

EXPLORING MOTIVATION AND ANXIETY OF ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the motivations and anxieties experienced by Islamic high school students in learning English speaking skills. It seeks to identify the driving factors that encourage students to engage in speaking English as well as the emotional and psychological barriers that hinder their performance. The research specifically focuses on understanding how personal goals, social expectations, and educational context influence students' motivation and anxiety. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving two participants from an Islamic high school in Malang, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. The participants were selected based on contrasting speaking behaviors—one highly motivated, the other significantly anxious in speaking English. The findings revealed that students are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. While one participant demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation driven by personal interest and academic ambition, the other exhibited instrumental motivation with limited self-confidence. Anxiety was found to stem from several causes, including fear of negative evaluation, lack of vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and classroom pressure. One participant overcame initial anxiety through frequent practice and teacher support, while the other continued to struggle with high anxiety due to a lack of self-efficacy and fear of judgment. Based on the findings, it is recommended that English teachers create psychologically safe learning environments, use culturally relevant teaching strategies, and provide regular speaking opportunities that reduce pressure and build confidence. Furthermore, supporting students' emotional needs and acknowledging their educational background are crucial to fostering both motivation and speaking proficiency in Islamic high school contexts.

Keywords: Motivation, Anxiety, Speaking Skills, Islamic High School.

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English speaking is essential in a globalized world, especially for students in Islamic high schools. Various studies have highlighted the influence of psychological factors like motivation and anxiety on students' English-speaking proficiency. For instance, research conducted at the Islamic Boarding School of Nabil Husein Samarinda found that students' speaking achievements were significantly influenced by anxiety (80.4%) and motivation (79.9%) (Sayuri, Malihah, & Fauzan, 2022). Similarly, Bakhtiar et al. (2022) identified types of anxiety such as state, trait, and situation-specific anxiety affecting students' speaking performance. Strategies like thorough preparation, building confidence, and consistent practice have been shown to reduce speaking anxiety effectively (Mazidah, 2020).

In Islamic educational contexts, English proficiency carries unique importance. It allows students to access a wide array of Islamic literature and scholarly texts predominantly available in English, including translated versions of the Quran, Hadith collections, and academic interpretations (Khoiriyah, 2022; Al-Fadhel, 2019). According to Hadi (2024), this ability enables students to bridge traditional Islamic knowledge with modern scholarship, enriching both spiritual and intellectual understanding. Participation in international Islamic seminars and online forums also fosters

intercultural and interreligious dialogue, strengthening students' roles in a global Islamic community (Nasir, 2020; Ahmed & Zain, 2021).

English speaking skills contribute significantly to students' future academic and career prospects. Fluency in English enables access to global opportunities, including international higher education and employment in multinational sectors such as diplomacy, business, and non-profit organizations (Jones & Ahmed, 2018; Baker, 2015). Yet, students often face challenges such as fear of mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and academic pressure, which are common causes of speaking anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Young, 1991). Addressing these affective barriers requires supportive classroom environments with interactive and student-centered learning strategies.

This study aims to explore the specific motivations and anxieties experienced by Islamic high school students in learning English speaking skills. While numerous studies have investigated motivation and anxiety in general English learning contexts (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei, 2005), fewer have focused on speaking skills, particularly in Islamic high school settings. Rahayu (2023) emphasizes the need for research that addresses the affective dimensions of English learning within culturally and religiously unique environments. By applying qualitative methods, this study intends to provide nuanced insights that inform effective language instruction for students in Islamic educational contexts.

1. What are the motivation that drive Islamic high school students to improve their English Speaking skill?
2. What factors contribute to the speaking anxiety experienced by the students?

METHOD

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method. A case study was chosen to deeply explore the Motivations and anxieties speaking at High School in Malang. The qualitative approach allows researchers the freedom to understand the phenomena occurring within their real-life context and complexity, thereby revealing detailed perspectives and experiences of educational practitioners..

Setting and Participants

In this study, there were two students as participants namely Yogi and Fathira (pseudonym), and they were selected using purposive sampling. They were chosen because based on observations of teaching and learning activities for 4 months, the two participants had different behavior. In recruiting the participants, the researcher set out some criteria as follows. First, participants on behalf of Yogi who were always silent even when appointed to speak English. While Fathira is always confident in her ability to speak English so that every time the teacher gives anyone the opportunity to speak English Fathira is always the first to raise her hand, Both had good scores on the English written test. In approaching the participants, we originally conducted informal interactions with two individuals about their personal histories and knowledge via zoom meeting. Second, the two participants were willing to participate in this research. Each student received a letter of consent to participate in the form of a printout that included the participant's identification, research title, research aims, and data confidentiality agreement. The consent letter was signed personally by the participant, the researcher, and other parties.

