



Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN
2581-1657

E-ISSN
2581-2203

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety: A Case Study of Pre-Service English Teachers

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 01 August 2019

Revised: 19 August 2019

Accepted: 28 August 2019

Published online: 24 Sept 2019

Keywords:

Speaking,
Speaking anxiety,
Pre-service English teachers

ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at finding out the level of speaking anxiety experienced by a group of pre-service English teachers at a university in Indonesia and investigating the factors contributing to their speaking anxiety. Using cluster random sampling, this mixed-method research took 30 pre-service English teachers from the same class as the research participants. The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were adapted from FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) designed by Horwitz et al (1986). The result of the questionnaire shows that the students' speaking anxiety is overall in the mildly anxious level. It was identified that there were six students (20%) in the level of very anxious, seven students (23%) in the level of anxious, 14 students (47%) in the mildly anxious level, one student (3%) in the relaxed level, and two students (7%) in the very relaxed level. The interview data indicated that the anxiety was likely because of several inter-related factors: social, linguistic, and personal factors. The social factors include fear of making mistake, feeling under pressure dealing with people, afraid of negative evaluation by teachers, worrying of losing face; the linguistic factor relates to students' lack of English ability (grammatical issues, proper pronunciation, and vocabulary). While from the personal factor deal with issues such as low motivation and family problems.

1. Introduction

Out of the four basic skills of English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills), speaking is often considered as one of the most important skills that plays

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an important role in human life. It is also thought as the most vital means of communication in order to share meaning through the use of words. This is because humans had been communicating through a spoken language long before they were able to read and write. This is in line with what Ur (1996) stated that of all the four skills, speaking seems to be the most important. For this reason, people who know a language are usually called as “speakers” of that language.

In the context of English Language Teaching in Indonesia, speaking skill is often used as the main indicator of seeing the success of an English learner. People would tend to judge someone as a good English user if he or she can communicate orally. The same tendency also happens in many Indonesian based industries which would normally assess a candidate’s English proficiency by conducting an English interview as one of the important stages in recruiting new employees. They focus more on speaking skill, not other skills. This practice has again indicated that English speaking proficiency is often considered as a special language skill.

Nevertheless, speaking is also found by many language learners in Indonesia as a difficult skill to be mastered. This is reflected by some data showing that Indonesian learners’ English proficiency is still at a very low level. The 2018 English Proficiency Index released by English First – a world-leading English institution – , for instance, reports that Indonesia ranks at number 51 out of 88 among non-English speaking countries in the world with ‘very low’ adult English proficiency. Although this global language ranking is considered pointless by some language scholars (see Graddol, 2011), considering a lack of data and a standard way of describing language proficiency, I would argue that the proficiency index is still useful in terms of providing general information about Indonesians’ English speaking proficiency.

This problem is probably because of some reasons: First, speaking combines the parts of writing and listening. It requires much more knowledge of grammar, and it requires us to use this knowledge in real-time. It means that a good English speaker will have to possess a complex linguistic element to be able to produce spoken English.

Second, it is probably because of lack of exposure to spoken English here in Indonesia. So, language learners find it difficult to practice their English in a natural setting. Most students only sometimes practice English in their classroom with very limited time allocation. Majority of them never use it outside of the class as they do not have an atmosphere that requires them to speak up in English in their daily life.

Another factor might also relate to a feeling of anxiety experienced by an English speaker. For some reasons, an English speaker has to deal with some state of nervousness, sweating, and anxious when he or she has to speak in English including in delivering an English presentation in front of class. In many cases, this anxious feeling has even hit the speaker's state of mind long before they start

to speak up. This kind of situation is often described as speaking anxiety in the literature.

Anxiety is generally defined as someone's fears in facing something that can be a serious problem for him/ her. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that anxiety is the feeling of apprehension, tension, worry, and nervousness dealing with an arousal of the automatic nervous system. In addition, Ormrod (2011) also said that anxiety can be defined as apprehensions and uneasiness feeling toward an uncertain result of a given condition. In conclusion, anxiety is every feeling of worry that happened because of the unsure result of a particular attempt.

Among other situations, speaking anxiety is the fear that faced by students when delivering or preparing a speech in front of people or the public. It usually happened because the students are not confident with their English ability, they were afraid and shy to practice with the target language, in this case, English, also they were scared about making mistake. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that the students who have a problem in speaking will have bigger difficulty in speaking in a foreign language class.

Considering all the issues previously mentioned, this study is intended to investigate the anxiety level of a group of preservice English teachers in a teacher education program at an Indonesian university. This research is further aimed at exploring factors that contribute to the pre-service English teachers' speaking anxiety.

