

# Factors Causing English Speaking Anxiety (ESA) in EFL Context: A Case Study among Post-Graduate Students in Indonesia

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## Abstract

*This research presents quantitative and qualitative data relating to the effect of language anxiety on speaking motivation, the causes, and the way students cope with speaking anxiety. The participants of this research were 13 students from a post-Graduate class in the Language Education Department majoring in English Education at Universitas Negeri Semarang. They were adult EFL students who had acquired three languages or more. This research used semi-open-ended questionnaires to gather data from the participants. The study found that ESA adversely affects the student's speaking performance. Post-graduate students also experience it. The students feel uneasy, unconfident, nervous, and afraid of speaking English as a foreign language, affecting their speaking motivation and fluency during class presentations and discussions.*

**Keywords:** Speaking Motivation, EFL, and Adult Learners

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety often refers to an abnormal sense or fear which might cause an extreme psychological condition marked by some physical reaction such as sweating, tension, and rising pulse. This anxiety may occur in learning other languages due to the limitation of language use and specific situations. This psychological disorder can affect the students' language performance in writing, listening, reading, and speaking.

EFL students often experience Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) when they have to perform their language skills, writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Cheng (2002) believes that English writers with a higher anxiety level will avoid taking the courses because they lack confidence. English language reading anxiety can be a frightening experience for students. Reading anxiety affects students' academic performance because they lack self-confidence and motivation. Dread, particularly the fear of failing and a lack of self-confidence, is the core cause of anxiety (Shadiq,

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2017). Speaking is arguably the ability most negatively impacted by language anxiety, as stated by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986).

In addition, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors significantly affect the amount of anxiety that students experience while taking language sessions. Vogely (1998) conducted a study to evaluate the connection between the level of stress that learners experience and their listening performance. According to the findings, the following factors contributed to the experience of anxiety:

1. The rapidity with which the information was conveyed.
2. Bad pronunciation.
3. An unfamiliar tone.
4. A variety of accents.
5. The length of the listening portions.

The aspects that correlate to the cause of anxiety need to be explored qualitatively and focus more on individual differences. Anxiety is closely related to the individual feeling depending on their psychological condition. If we would like to relate this to EFL learning, it is essential to focus on the individual difference and qualitative data which affect that condition. Quantitative research offers generalisation to its results and neglects the individual's differences.

Everyone in formal or informal situations experiences anxiety. Anxiety can sometimes become severe. Some people may get disadvantages when they cannot control their fear. They can heighten the frequency and intensity of worry in specific circumstances. According to Günay, Oncel, Erdoan, Güneri, Tendoan, and Uur (2008), one of the periods during which anxiety is noted the most is adolescence (Erozkan, 2011, citing Günay et al.). Youth is one of the periods during which anxiety is observed the most. Onwuegbuzie, Baily, and Daley (1999) researched to determine the factors that influenced anxiety associated with learning a foreign language. They discovered significant relations between the following variables: age, academic achievement, prior high school experience with foreign languages, and expected overall average for the current language course. It was discovered that older students had a higher level of language anxiety than younger pupils. It was proven to be the case when comparing students of different ages.

This paper presents research about speaking anxiety experienced by adult EFL. Adult language learners reported differently by some previous research. Shadiq (2017) claims that with increasing age, language learners in Saudi Arabia tend to experience higher anxiety levels. According to Dewaele et al. (2008), older participants reported considerably lower levels of CA / FLA than younger participants did. Individuals older than 18 years old in Donovan and MacIntyre's (2005) study reported higher levels of FLA than participants more youthful than 18 years old. This current study offers a different point of view in researching language anxiety among adult learners. This research will present quantitative data supported by qualitative data relating to the effect of language anxiety on speaking motivation, the causes, and the way students cope with speaking anxiety. This study aims to answer the research questions. They are:

1. How does anxiety affect students' English-speaking exposure?
2. What are the causes of speaking anxiety according to students?

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### 3. How do students overcome their speaking anxiety?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

When paraphrasing a source that is not your own, be sure to represent the author's information or opinions accurately and in your own words. Even when paraphrasing an author's work, you still must provide a citation to that work. When directly quoting an author's work, provide citation marks at the beginning till the end of the citation, and page number is necessary to be noted besides the name of the author and year of publication.

According to the definition provided by Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is a discrete complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with classroom language learning that arise from the distinctiveness of the language learning process. Anxiety in foreign language learning is an exciting topic to be analysed. Scholar's study this under educational psychology. There is a high possibility that students suffer high anxiety during English Foreign Language (EFL) learning, and students who are good at general topics may also have difficulties learning a foreign language.

