

## **Investigating EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety in Speaking Performance**

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### **Abstract**

The study examines the levels of anxiety in speaking English among students and explores strategies they employ to alleviate this anxiety. Drawing from Balemir's categorization of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety into high, moderate, and low levels, and supported by Kondo and Ying's theory, six strategies for reducing speaking anxiety are identified: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, audience depreciation, concentration, and resignation. Conducted as a qualitative case study, the research involved 30 students from a senior high school in Indramayu. The students completed questionnaires to assess their anxiety levels, 12 students were selected for in-depth interviews, representing each level of anxiety. Instruments included the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) and a semi-structured interview based on Kondo's framework. Results indicate that 16.6% of students experienced low anxiety, 40% moderate anxiety, and 43.3% high anxiety in speaking English. Strategies employed by students to reduce anxiety included preparation through studying and seeking assistance, relaxation techniques like calming down and consuming water, positive thinking, audience depreciation by diverting attention, concentration methods such as speaking slowly, and resignation, where students withdraw or remain silent. These findings shed light on the prevalence of speaking anxiety among students and the efficacy of various coping strategies, providing insights for educators to support students in improving their speaking proficiency.

**Keywords:** Speaking performance, Anxiety

## **A. Introduction**

The importance of speaking English as a skill for students, particularly in senior high school, is highlighted as it involves conveying information verbally. Richards (2008) emphasizes the organizational aspects of speech performance, including discourse markers and emphasis, to ensure clarity. However, speaking proficiency is often hindered by various factors, leading to anxiety and lack of confidence, as noted by Aras et al. (2022) and Ariyanti (2016). Anxiety, defined by Brown (2001) and Ellis et al. (2011), manifests in different forms, ranging from physical symptoms to psychological barriers, significantly impacting students' self-confidence, as Lagerfeld (2011) describes.

Speaking anxiety, in particular, leads to avoidance behaviors and hampers self-expression, creating a cycle of low confidence. Speaking performance, as outlined by Tuan and Mai (2015) and Dayat (2017), is influenced by various factors, including preparation, motivation, and anxiety levels. Previous studies, such as those by Asysyifa et al. (2019), Erdiana et al. (2020), and Damayanti & Listyani (2020), have identified factors contributing to student anxiety, ranging from lack of preparation to fear of embarrassment.

Many researchers research student anxiety-related research taken from various journals. The first description of previous studies is by Asysyifa et al. (2019), who found the factors that made students feel anxiety. The first is that the students are less prepared for English class. The second is students do not understand the material given by the teacher. The third group of students has a negative mindset when they speak English, such as fear of mispronouncing, misspelling words, and inappropriate words to the content. Students fear their friends will laugh at them if they make mistakes. The second is Erdiana et al. (2020), who found that more students had a moderate level of anxiety and a low level of anxiety, with only one student having a high level of anxiety. The third is Damayanti & Listyani (2020). They found out that the students feel anxiety in speaking class because of lack of vocabulary, underestimating their ability, lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being embarrassed by their friends.

This study aims to bridge gaps in existing research by focusing on senior high school students and providing a comprehensive understanding of anxiety levels and coping strategies. Unlike previous studies, which primarily examined anxiety levels and causative factors, this research delves deeper into strategies employed by students to mitigate anxiety. By exploring both anxiety levels and coping mechanisms, the study aims to offer insights into effective interventions for reducing speaking anxiety among students.

## **B. Research Methodology**

This study employs qualitative research methodology, specifically adopting a case study design. Qualitative research, as highlighted by Gerring (2017) and Sofaer (1999), is well-suited for exploratory analysis and providing rich descriptions of phenomena. It facilitates a deep understanding of contextual factors and events, enhancing researchers' peripheral vision and enabling the identification of patterns and configurations among variables. A case study design involves the intensive examination of a limited system over a specified period, utilizing detailed and in-depth data collection methods (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the researchers focused on investigating English-speaking anxiety among senior high school students, aiming to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the phenomenon. By delving deeply into the experiences of students and the strategies they employ to manage anxiety, the research aims to uncover nuanced insights into the nature of speaking anxiety in this context.

