

Investigating Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: A Case Study of Grade VIII Students

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Abstract: Speaking anxiety remains a common challenge for students learning in EFL, often limiting their willingness to participate in oral classroom activities. This study explored the speaking anxiety experienced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pekalongan, focusing on the forms of anxiety they encountered, the factors contributing to these experiences, and their influence on classroom participation. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research involved seven participants selected based on purposive sampling criteria. Evidence was obtained from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires, then organized through coding before being interpreted using thematic analysis. The analysis showed that students' speaking anxiety was reflected in three closely related dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. Students' speaking anxiety developed through the interaction of individual and classroom-related factors. Limited vocabulary and low self-confidence made students feel unprepared to speak, reactions of classmates and classroom atmosphere often increased their anxiety. Because of these conditions, many students became hesitant to speak and participated less in oral classroom activities.

Keywords: Classroom Participation; Communication Apprehension; EFL Learning; Fear Negative Evaluation; Speaking Anxiety.

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1. Introduction

Speaking is an essential component of language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, share opinions, and interact meaningfully with others. However, many students learning EFL find speaking to be the most challenging skill to master. One of the primary reasons is speaking anxiety, a psychological condition that often prevents learners from expressing themselves confidently during classroom interaction. When students are asked to speak in English, they may experience nervousness, worry about making mistakes, or hesitate because they fear being evaluated by teachers or classmates. These emotional responses frequently discourage active participation and reduce students' willingness to engage in oral communication.

Research has shown that speaking anxiety is influenced by a combination of personal and classroom-related factors. Individual factors, such as limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and fear of making errors, can make learners feel unprepared to communicate in English. At the same time, external influences—including classroom atmosphere, teaching practices, and peers' reactions—may intensify these feelings of anxiety. As a result, students often avoid speaking opportunities, provide only brief responses, or remain silent during classroom discussions. Such behaviors restrict meaningful speaking practice and may slow the development of students' oral communication skills.

Similarly, speaking competence is an essential professional skill for both prospective and practicing teachers. Effective oral communication enables teachers to explain concepts clearly, interact with students, and create meaningful classroom discussions. Therefore, developing confidence and proficiency in speaking is an important aspect of teacher preparation, as it contributes to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process Rahim

& Iii, (2021). For many EFL students, speaking anxiety becomes a barrier to active classroom participation. Students who feel anxious are often less confident to express their ideas in English. By understanding the factors behind this anxiety, teachers can develop classroom strategies that help students feel more comfortable and willing to participate in speaking activities Suparlan, (2021). Many EFL students find speaking English difficult because anxiety affects their confidence and ability to communicate. For this reason, researchers have continued to examine ways to help learners feel more confident during speaking activities. Building on this issue, this study explores students' experiences of speaking anxiety, including how they feel when it occurs and the strategies they use to deal with it Pattah et al., (2022). As a universal language, English is essential for cross-cultural and multilingual communication, making its mastery a key focus for global learners. While English education covers four fundamental skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking stands out as especially critical. It is the primary tool that enables learners to clearly communicate their ideas, viewpoints, and information in real-world contexts Badriyah & Novita, (2023). Understanding why students experience speaking anxiety can support teachers in improving classroom practice. The findings of this study may help teachers design learning activities that make students feel more comfortable speaking English and increase their confidence during classroom interaction Wijayati & Risa, (2023).

Encouraging students to participate actively in classroom activities can foster their creativity, reduce feelings of anxiety, and improve their speaking competence. Based on the findings of previous studies, speaking anxiety has a considerable influence on students' learning experiences, particularly during oral communication tasks. Earlier research also indicates that students' attitudes and behaviors throughout the learning process are closely associated with the level of anxiety they experience Taqwa et al., (2022). One of the major obstacles faced by foreign language learners is speaking anxiety, as it can interfere with their confidence and effectiveness in oral communication Febrianti et al., (2025). Oral communication is a key component of EFL learning because it allows students to participate actively in classroom interactions and convey their ideas. If learners are unable to communicate their opinions, respond to questions, or share information effectively, meaningful classroom engagement and the learning process may be limited Nurilahi & Suhartono, (2022).

