtained from the school principal, ensuring formal approval and support from the institution. Following this, the researcher coordinated with the English teacher to arrange a suitable schedule for observations, the administration of questionnaires, and the conduct of interviews. This collaborative planning was crucial to minimize disruptions to the school's routine. Data collection was carried out over three weeks in February 2022, providing sufficient time to gather comprehensive information from multiple sources. During this period, the researcher attended classes as an observer, taking detailed notes to capture students' behaviors and responses. After lessons, questionnaires were distributed to students to gather quantitative data on their experiences and perceptions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted either during break times or after regular class hours. This scheduling ensured that the research process respected the students' learning time while still enabling the collection of rich, in-depth data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) interactive model, which involves three interconnected stages. The first stage was data condensation, where information gathered from observations, questionnaires, and interviews was selected, focused, and transformed into meaningful codes and categories. These categories were aligned with the core themes of speaking anxiety, such as anxiety levels, influencing factors, and coping strategies. The second stage was data display, in which the organized data were presented through tables and narrative descriptions. This process made it easier to identify emerging patterns and relationships across the different sources of data. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, where interpretations were developed to directly address the research questions. During this phase, conclusions were continuously revisited and checked against the data to ensure accuracy and reliability.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study incorporated credibility strategies through triangulation. Methodological triangulation was achieved by combining multiple sources of evidence, namely observations, questionnaires, and interviews, to strengthen the overall validity of the results. Investigator triangulation was also applied by involving an external auditor, a speaking class lecturer, Ayu Liskinasih, M. Pd, who reviewed the data analysis process and interpretations to minimize researcher bias. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing summarized findings with

selected participants. This allowed the students to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences, thereby reinforcing the credibility and authenticity of the study's results (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Result of Questionnaire and Observation

The researchers in this study distributed the questionnaire to six grade students of SD Negeri 3 Panggungro Kepanjen, Malang with a number of 35 students. The data obtained from this instrument became the main data of this study. The questionnaire was consisted of 20 items and was adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Nilson (2019).

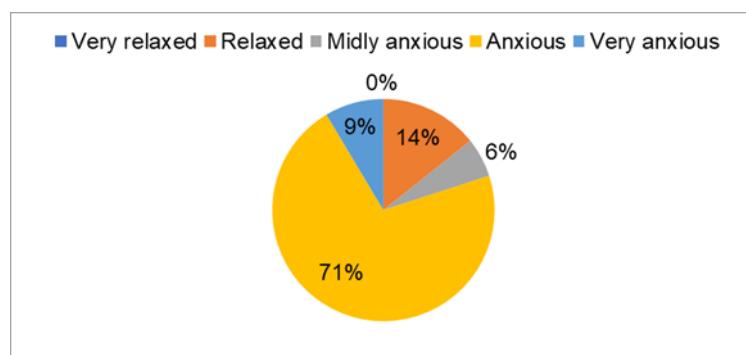


Figure. 1 Level of student speaking anxiety

Figure 3.1 explained how the level of speaking anxiety faced by students in young learner classroom. The majority of students (71%) had high level of anxiety with anxious category. Where, based on the anxiety category suggested by Ellis (2015), each student gets a score above 80. 9% of the students were categorized as very anxious, while only 6% of students had moderate level of speaking anxiety and 14% students belonged to relaxed category. This indicated that students seemed to experience various feelings of anxiety during speaking performance. This result certainly deserved attention in the implementation of the speaking learning process because it was possible for anxiety to contribute to students' speaking failure. The higher the level of anxiety experienced by students, the higher the possibility that language performance would be disturbed.

Furthermore, based on the results of the questionnaire, state and trait anxiety were the most common types of anxiety experienced by students. This was based on the results of the average value of respondents' answers on each item in the questionnaire.

