

An Analysis of Students' Anxiety in Learning English Speaking at SMAN 1 Masbagik

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the factors contributing to students' anxiety when speaking English in the tenth grade at SMAN 1 Masbagik during the 2025-2026 academic year. A qualitative descriptive design was used, employing observation, interviews, and questionnaires as the main data collection instruments. The findings reveal that students experience three types of anxiety: communication concerns, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The main factors that trigger speaking anxiety include limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, and fear of negative evaluation. To overcome these challenges, students applied several strategies such as repeated practice, relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, preparing for language comprehension/grammar, and seeking peer support. This study concluded that student speaking anxiety is a multidimensional problem influenced by linguistic and psychological factors, requiring efforts from teachers and students to foster a more supportive learning environment.

Keywords: Students; Speaking Anxiety; English

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It not only functions as a means of communication, but also serves as a global tool to connect people across cultures and countries. Sulistyowati (2023, pp. 45–56) emphasizes that in the fields of education, business, technology, and international relations, the role of English is undeniable. In Indonesia, where English is considered a foreign language, it has become an integral part of the national curriculum. This shows that learning English is not merely about mastering a subject at school, but also about preparing students to take part in academic and professional exchanges at the international level. In learning English, students are generally expected to master four main skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, speaking is often considered the most challenging, especially in an EFL context like Indonesia. Afidawati et al. (2024, pp. 107–130) state that unlike other skills that may allow more time and reflection, speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously with appropriate grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. This immediate demand makes speaking a particularly difficult skill for many learners, highlighting the need for more attention to this aspect of English learning.

The difficulty of speaking becomes more complex when psychological factors are taken into account. One of the most influential factors is speaking anxiety, which refers to feelings of nervousness or fear when using a foreign language in front of others. According to Pertiwi et al. (2021, p. 45), students often experience physical symptoms such as sweating or increased heart rate, as well as mental barriers such as forgetting what to say. These emotional obstacles not only reduce students' confidence, but also limit their opportunities to practice speaking, which in turn may hinder their overall language development.

In addition, research identified several factors that contributed to speaking anxiety. These factors included fear of negative judgment from peers, lack of self-confidence, low vocabulary acquisition, and pressure from the formal classroom environment. Nuraeni et al. (2024, p. 112) stated that even students who had prepared well experienced sudden anxiety that inhibited their performance. This suggested that anxiety was not only caused by a lack of preparation, but was also influenced by students' emotional and social environments.

Despite facing these challenges, many students use strategies to reduce anxiety. These strategies include thorough preparation before speaking tasks, relaxation exercises, the use of positive self-talk, and seeking support from peers. Afidawati et al. (2024, p. 88) found that students who consistently use these methods tend to build greater self-confidence and become more active in class discussions. Therefore, emotional self-regulation plays a crucial role in language performance, particularly in speaking skills.

Previous studies have also examined the phenomenon of speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. For instance, Amelia (2021) found that grammar-focused instruction often increases students' speaking anxiety because learners fear making grammatical mistakes during spontaneous speech. Similarly, Rachmawati and Yuliana (2022) reported that peer feedback can either reduce or heighten anxiety depending on how supportive classmates are. Another study by Afidawati et al. (2024) highlighted that structured anxiety reduction strategies such as relaxation and guided practice significantly improved students' confidence in speaking English. Moreover, Putri and Nugroho (2023) observed that positive teacher attitudes and classroom interaction patterns play a crucial role in minimizing fear of negative evaluation. These findings collectively show that speaking anxiety is influenced by a combination of linguistic, psychological, and social factors, which justifies the need for further exploration in different school contexts such as *SMAN 1 Masbagik*.

Given the importance of speaking skills in English communication and their significant impact on anxiety, this study aims to explore the specific causes of speaking anxiety among students and the strategies they use to overcome it. Understanding these aspects is crucial for creating a more supportive classroom environment and improving students' oral communication skills. To achieve this objective, this study employs a descriptive qualitative research method through interviews, observations, and documentation. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' personal experiences related to speaking anxiety and their coping strategies. This approach was selected because it allows researchers to capture emotional responses and behaviors that may not be revealed through quantitative measurements. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of English language teaching, particularly in speaking classes. For students, the findings can serve as a guide in developing self-regulation and effective communication strategies, thereby enhancing their confidence and speaking abilities.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the phenomenon of students' speaking anxiety in the English learning classroom. The descriptive qualitative design was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe and understand participants' experiences, emotions, and perceptions in their natural learning environment. As stated by Ari et al. (2010, p. 22), a basic qualitative study provides rich descriptive accounts aimed at understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved. Furthermore, according to WaMbaleka (2020, pp. 33–41), in descriptive qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument because he or she directly collects and analyzes data from the natural setting without relying on external instruments. The selection of a descriptive qualitative method is also supported by experts in research methodology. According to Creswell