### **Participants**

The choice of Class XI IPS 3 as participants in this study was informed by the researchers' first-hand experience during their Professional Practice Teaching (PPL) period. Through this experience, the researchers observed that many students at SMAN 1 Lohbener experienced feelings of fear, embarrassment, nervousness, and anxiety when speaking in front of the class. These anxieties stemmed from concerns about receiving unfavorable evaluations from their teachers and a perceived lack of vocabulary, leading to a lack of confidence and reluctance to

speak up. Given these observations, the researchers decided to focus on investigating students' anxiety levels when speaking English and analyzing the strategies they employ to cope with this anxiety. The choice of Class XI IPS 3, consisting of 30 students, was based on the prevalence of speaking anxiety observed within this specific group. The research methodology involved administering a questionnaire to all 30 participants to assess their anxiety levels. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a subset of 12 students, selected based on the questionnaire results to ensure representation across different anxiety levels (low, moderate, and high).

### **Instrument**

The researchers utilized both a questionnaire and an interview protocol as instruments for data collection:

#### 1. Questionnaire

Dornyei (2003) defines a questionnaire as a written instrument presenting a series of questions or statements to participants, who then provide written or selected responses. In this study, the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) questionnaire developed by Balemir (2009) was employed. This questionnaire consisted of 28 statements designed to assess students' levels of anxiety in speaking performance. The questionnaire was administered to all 30 participants to gather data on their anxiety levels during speaking performance.

#### 2. Interview

An interview involves direct questioning of informants to collect data or information. The interview protocol in this study was adapted from Handayani (2021) and developed by Kondo and Ying (2004). It focused on exploring students' strategies to reduce anxiety when speaking English. The interview was semi-structured, allowing flexibility in questioning based on the participants' responses. Participants were selected based on their questionnaire results, with four students chosen from each anxiety level category (low, moderate, and high) for a total of 12 interview participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process involved both quantitative analysis of the questionnaire responses and qualitative analysis of the interview data. Here's a breakdown of each step:

### 1. Questionnaire

The researchers utilized the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) questionnaire, adapted from Balemir (2009), to collect data on students' English-speaking anxiety levels. Responses were collected using a Likert scale, where participants indicated their agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. The total score for each participant was calculated by multiplying the Likert scale score by the number of respondents who chose that score. This provided a range of scores from 28 to 140. The scores were then categorized into three anxiety levels: High, Moderate, and Low, based on predetermined score intervals. The percentage of participants falling into each anxiety level category was calculated using the formula:

Percentage (%) =	(Number of the part)	X 100%
	(the total number)	

### 2. Interview Analysis

The qualitative analysis of interview data followed six steps adapted from Creswell (2012):

- a. Preparing and Organizing the Data.
- b. Exploring and Coding the Data.
- c. Coding to Build Descriptions and Themes.
- d. Representing and Reporting Qualitative Findings.
- e. Interpreting the Findings.
- f. Visualizing the Data.

## C. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the researchers will present and discuss the findings of the research conducted on students of class XI IPS 3 at SMAN 1 Lohbener. The research focused on two main aspects: the level of speaking anxiety among the

students and the strategies they employed to reduce this anxiety during speaking performances.

## **1. Results**

### **a. The student's anxiety level**

**Table 1. The level of anxiety and the percentage of the students speaking anxiety**

<b>Level of Student Anxiety</b>	<b>Total Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low	5	16.6%
Moderate	12	40%
High	13	43.3%
Total	30	100%

The data from the questionnaire results indicate that among the students of class XI IPS 3 at SMAN 1 Lohbener, the levels of speaking anxiety varied. Here's a breakdown of the findings, Low Level Anxiety 16.6% of students exhibited a low level of speaking anxiety, with five students. Moderate Level Anxiety 40% of students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety, comprising twelve students. High-Level Anxiety 43.3% of students, reported a high level of speaking anxiety, with thirteen students.

From these findings, it is evident that a significant portion of students in class XI IPS 3 at SMAN 1 Lohbener struggle with speaking anxiety. The highest percentage of students reported experiencing high levels of anxiety, followed closely by those with moderate levels. Only a minority of students reported low levels of speaking anxiety.

### **b. The students' speaking strategies to reduce anxiety at performance**

Based on the interview data, the strategies used by students to reduce their anxiety in speaking English performances are diverse and encompass various approaches such as preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, audience depreciation, concentration, and resignation.

## **1. Preparation**

**Table 2. Preparation strategy**

<b>Anxiety Categories</b>	<b>Students' code</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Low	S1	"Study at night to prepare more."
	S2, S3, S4	"Ask friends about the material."
Moderate	S5	"Ask a friend for help in getting noticed."
	S6	"Practice before coming forward with friends."
	S7	"Practice with friends."
	S8	"Taking turns with a friend, looking at the notes."
High	S9	"Ask friends for help and advice to not feel nervous."
	S10	"Practice with friends to check my pronunciation."
	S11	"Ask for help and advice from your friends."
	S12	"Read the book."

