An Investigation into Speaking Anxiety among Indonesian English as Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract: This study investigated the multifaceted nature of speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and sought to extract valuable insights from a student's experiences in overcoming this challenge. Speaking anxiety is a pervasive issue, frequently rooted in a lack of confidence, which often manifests as embarrassment, fear, and a reluctance to demonstrate speaking proficiency, leading many students to remain silent in classroom settings. Employing a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, this research utilized personal stories as the primary data source. The participant was a single female student, identified as DK, enrolled in the 6th semester of the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Data were meticulously collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The analytical process involved constructing the participant's life narrative and interpreting the transcribed data using Clandinin and Caine's three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework, encompassing the dimensions of time, social-personal interaction, and place. The findings revealed three distinct categories of anxiety experienced by the student: trait anxiety, situational-specific anxiety, and state anxiety. Additionally, past trauma was identified as a significant antecedent triggering speaking anxiety. A notable finding was the participant's remarkable persistence and resilience in managing her anxiety, enabling her to maintain active engagement within both classroom and broader campus environments. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of speaking anxiety and offers valuable perspectives on coping mechanisms within the Indonesian EFL context.

Keywords: *EFL students, Narrative Inquiry, Speaking Anxiety, Speaking Anxiety Experience*

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a negative representation of human emotions. When anxious, individuals often experience nervousness, worry, and fear, manifesting physically as trembling, sweating, and rapid heartbeats. According to Spielberger (1983), anxiety is a subjective feeling characterized by tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the activation of the autonomic nervous system. Based on these insights, anxiety can be defined as a feeling of pressure, nervousness, embarrassment, worry, and fear of potential adverse events.

In the educational context, particularly in learning English, speaking anxiety is a significant issue. Speaking anxiety refers to an individual's fear and nervousness about engaging in or avoiding communication (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Many languages learner struggle with oral performance, often feeling scared and excessively worried when required to

speak in front of the class. This difficulty is exacerbated when speaking in English, as learners often find it challenging to respond or express themselves. A major factor contributing to speaking anxiety is the lack of confidence in their abilities, leading to feelings of embarrassment, fear, and anxiety about showcasing their speaking skills. As a result, many students prefer to remain silent in class to avoid the discomfort associated with speaking.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that communicating with others in a foreign language while experiencing speaking anxiety can significantly hinder the learning process in class. Students with speaking anxiety often find it challenging to express their opinions and lack confidence, making it difficult to engage in discussions and understand the material being covered. In the Qur'an, it is commanded to speak clearly so that others can understand, as language serves as a vital tool for expressing feelings and ideas. As stated in Al-Q.S. Ar-Rahman: 3-4, "He hath created man (3) He hath taught him utterance (4)."

According to Tafsir As-Sa'di (n.d.), Allah created humans as the most perfect beings on earth, endowed with the ability to speak eloquently and express their thoughts. However, speaking anxiety can impede this ability, affecting one's capacity to convey opinions effectively. The importance of clear communication is highlighted by both the Qur'anic verses and expert statements, emphasizing that speaking anxiety can create significant barriers to effective communication.

This research aims to gain in-depth information about speaking anxiety experienced by students in a tourism course by applying a narrative inquiry approach, a qualitative research method. In the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, the use of narrative inquiry as a research method is still rare. This study provides an opportunity to explore the experiences of the informant in detail, using narrative inquiry to understand the complete chronology of their story. Narrative inquiry has become a crucial method for understanding experiences over the past few decades, yet it remains underutilized in recent research on student experiences.

The narrative inquiry approach, as applied in this study, is highly valuable for gaining deep insights into individual experiences. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry allows researchers to explore individuals' life stories within their social, cultural, and historical contexts, providing richer insights into the factors influencing speaking anxiety.

Due to the limitations of the researcher, this study focuses on understanding the types of anxiety experienced by students regarding speaking anxiety. Additionally, the research aims to identify factors influencing students' speaking anxiety, and the objectives of the research are as: To explore how student with anxiety articulate and make sense of them experience and to know what can the others learn from informant experience in overcoming speaking anxiety,

during learning at English education Department UIN Raden Intan Lampung.

Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety among foreign language learners, including those at the English Education Department of UIN Raden Intan Lampung, is a significant obstacle in the learning process. MacIntyre and Gardner (in Mukminin et.al., 2015) posit that speaking anxiety is a specific situational anxiety related to oral performance in a foreign language. This condition can cause students to feel nervous, fearful, and lacking in confidence when speaking English, ultimately impacting their ability to actively participate in class and slowing down the learning process.