(2012), qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher seeks to explore participants' subjective experiences in depth and to interpret meaning within a specific context. Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize that descriptive qualitative studies are useful for uncovering participants' real-life perspectives without manipulating variables. This makes it suitable for educational studies that involve psychological and emotional factors, such as students' anxiety in speaking English. Therefore, the data were presented through narrative descriptions obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, without the use of numerical analysis. This approach was in line with the aim of this study, which was to analyze students' anxiety in learning to speak English at *SMAN 1 Masbagik* and to explore their experiences, feelings, and responses during the speaking learning process.

The study was conducted at *SMAN 1 Masbagik*, located in East Lombok Regency, Masbagik District, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This school was selected as the research site because English speaking skill is one of the main focuses in English language learning, making it a relevant setting to examine students' speaking anxiety. Additionally, the researcher had good access to the school, which facilitated effective data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The school also provided a natural classroom environment in which students' interactions, behaviors, and emotional expressions could be observed in real time without external interference. These considerations are consistent with the purpose of descriptive qualitative research, which seeks to understand phenomena in an authentic and contextual setting.

The participants in this study were students of grade X at *SMAN 1 Masbagik*. During the classroom observation stage, all students were observed to identify interaction patterns and their reactions during English-speaking activities. In the interview stage, four to five students were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The selected students represented different levels of speaking ability and participation in the classroom to provide diverse and in-depth insights into the experience of speaking anxiety. Purposive sampling, as explained by Denieffe (2020, pp. 662–663), is an effective technique to ensure that the selected participants are those who can best contribute to achieving the research objectives.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. The researcher conducted classroom observations to examine the English-speaking learning process, focusing on students' behaviors, teacher–student interactions, and emotional reactions when they were required to speak in front of the class. This method helped the researcher obtain a real picture of situations that could trigger anxiety. To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students. The interview questions explored students' personal experiences in speaking English, the factors that caused their anxiety, and the strategies they used to overcome it. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018, p. 506), interviews are a widely used technique in educational research because they enable researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth and clarify responses that may not be fully captured through written instruments. Furthermore, classroom observations were carried out following Creswell and Creswell's (2018, p. 217) explanation that observation allows researchers to record participants' behavior directly in the natural setting, making it possible to identify non-verbal cues and interactional patterns. Documentation, as described by Sugiyono (2019, p. 240), was also used to collect data from existing records, photographs, and other relevant materials, serving to complement and validate findings from other sources.

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis following the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, p. 31), which involves three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from observations and interviews to make them more manageable and meaningful. Irrelevant

data were discarded, while information closely related to the research focus students’ forms of anxiety and their underlying causes was retained. The next stage, data display, involved organizing and presenting the reduced data systematically so that relationships and patterns could be clearly understood. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, during which the researcher interpreted the data and drew conclusions that aligned with the research objectives. The conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process by comparing data from different sources to ensure accuracy, consistency, and credibility. This continuous verification process was essential to provide a comprehensive and reliable understanding of students’ anxiety in learning to speak English at *SMAN 1 Masbagik*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Questionnaire Result

Table 1. The Result of Questionnaire

No	Statement	General Tendency
1	I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class.	Most students admitted this, showing nervousness in front of peers is very common.
2	I feel anxious when I must answer the teacher’s question directly.	Many agreed, indicating that spontaneous speaking increases anxiety levels.
3	I have difficulty expressing my ideas in English even when I know the answer.	Several students confirmed this, proving that lack of fluency creates hesitation.
4	I feel tense when I have to do oral presentations or interviews in English.	The majority reported feeling pressure, suggesting that formal tests raise anxiety.
5	I am afraid of getting low grades even though I study well.	Most students strongly agreed, meaning fear of failure is a major cause of anxiety.
6	I cannot think clearly during oral tests in English.	Many students noted this, showing that test situations affect concentration.
7	I am afraid my classmates will laugh at me if I mispronounce words.	Several agreed, highlighting peer reaction as a key factor of anxiety.
8	I feel anxious if the teacher gives negative judgment on my speaking.	Many admitted this, proving teacher correction also influences their confidence.
9	I am not confident because I am afraid of grammar or vocabulary mistakes.	Most agreed, indicating limited language knowledge as an important anxiety source.
10	I prefer to stay silent rather than speak because I fear making mistakes.	Many agreed, showing avoidance behavior is a common strategy among students.