Instruments

The main instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions designed to explore participants' views, experiences, and responses toward unfocused WCF. The teacher's questions focused on how feedback was given, the reasons for using unfocused WCF, and the challenges encountered. The student interviews explored how they received and responded to feedback. The questions were validated by a writing expert to ensure their clarity and relevance.

Data Collection

Data was collected using individual interviews through zoom meetings. The researcher contacted the school administration to become a bridge between the researcher and the participants. The permit process until the data was collected took approximately four months. The interviews followed an unstructured, open-ended protocol. The points of the interview questions included (1) students' motivation in speaking English; (2) students' anxiety in speaking English. These questions were created by the researcher and validated by an expert.

Each participant took about 30 minutes for the online interview. Meanwhile, the follow-up interview was conducted face-to-face and took about 20 minutes for each participant. The interview process was recorded and stored on the researcher's personal laptop where only the researcher could access. Communication between the researcher and participants used Indonesian and English during the interview process.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method began by carefully transcribing the interview tapes (**Step 1**), focusing on the most important issues raised by participants for data analysis. Following that, read (**Step 2**) the transcripts numerous times to determine how the participants interpreted the story. After completely absorbing the participants' stories, analyzed each individual code (**Step 3**), event, story, and experience that they shared.

And then collected and grouped similar major events recounted by participants (**Step 4**) into a draft narrative. Following that, started creating topics to wrap up the participants' life stories (**Steps 5 and 6**), and asked them to review the themes for a more effective presentation. Finally, we presented comprehensive findings (**Step 7**) that described the participants' experiences through past, present, and future narratives. Finally, member-checking was done discursively, as we did not wait until the analysis was finished to obtain participant feedback.

FINDINGS

Data in this study were obtained through interviews with two Islamic high school students who demonstrated contrasting characteristics—one highly motivated and confident in speaking English (S.A), and the other significantly anxious and hesitant to speak (M.A). The findings are presented in two main categories based on the research questions: (1) students' motivation in learning English speaking skills, and (2) factors contributing to students' anxiety in speaking English.

A. Motivation that Drive Students to Speaking English

1. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

S.A showed a strong combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. She expressed a genuine love for English and enjoyed engaging in English-related activities such as watching English movies and speaking with friends. Her aspirations to study abroad and obtain a scholarship indicated extrinsic motivation as well.

"I like English and I want to be good at it. I enjoy learning new words and trying to speak like in the movies I watch. I also want to get a scholarship and study abroad someday."

The support and encouragement from her teacher also served as an external motivator:

"My English teacher always supports us to speak up. She makes the classroom fun and not scary. I feel more confident now."

In contrast, M.A displayed predominantly extrinsic motivation. He acknowledged the importance of English as a global language and for job opportunities but lacked internal enthusiasm for learning it.

"Because it is an international language, so we have to learn. But I don't like speaking English in class. I feel nervous and sometimes I forget what I want to say."

Although he recognized its utility, his limited self-confidence and speaking anxiety prevented him from fully participating in classroom speaking activities.

B. Factors Contributing to Students' Anxiety in Speaking English

1. Fear of Negative Evaluation

M.A's speaking anxiety stemmed from fear of being judged by peers and making mistakes in front of the class. He expressed concern about pronunciation, grammar errors, and forgetting vocabulary while speaking.

"I am afraid when I speak English. I don't want to be laughed at by my classmates. Sometimes I forget what to say or I mispronounce words, and it makes me feel embarrassed."

These factors align with communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, as described in language anxiety literature.

2. Overcoming Initial Anxiety through Support and Practice

S.A admitted to feeling shy at first but gained confidence through practice and supportive classroom experiences.

"At first I was shy, but I become more confident because I often practice and my teacher motivates me a lot."

Her efforts to reduce anxiety included watching English videos, practicing with friends, and viewing mistakes as part of the learning process.

