

EFL STUDENTS' CLASSROOM SPEAKING ANXIETY LEVELS AND THEIR OUT-OF-CLASS LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety is a common issue among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, especially during classroom activities that require them to speak in front of peers and lecturers. Despite completing speaking-related courses such as Survival Speaking, Public Speaking, and English Debate, many students continue to experience anxiety when speaking English in class. This study aims to (1) identify the level of speaking anxiety experienced by sixth-semester EFL students at Universitas Islam Malang and (2) explore the out-of-class learning strategies they use to overcome this anxiety. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study began with a quantitative phase involving 44 students who completed a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Nine students were then selected for semi-structured interviews, representing low, moderate, and high anxiety levels. The results showed that most students experienced moderate speaking anxiety ($M = 3.0054$), with fear of negative evaluation being the most dominant aspect. Frequency analysis indicated that 52.3% had moderate anxiety, 25.0% low, and 22.7% high. The qualitative findings revealed five recurring out-of-class strategies: media exposure, self-practice, social interaction, cognitive preparation, and emotional regulation. These strategies were reported to help reduce anxiety and improve speaking confidence. In conclusion, while speaking anxiety persists, students actively engage in independent strategies outside the classroom to manage their anxiety and enhance their oral English proficiency.

Keywords: anxiety; speaking; learning strategies; out-of-class; confidence; EFL students

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in acquiring a foreign language because it allows learners to express ideas, build connections, and actively participate in academic and social contexts (Sarnilawati et al., 2024). It is often considered a core indicator of language proficiency, especially in EFL learning, where the ability to speak fluently in English can open doors to both educational and professional success (Rao, 2019). However, despite its significance, speaking is widely regarded as the most difficult skill to master. This is because it demands not only vocabulary and grammatical knowledge but also spontaneous delivery, confidence, and interactional ability (Asnaini et al., 2025). Many learners find speaking particularly intimidating due to psychological factors such as nervousness or fear. One of the most dominant emotional barriers faced by EFL students is speaking anxiety, which often interferes with their ability to perform even when they have acquired sufficient language knowledge (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Speaking, defined as a productive aural/oral skill used to convey meaning (Nunan, 1991), involves more than just pronunciation—it requires comprehension of both message and context (Yasin & Mustofa, 2021). However, anxiety and fear of being judged often interfere with fluent and

effective communication, leading to poor classroom participation and reduced speaking proficiency (Brown, 2004).

In Indonesia, speaking anxiety is particularly prevalent among high school and university students who fear negative evaluation and often feel insecure about their English abilities (Haryanti & Yuliana, 2024). Limited vocabulary, rare opportunities to practice, and low self-confidence often result in avoidance behavior and minimal classroom engagement (Ariani et al., 2024).

Courage and confidence are crucial for students to engage in oral communication. Learners with higher confidence levels are more likely to take communicative risks and persist despite mistakes (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Unfortunately, many Indonesian students lack these traits, which limits their willingness to speak (Haryanti & Yuliana, 2024; Ariani et al., 2024).

Although speaking courses such as Survival Speaking and Public Speaking are part of EFL programs, many students still feel unprepared due to limited chances for meaningful interaction and emotional support. Consequently, anxiety remains a major obstacle in speaking performance. To compensate, students often adopt out-of-class learning strategies such as watching English videos, listening to music, and self-practice, which offer low-pressure environments for language exposure (Meliyani et al., 2022). These informal strategies allow students to build confidence and gradually reduce anxiety related to speaking tasks.

While previous research has explored the causes of speaking anxiety, such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986) few studies have focused on how students actively cope with it outside the classroom. Furthermore, many existing studies are qualitative and lack standardized measurement of anxiety levels (Haryanti & Yuliana, 2024); (Listyani et al., 2020)

Additionally, studies examining coping strategies like those by (Horwitz et al., 1986b) are limited in scope, often focusing on high school students and not evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies. Thus, further investigation is needed to identify the actual anxiety levels experienced by EFL students in classroom speaking contexts and to explore the most effective out-of-class strategies used to manage that anxiety. This study aims to address these gaps by (1) measuring speaking anxiety levels among EFL students using standardized tools, and (2) exploring the specific out-of-class learning strategies students with varying anxiety levels (low, moderate, high) use to reduce anxiety and improve their speaking performance.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach to obtain data. According to Creswell & Clark, (2018), there are two types of sequential designs in mixed-methods research: exploratory sequential design and explanatory sequential design. This research applied the explanatory sequential design, which emphasizes the quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative data provide a generalizable overview of speaking anxiety levels, while the qualitative data offer deeper insight into students' personal experiences and out-of-class learning strategies. Combining both approaches enables comprehensive exploration and validation of the research phenomenon.