According to the findings of Horwitz and colleagues (1986), FLA could be related to three variables: a) communication understanding, b) fear of unfavorable evaluation and c) exam anxiety. Students who struggle with communication understanding feel awkward when they are required to communicate in a second or foreign language in front of other people, mainly when their listening and speaking skills are being tested. According to Ying (2008), several factors might lead to language anxiety, including personal and interpersonal factors, learner attitudes about language learning, teacher beliefs about language anxiety, teacher-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing.

Dewaele (2007) investigated how multilingualism, sociobiographical, and situational factors influenced the communicative (CA) and foreign language anxiety of adult language learners (FLA). The results show that multilingual people have more significant levels of CA in their L1 when exposed to stressful conditions but higher levels of FLA in languages that they learned later in life. There was a correlation between knowing more languages and having lower levels of FLA in the second language. It was discovered that only female individuals have higher levels of CA when it comes to L1 public discourse. There was a general trend where older individuals reported higher levels of CA / FLA across all languages. There was a statistically significant correlation between the L1, L2, L3, and L4 rankings for CA / FLA.

A study that was carried out with a quantitative research design and utilizing a survey approach to collect data regarding the participants' language anxiety is presented by Shadiq (2017). This study was also carried out to present findings. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the education faculty at Princes Nora University suffer from language

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anxiety and whether or not there is a significant correlation between the level of language anxiety and the variables listed below: (a) academic year; and (b) students' age. According to the survey findings, the vast majority of respondents reported some fear when they were in the language lesson. To put it another way, students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) typically do not have much anxiety around learning English, although they experience anxiety in some circumstances. (2017) investigates coping with speaking language anxiety. This study combines qualitative and quantitative data analysis. This study has aimed to explore the strategies for coping with Chinese university students' Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and the effectiveness of these strategies. The research finds that the knowledge of using effective speaking strategy and making the class comfortable reduce the student's speaking anxiety. Siddique (2020) adds that if the institution provides students with the adequate speaking opportunity, they will control their speaking anxiety appropriately.

Zhiping and Paramsivam (2013) examined why international students at a Malaysian university suffer from anxiety. They explore how these students deal with their fear and anxiety when speaking English in the classroom. In addition, the study studies the viewpoints of teachers and how they react to the anxious feelings of students, as well as the opinions of students regarding how teachers respond to their feelings of worry. To collect data, observations and interviews were conducted with eight international post-graduate students attending a university in Malaysia. The findings suggest that Nigerians, in general, do not experience anxiety when speaking in public. Differently, Iranians and Algerians are more likely to suffer from anxiety owing to the fear of receiving an adverse judgment and the dread of communicating with others. According to the findings, the methods used by the lecturers and the responses given by the students to those strategies are not tied to the students' cultural backgrounds but rather to the affective filters and learning abilities that all humans share.

### 3. METHODS

The participants of this research were 13 students from a post-Graduate class in the language education department majoring in English Education at Universitas Negeri Semarang. They were adult EFL students who had acquired three languages or more. Most of them use Javanese as L1 (12 students) and Sudanese (1 student); all students use Indonesian as L2 and English as Foreign Language (FL). They use English in formal situations as academic communication during class sessions and speak Javanese and Indonesian for informal communication among friends. The research is a case study of one single class. The researcher selected a case study design because she managed to obtain more specific data focusing on post-Graduate students, who are considered adult learners and have more experience using English during study or teaching experience. Most of them have experienced learning and teaching English for several years. However, this study focuses on reporting the causes of English-speaking anxiety (ESA), the effect on speaking exposure, and how students overcome ESA. This research uses semi-openended questionnaires to gather data from the participants. The questionnaires investigate the number of languages spoken by the participants to indicate that they are from multilingual cultures and use English as a foreign language; therefore, they are not using English for daily communication. The questionnaire also investigates how the students define the ESA by asking, "what is speaking anxiety?". The researcher intended to explore

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the participants' understanding of ESA to set common sense. Most of them associate speaking anxiety with fear, worry, and nervousness when speaking English. It is sometimes understood as a psychological condition that influences speaking performance. With semi-open-ended questionnaires, the researcher investigated the factors that cause ESA, the effect on speaking performance and how the students overcome the ESA.

The researcher uses two techniques to analyse the data because the instrument presents quantitative data and qualitative data. To analyse the multiple choices questionnaires, the researcher makes a classification and calculates the percentage of the choices. The percentage indicates the number of students who choose the same answer. The qualitative data will enrich the discussion of the quantitative data findings.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Some studies report many reasons why EFL learners experience speaking anxiety. EFL learners need to control their speaking anxiety for public speaking and daily oral communication. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge results in students' fear of miss pronunciation. Limited grammatical knowledge influences students' speaking fluency, creating communication gaps and misinterpretation. Students' levels of selfconfidence may be affected by their anxiety about being mocked during oral examinations. ESA can also be caused by several other factors, including the native speaker effect, the error correction method of the teacher, the degree of English ability of the student, stress about whether or not they are understood, shyness, and a lack of self-confidence. (Worde, 2003; Ohata, 2005; Woodrow, 2006; Awan et al., 2010.; Dalkic, 2013; Park & Lee, 2005 as cited in Mine, 2015).