In summary, while both students were motivated to learn English, their ability to act on that motivation differed. S.A's intrinsic motivation, combined with a positive learning environment, helped her overcome anxiety. M.A, despite recognizing the importance of English, struggled with high levels of anxiety that hindered his speaking performance. These findings highlight the importance of addressing both motivational and emotional aspects in EFL instruction for Islamic high school students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed important aspects of how motivation and anxiety impact Islamic high school students' English speaking performance. These results support and extend previous studies, providing both convergence and divergence in comparison to the literature reviewed in Chapter II.

In terms of motivation, the current study found that S.A demonstrated high intrinsic motivation, driven by enjoyment, personal interest, and future aspirations such as studying abroad. This aligns with the findings of Wulandari and Darmawan (2021), who emphasized the role of intrinsic motivation in long-term language retention and proficiency. Similarly, Gardner (1985) and Deci & Ryan (2020) argue that learners who enjoy learning are more likely to engage consistently in language practice, which was evident in S.A's case through her self-initiated learning strategies.

M.A, on the other hand, demonstrated instrumental or extrinsic motivation, learning English out of necessity rather than interest. His statement, "Because it is an international language, so we have to learn," reflects the perspective identified by Suherman (2022), who argued that many students are motivated by academic or career-related pressures. However, as noted by Mahmud & Hidayat (2021), extrinsic motivation alone may not sustain engagement if learners face anxiety or lack internal interest—a phenomenon clearly demonstrated by M.A's performance.

With regard to anxiety, M.A's fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension were prominent. These findings are consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) theory of language anxiety, which identifies fear of negative evaluation as a major barrier in oral performance. M.A's anxiety was intensified in situations where all attention was directed at him, echoing Farah (2022), who found that mixed-gender classrooms and classroom silence can exacerbate anxiety.

The study also confirms Kurniasih et al.'s (2022) assertion that lack of vocabulary and pronunciation issues are significant contributors to anxiety. M.A's difficulties with lexical recall during speaking tasks align with their findings that such challenges reduce self-efficacy and increase hesitation. His avoidance behavior, such as remaining silent, mirrors the observations of Hidayat (2021), who argued that insufficient communication strategies lead to breakdowns and silence.

Conversely, S.A showed resilience in overcoming her initial anxiety, supported by teacher encouragement and classroom environment—a result also noted in Mazidah (2020). Her improvement over time supports Young's (1991) claim that supportive classroom environments can transform initial anxiety into motivation and confidence. The influence of the teacher as a

motivational figure also parallels the conclusions of Rahim & Andriani (2021), who emphasized the importance of teacher support in fostering EFL learner confidence.

One novel contribution of this study is its context within **Islamic high schools**, where cultural and religious values may shape learners' affective experiences. While Diana et al. (2023) addressed anxiety in religious-based schools, this study adds depth by exploring how students internalize motivation and anxiety in relation to personal ambition, religious identity, and future goals. For instance, S.A's aspiration to access global Islamic scholarship through English proficiency connects to the work of Hadi (2024) and Khoiriyah (2022), who argue that English enables deeper engagement with Islamic resources.

In sum, the findings enrich previous research by offering detailed, context-specific insights into the lived experiences of Islamic high school students. They underscore the interplay of affective factors in language acquisition and highlight the importance of a culturally responsive and psychologically supportive approach in language instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the motivation and anxiety experienced by Islamic senior high school students in learning English speaking skills. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered from two participants with contrasting characteristics—one with strong motivation (S.A) and one with high anxiety (M.A)—through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework revealed important insights into the emotional and psychological factors that influence students' speaking performance.

The findings indicate that students' motivation in learning English speaking is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsically, students are driven by personal interest, enjoyment, and a desire for self-improvement. Extrinsically, factors such as academic achievement, future career goals, and social expectations also play a significant role. Motivation, particularly when internally generated, was found to positively impact students' willingness to practice and participate in speaking activities.

On the other hand, anxiety emerged as a substantial barrier to speaking performance. The most prominent form of anxiety identified in this study was fear of negative evaluation, which caused students to feel nervous, avoid speaking, or become mentally blocked when asked to speak in class. Other contributing factors included lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and pressure from the classroom environment. These findings suggest that anxiety can significantly undermine students' motivation and hinder their ability to speak effectively.

In conclusion, the study highlights the complex interplay between motivation and anxiety in the development of English speaking skills among Islamic high school students. Understanding these affective factors is essential for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational institutions to create more supportive and effective learning environments.

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