

## THE ROLE OF ANXIETY IN ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstrak** - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran kecemasan terhadap kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 2 Palembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan catatan guru untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman siswa terkait kecemasan berbicara dan strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasinya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kemampuan berbicara, terutama dalam hal kelancaran, koherensi, dan kepercayaan diri. Ketakutan melakukan kesalahan, penilaian teman sebaya, dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri menjadi faktor utama penyebab kecemasan. Sementara itu, lingkungan kelas yang mendukung, dorongan dari guru, kolaborasi teman sebaya, serta strategi individu seperti berlatih di rumah dan menyiapkan catatan membantu siswa mengelola kecemasan. Hasil ini menekankan pentingnya memahami pengalaman emosional siswa dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** Kecemasan berbicara, Kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris, Strategi coping.

**Abstract** - This study investigates the role of anxiety in English speaking performance among senior high school students at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and teacher notes to explore students' experiences of speaking anxiety and their coping strategies. The findings reveal that anxiety significantly affects speaking performance, particularly in terms of fluency, coherence, and confidence. Fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, and low self-confidence were identified as major contributors to anxiety. Meanwhile, supportive classroom environments, teacher encouragement, peer collaboration, and individual coping strategies such as practicing at home or preparing notes were found to help students manage anxiety. These results underscore the importance of understanding students' emotional experiences and creating supportive learning environments to enhance English speaking performance.

**Keywords:** Speaking anxiety, English performance, Coping strategies.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most important skills in English learning because it allows students to convey ideas, interact socially, and communicate effectively in academic contexts (Brown & Yule 2017; Bygate, 2018; Dincer & Dariyemez, 2020). In Indonesia, senior high school students often face difficulties in speaking English due to limited exposure to the language, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes, which can inhibit their participation in classroom activities (Wulandari, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2020; Ehsan et al., 2019). This challenge is compounded by the fact that English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), meaning students rarely have opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, which limits their oral proficiency development (Rao, 2019; Nejmaoui, 2019; Tuzer &

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Kilimci, 2024). Consequently, even when students possess adequate grammatical knowledge, they may struggle to produce coherent and fluent speech due to psychological barriers such as anxiety.

One of the primary psychological factors influencing English speaking performance is language anxiety, which is defined as a feeling of tension, nervousness, and apprehension specifically associated with learning or using a second language (Horwitz et al., 2018; Askhatova A, 2020; Gardner, 2018). Speaking anxiety manifests in various forms, such as fear of negative evaluation, concern about making mistakes, and self-consciousness during oral communication (Gardner, 2018; Padmadewi, 2018; Ditania, 2022). High levels of anxiety can negatively impact students' speaking performance by reducing fluency, accuracy, and willingness to participate, while moderate anxiety may function as a motivational factor that encourages preparation and active engagement (Horwitz, 2020; Hughes, 2019; Sujiyati, 2023). Therefore, understanding the role of anxiety in speaking performance is crucial to improve students' confidence and oral skills.

Several issues highlight the need for research on speaking anxiety among Indonesian senior high school students. First, many students report feeling nervous or anxious when speaking English in front of peers or teachers, which often leads to avoidance behaviors during oral activities (Anwer et al., 2018; Sujariati et al., 2016; Jaya et al., 2019). Second, anxiety frequently interferes with students' ability to organize ideas coherently, maintain proper pronunciation, and speak fluently, all of which are essential components of effective oral communication (Akramy, 2020; Ulfa & Wulandari, 2019; Horwitz et al., 2018). Third, despite the significance of speaking in English learning, there is limited empirical research investigating the specific role of anxiety in students' oral performance in Indonesian senior high schools, creating a gap in both theory and classroom practice.

This study focuses specifically on the relationship between students' anxiety levels and their English speaking performance. It does not examine other psychological factors such as motivation, self-efficacy, or personality traits, which may also influence speaking outcomes (Dornyei, 2011; Windasari et al., 2024; Carter, 2023). By narrowing the scope, the research aims to provide a focused analysis of how anxiety alone affects oral performance, particularly in terms of fluency, pronunciation, and willingness to speak. The study targets senior high school students in Indonesia, recognizing that cultural and educational contexts may influence the manifestation and impact of language anxiety.