The questionnaires revealed that most students experience English-speaking anxiety when they have to speak English in class. The causes of English-speaking anxiety, the effect of ESA on speaking performance and how the students cope with ESA are presented in the table.

Table 1. The causes, effects and strategy to cope with ESA

The Causes of ESA	N (%)
The influence of L1	3 (23)
Teachers' direct corrections	2(15)
Less self-confidence	9 (69)
Self-oriented perfectionism	3 (23)
Formal or informal situation	5 (38)
Other students speak better	4 (31)
Fear of criticism	8 (62)
Lack of vocabulary and preparation	3 (23)
The effects of ESA	

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Poor speaking fluency	11(85)
Low speaking motivation	4 (31)
Fail to recall the essential information	9 (69)
Using the first language	4 (31)
Low speaking confidence	9 (69)
Poor presentation	8 (62)
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The way to overcome	
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Peers speaking practice	6 (46)
Prepare the presentation well	11(85)
Self-practice	10(77)
Write speaking notes	7 (54)
Using code-mixing/code-switching (and FL)	2 (15)
Improve Self-esteem	3 (23)
Use body language	5 (38)

The factors that cause ESA are dominated by the feeling of less self-confidence and the fear of being criticised negatively. 69% of students admit that less self-confidence can cause speaking anxiety in participating in classroom discussions. The student's inability or unwillingness to converse with one another in a foreign language is often caused by a lack of self-confidence on their part. Students capable of speaking their native language (L1) confidently may, at times, benefit from additional self-assurance when employing a foreign language. It's possible that nerves and apprehension over making blunders are to blame. Another leading contributor to students' nervousness was the worry that they would be criticized (62% of all students). Another significant contributor to students' unease in the classroom is the worry that they will be judged poorly by their instructors and classmates. They dreaded the embarrassment of being called out in front of others, mainly if the lecturer would also make derogatory comments. They were also too preoccupied with other people's opinions and had apprehensions regarding the evaluations of other individuals.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also supported the study of how self-confidence influences speaking anxiety. They indicate that speaking is the action that causes the most fear in learning a second language, yet, fifty percent of their students commented that speaking practice was an experience that built their confidence. One of the most critical elements that contribute to anxiety is a person's level of self-confidence. It is because when pupils have high self-confidence, they do not need to be terrified of making errors or having their peers laugh at them. In addition, the research conducted by Park and Lee (2005) discovered that students' oral performances are significantly impacted when they have low levels of self-confidence or high levels of nervousness. Therefore, teachers need to find ways to increase students' speaking confidence. Students need to acknowledge some speaking strategies to apply during speaking performances. Creating a comfortable speaking atmosphere can lower students' anxiety (He, 2017).

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Some learners also experience a loss of connection with the things they want to say, which makes them temporarily forget about the topics they would like to talk about. This finding is supported by research done by Rajo (2010), who investigated student anxiety in public. Students often need clarification or connection during the presentation because they forget about things they would like to say. This can be related to their speaking confidence. Because of this, they may need help picking up a new language. If a person can execute a language well enough to be understood by others, they are said to have successfully learned that language. What this indicates is that skills such as speaking will become more important than other skills. Students feel negative feelings and fear of failure during the presentation. They develop a sense of guilt if they cannot speak sufficiently. They feel nervous and fail to recall the information they intend to share. The actual content of the presentation cannot be delivered properly. They focus on criticism and feel worthless upon unsuccessful presentation.

Some of the post-graduates are English teachers. They have a sense of responsibility to be role models in speaking English. They fear humiliation if they are compared to other students from the undergraduate level. Self-disappointment can be a physiological symptom of severe anxiety. Findings of research investigating test anxiety's effects on students show that students' confidence is also influenced by anxiety.

Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) reviewed and summarized previous studies and listed twenty coping strategies for EFL instructors and learners. Some of these strategies include instructors acknowledging the existence of anxiety among learners, instructors using formative assessment more to decrease learners' worry about classroom performance and grades, learners using positive self-talk, and learners encouraging themselves to take risks in EFL learning.