Settings and Participants

This research was conducted at the Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Malang. The participants were sixth-semester EFL students who had completed the compulsory speaking courses: Survival Speaking, Public Speaking, and English Debate. These courses provide foundational speaking skills in daily communication, formal speech, and argumentation contexts. The target population was approximately 60 students.

Using convenience sampling 44 students completed the questionnaire. This sampling method was chosen due to practical constraints while still ensuring participant diversity. From the questionnaire results, nine students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews representing low (4 students), moderate (2 students), and high (3 students) speaking anxiety groups to explore varied experiences and coping strategies.

Instrument

Two main instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), focusing on 21 items specifically related to speaking anxiety. The instrument was translated into Bahasa Indonesia and validated by an expert. The questionnaire demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.910. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The speaking anxiety levels were interpreted based on the mean score ranges in Table 3.3 below:

TABLE 1. Questionnaire Interpretation

Mean Range	Speaking Anxiety Level
4.50 – 5.00	Very High
3.50 – 4.49	High
2.50 – 3.49	Moderate
1.50 – 2.49	Low
1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

The semi-structured interview, developed based on Horwitz et al. (1986) and (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), consisted of 11 questions exploring three anxiety components Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation as well as various learning strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, social). Conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the interviews aimed to gain in-depth understanding of students' anxiety experiences and out-of-class strategies for coping and improving speaking skills.

Data Collection

The questionnaire link was distributed via Google Forms and shared through WhatsApp groups. Participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire, which took approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. The nine interview participants were contacted individually to schedule face-to-face interviews. Consent forms and interview protocols were provided before each session. Interviews were audio-recorded, lasted about 30 minutes, and were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants.

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses aimed at answering the research questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, while qualitative insights were derived from semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

Descriptive Statistics of English-Speaking Anxiety

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of English-speaking anxiety scores. The scores ranged from a minimum of 2.10 to a maximum of 3.95, with an average (mean) score of 3.0054 and a standard deviation of 0.56635. According to the interpretation scale used, this average score is classified as moderate anxiety, indicating that students generally experience a moderate level of anxiety when speaking English in the classroom

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics of English-Speaking Anxiety

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety Score	44	2.10	3.95	3.0054	.56635
Valid N (listwise)	44				

Frequency Distribution of Speaking Anxiety Levels

The frequency distribution of anxiety levels is presented in Table 4.2. The majority of students (52.3%) were classified as having moderate anxiety. Meanwhile, 25.0% fell into the low anxiety category, and 22.7% into the high anxiety group. No students were categorized as very low or very high anxiety. These results show that although speaking anxiety is common among students, the intensity remains manageable for most.

TABLE 3. Distribution of Speaking Anxiety

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
2.00	11	25.0	25.0	25.0
3.00	23	52.3	52.3	77.3
4.00	10	22.7	22.7	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Mean Scores by Type of Speaking Anxiety

Table 3 details the average scores for the three types of speaking anxiety assessed: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. All three types fall under the moderate level. The highest mean score was for Fear of Negative Evaluation (3.0256), indicating that students are most anxious about being negatively judged by lecturers or peers. Test Anxiety (3.0227) and Communication Apprehension (2.9583) also contribute significantly to students' anxiety. This suggests that speaking anxiety results from multiple sources, including fear of judgment, exam pressure, and nervousness when speaking publicly.

TABLE 4. Mean Scores and Levels of Speaking Anxiety by Type

Type of Speaking Anxiety	Average Score	Level
Communication Apprehension	2.9583	Moderate
Test Anxiety	3.0227	Moderate
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.0256	Moderate

Based on the quantitative findings, most students experience a moderate level of speaking anxiety in the classroom. Among the different types of anxiety, fear of negative evaluation is the most prominent, indicating that students are particularly concerned about being judged or criticized by their lecturers and peers. Test anxiety and communication apprehension also contribute significantly to their overall anxiety, showing that nervousness during oral exams and discomfort when speaking publicly are common issues. These results suggest that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted problem

influenced by various emotional factors, so efforts to reduce it should target not only fear of judgment but also exam-related stress and general communication apprehension to effectively support students' speaking confidence.