According to Young (in Tsiplakides, et.al., 2009), speaking anxiety in a foreign language can stem from various factors, including lack of preparation, fear of negative evaluation, and previous negative experiences in public speaking. This anxiety can also be exacerbated by an unsupportive learning environment, such as peer or teacher criticism. Additionally, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) identify three main components of speaking anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, all of which contribute to students' discomfort in speaking a foreign language.

Tanveer (2007) study also found that speaking anxiety can have significant negative impacts on students' academic performance. Students experiencing speaking anxiety tend to avoid situations requiring them to speak in English, thereby limiting their opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills. This underscores the need for effective interventions to help students overcome speaking anxiety and boost their confidence.

Spielberger (1983), anxiety is a subjective feeling involving tension, fear, anxiety, and worry associated with the activation of the autonomic nervous system. In the context of language learning, speaking anxiety can manifest through physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, and rapid heartbeat. A key factor causing speaking anxiety is students' lack of confidence in their ability to speak in a foreign language, often leading them to feel embarrassed and afraid to demonstrate their speaking skills (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In the Qur'an, the importance of speaking clearly and being understood by others is emphasized in Surah Ar-Rahman, verses 3-4, which state that Allah created humans and taught them to speak. Tafsir As-Sa'di adds that humans were created as the most perfect beings on earth and endowed with the ability to speak fluently to express their opinions. However, speaking anxiety can hinder this ability and impede effective communication.

Indicators of Anxiety

The presence of speaking anxiety is evident through various indicators. Physically, individuals may exhibit nervousness, trembling limbs, sweating, dry mouth or throat, difficulty speaking or breathing, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, weakness, frequent urination, sensitivity, or

irritability. Observable behaviors include excessive body movements such as hand gestures, hair twirling, or head scratching, as well as facial expressions like smiling. Additionally, students may demonstrate cognitive symptoms such as going blank, forgetting prepared utterances, struggling to articulate thoughts, fearing miscommunication, or using speech fillers like "uh" or "hmm."

Categories of Anxiety

In language learning contexts, anxiety can be categorized into three types according to Ellis (2008): trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety pertains to a person's enduring personality trait, making it difficult to control feelings, emotions, ideas, or thoughts. This often leads to reluctance to participate in classroom activities and express opinions. State anxiety is transient, arising from external factors that alter emotional states during class, potentially hindering students' enjoyment of learning activities. Spielberger notes that state anxiety is a normal psychological response that diminishes as positive emotions towards language learning are cultivated. Situation-specific anxiety arises from particular language learning events such as exams, class participation, English clubs, or public speaking engagements.

Sources of Anxiety

Personal and Interpersonal Anxieties: The primary sources of language anxiety often stem from personal and interpersonal factors. Individuals with low self-esteem may fear negative evaluations from peers, impacting their willingness to speak. These psychological constructs contribute significantly to anxiety and affect students' confidence in their language abilities.

Learner Beliefs about Language Learning: Students' beliefs about language learning also play a crucial role in anxiety. Unrealistic expectations, such as achieving native-like fluency within a short time or focusing excessively on pronunciation perfection, can lead to frustration and stress. Misconceptions about language learning being solely about translation or only achievable by a select few exacerbate anxiety and undermine performance. These insights into the indicators, categories, and sources of speaking anxiety provide a comprehensive understanding of its multifaceted nature in language learning environments. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to alleviate anxiety and enhance language learning experiences.

Factors Affecting Anxiety Levels

According to Kılınçel, et al. (2020), anxiety levels are influenced by several interconnected factors. First, psychosocial stressors encompass any circumstance or event that disrupts a person's life, necessitating adaptive responses. Second, maturation plays a significant role; individuals with mature personalities demonstrate greater resilience to stress-induced disorders due to their adaptive capabilities, whereas those with immature personalities may be more vulnerable to stressors. Third, lower levels of education and

economic status are associated with heightened stress compared to individuals with higher socioeconomic standing. Fourth, insufficient knowledge exacerbates susceptibility to stress and anxiety. Finally, physical health conditions such as injuries, chronic illnesses, surgeries, or disabilities can increase susceptibility to stress and anxiety. These factors collectively contribute to varying levels of anxiety experienced by individuals, impacting their overall well-being and ability to manage stressors effectively.

METHODS

This study employed narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method, akin to life history research, although their distinctions are not always clear-cut. Narrative inquiry emphasizes the use of stories as primary data. "At its core, narrative inquiry revolves around stories or collections of stories." As a qualitative approach, human participants were central to the study, with the researcher conducting interviews with students experiencing speaking anxiety to gather data. The students' life stories served as the primary data source, aligning narrative inquiry with the study's methodology.