In conclusion, investigating the role of anxiety in English speaking performance is crucial for enhancing students' communicative competence and confidence in the EFL classroom. By identifying how anxiety affects speaking skills, educators can develop targeted interventions and strategies to reduce students' apprehension, improve oral performance, and foster a more supportive learning environment (Dale et al., 2019; Prigerson & Maciejewski, 2020). Understanding this relationship will not only contribute to theoretical knowledge on language anxiety but also provide practical guidance for teachers seeking to improve speaking outcomes among Indonesian senior high school students.

## **2. METHOD**

### ***2.1 Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with a case study approach, aiming to provide an in-depth description of the role of anxiety in students' English speaking performance. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to understand students' experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding anxiety in speaking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon of anxiety in detail within the context, providing a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety affects students' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English.

## **2.2 Participants**

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang, selected due to its active English learning programs and opportunities for students to participate in speaking activities. The participants consisted of 30 students from grades XI, selected purposively, meaning students who actively participate in English lessons and are willing to share their experiences regarding speaking anxiety. Purposive sampling ensures that the information collected is relevant and provides rich insights into the phenomenon under study (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

## **2.3 Research Instruments**

The main instrument in this qualitative study was semi-structured interviews, allowing the researcher to explore students' experiences and feelings related to anxiety in speaking English. The interview questions were designed based on anxiety indicators, such as tension during speaking, fear of making mistakes, and the influence of peers or teachers (Gill & Baillie, 2018). In addition, participant observation was conducted to record students' behaviors during speaking activities, including facial expressions, intonation, and engagement in discussions. Supplementary data were obtained from teachers' documents or notes on students' speaking performance to support data triangulation.

## **2.4 Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected in several stages. First, the researcher conducted interviews with participants to understand their perceptions and experiences of speaking anxiety. Second, classroom observations were carried out during English speaking activities, noting both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Third, the researcher collected supporting documents, such as teachers' notes on students' speaking abilities. All stages were conducted with research ethics in mind, including obtaining permission from the school, participants' consent, and maintaining confidentiality of the data.

## **2.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using the steps proposed by Miles and Huberman (2019): (1) data reduction, which involves selecting and simplifying relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents; (2) data display, presenting data in descriptive narratives and summary tables for clarity; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, interpreting findings on the role of anxiety in speaking performance and verifying them through data triangulation. This analysis aims to provide a rich and accurate understanding of how anxiety affects students' English speaking performance at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang.

# **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

## **3.1 Result**

This part presents the findings of the study regarding the role of anxiety in English speaking performance among senior high school students at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang. The data were obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and teachers' notes. The findings are organized into three main themes: students' experiences of anxiety, the impact of anxiety on speaking performance, and coping strategies.

### **3.1.1 Students' Experiences of Anxiety**

Most students reported feeling nervous and tense when asked to speak English in front of their peers or teachers. One student said, *"I feel my heart racing and my hands trembling when I have to speak in English. I am afraid of making mistakes."* Another student added, *"Sometimes I just stay quiet even if I know the answer because I'm scared my classmates will laugh."* These responses show that anxiety is not only about language proficiency but also fear of social evaluation in the classroom.

Classroom observations also confirmed these findings. One teacher noted, *"I often see students hesitating, lowering their voices, and avoiding eye contact when asked to speak. Some just refuse to answer."* Another teacher mentioned, *"Even when I encourage them, some students are still very reluctant to participate. You can see they are nervous and unsure of themselves."* These observations demonstrate that anxiety can manifest in both behavioral signs and emotional responses, which directly affect speaking performance.

Students described specific challenges caused by anxiety. One student stated, *"I get stuck in the middle of a sentence and forget what I want to say. I feel embarrassed and sometimes just stop speaking."* Another added, *"I worry about my pronunciation. I think my friends will judge me if I say a word wrong."* These statements highlight that anxiety impacts fluency, pronunciation, and confidence, which are crucial components of speaking performance.

Finally, teachers emphasized the importance of supportive classroom strategies. One teacher said, *"Creating a relaxed environment helps students speak more. When they know mistakes are okay, they try more."* Another teacher noted, *"Pair work or small group activities reduce anxiety. Students feel safer to practice speaking without being watched by the whole class."* These perspectives suggest that anxiety can be mitigated through careful teaching strategies and classroom management, enhancing students' willingness and ability to speak English..