Semi-structured Interview

This study's qualitative phase involved nine participants with varied levels of speaking anxiety high (3), moderate (2), and low (4). Semi-structured interviews revealed distinct patterns in how these groups managed their anxiety and improved their speaking skills outside the classroom.

Strategies of Students with High Anxiety

High anxiety levels in English speaking students cause significant stress due to fear of mistakes, negative peer and lecturer judgments, and fear of making mistakes. Despite these challenges, they still apply learning strategies outside of class to reduce anxiety. These strategies include media exposure, self-practice, cognitive preparation, emotional regulation, and a supportive environment, demonstrating genuine efforts to improve speaking skills.

TABEI 5. EFL Students' Voices on Out-of-Class Learning Strategies (High Anxiety)

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Quotes
Out-of-Class Learning Strategies	Media Exposure	P7: "I watch YouTube and podcasts, but I mostly talk to myself to get used to it." P8: "I listen to songs just to calm my mind." P9: "I usually watch Korean Dramas with English subtitles, so I learn a little while watching."
	Self-Directed Practice	P7: "I practice speaking alone in front of the mirror, afraid of being laughed at if I practice with friends." P8: "I never practice speaking alone, I'm too shy." P9: "Sometimes I record my voice and listen again to find out where I make mistakes."
	Cognitive Preparation	P7: "I reread the material and write scripts to remember better." P8: "I read the slides and arrange the presentation content, but I don't practice speaking out loud." P9: "I usually make important points first so I won't get confused when speaking."
	Emotional Regulation	P7: "I take deep breaths, but sometimes I still feel anxious." P8: "I try to calm myself down and convince myself that it's not a big deal." P9: "I tell myself, 'Relax, everyone gets nervous sometimes.'"
	Supportive Environment	P7: "If the lecturer is supportive, I feel more comfortable speaking." P8: "If the lecturer often blames me, I get more nervous and scared." P9: "Sometimes friends help, so I'm not too afraid to try speaking, even though sometimes I still get really nervous."

From the data in Table 5, it can be seen that each student has a unique approach in dealing with speaking anxiety. Some are more comfortable with passive ways like watching or listening, while others choose active exercises like talking to themselves or taking notes. Emotional support from yourself and the environment also plays an important role. This shows that the strategy used is highly dependent on the preferences and comfort of each individual.

Strategies of Students with Moderate Anxiety

Interviews with students experiencing anxiety when speaking indicate that they actively and consistently apply a variety of learning strategies outside the classroom to overcome anxiety and improve their English-speaking skills. Unlike students with low anxiety levels who tend to be more

confident and use more natural strategies, this group demonstrates a more structured and gradual conscious effort to manage anxiety while improving language skills. The strategies employed by students with moderate anxiety are categorized into five sub-themes: Media Exposure, Self-Directed Practice, Social Interaction, Cognitive Preparation, and Emotional Regulation.

TABLE 6. EFL Students' Voices on Out-of-Class Learning Strategies (Moderate Anxiety)

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Quotes
Out-of-Class Learning Strategies	Media Exposure	P5: "I watch English cartoons with subtitles, and I try to imitate the pronunciation even if it's not perfect." P6: "I like watching English videos or movies, and whenever I find a new sentence, I practice its pronunciation right away."
	Self-Directed Practice	P5: "I talk to myself, read English texts, sometimes practice acting like a Jaksel (South Jakarta) person." P6: "I speak alone even if no one listens, practicing in front of the mirror or laptop."
	Social Interaction	P5: "Before presentations, I get used to speaking English with friends to build confidence." P6: "I play online games where I interact with foreigners, so I have to speak English." P6: "I once joined an English club at the pesantren (Islamic boarding school)."
	Cognitive Preparation	P5: "I like asking AI to explain things briefly so it's easier to understand." P6: "I write down and memorize key points so I don't get confused while speaking."
	Emotional Regulation	P5: "I control my breathing so my intonation is right during presentations and try to act confident so I don't get anxious." P6: "I take deep breaths to calm myself and try to relax." P5: "If the lecturer pressures me, I see it as a challenge so I don't get more nervous."

