Identifying EFL Students Speaking Performance: Foreign Language Anxiety Among Non-English Department Students

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	EFL learners at the tertiary level continue to struggle to practice English, especially speaking. Students were frustrated to demonstrate their spoken English when they made mistakes. They tend to avoid mistakes by remaining silent in language class. This uneasy condition in comprehending spoken English is considered foreign language anxiety. This phenomenon also happens to students in the information technology department. This study aims to investigate the foreign language anxiety phenomenon in EFL students in the non-English department. Research objectives have focused on the anxiety factors, the degree of anxiety, and defining solutions to overcome the problem. This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data was taken through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview with some respondents. The questionnaire was adopted from Horwitz's foreign-language classroom anxiety scale. As the results show, non-English department students in the IT department were classified with a high level of anxiety. Overall results show that almost half of the respondents (35 of 79 students) gained 44,44% within a score >72. The findings also reveal that most students get anxious about speaking when they get negative feedback from their peers. They are prone to not participating in classroom activities to avoid mistakes. For future researchers, classroom management is vital to provide a comfortable learning atmosphere for learners. Another way to get students' attention is by using various learning platforms to support speaking activities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring foreign languages as soft skills is still a big question for some Indonesians. EFL learners in Indonesia sometimes find English difficult to acquire (Bachtiar, 2021). The common idea regarding English learning outcomes is that learners are successful when they communicate effectively in English. This factor is also included in the employment requirements: they may be able to get work if they improve their speaking skills (Suryadi, 2022). Language learners may encounter some problems during the process of acquiring

English as part of their competencies. Some conditions to figure out this phenomenon are when our English teacher throws a question, then waits for our response and feedback. We might say some words in delay or remain silent by not responding to the questions at all. This situation becomes a barrier for foreign language learners to compete in this lesson. In a language learning context, this phenomenon is called foreign language anxiety.

Anxiety in foreign language learning settings is triggered by some aspects. It sometimes comes from the activities during the learning process or ways for instructors to teach in the classroom (Irasuti & Bachtiar, 2024). Specifically, this paper investigates the factors of anxiety experienced by students related to their speaking performance. Horwitz and Cope (1986) found that speaking in a foreign language is the most anxiety-producing experience. In speaking activities, anxiety is a very common thing. Anxiety was interesting because it can affect learning achievement, especially in foreign language learning. Anxiety can be either negative or positive for the student's achievement.

In the mid-1980s, many researchers have investigated these phenomena in educational settings. Some scholars were interested in the factors that can trigger anxiety and how they affect performance and learning outcomes. Anxiety was problematic in language education settings since it became a barrier for learners to deal with (Wu, 2010). Most foreign language learners had problems in their language classroom. Almost one-third of all foreign language learners struggle with language anxiety at any level (Horwitz, 1986). Related to skills, anxiety mostly affected speaking skills. As the expected output, speaking becomes a skill that needs to be mastered by EFL learners (Indriyanti, 2022). Speaking skills are an indicator of successful learning outcomes. Leong and Ahmadi (2017) consider speaking a productive skill. Speaking is a productive skill when students can produce utterances or communicate in their target language. Most often, the impression is based on the ability to communicate in English. Somehow, the indicator is that the student can smoothly produce utterances as they perform spoken English as well. Moreover, speaking is one of the essential parts of communication in EFL teaching. Considering the aim of learning English is to comprehend speaking skills, students urge themselves to communicate in English.

Making students speak in the classroom requires efforts and strategies. Students speak in English with limited capabilities both in grammar and vocabulary. To demonstrate their speaking skills, students are frustrated and feel hard to deal with. Students may not speak smoothly because of their limited vocabulary or low level of comprehension in English. Since they predominantly speak their mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia), spoken English is a heavy task. This situation may make it difficult for them to maintain their performance because of their low comprehension of the target language. They need time to adapt by switching their Bahasa Indonesia to English. Other situations that affect students' performance are avoiding mistakes, so students tend to remain silent and not participate in classroom activities due to producing mistakes that may burden them when their peers respond negatively to their speaking. Some previous research found this as one of the roots that can trigger anxiety among learners.

Some recent research has found this phenomenon in an Indonesian context. Research conducted by Indriyanti (2022) investigated the speaking anxiety phenomenon in high

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school students at MAS Raudhatul Akmal. Her research findings show that the majority of them worry about pronouncing words incorrectly and using poor grammar. They suddenly start to feel anxious when they want to speak in front of the class. Speaking in front of their friends made them feel really nervous. As a result, they found it challenging to execute since they became anxious, doubted themselves, and worried about their performance. The researcher found that there were many components to the student's anxiety.