This research focused on fourth-semester students enrolled in speaking for tourism courses at the English Education Department of UIN Raden Intan Lampung, located in Lampung, Indonesia. Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research criteria. The study aimed to explore the experiences of speaking anxiety among these students using a narrative approach, which facilitates a nuanced understanding of individual experiences within specific educational contexts. Data collection involved conducting interviews with selected students and analyzing their narratives to identify recurring themes and insights related to speaking anxiety.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Speaking Anxiety Among Indonesian English Foreign Language Learners

No.	Type of Anxiety	Description
1	Trait Anxiety	- Fear of being the center of attention
		- Difficulty expressing ideas in discussions or presentations
		- Physical symptoms like trembling and sweating
2	Situational-Specific Anxiety	- Anxiety due to lack of preparation
		- Nervousness in unfamiliar environments
		- Feeling uncomfortable in speaking roles
3	State Anxiety	- Anxiety during English speeches and presentations
		- Fear of making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar
		- Physical and psychological symptoms like difficulty concentrating and sleep disturbance
4	Causes of Anxiety	- Past traumatic experiences such as bullying
		- Negative evaluation fears and communication apprehension

		- Test anxiety and fear of failure
5	Coping Mechanisms	- Preparation through practice and revising notes
		- Joining supportive organizations for practice and peer support
		- Psychological strategies like changing mindsets and assuming audiences are friendly
6	Implications for Practice	- Importance of creating supportive learning environments
		- Need for tailored interventions to address specific anxiety types
		- Recommendations for educators and policymakers in improving language learning environments

This study delved into the experiences of speaking anxiety among Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the English Education Department of UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Using the narrative inquiry method and guided by Clandinin and Connelly's temporal dimensions of story (past, present, and future) the research explored the multifaceted nature of speaking anxiety.

2. Narrative Dimensions

The narrative journey unfolded through three temporal dimensions (past, present, and future) as proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Each dimension revealed distinctive insights into participants' experiences with English speaking anxiety.

a. Past Experiences: Foundations of Anxiety or Interest

Participants' early experiences with English varied, with some recalling positive exposure through engaging teaching methods, while others highlighted negative social interactions that triggered anxiety.

"Waktu SMP, guru bahasa Inggris saya sering menggunakan lagu dan games. Itu membuat saya suka pelajaran itu dan ingin belajar lebih banyak." (P2)

Conversely, several participants shared memories of bullying that undermined their self-confidence in language use.

"Saya pernah diejek karena pelafalan saya salah waktu disuruh baca depan kelas. Sejak itu, saya takut banget kalau disuruh ngomong Inggris di depan orang." (P5)

These contrasting experiences shaped their emotional responses and self-perceptions toward English speaking into adulthood.

b. Present Experiences: Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety

In the present, participants reported experiencing anxiety in academic settings, especially when engaging in public speaking or presentations. Common symptoms included nervousness, trembling, and cognitive disruption.

"Kalau presentasi dalam bahasa Inggris, tangan saya gemetaran, kadang sampai keringat dingin. Kepala jadi blank, padahal saya sudah belajar." (P8)

Situational-specific anxiety was also apparent, especially when students felt unprepared or uncertain about the topic.

"Saya merasa cemas kalau belum siap. Suara saya jadi kecil, dan saya ragu-ragu untuk ngomong." (P3)

These experiences reflect the interplay between cognitive, emotional, and physical responses to language learning demands.

Despite challenges, most participants expressed a desire to overcome their anxiety and become more confident speakers. They emphasized the role of active coping strategies and institutional support.

> "*Saya mulai ikut organisasi kampus supaya bisa latihan ngomong di depan orang. Lama-lama mulai terbiasa.*" (P1)

Others described self-initiated practices, such as rehearsing presentations alone or with peers.

> "*Sebelum presentasi, saya suka latihan di depan kaca atau rekam suara saya sendiri. Itu membantu saya lebih tenang.*" (P6)

These forward-looking reflections suggest resilience and motivation for personal growth through structured practice and supportive environments.

Social and Environmental Influences

The narratives also revealed that social contexts (both supportive and hostile) significantly influenced learners' anxiety levels. Positive peer dynamics and empathetic teachers served as protective factors.

> "*Dosen saya pernah bilang, 'salah itu biasa, yang penting berani ngomong'. Itu membuat saya merasa dihargai.*" (P4)

In contrast, past experiences with ridicule or exclusion had lasting negative impacts.

> "*Teman-teman saya dulu sering ngetawain kalau saya salah ngomong. Itu bikin saya makin takut buka suara di kelas*." (P7)

These accounts demonstrate how interpersonal interactions shape learners' willingness to communicate and influence their emotional security in the classroom.