Based on the interview data, the first strategy mentioned by the participant is preparation such as studying the material beforehand, possibly during night time study sessions, seeking assistance and clarification from friends regarding the material, practicing speaking with a friend before presenting to the class, taking turns practicing with friends to build confidence, reviewing notes and seeking help from friends for pronunciation and comprehension.

## 2. Relaxation

**Table 3. Relaxation Strategy**

<b>Anxiety Categories</b>	<b>Students' code</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
low	S1, S3	"Don't feel nervous."
	S2	"Searching on the Internet"
	S4	"Just enjoy it."
Moderate	S5	"Rethinking by playing with a pen."
	S6	"Playing with the pen."
	S7	"Try to calm down."
	S8	"Drink some water, play with the pen and book."
High	S9, S12	"Just calm down."

	S10	"Trying to calm down so the memory doesn't go anywhere."
	S11	"Silent."

The second strategy mentioned by participants is relaxation such as engaging in activities to calm nerves, searching the internet or enjoying oneself, using physical objects like pens or books to distract and relax oneself, taking deep breaths and drinking water to promote relaxation, maintaining a calm demeanor and remaining silent to ease anxiety.

### 3. Positive Thinking

**Table 4. Positive Thinking Strategy**

Anxiety Categories	Students' code	Strategies
Low	S1	"Practice before coming forward so that when coming forward, it can be prepared well."
	S2, S3, S4	"Think positively to make the delivery even more pleasant."
Moderate	S5	"Thinking positively and confidence."
	S6	"Ask the teacher if the reading is correct or not."
	S7	"Memorised and studied."
	S8	"Just self-confidence."
High	S9, S10, S12	"Try to think positively."
	S11	"Even though I was nervous, I tried to stay calm and think positively."

The third strategy is positive thinking such as practicing beforehand to build confidence and reduce anxiety, encouraging oneself to think positively and remain calm, seeking reassurance from teachers and peers, focusing on the task at hand and maintaining a positive mindset.

### 4. Audience Depreciation

**Table 5. Audience Depreciation Strategy**

Anxiety Categories	Students' code	Strategies
Low	S1, S2, S4	"Looking at the audience."



	S3	"Looking at the audience, as well as mental training."
Moderate	S5, S6, S7	"Look at other objects; I usually look at the wall because if I look at my friends, I might lose focus."
	S8	"Looking at the notes."
High	S9	"Looking at another object."
	S10, S12	"Looking at the wall because if I look at my friends, I'm afraid I'll get the wrong focus."
	S11	"Looking at the wall, keeping my head down, or looking at the text."

The fourth strategy is audience depreciation such as redirecting focus away from the audience by looking at other objects or the wall, and referencing notes to maintain concentration and composure during the performance.

## 5. Concentration

**Table 6. Concentration**

Anxiety Categories	Students' code	Strategies
Low	S1	"It is normal and not in a hurry to be heard clearly."
	S2, S4	"Slowly, to make the delivery more comfortable."
	S3	"Take it easy, it will be done."
Moderate	S5	"In a hurry because if I speak slowly, some people will hear me, and I'm afraid I'll make a mistake."
	S6, S8	"Slowly so that it is pleasant to hear."
	S7	"In a hurry, to finish it quickly because if I speak slowly, I will get nervous."
High	S10, S12	"Speak in a hurry because of fear of being wrong."
	S9, S11	"Slowly, because if I speak in a hurry, I am afraid I'll make a mistake."

The fifth Strategy is concentration such as speaking slowly and deliberately to ensure clarity and confidence, taking the presentation one step at a time and not rushing through it, and attempting to remain composed despite the fear of making mistakes.

## 6. Resignation

**Table 7. Resignation Strategy**

Anxiety Categories	Students' code	Strategies
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<b>Low</b>	S1	"Just resign and stay in front."
	S2	"Stay in place."
<b>Moderate</b>	S3, S4	"Resign with the situation."
	S5	"Try to remember."
	S6	"Just keep quiet."
<b>High</b>	S7, S8	"Ask a friend to help."
	S9	"Try to blend with the situation."
	S10	"Stay in place."
	S11	"Keep silent."
	S12	"Will be quiet and resign with the situation."

The last strategy that the participant used was resignation, accepting the situation and remaining in place despite the anxiety, resigning oneself to the circumstances and attempting to blend in with the problem, and seeking assistance from friends or peers to navigate the situation.

These strategies reflect a combination of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional approaches to managing speaking anxiety. By employing these strategies, students aim to alleviate their anxiety and enhance their performance during English-speaking activities.