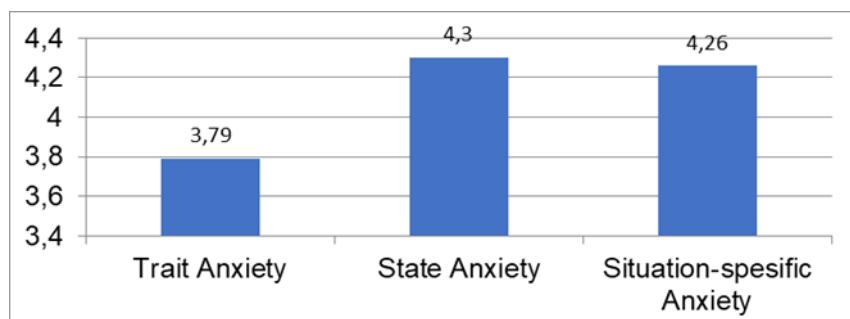


Figure 2. Type of Anxiety Faced by the students

Based on Figure 3.2, students gave high scores on state anxiety with an average value of 4.3 and was followed by situation-specific anxiety with an average value of 4.2. Meanwhile, trait anxiety got an average score of 3.6. This showed that students generally had the type of anxiety in the form of state and situation-specific anxiety. In terms of state anxiety, the students seemed to have an unstable feeling of anxiousness that arose in specific circumstances as a response to an external stimulus. It was because they were exposed to a particular situation which caused them stress, but it was believed to fade when the threat disappears. In terms of situation specific anxiety, the students seemed to feel anxious in a particular setting or situation, such as taking a test, public speaking or speaking in a foreign language. Nonetheless, the students also felt trait anxiety. Where, the students tended to feel anxious in all situations in young learner classroom. Special strategy was probably needed to overcome this type of anxiety because it was related to student characteristics and was difficult to change.

The researchers did classroom observation during speaking class. The data showed that most of the students had high level of speaking anxiety. Although all of the students showed learning interest and join the English discussion in the learning process, the majority of the students were inactive. Moreover, during the speaking performance, the students did not seem comfortable to speak. It could be seen from their concentration. The students seemed to get panic, look shy, and get nervous. The students also tended to be silent during question-and-answer time. However, the students who gained low score tried to use strategy to reduce their speaking anxiety such as; start speaking after inhaling, silent for a while, and look around and take deep breath.

The Result of Interview

The researchers interviewed 8 students. Those eight students were chosen as the participant of interview based on the result of questionnaire. 4 students were taken from students with high anxiety category and 4 were taken from students with low anxiety category. This instrument was the supporting data. The purpose of using this instrument in this study was to confirm the data of questionnaire and to get deeper information about the factor influencing speaking anxiety and strategies used to reduce speaking anxiety. The interview used in this study was in the form of open-ended interview.

The result of interview showed that both students with anxious category and students with relaxed category felt speaking anxiety in young learner classroom. The speaking anxiety faced was also relatively the same: such as feeling shy, scared, and worried when speaking English in young learner classroom. This happened because their English skills were still weak, especially vocabulary mastery. In addition, students also seemed to be disturbed by comments from the teacher and being laughed at by other students. As a result, students felt embarrassed and afraid when speaking English in class. Students were also afraid of getting low grades. The difference was the way they dealt with speaking anxiety. Students with relaxed categories tend to be able to overcome speaking anxiety problems. Table 1 showed in detail what the students felt in speaking performance:

Table 1. Feelings Faced by the students during Speaking Performance

Student with anxious category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling shy, scared, and worried of their language skill • Afraid of teacher and being laughed at by other students • Afraid of getting low grades
Students with relaxes category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afraid of their language skill • Afraid of getting low grades • Embarrassed to speak English in class

The second question given to the students was about the possible factor that contribute to students' speaking anxiety. This question was given to find out factors that affect students' speaking anxiety. The question was "What are the factors that make you feel anxious about speaking English?". Students with anxious category admitted that there were a number of factors that made them experience speaking anxiety in the classroom. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors, namely the weakness of their English language skills and the influence of other students and teachers. Students were worried that their English could not be understood because of the wrong composition and pronunciation.