2. Methodology

This research used a Sequential Explanatory mixed method, a method combines both quantitative and qualitative method. It is called a sequential explanatory because this study applied a two-phase design where the quantitative data was collected first followed by qualitative data collection. The purpose is to use the qualitative results to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase (Ivankova, et al., 2006). This study is also called as a case study. According to Yin (2009), a case study is an empirical investigation that investigates contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear. To be more specific, this study particularly investigates the case of a group of pre-service English teachers studying speaking subject at a teacher education program.

Thirty pre-service English teachers involved as participants in this research. They were selected using cluster random sampling technique. The quantitative data were obtained through a set of questionnaires adapted from FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) as suggested by Horwitz et al (1986). The questionnaires were arranged using Likert Scale ranging from Strong Agree to Strongly Disagree. These questionnaires were distributed to find out the level of students' speaking anxiety. As for qualitative data, it was gathered through semi-

structured interviews with six participants identified with high level speaking anxiety. The interviews were conducted to find out the factors contributing to the students' speaking anxiety.

After calculating participants' score using Likert's Scoring Table adopted from Horwitz et al. (1986), participants' levels of speaking anxiety were categorized using Oetting's scale (1983) as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. FLCAS adapted from Oetting's Scale (1983)

Range	Level
124-165	Very Anxious
108-123	Anxious
87-107	Mildly Anxious
66-86	Relaxed
33-65	Very Relaxed

3. Results and Discussion

Level of Participants' Speaking Anxiety

The first part of the research is to find out the level of students' speaking anxiety. This was assessed through a set of questionnaire adapted from Horwitz et al (1986) as previously mentioned. The following Table 2 shows that the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by the students varied ranging from very relaxed to very anxious.

Table 2. The Levels of Students' Speaking Anxiety

No.	Level of Anxiety	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very Anxious	6	20%
2.	Anxious	7	23%
3.	Mildly Anxious	14	47%
4.	Relaxed	1	3%
5.	Very Relaxed	2	7%
	Total	30	100%

The percentage of students' speaking anxiety levels is also presented in the following pie chart:

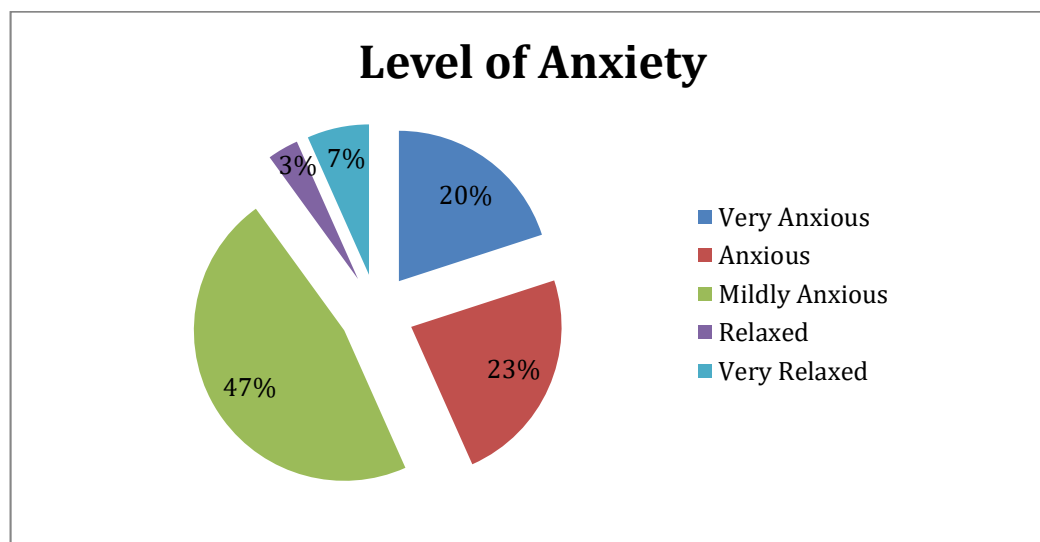


Figure 1: The percentage of students' speaking anxiety

Both table and figure show that the students get different levels of anxiety in speaking. Out of 30 students, six students (20%) are in a very anxious level. Seven students (23%) are in the anxious level. The other 14 students (47%) are in the mildly anxious level. There is only one student (3%) in the relaxed level and two students (7%) who are at the level of very relaxed. It can be concluded that the pre-service English teachers are overall in the mildly anxious level with an average score of 95.5.