In addition to student reports, classroom observations reinforced these findings. Teachers noted that anxious students often displayed physical signs such as lowered gaze, avoiding eye contact, speaking softly, and tense facial expressions. Many students preferred to stay silent or gave very brief answers to avoid the risk of making mistakes. This phenomenon shows that anxiety not only affects emotional aspects but also directly impacts communicative behavior, limiting their speaking performance. Wu (2018) argue that language anxiety is a significant emotional barrier because it can prevent students from freely expressing ideas and participating actively in learning activities.

From the teachers' perspective, anxiety poses a particular challenge in the learning process. Several teachers observed that anxious students often refuse opportunities to speak or give minimal responses, reducing verbal interaction that is essential for language development. This affects the overall progress of their speaking skills, as language proficiency improves through practice and active participation. These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and emotionally safe classroom environment, where students feel comfortable

attempting to speak without fear of negative evaluation. A supportive environment, combined with effective teaching strategies, is believed to reduce anxiety levels and enhance students' confidence, willingness, and ability to speak (Padmadewi, 2018).

### **3.1.2 Coping Strategies for Speaking Anxiety**

Students reported various strategies they used to manage their anxiety when speaking English. One student explained, *"I usually practice at home in front of the mirror or with my family. It helps me feel less nervous in class."* Another student added, *"I prepare short notes before speaking. When I forget a word, I can just look at my notes and continue."* Observations also showed that students who watched or listened to peers with better speaking skills often gained confidence. A student stated, *"I try to follow how my friends speak and copy their pronunciation and rhythm. It makes me feel I can do it too."*

Support from teachers and classmates was another important factor in coping with speaking anxiety. One teacher noted, *"I always encourage students to speak, even if they make mistakes. I tell them that errors are part of learning, and gradually, they become more confident."* A student confirmed this, saying, *"When the teacher praises even small efforts, I feel braver to speak in front of the class."* Peer support also helped; another student shared, *"I feel less nervous when my friends listen patiently and don't laugh at my mistakes."*

These coping strategies indicate that both personal preparation and social support are crucial in reducing speaking anxiety. As Horwitz et al. (2018) argues, strategies such as rehearsal, note-taking, and observing peers, combined with a supportive classroom environment, significantly help students manage language anxiety. Teachers' encouragement and a positive classroom climate provide emotional security, enabling students to participate more actively and improve their speaking performance.

### **3.1.3 Students' Perceptions**

Students' perceptions of digital storytelling as a tool in developing their writing skills were generally very positive. Many students reported that the method was engaging and enjoyable because it combined creativity with technology. They felt more motivated to participate in the writing process, as digital storytelling allowed them to present their ideas in a more interactive and expressive way. One student mentioned, *"I really enjoy learning through digital storytelling because it makes writing more fun and helps me generate new ideas more easily"*. This highlights how digital storytelling created a dynamic learning environment that encouraged students to move beyond traditional writing exercises and explore their imagination. It also supported them in developing originality, as they were not only writing but also integrating visual and audio elements into their work.

In addition to motivation, students found that digital storytelling helped them organize and express their ideas more effectively. By combining text with images and narration, they were able to connect their thoughts in a coherent and meaningful way. This was particularly helpful for students who often struggled to begin or develop their writing. As another student shared, *"When I use pictures and voice to support my story, it is easier for me to find ideas and make my writing clearer"*. This shows that digital storytelling functioned not only as a creative outlet but also as a cognitive aid in idea generation, making the writing process more structured and less intimidating. The multimedia aspect of storytelling enabled students to better understand the connection between imagination and written expression.

However, despite the positive aspects, several challenges were also identified. Some students struggled with limited technical skills, particularly in using editing software or digital applications. One participant admitted, *“Sometimes it is hard for me to use the applications because I am not very familiar with technology”*. This indicates that digital literacy plays a crucial role in the success of digital storytelling projects. Time constraints were another challenge, as creating digital stories required more effort, from planning and drafting to editing and finalizing the product. While these challenges sometimes caused frustration, most students agreed that the benefits outweighed the difficulties. Overall, the responses showed that digital storytelling was not only effective in enhancing motivation, originality, imagination, and expression but also contributed to building confidence and creativity in English writing.