Meanwhile, student with relaxed category were somewhat gave different statement. Students with relaxed category also mentioned a number of factors that contributed to speaking anxiety. These factors included worried of getting bad grades, fear of making mistakes, and getting negative feedback from teachers and other students. In addition, students also mentioned that lack of preparation was also a contributing factor to speaking anxiety. However, students in the relaxed category claimed to be able to overcome existing problems, so they continued to speak English confidently in young learner classroom.

The data above indicated that there were a number of factors that contributed to speaking anxiety faced by students with high and low anxiety. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors, namely the weakness of their English language skills and the influence of other students and teachers. Students were worried that their English could not be understood because of the wrong composition and pronunciation. In addition, students were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, afraid of getting bad grades, afraid of being laughed at by their friends, and afraid that their English cannot be understood. However, students in the relaxed category claimed to be able to overcome existing problems. Table 2 showed in detail what the factor contributing on students' speaking anxiety.

Table 2. Factors Contributing on Students' Speaking Anxiety

Student with anxious category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The weakness of their English language skills (grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary) The influence of other students and teachers Afraid of making mistakes, getting bad grades, being laughed at by their friends, and their English cannot be understood
Students with relaxed category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worried of getting bad grades Fear of making mistakes, and getting negative feedback from teachers and other students Lack of preparation

The third question given to the students was about whether the students needed preparation in speaking performance or not. This question was given to find out the importance of preparation for students in speaking performance. The question was "Do you need preparation in doing speaking performance?". Students with anxious category admitted that preparation was needed to speak English in young learner classroom. Preparation was claimed to help them speaking English, but preparation could only reduce anxiety not to overcome the anxiety they face. The better the preparation they did, the more helpful it was in speaking performance. The preparation done by the students was included collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises.

Meanwhile, student with relaxed category were somewhat gave different statement. Students with relaxed category also admitted that preparation was needed to be done before speaking English in young learner classroom. In addition, students also claimed that preparation could increase their confidence and overcome the anxiety they felt in speaking English. Preparations made by students included preparing the material and memorizing the material that had been made. Additionally, students also did exercises both independently and with peers. This was done to make them more comfortable and fluent in speaking English. Table 3 showed in detail what preparation needs by the students.

Table 3. Preparation Needs by the Students

Students with anxious category
Collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises
Students with relaxed category
Collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises

The result of the third question of interview showed that both students with low and high anxiety needed preparation in speaking performance. Preparation is considered so helpful in speaking English. The preparation done by the students was included collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises. However, the difference was the effect of the preparation itself. However, Preparation could only reduce speaking anxiety not to overcome the anxiety faced by students with anxious category.

The fourth question given to the students was about possible strategies used by the students to reduce speaking anxiety. This question was given to find out the possible strategies used by the students to reduce speaking anxiety. The question was "Do you have strategies to reduce speaking anxiety?". Students in the anxious category admitted that they used a number of strategies to reduce the anxiety they faced in speaking English. Those were included preparing and practicing speaking. In addition, students also tried to relax, smile, take a deep breath, and look away in various directions during speaking performance. Additionally, students tried to concentrate on the material that had been memorized. These strategies were claimed to be helpful in reducing speaking anxiety in young learner classroom.

The data above showed that both students with high and low anxiety had a number of strategies to reduce speaking anxiety. Those strategies were included preparing, practicing, relaxing, smiling, taking a deep breath, making jokes, and looking away in various directions during speaking performance. These strategies were claimed to be helpful in reducing speaking anxiety in young learner classroom. Table 4 showed in detail strategies applied by the students to reduce speaking anxiety.