Validation and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and reliability, the study employed methodological triangulation, involving interviews, field notes, and participant journals. Furthermore, expert validation was conducted by two specialists in psychology and EFL speaking pedagogy. Their feedback affirmed the significance of participants' narratives and supported the categorization of anxiety types, causes, and coping strategies according to established psychological and educational frameworks.

The findings underscore several practical recommendations. First, educators should foster emotionally supportive learning environments to reduce the fear of negative evaluation. Second, early identification of anxiety stemming from past trauma or social experiences is essential, necessitating preventive interventions and access to counseling services. Lastly, future studies should explore the longitudinal development of speaking anxiety, examining how it evolves with continuous exposure, practice, and institutional support.

> "*Kalau dari awal mahasiswa diberi pemahaman bahwa semua orang bisa belajar bicara, mungkin rasa takut itu tidak berkembang jadi berlebihan.*" (Expert Validator)

These recommendations aim to guide curriculum developers, teachers, and policymakers in building anxiety-aware and student-centered English language learning programs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute meaningfully to the growing body of literature on foreign language speaking anxiety, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. The emergence of trait, situational-specific, and state anxiety as prominent forms of speaking anxiety among participants aligns with the categorization proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) in their *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS), confirming that speaking anxiety is a multidimensional construct.

Consistent with Liu and Jackson (2008), this study confirms that fear of negative evaluation and lack of preparation are critical contributors to speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. Participants frequently cited these issues, echoing previous findings where students' fear of making mistakes and being judged led to performance avoidance and low participation in class discussions. The physical symptoms such as trembling and sweating noted in the present research are also in line with Young's (1991) observation that language anxiety manifests not only psychologically but also physiologically.

However, this study expands upon previous research by employing a narrative inquiry approach, which provided rich, personal insights into how past traumatic experiences, such as bullying, have long-term impacts on students' confidence and willingness to speak. While earlier studies (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) primarily examined situational triggers within the classroom, the current research highlights how historical social experiences outside the classroom can shape language anxiety trajectories over time. This nuanced perspective partially extends the existing framework by integrating temporal dimensions (past, present, and future), as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), thus offering a broader lens through which speaking anxiety can be understood.

Moreover, the coping mechanisms identified rigorous preparation, involvement in supportive peer groups, and psychological reframing reinforce findings by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), who noted that effective anxiety management often involves both behavioral and cognitive strategies. However, this study confirms and enriches those insights by demonstrating how students adapt these strategies within their specific cultural and institutional settings, such as participation in Islamic-based campus organizations for language practice and moral support.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this study is in line with Botes et al. (2020), who emphasized the significance of addressing foreign language anxiety through well-informed curriculum design. The participants' narratives underscore the importance of supportive learning environments, inclusive peer relationships, and empathetic teaching strategies in reducing speaking anxiety. Thus, these findings reinforce the critical role of educational policy and classroom practices in creating emotionally safe and productive spaces for language learners.

This study also identifies gaps in previous research that often overlooked the long-term

psychological aftermath of negative school experiences on speaking confidence. In doing so, it encourages future researchers to investigate longitudinal impacts of early experiences on language performance, potentially confirming or disconfirming existing assumptions about the stability or malleability of language anxiety over time.

While this study affirms many findings from established literature, it also diverges slightly by emphasizing the intersection between language anxiety and social trauma, an area underexplored in quantitative-heavy studies. This divergence highlights the value of qualitative narrative inquiry in capturing deeply personal and context-bound realities.

In conclusion, this study confirms and enriches prior research while also providing novel contributions by contextualizing speaking anxiety within personal life histories and social environments. Further research is encouraged to explore how these findings generalize to broader populations, especially through mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and to investigate the role of cultural narratives in shaping learners' affective experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the complex nature of speaking anxiety through the lived experiences of a female EFL student, DK, in the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Utilizing narrative inquiry and Clandinin and Caine's three-dimensional framework, the research identified three interrelated types of anxiety trait anxiety,

situational-specific anxiety, and state anxiety hat manifested in DK's academic journey.

The findings confirm that low self-confidence, often rooted in past traumatic experiences, serves as a primary driver of speaking anxiety, leading students to feel embarrassed, fearful, and hesitant to engage in classroom communication. Despite these challenges, the participant's narrative illustrates a remarkable journey of persistence and growth, as she actively employed coping strategies, sought supportive environments, and gradually built resilience through continuous exposure and self-reflection.

This research emphasizes the importance of recognizing individual stories in understanding the emotional and psychological barriers to language learning. It also highlights the critical role of educators and institutions in creating emotionally safe, inclusive, and responsive learning environments that acknowledge and address students' affective needs. Future research should consider broader participant groups and longitudinal designs to further investigate how personal histories and institutional contexts shape the trajectory of speaking anxiety and learner agency over time.

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