In many countries, including Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language because it supports communication, education, and access to global information. For this reason, English has become an important subject in school curricula at different educational levels.

While in Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, making it essential for students to develop adequate proficiency to communicate effectively in academic and real-world contexts Pardede et al., (2022). Various classroom-related factors may contribute to students' speaking anxiety, particularly the nature of the learning environment. A classroom that is excessively formal or restrictive can discourage students from expressing themselves confidently. In contrast, cooperative learning activities provide opportunities for peer support and interaction, which may help reduce anxiety and promote more active participation in speaking tasks Meilasari et al., (2023). Because opportunities to use English outside the classroom are often limited, many EFL learners struggle to develop their speaking ability through authentic practice. This situation may contribute to higher levels of speaking anxiety, which previous studies have linked to poorer performance in foreign language learning Santoso et al., (2021). One of the main aims of studying (EFL/ESL) is to develop effective speaking proficiency. Learners generally perceive improvement in their language ability through increased confidence and competence in oral communication Ghafar et al., (2023).

Among the four language skills, speaking plays a crucial role in enabling learners to express their thoughts, exchange ideas, and participate in meaningful communication. While mastering this skill requires continuous practice, it facilitates direct interaction in which individuals can exchange information and respond to one another instantly. Consequently, speaking is indispensable for effective communication in both academic and everyday contexts Najiha, (2021). Within the Indonesian education system, English speaking competence is regarded as a key learning outcome for junior high school students. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum further reinforces this objective by emphasizing communicative language use in real-life learning situations Nurchasanah et al., (2025). In Indonesia, English is incorporated into the formal education curriculum as an important subject across multiple educational levels, ranging from elementary school to

higher education. Although the curriculum and instructional policies differ at each level, overall English language needed for academic and communicative purposes Canestra & Putra, (2023).

Research on speaking anxiety has provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by EFL learners. Most previous studies have examined the factors that cause speaking anxiety or investigated its relationship with students' speaking performance. However, fewer studies have explored how junior high school students experience speaking anxiety during everyday classroom interaction by combining evidence from observations, interviews, and questionnaires. As a result, a detailed understanding of how anxiety influences students' participation in real classroom situations remains limited (Santoso et al., 2021; Febrianti et al., 2025).

Speaking anxiety has long been recognized as an important issue in EFL research because of its influence on students' oral communication. Existing studies have primarily examined the factors contributing to speaking anxiety and its effects on students' speaking performance. However, less attention has been given to understanding how students experience this phenomenon within their everyday classroom interactions, particularly in junior high school EFL settings Santoso et al., (2021); Febrianti et al., (2025)

Evidence from previous studies suggests that speaking anxiety emerges through the interaction between learners' personal characteristics and the classroom environment. Internal factors, including low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes, together with external conditions such as classroom dynamics and the learning atmosphere, have consistently been associated with increased anxiety during English-speaking activities Pardede et al., (2022). Building on these findings, the present research explores how eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pekalongan experience speaking anxiety during English-speaking activities. Specifically, the study examines the different forms of speaking anxiety, investigates the factors associated with its occurrence, analyzes its influence on classroom participation, and explores the strategies students use to respond to anxiety in speaking situations.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative case study to explore students' speaking anxiety in a real classroom setting. A qualitative case study was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand students' experiences and examine the phenomenon in a specific educational context. The participants were seven eighth-grade students from SMP Negeri 10 Pekalongan. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their level of speaking anxiety and their willingness to participate in the study. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Classroom observations were conducted to identify students' behaviors during English-speaking. Interviews were used to explore students' feelings, experiences, and challenges when speaking English. Questionnaires were distributed to support and confirm the findings from the observations and interviews.

Following the qualitative data analysis framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the researcher first examined the information collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. This initial examination focused on selecting data that directly addressed the research objectives and provided meaningful insights into students' speaking anxiety. The selected data were then coded and organized into categories, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes. These themes formed the foundation for interpreting the findings and addressing the research questions. The credibility of the findings was strengthened by comparing evidence gathered through classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Examining the same phenomenon from these different sources enabled the researcher to confirm the consistency of the interpretations throughout the analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to verify the consistency of the findings while strengthening the credibility and dependability of the study through evidence drawn from different perspectives.