Table 4. The Strategies Applied by the Students to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

Students with anxious category
Collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises
Students with relaxed category
Collecting material, searching for vocabulary, formulating sentences, memorizing, and doing exercises

Based on the result of interview, both students with anxious category and students with relaxed category felt speaking anxiety in young learner classroom. The speaking anxiety faced was also relatively the same. The difference was that the students with

relaxed category could overcome the anxiety faced. Furthermore, there were a number of factors that contributed to speaking anxiety faced by students with high and low anxiety. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors. In terms of internal factors, the students were worried about their language skill, afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, and having low confidence. In terms of external factors, the students were afraid of getting bad grades, afraid of being laughed at by their friends, afraid of getting negative feedback from the teacher, and afraid that their English cannot be understood.

Discussion

The Level of Student Speaking Anxiety

The result of this study showed that the majority of students had high level of anxiety with anxious category. This indicated that students seemed to experience various feelings of anxiety during speaking performance. It was supported by one of the student's statements, "I feel scared and worried when speaking English. I was afraid because I cannot speak English well". This result certainly deserved attention in the implementation of the speaking learning process because it was possible for anxiety to contribute to students' speaking failure. The higher the level of anxiety experienced by students, the higher the possibility that language performance would be disturbed. Therefore, it was important for teachers and students themselves to overcome students' anxiety in young learner classroom.

In line with the findings of this study, Elmenfi (2016) claimed that anxiety becomes a problem to the foreign language learners who contributes themselves in conveying a message and building communication in their environment. Language anxiety among learner especially young learners to be alarming and estimated that up to one half of all language students experience debilitating levels of speaking anxiety (Tobergte & Curtis, 2013). Students' anxiety can influence both the fluency and the accuracy of speaking. Because anxiety acts as a distraction, students may not be able to learn new words, phrases, grammar, and so on when they are worried. This worry may take the form of worrying about future communication or simply the fear of misunderstanding something.

Furthermore, anxious English language students might not be able to successfully pass oral tasks due to their anxiety impeding their ability to fare well Copland et al. (2012). In contrast, relaxed students would perform better because they do not experience the language anxiety impedance. Foreign language anxiety is a hindrance to successful language learning as it curbs the language learning process (Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). This has a strong impact on speaking skills as it is confirmed by Copland et al. (2012). Speaking is the most challenging skill of language learning, and it is one of the most negatively influential affective variables. It plays an important role in language learning and contributes in reducing learners' oral engagement and performance (Jusoh et al., 2016).

Speaking anxiety, one of the most important affective variables that influences foreign language learning, often has a detrimental effect on the students' oral performance of English (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). Speaking anxiety can be from slight feeling of nervousness to high level of fear. Hand shaking (Abrar, 2017), shivering, sweating, fear, forgetfulness, blankness, butterflies in the stomach, dry mouth and throat (Karatas et al., 2016), fast heart beat and squeaky voice are the most common symptoms of speaking anxiety (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021). The anxiety level varies from person to person according to the physical and psychological condition and specific situational demands.

The current study identified that the students generally had the type of anxiety in the form of state and situation-specific anxiety. In terms of state anxiety, the students seemed to have an unstable feeling of anxiousness that arose in specific circumstances as

a response to an external stimulus. It was because they were exposed to a particular situation which caused them stress, but it was believed to fade when the threat disappears. The student with state anxiety said that "I am afraid that I cannot speak English if I have to come forward in front of the class".

In terms of situation specific anxiety, the students seemed to feel anxious in a particular setting or situation, such as taking a test, public speaking or speaking in a foreign language. The student with situation specific anxiety admitted that "I am afraid of being scolded by the teacher, afraid of being laughed at by friends, and afraid of getting bad grades". Nonetheless, the students also felt trait anxiety. Where, the students tended to feel anxious in all situations in young learner classroom. The students with trait anxiety said that "I feel anxious in all condition during joining speaking class, even I am not called to perform". Special strategy was probably needed to overcome this type of anxiety because it was related to student characteristics and was difficult to change.