Table 6 illustrates that students with moderate levels of anxiety have a high awareness of developing speech skills independently. They implement more varied strategies, including social interactions such as talking to friends or joining a community. Their approach tended to be more balanced between managing anxiety and improving language skills, suggesting a combination of mental preparedness and purposeful practice outside the classroom.

Strategies of Students with Low Anxiety

Low anxiety students actively engage with English media, practicing pronunciation by imitation. Their self-directed practices are routine and diverse, involving self-questioning and rehearsal in front of mirrors or devices. Social interaction enhances fluency and reduces nervousness. Cognitive preparation is thorough, focusing on organizing ideas and vocabulary before class. Emotional regulation emphasizes acceptance of mistakes, positive affirmations, and relaxation techniques. These strategies reflect high levels of autonomy and confidence, consistent with prior studies highlighting the role of social interaction and positive self-regulation in reducing speaking anxiety. Exposure to authentic speaking contexts is key to lowering anxiety.

TABLE 7. EFL Students' Voices on Out-of-Class Learning Strategies (Low Anxiety)

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Extracts
Out-of-Class Learning Strategies	Media Exposure	P1: I usually watch films and other content in English, and sometimes I like to imitate their pronunciation, which is helpful for improving my Speaking skills in class. P2: I watch YouTube, listen to podcasts, and read novels, all in English. Because I do this so often, it has really helped my English skills in class, even though I still forget sometimes. P4: I like watching YouTube and listening to English podcasts. This helps me expand my vocabulary and practise my pronunciation

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Extracts
	Self-Directed Practice	P3: I often talk to myself in English, like telling myself what to do today when I have free time. P2: I practise speaking in front of a mirror or laptop. P4: I ask myself questions that I have created myself, which is very helpful, especially before preparing for presentations in class.
	Social Interaction	P1: I chatted with foreigners at tourist attractions, which helped me overcome my nervousness, because I had already spoken with native speakers. P3: I sometimes speak English at work as a cashier when I meet foreigners, so indirectly I have been practising on my own without any preparation. P2: I practise speaking with my friends or my siblings. P4: I often use Ome TV to talk to people from other countries. Because I often talk to people from other countries, I feel like I know how to pronounce words correctly, so when I'm in class, I'm not as nervous as I used to be.
	Cognitive Preparation	P3: I arrange words that are easy to remember so that I don't get confused, and I also sometimes practise speaking to myself in front of the mirror. P4: I usually write down the points I want to talk about and always practise speaking in English so that I won't be nervous in class. P2: I write down the material first so that I understand it better before speaking, and I also write down the words that I think I will say in class later.
	Emotional Regulation	P3: I think I'm still learning, so it's okay if I make mistakes, and I usually remember the vocabulary I've learned. P2: I took a deep breath to calm myself down and tried to relax. P4: I give myself positive affirmations and always try to remember what I have learned.

Table 7 shows that students with low anxiety tend to have more natural, varied, and consistent learning strategies. They are more confident in using English-language media, doing independent exercises, and actively interacting socially. In addition, they show mental readiness through careful planning and positive regulation of emotions. These strategies reflect a high degree of independence and an understanding that speaking skills develop through direct experience as well as a positive attitude towards mistakes.

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between English-speaking anxiety levels and out-of-class learning strategies among EFL students using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative results revealed that the majority of students experienced moderate speaking anxiety, with the Fear of Negative Evaluation having the highest average score among the three anxiety types. Qualitative findings further demonstrated that students at different anxiety levels applied different out-of-class learning strategies, with media exposure emerging as the most effective and commonly used strategy across all levels. These findings highlight not only the psychological challenges faced by learners but also the practical ways students attempt to overcome them outside the classroom setting.

The study found that the average level of speaking anxiety was moderate ($M = 3.0054$), with moderate scores also recorded for communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These results are consistent with (Quvanch et al., 2024) and (Listyani et al., 2020), who identified the same primary anxiety dimensions. Particularly, fear of being judged negatively was the most significant contributor to anxiety in this context. This finding reinforces Horwitz et al (1986) theory that speaking anxiety is not purely linguistic but deeply rooted in psychological and social factors, such as embarrassment and fear of incompetence.