3. Results

The analysis revealed several patterns related to students' experiences of speaking anxiety during English classroom activities at SMP Negeri 10 Pekalongan. The data were

collected from seven participants through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The use of multiple data collection methods provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon while allowing the researcher to confirm the consistency of the results through data triangulation. The analysis revealed several major themes, including the types of speaking anxiety experienced by students, the factors contributing to these feelings, and the influence of speaking anxiety on their participation in English-speaking activities.

Observation

The population in this study were grade VIII students, while the sample was seven students were chosen as participants through a purposive sampling technique.

Table 1. Results of Observation.

Student	Indicator	Observation (What you saw)	Code	Category
S1	Hand Tremors	Hands looks tremor when speaking	Nervous	Communication Apprehension
S2	Speak very softly	Students speak very softly	Low Voice	Low Self confidence
S3	Short Explanation	Students shortens explanation doesn't elaborate	Limited Response	Low Self confidence
S4	Fillers ("uh,umm")	Students often use filler words "umm"	Hesitation	Low Self Confidence
S5	Avoid eye contact	Looks up most of the time	Avoidance	Fear of Negative Evaluation
S6	Frequently stop	Students frequently stop, forget the words while speaking	Hesitation	Low Self Confidence
S7	Stiff body	Students show stiff body when speaking	Rigid posture	Communication Apprehension

The findings indicated that most participants experienced speaking anxiety during English classroom activities. The findings suggest that students' experiences of speaking anxiety can be understood through three dominant dimensions: low self-confidence, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. These psychological factors affected students' participation and were reflected in both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Common indicators included hesitation before speaking, short or incomplete responses, speaking in a quiet voice, avoiding eye contact, and exhibiting visible signs of nervousness.

Interview

This section presents the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with seven students to explore their experiences of speaking anxiety in English classroom activities. The interviews focused on students' emotional responses, reactions when feeling nervous, concerns about making mistakes, behaviors while being observed, levels of self-confidence, and the reasons behind their hesitation to speak. The interview data were analyzed using thematic coding, which generated three major themes: CA, FNE, LSC. Overall students encountered a range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral difficulties when speaking English, particularly nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary.

Table 2. Result of Interview.

Student	Q1 Feeling	Q2 When Nervous	Q3 Fear of Mistakes	Q4 When Observed	Q5 Confident Reason	Q6 Hesitation Reason	Codes	Category
S1	Happy	Shaking hand	Yes, afraid of being laughed	I feel shy	I am not confident because I don't know many words and shy	I cant speak english and shy	Shaking, fear of being laughed, shy, not confident, limited vocabulary	CA, FNE,LSC

S2	I feel a little nervous	I pause and take a deep breathe	No, because still practice	I feel shy and afraid of said something wrong	Confident because If not im afraid of said something wrong	Lack of vocabulary	Nervous, pause, fear of saying wrong, shy, limited vocabulary	CA, FNE, LSC
S3	I feel Nervous	I avoid speaking and thinking some funy things	No, because still practice	I feel nervous and wanna laugh my performance	I am not confident because my vocabulary is limited	Lack of vocabulary	Nervous, avoidance, distraction, limited vocabulary, not confident	CA, LSC
S4	I feel a bit stressed	I take a deep breathe and trying to confident	Yes, afraid because didn't practice	I feel shy	I am confident because still practice	Lack of vocabulary	Stress, deep breathing, fear (no practice), shy, limited vocabulary	CA, FNE, LSC
S5	I feel a bit nervous	I take a deep breath and pause for a while	No, because I little bit can speak english	I feel a little bit nervous	I am confident because I can speak english	Lack of Vocabulary	Nervous, pause, limited vocabulary	CA, LSC
S6	I am very nervous	I pause frequently and take a deep breathe	Yes, afraid of said something wrong	I tried to confident	I am confident because got a reward	Lack of Vocabulary	Very nervous, frequent pause, fear of mistakes, low confidence, limited vocabulary	CA, FNE, LSC
S7	I am happy because got a reward	I stop and take a deep breath	No, because still learning	I feel cool when speak english	I am confident because I got a reward	Didn't practice and lack of vocabulary	Stop, lack of practice, reward-based confidence, low vocabulary	CA, LSC