The Factors Influencing Student Speaking Anxiety

The result of this study showed that both students with anxious category and students with relaxed category felt speaking anxiety in young learner classroom. The speaking anxiety faced was also relatively the same. The difference was that the students with relaxed category could overcome the anxiety faced. Furthermore, there were a number of factors that contributed to speaking anxiety faced by students with high and low anxiety. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors. In terms of internal factors, the students were worried about their language skill, afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, and having low confidence. The students admitted that "I am not confident in speaking English. I am not confident because my English skills are not good. Besides, I don't understand much English vocabulary". In terms of external factors, the students were afraid of getting bad grades, afraid of being laughed at by their friends, afraid of getting negative feedback from the teacher, and afraid that their English cannot be understood. The students said that "There are many factors. I am afraid of being scolded by the teacher, afraid of being laughed at by friends, and afraid of getting bad grades".

What makes students having anxiety in speaking can be possibly derived from many factors. Debrel and Demirkan (2016) reported that EFL learners suffer from language anxiety which is aroused by several factors such as unpreparedness for the class, communication, apprehension with teachers, teachers' questions, students' perception of low ability in relation to their peers, and corrections in a classroom environment; tests and negative attitudes towards the English classes. Ellis (2015) stated that there are other factors associated with the learners' speaking anxiety such as self-consciousness in front of large groups, fear of preparing nervous, the concern that others are judging you, past failure, poor or insufficient preparation, comparing ourselves to others, etc. In addition, Huang (2018) stated that there are some causes of speaking anxiety in a foreign language. First of all, some people do not like to talk in a foreign language. Second, speaking anxiety can be caused by tiredness in pronouncing words. Third, people sometimes participated in a discussion that is difficult to do.

Anxiety, in principle, is a response triggered by external threat. Therefore, it can be attributed to several factors in the context of language learning in general. Boonkit (2010) argues the possibility that language anxiety may emerge from three aspects of learning: the teacher, the learner and the instructional practice. More specifically, he claims six interrelated factors as the causes of learning anxiety, namely: (1) personal and interpersonal anxiety; (2) learner beliefs about language learning; (3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; (4) instructor-learner interactions; (5) classroom procedures; (6) language tests.

In the foreign language context, Tsipakides (2009:39) conclude that anxiety is the result of three possible affecting factors: communicative apprehension (e.g. difficulty in understanding the teachers' instruction and/or peers' talk); fear of negative evaluation (e.g. fear of being corrected by teachers/peers); test anxiety (e.g. fear of failing the module/lesson). These three affecting factors are well-known sources of anxiety and are relevant to the discourse of foreign language anxiety.

In the context of foreign language learning, anxiety is often associated with speaking ability (Becker & Roos, 2016). Many studies have consistently shown that foreign language anxiety and speaking ability are, to a certain extent, interwoven. Aulia et al. (2021), for instance, argued that communication comprehension is conceptually relevant to foreign language anxiety. Jusoh et al. (2016), then, revealed that speaking in front of peers in the target language provoked the most anxiety for learners in her foreign language class. On a similar thread, Ellis (2015) asserted that speaking caused the most anxiety among foreign language learners. Clearly, the correlation between speaking and anxiety is a cause-effect relationship in which speaking itself leads to anxiety for foreign language users/learners.

Strategies Used to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

The result of this study showed that both students with high and low anxiety had a number of strategies to reduce speaking anxiety. The students argued "There are several strategies that I use to reduce anxiety in speaking English. My main strategy is to do the exercises". Those strategies were included preparing, practicing, relaxing, smiling, taking a deep breath, making jokes, and looking away in various directions during speaking performance. These strategies were claimed to be helpful in reducing speaking anxiety in young learner classroom such as stated by one of the students "The strategy I used was helpful to reduce speaking anxiety. At least I can feel better".

One of the students' barriers in communication is anxiety. Anxiety is the distinct complex of self-perception, feeling, beliefs and behavior related to the classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process particularly in speaking English (Palupi, 2021). In order to reduce speaking anxiety, there are some strategies that can be used by the students. This study identified that there are some strategies used by the students to reduce speaking anxiety. Those strategies are such as: Taking a deep breath before starts speaking, practicing, making planning, making a note, looking around, making a joke, thinking positively, and warming up.