Lack of preparation was another factor that made students experience speaking anxiety. Lack of preparation greatly influences the students' ESA because they use English dominantly in classroom presentations and discussions. Speaking in public may cause a big problem for several students. Students feel nervous when they have to speak in front of many people. They got anxious when they had to do the presentation, felt embarrassed when they made mistakes and feared being criticised negatively by classmates and their teacher. The public speaking process involves a lot of preparation and practice to make them become good presenters. Students admit that they need to practice to overcome their ESA (77%).

Furthermore, they also need to prepare the presentation well due to the critical topics of the discussion they need to present (85%). Post-graduate students have plenty of experience in presentations; however, they must feel relaxed, confident, and confident in English speaking, especially when they have to be presenters. Some strategies they have used to deal with ESA include practising with friends and selfpractice. They usually make an outline or summary of the important thing they would say to manage the things they would like to say. This strategy will help them anticipate a situation where they might forget the material.

One of the methods that the students were turning to alleviate the strain in the environment was to speak English with more expression. Smiling as a means of disguising the fact that one is anxious is one of the characteristics of non-verbal communication; hence, the behavior of this kind would be an expected response to reduce tension in the classroom. Smiling and laughing are sometimes recognized as

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the most prevalent examples of expressive reactions. Students can better convey the topic by using body language, such as by moving their hands. It is constructive for students who need to emphasize the essential components of the case and for students who struggle with expressing their thoughts in English.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Unlike other previous research, which focuses on anxiety levels and measures the correlation with other variables such as age, gender, academic level, language achievement etc., this study focuses more on the cause, effect and how students cope with ESA among post-graduate students. The research results show that postgraduate students also experience English-speaking anxiety. The ESA's primary source is the feeling of less confidence, fear of criticism, situation, the feeling that other students do better, the influence of L1 and lack of the target language knowledge. These results support the previous research by Lui (2006: 23-25). Lui investigated the factors that led to anxious feelings among 98 English as a Foreign Language students while taking English classes. He reported the following causes: a lack of practice, limited vocabulary knowledge, low level of proficiency, personality, incomprehensible input, fear of committing mistakes, lack of preparation, imperfect grammar, lack of self-confidence, fear of being ridiculed, task difficulty, poor pronunciation, lack of familiarity with peers, lack of understanding with the subject matter, fear of negative evaluation, fear of being the focus of attention, inability to find suitable work. A lack of practice, limited vocabulary knowledge, low proficiency, and personality.

ESA has a negative effect on the student's speaking performance. It also experiences by post-graduate students. However, the significant effect of language anxiety is its effect on the individual language learner. The students feel uneasy about speaking a foreign language (Suleimenova, 2013). The post-graduate students are expected to perform better-speaking performance than undergraduate or graduatelevel students. They must expose themselves in many public speaking events, primarily academic presentations at national or international conferences. ESA can be a communication block, an event for high-level students. Indonesian EFL students may feel that when speaking in English, they might make many grammatical mistakes and fear direct criticism. To avoid that, students often keep silent during the discussion.

Another source of ESA was a lack of practice. This means that students need more training in or outside the classroom. This might be due to the use of English in the students' daily communication. In Indonesia, English is only used as a foreign language. Students use it sparingly in daily contact. Although most post-graduate students are English teachers, they only use English in an academic situations. Their use of English as teachers and students gives them a different sense of language anxiety. English education students experience ESA because they are under the teacher's direct supervision and other students' criticism. Significant causes of foreign language speaking anxiety are fear of making mistakes and lack of preparation. From the result of the questionnaires, the students claimed that they overcame their ESA by practicing and preparing the material they would present well by making a list or summary.

"insufficient opportunities for students' engagement can be the major cause of students' inadequacy and poor speaking activities," says Gan (2012). It is according to the research that he conducted. It can be explained by pointing out that the English

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language, when used in the context of Indonesia, is seen as a foreign language and has a restricted range of communicative applications.

Students learning English as a foreign language can be distracted from their studies by several factors, one of which is anxiety. Inside or outside of the classroom, students who are anxious about speaking English can benefit from employing several different tactics. The burden of coping with ESA does not fall only on the shoulders of the students. In addition, teachers and instructors need to be able to de-escalate any tense situations that may arise in the classroom. Students are more willing and courageous to participate in speaking activities when their feelings are acknowledged and appreciated. In addition, instructors are obligated to respect the students they educate. Enjoying students as the centre of the learning and teaching process is one of the strategies that can be used to reduce the anxiety that students experience. Encouragement is a powerful tool that can help teachers boost their students' self-confidence. It has the potential to remove any psychological hurdles they may have. Anxiety can also be reduced by increasing students' awareness and knowledge of foreign cultures, reducing social stress by reinforcing attachment styles with the social environment and improving students' desire to communicate with foreign languages and cultures. All of these things work together to accomplish this.

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