Analysis of the data showed that speaking anxiety was a common experience among the participating students during English classroom activities. The evidence revealed three dominant manifestations of this anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. Among the contributing factors, limited vocabulary was identified as the most significant, as it increased students' anxiety and negatively affected their ability to perform in speaking tasks.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative information about students' experiences of speaking anxiety. Quantitative data were obtained through closed-ended statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, allowing the researcher to identify students' perceptions of anxiety, confidence, fear of making mistakes, and classroom participation. To complement these responses, several open-ended questions invited students to explain their experiences in greater detail. This combination enabled the researcher to compare numerical responses with students' personal explanations, resulting in a more complete interpretation of the findings.

Table 3. Result of Close ended question.

Student	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
S1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
S2	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4

S3	5	4	3	4	5	5	4	4
S4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3
S5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
S6	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5
S7	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

The questionnaire findings suggest that the majority of students experienced speaking anxiety during English-speaking activities. Higher responses were observed on items related to feelings of nervousness, difficulty initiating speech, and concerns about making mistakes, indicating that communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation were the most prominent sources of anxiety. Furthermore, many students reported feeling shy and lacking confidence when speaking English, reflecting the presence of low self-confidence.

Table 4. Result of Open ended question.

Student	Q9 Answer	Code	Category
S1	I feel very nervous and afraid, so I cannot speak well and lose confidence	Nervous, low confidence	CA, LSC
S2	I feel afraid of making mistakes, so I become less confident when speaking	Fear of mistakes	FNE, LSC
S3	I feel shy and nervous, so I cannot speak clearly	Shy, nervous	LSC, CA
S4	I feel nervous and sometimes forget what I want to say	Nervous, forgetting	CA
S5	I feel a little nervous but I still try to speak	Mild anxiety	CA
S6	I feel very afraid and embarrassed, so I don't feel confident	Fear, embarrassment	FNE, LSC
S7	I feel okay because I am still learning, so I try to be confident	Learning stage	LSC

The responses to the open-ended questions were consistent with the quantitative results. Most participants explained that feelings of nervousness and fear negatively affected their confidence when speaking English. Several students reported forgetting what they intended to say, whereas others described feeling shy or worried about making mistakes during speaking activities. The findings suggest that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence interact to influence students' experiences of speaking anxiety.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide insight into how students experienced speaking anxiety during English learning. Based on the data collected through interviews and questionnaires, three major dimensions of speaking anxiety emerged: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. Most participants reported feeling nervous when they were required to speak in front of their classmates. They also expressed concerns about making mistakes and doubted their ability to communicate effectively in English. These emotional responses often discouraged students from participating actively in classroom speaking activities. The following sections discuss each dimension in detail by interpreting the findings in relation to relevant theories and previous research.

Communication Apprehension Affected to students

The results suggest that communication apprehension plays a major role in shaping students' speaking anxiety in English classrooms. Interview data showed that many participants felt nervous whenever they were asked to speak in front of their classmates. Several students reported that these feelings of anxiety led them to hesitate, pause while speaking, or avoid participating in oral activities altogether. Similar patterns were observed during classroom observations, where students displayed various signs of anxiety, including speaking softly, maintaining stiff body language, and showing little confidence when completing speaking tasks. These findings indicate that communication apprehension substantially affects both students' classroom behavior and their willingness to engage in English-speaking activities.

The questionnaire results also support these findings. Most students agreed that they feel nervous when speaking English and find it difficult to start speaking. Some of them also admitted that they avoid participating in speaking activities unless they are asked by the teacher. This shows that communication apprehension affects students' willingness to speak in the classroom. This finding is in line with Tanveer (2007), who states that communication apprehension can cause students to feel nervous and unable to express their ideas clearly. Similarly, Taqwa et al., (2022) found that students often hesitate and pause when speaking due to anxiety. This finding supports Rahim, (2021) who stated that speaking anxiety can reduce students' classroom participation and speaking performance. In the present study, communication apprehension also made students feel less confident and less willing to speak English during classroom activities.