Strategies are the behaviors and technique they adopt in their efforts to learn. Selection from among possible strategies is often a conscious choice on the part of learners, but it is strongly influenced by the nature of their motivation, cognitive style, and personality (Elmenfi, 2016). In addition, with use the strategies the students are expected to perform better in speaking in English by minimizing their anxiety and the teachers are expected to be able to reduce their students' anxiety in speaking English in the classroom. The students in this study taking a deep breath before start speaking. This strategy is believed to be able to reduce the speaking anxiety.

Planning, practicing, and warming up are also used by the students to reduce speaking anxiety. Planning and practicing are the fundamental management functions, which involves deciding beforehand, what is to be done, when is it to be done, and how it is to be done (Tobergte & Curtis, 2013). Through planning and practicing, the students are able to organize the idea that they want to talk during the speaking performance. The students also believed that those strategies are able to reduce the students' speaking anxiety. Practicing will make it easier for students to convey the material. Besides, students will also have more confidence after they practice well. Therefore, this strategy is important for the students in reducing speaking anxiety.

The next strategy is making a not. Effective note-taking is an important transferable skill, a skill that can be applied in performing. Note-taking is a powerful aid to communication, a way of summarizing and retaining the key points from what students have heard and understood (Nilsson, 2019). Through this way, the students will be easier to deliver the speaking performance, since when the students forget about the material, they can directly open the note. This study identified that note taking is believed to be able to reduce students' speaking anxiety. The last strategies used by students are looking around and making joke. These strategies are believed to be able to reduce the students' speaking anxiety. These strategies make the students relax and calm. It is usually done by the students before starting performing the speaking performance. Since students applied different strategies, teachers should train them how different strategies work (Amin et al., 2024; Rao, 2019; Sakale, 2019).

Another activity to do is having a dialogue with students, such as dialogic pedagogy which leads students to minimize their anxiety through guided discussion sessions (Fitriyani et al., 2023; Marhaban et al., 2023; Sulistyo et al., 2025; Sulistyo & Lutviana, 2023). In short, teachers should be aware of their students' needs and problems in speaking classes by motivating the students how to speak without too much fears, indicating the wise strategies in the speaking sessions and listen to the student voices (Miyazaki, 2019; Nussbaum et al., 2023; Sulistyo et al., 2021; Sulistyo & Heriyawati, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The majority of students (71%) had high level of anxiety with anxious category. Meanwhile, 6% of students had moderate level of speaking anxiety and 14% students belonged to relaxed category. This indicated that students seemed to experience various feelings of anxiety during speaking performance. This result certainly deserved attention in the implementation of the speaking learning process because it was possible for anxiety to contribute to students' speaking failure. The higher the level of anxiety experienced by students, the higher the possibility that language performance would be disturbed.

There were a number of factors that contributed to speaking anxiety faced by students with high and low anxiety. These factors were generally related to internal and external factors. In terms of internal factors, the students were worried about their language skill, afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, and having low confidence. In terms of external factors, the students were afraid of getting bad grades, afraid of being laughed at by their friends, afraid of getting negative feedback from the teacher, and afraid that their English cannot be understood.

Last, there were a number of strategies used by the students to reduce speaking anxiety. Those strategies were included preparing, practicing, relaxing, smiling, taking a deep breath, making jokes, and looking away in various directions during speaking performance. These strategies were claimed to be helpful in reducing speaking anxiety in young learner classroom. It implies that teachers should realize the students' needs and weaknesses in speaking classes by applying smooth dialogic with the students so that they will speak without too much fears.

RECOMMENDATION

Due to some possible limitations of this research, especially dealing with the number of the respondents, further research can be done by investigating how teachers' classroom management, feedback styles, and interaction patterns affect students' speaking anxiety and willingness to speak.

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