Speaking becomes uncomfortable when you are improperly prepared. Given that they are not speaking in the target language, this scenario obviously matters to EFL learners. They require a moment to comprehend the spoken English. They felt nervous when speaking openly and spoke clearly when there was no draft. Ningsih and Fatimah's (2020) research also discovered a comparable phenomenon in the speaking anxiety that the SMKN 6 Padang tourism and hospitality departments encountered. They discovered that the speaking evaluation is the primary cause of anxiety among students. When it came time for the speaking exam, they were having trouble. Because of their performance, students were concerned that they wouldn't pass the test. They felt insecure about themselves as a result of not passing the test. The results show that the students are reluctant to reply in English to other people. Despite their prior preparation, they nevertheless experienced anxiety. They couldn't perform well if they were extremely nervous.

In addition, when students are not confident about their speaking ability or are not well prepared to deal with the speaking evaluation, this condition will cause them to not achieve their peak performance. This condition was set as the background for conducting preliminary research related to the anxiety factors among vocational students in the Informatics Engineering study program. The similarity of the backgrounds will be described as a general phenomenon that needs to be distinguished and solved based on their settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is still found to be the hardest skill to acquire by EFL learners in Indonesia. Some background on this phenomenon relies on the limited time spent practicing English in school; English is still considered a foreign language that students are not familiar with; and so forth. Regarding the phenomenon, the output of English teaching and speaking is still fruitless (Djafar, Syukri, & Yunus, 2023). These conditions are a glimpse of how EFL learners struggle with speaking.

Due to the market's rapid expansion, future workers must possess the fundamental soft skills (spoken English) to enter the global labour market. On the other hand, the majority of EFL students continue to be ignorant of the demanding English environment they face in classrooms. Most non-native English-speaking countries, including Indonesia, have made it a goal of their English curricula to enable students to engage with people worldwide (Alsagoff, 2012). As a result, identifying problems and providing appropriate answers is one method of assisting students in understanding what they are studying. Assisting students with the proper teaching strategies for speaking and mapping the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety in the classroom can contribute to desirable outcomes.

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2.1 Speaking Skills through EFL Perspectives

Some scholars claim that speaking is an engaging activity that demands users' participation. Speaking displays the ability to perform (Richards, 2008). Therefore, it is essential that EFL students demonstrate their spoken language as often as possible. Speaking involves a variety of activities, including information sharing, message delivery, feedback, clear speech, emphasizing key points, and more. It is common for EFL learners to struggle with spoken English (Suryadi, 2022). The reasons behind this include the following: they don't speak English as their first language; they don't have much time to practice speaking it; and English is more difficult to understand than Bahasa Indonesia. However, the primary issue concerns their comprehension of English and the necessary knowledge that they must acquire (Bachtiar et al., 2024). According to Goh and Burns (2012), speaking involves a lot of processes, which makes it challenging for some learners. The gaps in the spoken English (stress, articulation, fluency, accuracy, and so on), which needed some time to understand, could cause the learners to falter in this situation. The speaking difficulties brought on by the students' nervousness are also connected to other specific challenges. This problem results from the inability of students to participate in the learning process.

2.2 Speaking obstacles: Foreign Language Anxiety

The feelings of disquiet, fear, tension, and uncertainty associated with learning a foreign language are known as foreign language anxiety. These circumstances can arise from any situation involving a second language, regardless of whether they are connected to the useful abilities of writing and speaking. Students might feel nervous when their teacher asks them to communicate in English. It is a particular circumstance that can impact anyone, even if they do not experience anxiety in other settings. Horwitz et. al. (1986) stated that most EFL learners found it difficult to engage in a foreign language classroom, and they identified this phenomenon as foreign language anxiety. The forms of anxiety were classified based on the learners' surroundings, such as social comprehension, negative judgment, and task evaluation.

2.3 Speaking Anxiety

The condition of the EFL learner's nervousness about answering and giving feedback on teacher questions is classified as speaking anxiety. This situation happens when the learner is unable to perform their spoken English well (Azzahara et al., 2024). Speaking anxiety is the term used to characterize EFL students' anxiety when it comes to responding to and providing comments on teacher questions. This condition arises from the learner's poor spoken English performance. When completing their assignments or performing activities, EFL students may experience anxiety (Price, 1991). In addition, Price (1991) identifies the variables that influence speaking anxiety as the avoidance of mispronouncing words and the fear of peer criticism as a result of mispronouncing words.