This data indicates that most of pre-service English teachers taking Speaking 3 subjects experienced some degree of anxiety. 47% of the students were mildly anxious. Another 20% were in very anxious level. This means that there are at least 6 students who are in the state of worried, nervous, and insecure when they have to perform a spoken communication during teaching and learning process. They found speaking activities such as having a conversation with others, having an English presentation, and other spoken activities as unhappy experiences. When they are talking in front of people, they might feel their palm sweat, stiff, and feel nervous to talk.

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

The six participants identified as very anxious English speakers were then invited to have a semi-structured interview. However, one of them could not attend the interview session. So, the interview was finally conducted only with five participants. The semi-structured interview was conducted to further find out the factors contributing to the students' speaking anxiety. One of the questions asked during the interview was "What makes you feel anxious while speaking English in the classroom?" This question was intentionally asked to explore the factors that have made students feel anxious when they have to speak in English.

Participants provided relatively similar answers to the question. Generally, the factors mentioned by the participants can be generally classified into three main

factors: (a) social factor (how the participants react to people's responses when they practice speaking, (b) linguistic factor (lack of English ability: grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation issues), (c) individual factor (personal problem). Details of the findings can be seen in the following section:

Social Factor

This factor relates to how the participants react to the responses made by people around when they are speaking English. This includes how the participants react to teachers' feedback toward their speaking performance in the class or outside of the class. Data from the interviews indicate that these social factors appear to be the most dominant factors contributing to participants' speaking anxiety.

Five participants, for instance, mentioned similar trends in their answers. First, the reason why they felt really anxious about speaking was that they worried about making mistakes. They do not want to lose their faces if their classmates or teachers negatively react to their mistakes.

“The first thing is because I'm afraid of making a mistake. Afraid of being wrong..”

(RR)

I feel like someone will judge me.”

(ND)

This finding is similar to the finding of other studies such as a study conducted by Wahyudi et al. (2015). He found that one of the factors of students' speaking anxiety is because the students feel afraid of making mistakes. As ones who are learning a new language, they keep thinking how to be correct; how to avoid mistakes. They do not want to feel ashamed due to the mistakes they have made.

Another social-related factor inferred from participants' stories is that some of them feel uncomfortable to speak in front of many people. They do not feel confident dealing with many people. They feel under pressure. It was interesting to know that two participants reported that they usually felt relaxed when they practiced speaking alone at home, but when they have to deliver the speech in front of many people, they immediately got nervous and anxious. They felt like being under pressure and felt blank.

“ When we talk in front of the public, it is like, even though it has run smoothly at home, but in front of public, I just getting nervous. Immediately blank.”

(AM)

“It might be because there are a lot of people, maybe. Crowd factor. Usually, it runs smoothly when we practice speaking alone at home. Then, when the day is coming, there are many people. That's why I got nervous”

(ND)

This underpressure feeling is very likely related to their worried about negative feedback from their peers. In some cases, some other students mocked or laughed at those making mistakes in speaking. As stated by Jones (2004) that a classroom always brings students to a dilemmatic situation. On one hand, it is a place for

students to learn and to practice what they are learning. On the other hand, it also a site where you find people watching you, and try to correct you. They sometimes blame you for any mistakes you have done. They even sometimes also laugh at you. They provide you with harsh negative feedback.

The phenomenon of some negative feedbacks have been reported by some other studies in Indonesia (Abrar, 2017; Hutabarat, and Simanjuntak, 2019) or overseas (see, for instance, Phillips, 1991; Asif and Fahira, 2017; Di Loreto, and McDonough, 2014). This negative feedback has left some degrees of traumatic experience among the participants. They felt insecure. As clearly mentioned by one of the participants,

“yes, ..., I felt insecure. I’m afraid my friend will judge me.”

(RK)

yes, it depends, if the teacher is like, kinda tough, when they come into the class, we immediately scared. But, when the teacher enjoys, we also enjoy the lesson, even though we were not good at that course.”

(AM)

Data showing the social aspects contributing to speaking anxiety is actually self-evident. Human beings are basically homo-sapiens who interact and influence each other. Positive feedback will lead to positive results. On the contrary, negative feedback will also bring negative impact. In the context of this study, negative feedback from friends and teachers has clearly indicated that it has brought about negativity toward students’ physiological state of being during lesson. This finding implies that teachers need to design a positive atmosphere during his or her lesson by strictly applying ‘no-bullying policy’, for instance. This strategy would help the teachers to create a positive teaching situation which later could reduce students’ speaking anxiety.

Furthermore, teachers seem to play an important role in how to reduce the anxiety experienced by the students. Teachers can be one of the main reasons why students feel anxious, that is when the teachers are not friendly. At the same time, teachers can also be an important factor that can reduce anxiety when they can nicely approach the students. For this reason, teachers should approach their students as nicely and friendly as possible.