From the results of the questionnaire on the data in the column above on 18 September 2025 at *SMAN 1 Masbagik*, it was concluded that students at *SMAN 1 Masbagik* experienced different levels of anxiety when speaking English. The majority of them reported feeling nervous and tense when asked to speak in front of the class, during oral presentations, or

when answering spontaneous questions from the teacher. This showed that communication apprehension was a common type of anxiety among the students. In addition, many students expressed concern about the possibility of receiving low grades and losing focus during oral examinations, which reflected the presence of test anxiety. The pressure of formal assessments and the fear of failure strongly influenced their performance and reduced their confidence in speaking English. The findings also revealed that students were worried about how they might be judged by others. They were afraid of being laughed at by classmates or negatively evaluated by their teacher. This indicated that fear of negative evaluation played a significant role in shaping their reluctance to speak.

Overall, the questionnaire confirmed that the three main types of anxiety—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—were all present among the students, with different levels of intensity. These results highlighted that both internal factors (such as low confidence and lack of vocabulary) and external factors (such as teacher correction, peer reactions, and classroom atmosphere) contributed to students' speaking anxiety.

2. Interview Result

In the interview sessions, the researcher obtained detailed information about students' experiences and feelings when speaking English in class. The interviews aimed to identify the types of anxiety the students experienced, the factors that caused their anxiety, and the ways they attempted to overcome it. The results revealed that students experienced three types of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, as supported by Horwitz et al. (1986, p.127).

The first type, communication apprehension was commonly experienced by students when they had to speak English spontaneously. Many students reported feeling nervous, worried, or hesitant, particularly when they were asked to respond without preparation. One of the participants expressed, *"Sometimes I get nervous when the teacher suddenly points at me."* Another added, *"My heart pounds and I get nervous when speaking in front of the class."* Others mentioned similar experiences, such as confusion in finding the right words, difficulty concentrating when the class was noisy, and increased confidence only when supported by peers. These statements show that communication apprehension often arises from a lack of confidence in vocabulary and pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and the pressure of speaking in front of others. External conditions, such as a noisy classroom or peer attention, also heightened their anxiety. Therefore, this type of anxiety reflected both internal and external influences that hindered students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

The second type identified was test anxiety, which appeared during speaking assessments or oral presentations. Several students admitted feeling tense and nervous even after preparing in advance. One student said, *"When it comes to speaking tests, I am afraid of getting a bad mark,"* while another shared, *"During presentations, I often forget what I have memorized."* Others explained that they feared failing to answer questions during exams, though some practiced at home to reduce their nervousness. These responses indicate that formal assessments created strong psychological pressure on students, as they feared negative outcomes and evaluation. Even when students had studied beforehand, the test situation itself being graded, judged, or observed triggered anxiety that affected their fluency and performance. This finding demonstrates that test anxiety was influenced not only by insufficient preparation but also by the psychological burden of assessment.

The third type, fear of negative evaluation, emerged when students were concerned about being criticized, laughed at, or judged negatively by peers and teachers. This form of anxiety

led many students to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes. One student confessed, “*I am afraid of being laughed at by my friends if I make a mistake.*” Another said, “*I feel inferior when the teacher corrects me in a harsh tone.*” Similar comments described feelings of embarrassment and loss of confidence during speaking activities, especially when others performed better. Some participants admitted that they felt more confident when speaking in small groups than in front of the entire class. These findings indicate that fear of negative evaluation strongly affected students’ willingness to participate in English-speaking activities. The fear of being judged or ridiculed discouraged students from engaging, even when they possessed adequate knowledge to answer. Thus, social pressure and classroom atmosphere played a crucial role in shaping students’ confidence levels. Encouraging teacher attitudes and peer support were found to be important in reducing this type of anxiety.

Overall, the interview data revealed that students’ speaking anxiety was influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included lack of self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and linguistic difficulties, while external factors involved classroom atmosphere, teacher feedback, and peer evaluation. Each type of anxiety communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation contributed to students’ hesitation and discomfort in speaking English. These results highlight the need for teachers to build supportive learning environments that reduce pressure and foster students’ confidence in using English.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings related to the types of anxiety experienced by students, the factors contributing to their speaking anxiety, and the strategies they used to overcome it in learning English at *SMAN 1 Masbagik*. The results revealed that students experienced three major types of speaking anxiety communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These types of anxiety influenced their confidence, classroom participation, and overall speaking performance in different ways. The first type, communication apprehension, appeared when students felt nervous or hesitant to speak spontaneously during English lessons, especially when the teacher asked unexpected questions. Many students showed physical signs such as trembling hands, shaky voices, and mental blocks. These symptoms indicated their difficulty in expressing ideas under pressure and their fear of making mistakes in front of others. This finding supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who stated that communication apprehension is one of the most common forms of foreign language anxiety experienced by learners who fear real or anticipated communication with others.