Fear of Negative Evaluation Affected to students

The results showed that FNE was the strongest factor influencing students' speaking anxiety. Most participants admitted that they were afraid of making mistakes because they worried that their classmates would laugh at them or that their teacher would judge their English ability. This fear made many students focus more on others' opinions than on expressing their ideas. During classroom activities, several students avoided eye contact, lowered their heads, spoke very softly, or hesitated before answering questions. These behaviors reflected their discomfort when speaking in front of others. Similar responses were also found in the questionnaires, where many students agreed that they felt worried about being judged while speaking English. Taken together, the interview, observation, and questionnaire data show that fear of negative evaluation reduced students' confidence and limited their participation in English-speaking activities.

The findings of this study support Horwitz et al., (1986) who identified fear of negative evaluation as one of the main dimensions of foreign language anxiety. The theory explains that learners often feel anxious because they are afraid of being judged by their teachers or classmates. In this study, many students were worried about making mistakes, which made them less confident and less willing to speak during classroom activities. Similar findings were reported by Wijayati & Risa, (2023), who found that students often felt anxious because they feared negative reactions from their classmates. Likewise, Nurchasanah et al. (2025) explained that fear of negative evaluation can reduce students' confidence and discourage them from participating actively in English-speaking activities.

Low Self Confidence Affected to students

The findings suggest that low self-confidence is another significant factor underlying students' speaking anxiety. The interview data showed that many participants felt insecure and embarrassed when they were asked to speak English in front of the class. Several students attributed their lack of confidence to limited vocabulary, concerns about making mistakes, and the belief that their English proficiency was insufficient. These responses indicate that students' perceptions of their own language ability. Evidence from classroom observations supported these interview findings. Students who demonstrated lower self confidence tended to speak quietly, avoid eye contact, and provide short or limited responses during speaking activities. Some participants also appeared hesitant and uncertain when expressing their ideas, suggesting discomfort with using English in front of their classmates. Similar trends emerged from the questionnaire data, in which most students reported feeling shy and lacking confidence when speaking English in public. The consistency of the evidence across interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires highlights the important role of low self-confidence in shaping students' participation and performance during English-speaking activities. These findings indicate that low self-confidence is a widespread issue that can hinder students' development of speaking skills. Students who have little confidence in their own abilities are generally less willing to participate actively in English-speaking activities. This finding is consistent with Rahim (2021), who argued that limited self-confidence decreases learners' willingness to communicate in English. As a result, students with lower confidence are more likely to avoid opportunities to speak and experience higher levels of anxiety when expressing their ideas in the classroom. Similar conclusions were reported by Nurilahi and Suhartono (2022) who found that students with low self-confidence frequently hesitate and participate less during speaking activities. Likewise, Pardede et al. (2022) explained that a lack of confidence can impair students' speaking performance because it discourages them from taking risks when using English.

4. Conclusion

This study found that speaking anxiety remained a common challenge for the eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Pekalongan during English-speaking activities. The data showed that students' anxiety was mainly associated with three interconnected dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. Rather than appearing separately, these dimensions influenced one another and shaped the way students participated in classroom speaking tasks.

Students who experienced communication apprehension often felt nervous before speaking and tended to hesitate, pause, or avoid answering questions. Fear of negative evaluation was reflected in students' concerns about making mistakes and being judged by their teachers or classmates. In addition, low self-confidence reduced students' willingness to express their ideas, leading many of them to speak quietly or provide only brief responses. These behaviors limited students' opportunities to practice English and participate actively in classroom interaction.

Information gathered from classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires showed a consistent pattern across the participants. Students who lacked confidence were more likely to worry about negative reactions from others, and these concerns increased their anxiety when speaking English. As a result, many participants became less active during speaking activities and experienced difficulty communicating their ideas effectively.

Overall, the findings indicate that speaking anxiety is influenced by several related psychological factors rather than a single cause. Therefore, creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages students to participate without fear of making mistakes may help reduce speaking anxiety and improve students' confidence in using English.

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