3. METHOD

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The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the phenomena of foreign language anxiety, which has an impact on speaking performance. Best and Kahn (2006) defined descriptive research as the use of qualitative methodologies to describe, document, analyze, and interpret existing conditions. The data were gathered from a questionnaire and an interview. This study's respondents are first-year students in the non-English department of the Informatics Engineering study program for the academic year 2023-2024. This study's participants were 79 students who took an English course that semester. Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Scales (1986) were used to collect data via a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview was undertaken to obtain detailed information on the speaking anxiety phenomena. The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, which comprises of 18 statements, is used to gather quantitative data. Data was collected using an instrument using a 5-point Likert scale for each item. As a result, each respondent's overall score for the 18 items ranged between 18 to 90.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the questionnaire, the majority of students had a high amount of anxiety about speaking. As for the results, 79 participants showed results; 38.30 percent of respondents (30 students) scored between 54 and 72, indicating a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Additionally, 17.26 percent of respondents (14 students) scored lower than 54, which suggests a low level of speaking fear compared to only 44.44 percent of respondents (35 students) who had a high level of speaking anxiety.
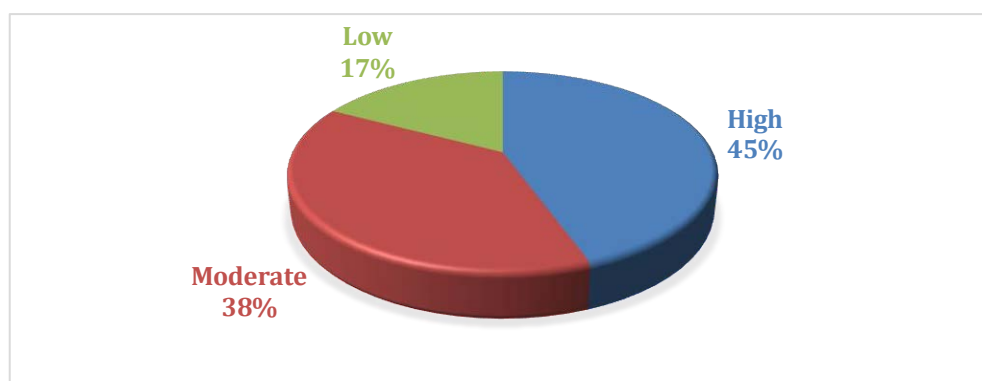

Figure 1. Anxiety level of Informatics Engineering Students

From the interview with some respondents who considered high-level anxiety, they figured out how they got anxious while speaking. Some respondents described the situation when the lecturer asked them to share ideas.

"*Once, the lecturer asked us to share our past experience learning English in high school. I didn't know what to say because of my poor vocabulary. I just smiled and waited for my lecturer to point to another student*". (MRA)

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"My lecturer once asked me to read a passage in front of the class. But I chose to remain silent because my English was "medok". Then, my lecturer asked another student to replace me. Then, I felt relief." (AD)

"My brain suddenly halted when the lecturer asked me to answer a question. I thought it was an easy question, but my brain and mouth couldn't speak any words. So next, I prefer to ask permission to go to the toilet when the Q&A session starts." (AS)

This situation described that some students were frustrated with sharing ideas or Q&A sessions. They are prone to shut their mouth and wait for the lecturer to point to other students. Avoiding mistakes through silence keeps them safe through peer feedback. Somehow, students can't avoid mistakes, so their peers will boo or mock them. This situation could be difficult for them when their peers respond with negative feedback. So, student pretends to bypass this learning session as much as they can (asking permission to go to the bathroom or keep their mouth closed).

Some respondents stated that the lack of variety in speaking activities (doing presentations and answering questions) makes them lack motivation in classroom. Somehow, this condition makes them anxious to present their slides because they may think other students would speak more fluently than others.

"When I heard my friend speak fluently, I felt falter about my own presentation." (MAL)

"The worst thing happens when others present their slides smoothly." (DU)

My heart was beating fast when I knew that the other group's presentation was better than ours. (MUA)

The transcription revealed that the student's low self-confidence is typical. Most of them are concerned that their friend will outperform them. The student's self-perception influences their performance. Students who believe their speaking is not fluent due to a lack of self-confidence will struggle to talk. When speaking English, some of them appeared distressed. Their psychological assumptions hold that other pupils will outperform them. So, they pretend they can't perform. In some situations, students prefer to plan rather than react spontaneously to avoid mistakes.

The result of the interview transcription underlines that the speaking aspect needs various activities that can boost student's motivation. Speaking activities can be in the form of roleplay or making a video podcast. Roleplay helps student to take a role and focus on their own dialogue. Roleplay is a lot of fun, so the student can enjoy speaking in their own style without any hesitation. Also, roleplay can help them bond with each other. Video Podcast is a new brand nowadays. Through video podcasts, students will provide different experiences and challenges to speak at specific times, look for interesting topics, and manage

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the dialogue. It is more complicated, but students can challenge themselves to complete that project.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings that were conducted with informatics engineering students, it can be concluded that the degree of students' speaking anxiety was high. Most students are anxious when they ask to speak in front of the class. Demonstrating their speaking abilities makes them nervous because they need more practice to provide their finest performance. Students may feel more comfortable speaking up in class if the atmosphere is generally positive. However, appropriate activities that enhance students' speaking results must be developed. Students can be more engaged when they participate in more interactive classroom activities, such as roleplaying or group discussions, rather than simply presenting PowerPoint but in certain instances, two or three paragraphs may be necessary.

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