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that anxiety is a major factor affecting English speaking performance among senior high school students at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang. Most students reported experiencing nervousness, tension, and fear of making mistakes when required to speak in English, particularly in front of their peers or teachers. One student expressed, *“I feel my heart racing and my hands trembling when I have to speak in English. I am afraid of making mistakes.”* Observations confirmed these reports, showing that students often hesitated, spoke in a low voice, or avoided eye contact during speaking tasks. These findings align with Horwitz (2020), who describe language anxiety as a significant emotional barrier that interferes with second language learning, particularly in oral performance. Similarly, Gabriel et al. (2020) argue that anxiety reduces learners’ willingness to communicate, lowers self-confidence, and can negatively influence fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

The study also demonstrates that the severity of anxiety differs among students. High levels of anxiety were observed to disrupt students’ fluency, coherence, and overall performance, while moderate levels of anxiety could serve as a motivating factor. Some students reported that a moderate level of nervousness encouraged them to prepare notes, practice at home, or observe more confident peers to improve their speaking. One participant shared, *“I feel a bit nervous, but it pushes me to practice more before speaking in class.”* This supports the idea of “facilitative anxiety” proposed by Jin (2023), who suggests that a certain level of anxiety can enhance alertness and motivate learners to focus and perform better.

Another important finding is the role of classroom environment and social support in mitigating speaking anxiety. Students who received encouragement from teachers or supportive feedback from peers reported feeling more confident and willing to participate in speaking activities. A teacher noted, *“I encourage all students to speak, even if they make mistakes. Positive reinforcement helps them feel safe and confident.”* One student added, *“When my friends listen patiently and don’t laugh at my mistakes, I feel braver to speak.”* These findings corroborate Day (2023), who emphasizes that teacher encouragement, peer collaboration, and a positive classroom atmosphere are critical in reducing language anxiety and enhancing communication skills.

The study also highlights practical coping strategies that students adopt to manage anxiety, such as preparing notes, practicing speaking at home, and observing skilled peers. These strategies indicate that students actively seek solutions to reduce anxiety and improve their performance. As reported by a student, *“I practice speaking in front of the mirror at home. It*

*makes me more confident when I speak in class.*” This shows that personal efforts, combined with a supportive environment, can significantly improve students’ speaking performance despite the presence of anxiety.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that anxiety is a multifaceted factor influencing English speaking performance, involving internal emotions, peer interactions, and teacher support. Understanding these dynamics allows teachers to implement strategies that address students’ psychological needs, such as creating a safe speaking environment, encouraging gradual participation, and fostering peer support. By doing so, students can develop their oral communication skills effectively while managing the negative effects of anxiety, contributing to better overall language proficiency.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that anxiety significantly affects English speaking performance among senior high school students at SMA Negeri 2 Palembang. Students with high levels of anxiety tend to experience disruptions in fluency, coherence, and confidence during speaking activities, primarily due to fear of making mistakes, concern about peer judgment, and low self-confidence. Interestingly, moderate levels of anxiety may serve as a motivating factor, encouraging students to prepare more thoroughly before speaking. The study also shows that teacher and peer support play a critical role in reducing anxiety, as students who received encouragement and positive feedback were more willing to participate in speaking tasks. Additionally, students reported using coping strategies such as practicing speaking at home, preparing notes, and observing confident peers, which helped them manage anxiety effectively.

The findings of this study have important implications for English language teaching in senior high schools. Teachers are encouraged to create a supportive and safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable speaking without fear of mistakes. Positive reinforcement, constructive feedback, and gradual speaking activities such as small-group discussions can help reduce anxiety and build students’ confidence. Moreover, teaching students specific coping strategies, like independent speaking practice or conversation simulations, can further support their ability to manage anxiety and enhance oral performance.

For future research, several directions are recommended. Studies can explore additional psychological factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence, which may interact with anxiety to influence speaking performance. Researchers could also involve larger and more diverse samples from multiple schools to improve generalizability. In-depth qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews or longitudinal case studies, could provide deeper insights into students’ emotional experiences related to speaking English. Finally, future research could focus on developing and testing teaching interventions specifically designed to reduce anxiety and enhance speaking performance, including project-based learning or digital-assisted methods. Collectively, these efforts can contribute to a better understanding of the role of anxiety in language learning and help teachers implement strategies to improve students’ English speaking skills.

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