## 2. Discussion

The researchers conducted a study on 30 students to assess their levels of speaking anxiety, categorizing them as low, moderate, or high. Results showed that 16.6% had low anxiety, 40% had moderate anxiety, and 43.3% had high anxiety. Ikhsaniyah (2022) described behaviors associated with each anxiety level, such as excessive fear for high anxiety, pauses and hand-holding for moderate anxiety, and enjoyment for low anxiety. These findings were supported by Sutarsyah (2017), indicated that students with lower anxiety levels perform better in speaking. Tianjian (2010) suggested that lower-level students tend to be more anxious, consistent with Gardner and MacIntyre's (1993) definition of language anxiety. However, some students felt confident and relaxed when speaking English, aligning with Balemir's (2009) findings that student level doesn't significantly impact Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA).

The study delved into strategies employed by students to alleviate speaking anxiety, categorized into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, audience depreciation, concentration, and resignation. Sampling for interviews was drawn from three anxiety levels: low, moderate, and high, with four students from each level interviewed. The first is preparation strategies varied across anxiety levels. Low level of anxiety, students engaged in thorough study and sought assistance from friends. Moderate level of anxiety students practiced with peers and reviewed notes, while high-anxiety students sought extensive help and practiced pronunciation. The second relaxation strategy differed as well. Low-anxiety students felt calm and enjoyed speaking. Moderate-anxiety students employed deep breathing and mental reassurance, while high-anxiety students focused on staying calm and silent. The third is positive thinking strategies involve envisioning successful performances. Low-anxiety students maintained an open mindset, while moderate-anxiety students built confidence through self-memorization. High-anxiety students emphasized staying calm and positive. The fourth is audience depreciation tactics aimed to minimize anxiety-inducing factors. Low-anxiety students maintained eye contact, while moderate-anxiety students focused on objects other than the audience. High-anxiety students avoided eye contact and minimized audience interaction. The fifth is concentration strategies varied by anxiety level. Low-anxiety students spoke slowly and confidently, while moderate-anxiety students hurried to finish speaking. High-anxiety students also spoke slowly, fearing mistakes and seeking a comfortable pace. The last is resignation strategies involved accepting anxiety without resistance. Low-anxiety students remained composed, while moderate-anxiety students sought assistance from peers. High-anxiety students resigned to their anxiety, opting for silence and avoidance.

#### **D. Conclusion and Suggestion**

##### **1. Conclusion**

Based on the findings and discussions above, it could be concluded that the level of anxiety in speaking at SMAN 1 Lohbener is at a high level of 43.3% (13 students), moderate 40% (12 students), and a low level of 16.6% (5 students).

Students employ various strategies at different levels of anxiety to reduce their apprehension when speaking English in performances.

### **Low Level Anxiety**

The first is preparation, studying the material at night, and seeking assistance from friends. The second is relaxation, avoiding nervousness, searching the internet, and finding enjoyment. The third is positive thinking, practicing beforehand, calming oneself, and maintaining a positive mindset. The fourth is audience deprecation, looking at the audience for mental training. The fifth is concentration, speaking slowly and taking it easy. The last is resignation, staying in place and resigning with the situation.

### **Moderate Level Anxiety**

The first is preparation, seeking help from friends, practicing with friends, and referencing notes. The second is relaxation, rethinking, playing with objects, and attempting to calm down. The third is positive thinking such as thinking positively, seeking teacher assistance, and building confidence. The fourth is audience deprecation, Focusing on other objects like the wall or notes. The fifth is concentration, speaking in a hurry due to fear and attempting to speak clearly. The last is resignation, such as trying to remember and seeking assistance from friends.

### **High Level Anxiety**

The first is preparation such as seeking advice from friends and practicing pronunciation. The second is relaxation, remaining silent and attempting to calm down. The third is positive thinking such as staying calm and positive despite anxiety. The fourth is audience deprecation, focusing on other objects and trying to avoid eye contact. The fifth is concentration such as speaking slowly and fearing mistakes. The last is resignation such as attempting to blend with the situation and remaining silent.

These strategies showcase the adaptive responses students employ to manage their speaking anxiety levels effectively during English performances. By

understanding and implementing these strategies, students can enhance their confidence and performance in speaking English.

## 2. Sugestion

In this research, the researchers suggested some strategies for students, teachers, and further researchers for the teaching and learning process in the future, especially in dealing with a student's anxiety when speaking English at a performance. This research focuses on high school students. This research is suggested to help teachers find more English teaching strategies to reduce student anxiety at performance. The researchers suggested further research about adding some anxiety factors in speaking for the following research to make this research more complete.

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