The results align with the study's objective of understanding the psychological factors influencing speaking performance and how these are managed through out-of-class learning strategies. The link between emotional safety and performance becomes particularly evident when observing how students with high anxiety avoid social interaction and favour private, low-risk learning methods.

The qualitative findings clearly show that out-of-class learning strategies differ based on anxiety level, which aligns with models proposed by (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) and Bialystok (1978).

- Students with low anxiety were confident, proactive, and used interactive and social strategies, such as speaking with friends, joining English clubs, and practicing with native speakers. These behaviors demonstrate high self-regulation, which supports (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991) claim that lower anxiety enhances motivation and willingness to communicate.
- Moderately anxious students used a mix of personal and social strategies. They engaged in self-talk, watched English content, and prepared vocabulary ahead of speaking, showing strategic awareness and coping mechanisms. Their behavior aligns with Horwitz et al. (1986), suggesting that manageable anxiety can motivate learners to adopt structured strategies for improvement.
- Highly anxious students, in contrast, preferred passive and solitary strategies, such as watching YouTube videos or practicing privately. Their behavior reflects a desire for emotional control and avoidance of real-time interaction. This supports Bialystok's (1978) perspective that learners with high anxiety prefer control-based strategies to mitigate risk.

These distinctions highlight that strategy use is closely related to emotional comfort and self-perceived competence. It also reinforces that strategy selection is a personalized response to anxiety, influenced by individual tolerance to social exposure and judgment.

Despite differences in anxiety level, media exposure (e.g., watching English videos, listening to songs or podcasts) emerged as a universal and effective strategy. It offers contextualized language input without the immediate pressure of speaking, making it especially beneficial for students with higher anxiety. The ability to imitate pronunciation, process vocabulary, and control the pace of learning creates a low-stress, high-impact environment for developing speaking skills. This supports previous findings from Nugroho and Hapsari (2024) and Quvanch et al. (2024), which show that students often turn to informal digital media and self-practice as tools to manage anxiety. These strategies bridge the gap between passive input and active practice, helping students gain confidence over time.

The findings indicate that anxiety management is not only a psychological challenge but also a strategic learning behavior. Recognizing this, educators must go beyond grammar and speaking drills to consider the affective domain of learning. For instance, providing a safe classroom environment, allowing peer collaboration, and recommending out-of-class practices tailored to students' comfort levels can significantly reduce speaking anxiety. Additionally, this study adds to the literature by evaluating not just the presence of anxiety, but how students deal with it strategically—an area underexplored in existing research. It reveals the importance of learner autonomy, emotional awareness, and the use of flexible, student-driven learning strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to answer two main questions: (1) to identify the level of English-speaking anxiety experienced by EFL students during classroom activities, and (2) to explore the out-of-class learning strategies that EFL students use to build confidence and overcome speaking anxiety in English language learning. By using a mixed-method design that combines quantitative and qualitative data, this study provides a thorough understanding of these issues.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that most students experience English-speaking anxiety in the classroom at a moderate level. Among the three types of anxiety identified, the most dominant is fear of negative evaluation, which is then followed by test anxiety and communication apprehension. These findings suggest that students' speaking anxiety is not merely rooted in their linguistic limitations or lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Instead, psychological and social dimensions such as the fear of being judged by peers or teachers, the

anxiety of performing well during tests, and the general discomfort in initiating or participating in classroom conversations play a significant role in shaping their emotional responses to speaking tasks. This implies that English-speaking anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a comprehensive approach to addressing it.

Given these insights, learning strategies should not only aim at improving students' linguistic competence through practice and exposure to the language, but should also integrate affective and social support mechanisms. These may include encouraging peer collaboration, promoting a non-judgmental atmosphere in the classroom, reducing pressure during oral assessments, and incorporating motivational strategies that build students' confidence. By fostering a psychologically safe and encouraging learning environment, teachers can help students gradually overcome their anxiety and become more willing and able to use English in real classroom interactions. Thus, addressing both the internal (psychological) and external (social and academic) factors of anxiety is essential for promoting effective English-speaking skills among EFL students.

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