Linguistic Factor

Another factor contributed to speaking anxiety according to the participants is related to some linguistic issues they have when they speak in English. Four of these very anxious speakers that they worry to speak because they are not confident with their English ability. The anxious participants reported that they feel like they are lack of grammar or structure, limited vocabulary, or bad English pronunciation.

“E, it’s, I’m afraid when I want to speak. [my] structure is not correct”

(AM)

“The factor is.. what if I will say something wrong, it is like, when we learn about grammar, there are V1, V2, and V3, so, “do this also need the use of verb or not?” while my friends already knew about that, that’s why I am so scared, especially speaking, I am really scared about that.”

(ND)

Worrying about making mistakes in grammatical issue seems to be one of main reason why some students who learn English as a foreign language in Indonesia feel afraid to speak up. Grammar has indeed been major issue for English language learners in Indonesia for many years. This is likely due to the fact that English Language Teaching in Indonesia has been grammarly oriented for many years. People would tend to judge and assess your English based on the grammatical accuracy you can perform in your speaking. Otherwise, you would sometimes be bullied or considered to be a less competent English speaker.

In addition to the grammatical issue, the anxiety also come up, as a result, worrying about their lexical resources and improper pronunciation. Some participants reported that they lack vocabulary. They worried to speak up in case they can not keep the communication going due to their limited vocabulary. At the same time, they felt anxious if they can not pronounce words like a native English speaker.

“Sometimes, e, I’m afraid, e, when I’m talking in English, people will not understand what I said. Maybe because I am still lack of vocabulary.”

(MN)

“The first thing is I am not that confident. Eee, afraid when I am talking’. If I mispronounce something, ... I feel like someone will judge me.”

(RK)

Lack of English ability has been a serious problem for students to speak in English. Especially for students who learn English as a foreign language. Vocabulary is one of the common problems among English learners in Indonesia. It is understandable that limited vocabulary would be a reason why someone worried and decided to remain calm during a speaking activity in the classroom. People will not be able to communicate without sufficient lexical resources.

Personal Factor

Another factor that has caused anxiety in speaking as indicated from the participants’ answers during the interview is related to personal factor. This factor refers to how one particular participant has interacted with some other people in their personal life such as their parents, friends, and their teachers. It also refers to how these people then affect the participants’ choices to learn English or to be a pre-service English teacher.

One of the participants, for instance, clearly admitted that she is actually not interested in English, but her family asked her to join the English study program. As this was not what she wanted to do, she found herself to be less motivated in studying English. This low motivation further affected her desire to practice

speaking. There was like a mixed feeling within herself – between anxiety and reluctance.

“... e, so, I have no intention to join the English study program in the first place, but my family asked me to.. so I feel like I have no basic knowledge in English. I accept that I’m not interested in English”

(ND)

In the Indonesian context, the case where parents insist and even force their children to go to a teacher education program is likely not only a case found in this study. A similar story, for example, has been reported by some other studies (see Basalama, 2010; Tustiawati, 2017; Haryanti, et al., 2016). This happens because many parents consider that teaching is a good career choice for their children. Not only because the teaching profession in Indonesia is socially and culturally respected, it is also because the teaching profession has been paid much better today compared to the past time. However, some parents might have forgotten the fact that it should be their children’s choice, not their choice. If the parents insist and their children resist it, what is found in this study that some participants feel ill-passionate with their speaking activity will be more rampant in the future.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data provided it can be concluded that most of the participants in this study still felt anxious when they have to speak in English during their teacher education program. The students’ speaking anxiety in this research was found to be overall in the mildly anxious level. Several inter-related factors have been found to contribute to speaking anxiety experienced by the participants. Data from interviews conducted to the participants with very anxious level indicate that the factors range from social, linguistic, and personal factors. Social factor seems to be the most significant factor affecting students’ speaking anxiety. This factor relates to how students react to responses made by people around them when they practice speaking. This includes their fear of making mistake, feeling under pressure dealing with people, feeling worried about negative evaluation by teachers, and worrying about losing faces. The other two factors are linguistic and individual factor. While the former refers to participant’s low efficacy of their English skills, the latter deals with personal issues experienced by particular participants with their family or some significant others in their life.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to the dean of Faculty of Teachers Training and Education of Universitas Riau who has sponsored this research project under ‘Penelitian Unggulan Fakultas’ research grant year 2019.

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How to cite this article:

Daud, A., Ras, F., Novitri & Audia, C. P. (2019). Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety: A Case Study of Pre-Service English Teachers. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 3(3), 412-422.