The second type, test anxiety, emerged when students participated in oral tests or speaking presentations. Although some students prepared their material in advance, the pressure of being evaluated often caused them to forget what they had memorized or lose concentration during performance. This result aligns with MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who emphasized that test anxiety negatively affects learners’ ability to perform under evaluative conditions, as the fear of poor performance or low scores can interfere with cognitive processing. Consequently, students who experience test anxiety tend to focus more on the fear of failure than on the communication task itself, leading to reduced fluency and confidence.

The third type, fear of negative evaluation, was found to be a dominant form of anxiety among students. Many participants admitted that they often felt afraid of being laughed at by their classmates or judged critically by their teacher. This fear caused some students to remain silent or minimize their participation to avoid embarrassment. Such findings are consistent with Rahmania et al. (2022), who explained that peer judgment and teacher criticism are strong predictors of speaking anxiety among language learners. Overall, the presence of these three types of anxiety communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation

demonstrates that students at *SMAN 1 Masbagik* face both psychological and social barriers that hinder their willingness to speak English in class.

In addition to identifying the types of anxiety, this study also explored the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety, which were categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors involved limited vocabulary, weak grammar mastery, and low self-confidence. Several students admitted that they often forgot words or made pronunciation mistakes, which made them anxious and reluctant to speak. This finding supports Hermawan et al. (2024), who found that linguistic limitations, particularly in vocabulary and grammar, are strongly correlated with higher levels of speaking anxiety. Meanwhile, external factors included classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, and teacher behavior. Students reported that a noisy class, laughter from peers, or harsh correction from teachers increased their nervousness. A tense or overly serious classroom atmosphere also made students feel uncomfortable when speaking English. These findings are consistent with Handayani et al. (2020), who emphasized that peer reactions and classroom management significantly shape students' emotional comfort and anxiety levels. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' speaking anxiety results from a combination of personal linguistic challenges and external social pressures within the learning environment.

The study also identified several strategies students used to anticipate and cope with their speaking anxiety. Many students managed their anxiety through self-preparation techniques such as practicing dialogues at home, memorizing sentences, and rehearsing before speaking activities. These strategies helped them feel more confident and better prepared when speaking in class. In addition, some students adopted relaxation and emotional control strategies, including deep breathing, positive self-talk, and motivating themselves to stay calm before performing. These techniques correspond with Afidawati et al. (2024), who highlighted that emotional regulation and self-preparation effectively minimize nervousness and improve speaking performance. Moreover, peer and teacher support were found to play a crucial role in reducing anxiety. Students felt more comfortable speaking in smaller groups, where they received encouragement and assistance from their peers. Supportive teacher attitudes, such as correcting mistakes gently and providing positive feedback, also contributed to reducing fear and building confidence.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that students at *SMAN 1 Masbagik* experience various forms of speaking anxiety that stem from both linguistic limitations and psychological pressures. However, they also demonstrate awareness and initiative in coping with their anxiety through self-preparation, relaxation techniques, and social support. Creating a more supportive classroom environment where teachers provide constructive feedback, encourage participation, and foster peer collaboration can help students build confidence, reduce anxiety, and enhance their overall English-speaking competence.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore the factors of anxiety in speaking English among students in the tenth grade at *SMAN 1 Masbagik* during the 2025-2026 academic year. The findings show that students experience three types of anxiety in speaking English, namely communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These types of anxiety manifest in various forms, such as nervousness, hesitation, trembling, lack of concentration, and avoidance of speaking tasks. Several factors contribute to this anxiety. Internal factors include limited vocabulary, lack of grammar mastery, and low self-confidence. External factors involve the classroom atmosphere, peer reactions, and the teacher's correction style. Both internal and external factors significantly affect students' anxiety levels when learning to speak English.

Despite facing these challenges, students employ various strategies to overcome their anxiety, such as practising at home, memorising dialogues, deep breathing, positive thinking, and seeking peer support. The role of teachers is also crucial in reducing anxiety, especially when they provide encouragement and correct mistakes in a supportive manner. In summary, speaking anxiety among students is a complex phenomenon influenced by psychological, linguistic, and social factors. However, through preparation, emotional regulation, and supportive classroom interactions, students can gradually reduce their anxiety and improve their speaking performance.

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